GLOBAL ALLIANCE
AGAINST HUNGER
AND POVERTY

Social protection and the way forward to eliminate poverty and ensure human dignity and adequate nutritious food for all

A report prepared for the G20 Task Force for the Establishment of a Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty

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Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board



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Summary

Key messages **8**

1. Current trends and transformations regarding poverty and hunger **10**

1.1. Hunger and malnutrition on the rise and lack of progress in poverty reduction 10

1.2. The many faces of poverty and hunger 10

1.3. Economic and labour market developments in the context of multiple crises 11

1.4. Conflict and climate crisis as key drivers of hunger and poverty 12

1.5. Making the food systems transformation benefit all and avoid environmental degradation 13

2. The potential of social protection to reduce hunger and poverty **14**

2.1. The centrality of social protection systems in combating hunger and poverty 14

2.2. Economic Inclusion programmes 16

2.3. Current trends in economic inclusion efforts and social protection coverage 19

2.4. Adequacy of benefit levels 24

2.5. Adaptive Social Protection and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic response 26

3. Investments that work: integrated policies, actions and interventions **29**

3.1. Social protection, food security and nutrition and the need for integrated policies 29

3.2. Building rights-based universal social protection systems 34

3.3. Ensuring sustainable, equitable and sufficient financing for social protection 35

3.4. Pathways for progressively expanding social protection 37

3.5. Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy 38

Summary

4. Learning from experiences: Capacity building and knowledge sharing on what works in social protection and economic inclusion 40

5. Conclusions and way forward 41

Notes 44

Boxes

BOX 1. Call to action by the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) 16

BOX 2. The Global Accelerator on jobs and social protection for just transitions 33

BOX 3. Achieving better impacts through higher-coverage, lifecycle-based programmes 37

Figures

FIGURE 1. Public social protection expenditure (excluding health), percentage of GDP and poverty rates, 2020 or latest available year 14

FIGURE 2. Effective social protection coverage, global and regional estimates, by population group, 2020 or latest available year 20

Figures

FIGURE 3. Coverage of social protection programmes by type of programme—total and Q1 21

FIGURE 4. Coverage of social protection programmes by area and income level —total and Q1 21

FIGURE 5. Type and prevalence of social assistance programmes 22

FIGURE 6. Coverage of social assistance programmes for total population and by quintile 23

FIGURE 7. Non-contributory old-age pensions as a percentage of the national poverty line, single person, selected countries, 2017 or latest available year 24

FIGURE 8. Adequacy of benefit level of social protection programmes by type of programme—total and Q1 25

FIGURE 9. Adequacy of benefit level of social protection programmes by area and income level—total and Q1 25

FIGURE 10. Benefit levels of social assistance programmes—total population and Q1 26

FIGURE 11. Number of measures announced in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Ukrainian crisis and the cost of living crisis, 2020–2022 28

Tables

TABLE 1. Percentage of working-age population legally covered by comprehensive social security systems, by region and sex, 2019 21

TABLE 2. Leveraging social protection for climate change adaptation and mitigation 27

TABLE 3. Overview of the impact on poverty and hunger of different policy instruments and country applications 33

Key messages

- Poverty, hunger and malnutrition are mutually reinforcing and create a vicious cycle of deprivation and lost human capital. The COVID-19 pandemic, ensuing conflicts and the worsening climate crisis have eroded progress made over the past decade in the fight against poverty and hunger. In fact, global hunger has risen by 1.3 percent since before the pandemic and today, 700 million people live in extreme poverty, 148 million children are stunted, and over 40 percent of the world's population is overweight or obese, of which over 70 percent live in LMICs.

- However, beyond crises, conflict and climate change, many structural factors, such as inequalities, pervasive discrimination, low productivity, unfavourable macroeconomic policies and trade regimes, as well as the weakness of public institutions, have contributed to poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

- Social protection addresses multiple dimensions of poverty and can improve nutrition outcomes, including impacts on stunting, wasting, and incidences of diarrhoea. Similarly, economic inclusion interventions can support people to manage and grow their livelihoods and become resilient in the face of future shocks and stresses.

- However, globally, less than half of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, leaving 4.1 billion people without protection, with significant regional variation. In Africa, only 17.4 percent of the population is covered by at least one benefit; and in the Arab States region, 40 percent, and Asia and the Pacific, 44 percent.

- While there has been a significant improvement in the pension coverage for older persons (77.5 percent), less than one in five unemployed workers receive unemployment benefits (18.6 percent), only one in four children receives child benefits (26.4 percent) and one in three persons with disabilities (33.5 percent) receives disability benefits. Only 30.6 percent of the working age population enjoys comprehensive coverage across the life cycle (34.3 percent for men and 26.5 percent for women).

- Despite the significant social and economic returns on investing in social protection systems, financing gaps remain substantial, estimated to be USD 1,191.6 billion or 3.8 percent of the GDP of low- and middle-income countries. To close financing gaps in low-income countries, USD 77.9 billion per year is needed to establish a social protection floor that would provide an effective safeguard against poverty and hunger.

- Experiences in countries provide important lessons regarding the design of interventions to maximise the impact across the SDGs:

    - Integrated approaches that combine social protection with access to other goods and services, such as interventions for food and nutrition security,

skills development, employment services, health and care services, access to finance or agricultural inputs can help to overcome structural barriers.

- Institutionalized social protection systems and benefits anchored in national legislation guarantee sustainability and equity across changes in government, ensure predictability of benefits, transparency and accountability, and foster trust in public institutions

- Progressive building of coherent social protection systems, combining social insurance and tax-financed social protection benefits, and complemented by public services, is essential for meeting the diverse needs of the population.

- Strong implementation mechanisms build on a combination of digital solutions and in-person support along the delivery chain.

- Domestic resources as the predominant source of social protection financing ensure the sustainability of the system, yet some countries might request complementary international support to build their social protection systems.

- To get back on track to achieve the SDGs, the international community already supports important global initiatives that support countries in the implementation of extending social protection through integrated approaches, in particular:

  - The UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, which ensures coordinated support by UN agencies, development and financing partners for pathfinder countries in implementing integrated approaches.

  - The socialprotection.org platform that is the most actively used tool for capacity building and knowledge management across the social protection community.

1. Current trends and transformations regarding poverty and hunger

1.1. Hunger and malnutrition on the rise and lack of progress in poverty reduction

The current global crisis of poverty, inequality and hunger is of alarming proportions. The 2022 Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report underscored that the world was likely witnessing the greatest setback to poverty eradication since World War II.[1] While extreme poverty significantly declined between 1990 and 2019, multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and others, reversed or significantly slowed down the progress made in poverty reduction and led to rising rates of hunger and malnutrition.

Overall, currently close to 700 million people live in extreme poverty globally, just below the pre-pandemic levels.[2] In addition, the World Bank estimates climate change will push an additional 132 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.[3] Meanwhile, the proportion of the world population facing chronic food insecurity in 2022 was about 9.2 percent (734 million people), compared with 7.9 percent (612 million people) in 2019—an increase of 122 million people since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.[4] While the repercussions of the crises are global, low and lower-middle income countries (LMICs) are more impacted and less equipped to mitigate the consequences. In the current setting, the prospects of achieving the SDG targets on poverty and hunger are unlikely, making concerted action at the international level all the more important.

International financial resources needed to keep people from starving have, so far, been insufficient. Meanwhile, the cost of providing food assistance is at a record high due to rising food and fuel prices. WFP analysis suggests that for every one percent cut in food assistance, 400,000 people are pushed to emergency hunger.[5]

While poverty is most readily measured based on income or consumption, the lack of monetary income is both the cause, and the consequence, of many other socio-economic factors, which should be considered when assessing and designing policies and systems to address poverty. These include access to healthcare, education or food, as well as exposure to climate change, conflict and other shocks. Moreover, income poverty does not impact everyone in the same way, and it intersects with other disadvantages faced by women, children, people with disabilities, older people, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants, forcibly displaced persons, LGBTQI+ persons and rural populations affecting their access to resources and services and, for those in working age, their income-generating capacities and opportunities.

1.2. The many faces of poverty and hunger

Almost 84 percent of people in poverty live in rural areas, many of whom play a role in food production.[6] Almost two thirds of all people in poverty live in middle-income countries and one third in low-income countries (LICs).[7] Least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked least developed countries (LLDCs), and small island developing states (SIDSs) faced rates of undernourishment at more than double the global average (9 percent) (UN, 2021).

These nations are often highly dependent on food imports and rely on international markets for their food and other needs. Large segments of these populations also depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and are therefore disproportionately impacted by fluctuations in the global food system.

Children are more than twice as likely as adults to live in extremely poor households and be multidimensionally deprived; one billion children live in multidimensional poverty today.[8] Worldwide, in 2022, an estimated 148.1 million children under five years of age (22.3 percent) were stunted, 45 million (6.8 percent) were wasted, 37 million (5.6 percent) were overweight[9] and 202 million children were living in severe food poverty.[10]

Workers in the informal economy make up 90 percent of workers in LICs and 67 percent in middle-income countries. For this group, the poverty rate is between twice to ten times that for workers in the formal economy.[11] In many countries, women are more likely to be in informal employment than men.[12] Globally, 81.7 percent of rural employment, compared to 42.8 percent of urban employment, is informal.[13] The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the high vulnerability of these workers who depend on daily earnings for purchasing food and other necessities. Being registered with neither social insurance nor social assistance authorities, informal economy workers proved particularly difficult to reach with emergency response measures.

In some countries, persons with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty or to be unable to afford a healthy meal than persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities also face discrimination, social inclusion and greater barriers to access health care, including for sexual and reproductive health. Persons aged 65 years old or older also live more often in poor households than the working-age population, with particularly high poverty risks for older women.[14] An estimated 142 million older people globally are unable to meet their basic needs, while age discrimination and a lack of age, gender and disability-responsive policies, laws, systems, services and communities, mean they are unable to enjoy their fundamental human rights.[15] This became obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic when, despite being among the groups most at risk, older people have been left behind in responses.[16]

Across all ages, women and girls are more likely to be poor than men and boys. Gender disparities can be attributed to various factors, including the accumulated impact of a lifetime of gender-based discrimination and inequality in different domains of quality of life and well-being, including employment, health, education, distribution of unpaid care work, exposure to gender-based violence. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic reversed progressed made with women being the first to withdraw from the labour market to engage in unpaid care work for children and older or sick household members.

1.3. Economic and labour market developments in the context of multiple crises

Global GDP growth is expected to slow to 2.4 percent in 2024,[17] the third consecutive year of deceleration. High interest rates and rising debt burdens, geopolitical uncertainties, fiscal austerity, and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events all bode poorly for investment and productivity. While real GDP growth is expected to

resume this year in LICs (from 3.5 to 5.5 percent), per capita income is forecast to be below its 2019 level in over one third of LICs and in more than half of the countries marred by fragility and conflict.[18]

Debt is a significant challenge for the LDCs, limiting fiscal space for investments in the social sector. Since 2018, LDCs have spent more on debt repayment than education, and some have spent more on debt repayment than health and education combined.[19] These countries are also the ones facing extraordinary labour market challenges. The jobs gap[20] in debt-distressed LICs is 25.7 percent, compared to 11 percent for developing countries at low risk of debt distress. The strong correlation between debt distress and the jobs gap points to the crucial need for international financing to promote stronger and faster labour market recovery, as high levels of informality further constrain domestic fiscal space.[21]

These economic trends are coupled with other transformations that have strong impact on the labour market. By 2025, 85 million jobs may be displaced by a shift in the division of labour between humans and machines, while 97 million new roles that are more adapted to the new division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms may emerge.[22] Meanwhile, by 2030, 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 and over with important implications for economic and labour market developments. This will strongly impact low-and middle-income countries where over 70 percent of older people live, often without any stable source of income.

1.4. Conflict and climate crisis as key drivers of hunger and poverty

Conflict remains a primary driver of hunger, with 60 percent of the world's hungry residing in war-torn areas. The 22 countries experiencing a protracted food crisis face a rate of undernourishment almost three times that of other developing countries.[23]And almost half of children living in extreme poverty (164.7 million) live in countries affected by conflict and fragility.[24] Recent developments in Ukraine and Gaza exemplify how conflict exacerbates food insecurity by displacing people, eradicating income sources and destabilizing economies.

The world is currently experiencing an upward trajectory of conflict-driven displacement, with the largest ever increase in 2022[25] and a total of over 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide.[26] Conflict has immediate effects on health, well-being and food security, as a result of death, injury, restricted food access and an inability to plant or harvest. Additionally, it generates indirect and prolonged impacts, disrupting agricultural supply chains.[27] Responses to these crises often exacerbate these impacts, with some nations implementing export limits or bans, contributing to price volatility.

Furthermore, the increase in global poverty and hunger is significantly fuelled by the climate crisis. Climate change is responsible for more frequent and severe droughts, floods, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events, exacerbating widespread food insecurity. Over the past 50 years, the number of climate-related disasters has surged five-fold. A recent study revealed that countries grappling with hotter, wetter, or drier conditions are experiencing intensified food insecurity. Many climate change hotspots (CCH) cut

across administrative boundaries and have limited political representation rendering the challenges they face even more difficult.[28, 29] While quantifying the precise, direct impact of climate change on food insecurity is challenging due to the intricate nature of hunger crises, the latest IPCC report on food security details how climate change negatively impacts all dimensions of food security.[30]

Children living in poverty are particularly exposed to and vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events—3 out of 10 children live in provinces with very high climate risks and a high concentration of child multidimensional poverty.[31] When food is scarce, older people are also at risk of malnutrition. Older women, in particular, have been found to be worse hit by food scarcity.[32] Overall, the effects of climate change on nutritional status vary based on wealth and livelihood, but the burden of undernutrition is projected to worsen relative to a no-climate-change scenario.[33]

Of the 20 most climate-vulnerable and least climate-prepared countries, 17 were LDCs as of 2021, and nearly 70 percent of global climate-related deaths over the past 50 years have been in LDCs.[34] The list of climate hotspot countries is also testimony to the global social injustice of the climate catastrophe with the poorest being hit hardest while they contribute the least to carbon emissions. Since the 1990s, the richest 1 percent emitted twice as much as the poorest half of the world's population.[35]

The impacts of climate catastrophes and conflicts often reinforce the structural injustices that limit rights, freedoms, and developmental prospects. Whether these injustices are due to gender inequality and discrimination, economic disparities, elite appropriation of resources, forced migration, and rapid urbanization, they contribute to vulnerabilities before, during, and after particularly acute events.

1.5. Making the food systems transformation benefit all and avoid environmental degradation

During the last half a century, we have seen a transformation of food systems with remarkable productivity gains across the food value chain, in particular for cereals and food staples. World cereal yields have increased from 1.35 tons per hectare to 4.07 tons on average between 1961 and 2018, with significant regional variations.[18] However, this transformation has not benefited all, as hunger and malnutrition remain widespread in certain regions due to persistent challenges. Apart from situations where markets are dysfunctional due to conflicts or other emergencies, food supplies are abundantly available in most contexts. However, food availability does not translate into food accessibility for an increasing number of people. For many households, the challenge is the affordability of a healthy diet, not the availability of food. The poor cannot exercise demand in the market because they lack purchasing power and this is precisely what social protection systems can and should remedy by providing at least a basic guaranteed level of income that allows for a life in health and dignity.

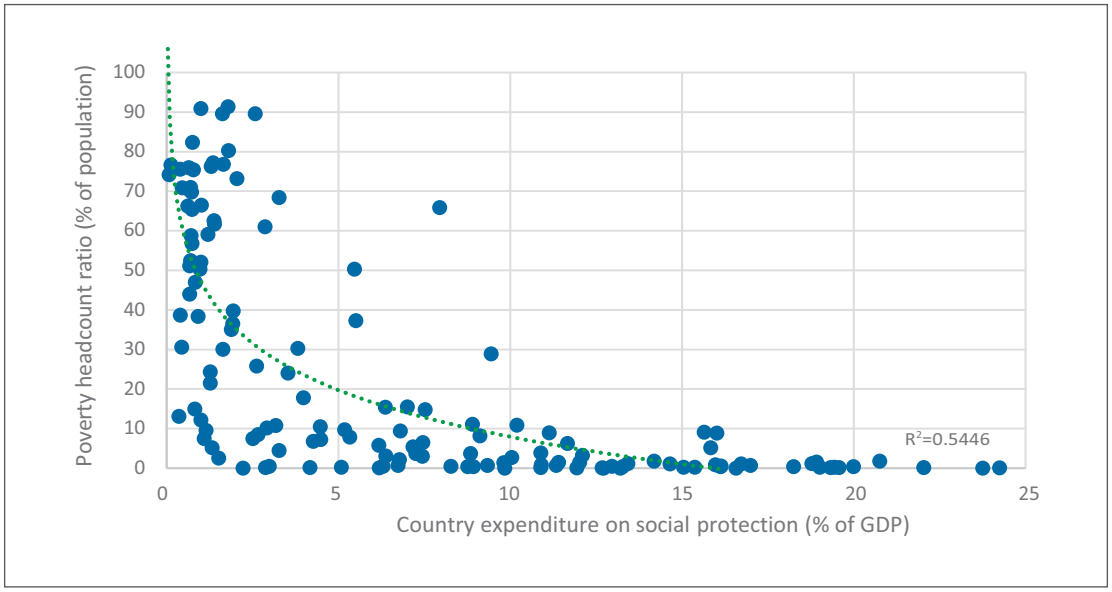
The increases in productivity and mechanization of food systems that partially led to the reduction of hunger and poverty were not without costs to natural resources and the environment, with significant long-term effects on natural habitats and human lives. Despite gains in productivity per hectare, agricultural land use has been expanding, while production is increasingly relying on input-intensive, fossil-fuel-based techniques. By converting natural ecosystems to lands for crop production or pasture, food systems became a major cause of biodiversity loss.[22, 23] In addition, industrialized production processes, excessive use of chemical inputs and production practices favouring monoculture are exerting significant pressures on the quality of land and water, often resulting in water scarcity and desertification. For example, 33 percent of Earth's soils are degraded, with predictions that this figure could rise up to 90 percent by 2050.[24] Food systems are also responsible for about 21 percent to 37 percent of all polluting emissions, significantly contributing to climate change and its consequences.[36]

2. The potential of social protection to reduce hunger and poverty

2.1. The centrality of social protection systems in combating hunger and poverty

Social protection[37] is increasingly acknowledged as a powerful tool in addressing the complex determinants of poverty and malnutrition, and promoting food security. At the same time, it is part of the policy response to the multifaceted crises the world is facing, which are putting jobs, incomes and food security at risk. Furthermore, higher investments in social protection are associated with lower poverty rates as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Public social protection expenditure (excluding health), percentage of GDP and poverty rates, 2020 or latest available year



Source: ILO (2021) World Social Protection Report 2020–2022.

Evidence from various LICs shows that social protection benefits are essential for the prevention or at least reduction of poverty.[38] In six African countries (Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe), cash benefits reduced the poverty headcount, with impacts ranging from 2.1 percentage points in Ghana to 14.9 percentage points in Malawi.[39] In Mozambique, the impact of a child grant programme on poverty was larger among female-headed households compared to male-headed households (24 percentage points, versus 6.5 percentage points for male-headed households) (Child Grant Evaluation Team, 2022). Policies that improve the quality of public childcare environments, ensuring access for the poorest and most vulnerable, can improve equality of opportunities, attenuate the effects of poverty on childhood development, and enhance children's long-run educational achievements, productivity, and incomes. In the Asia-Pacific region, building social protection floors across the life cycle has been shown to also reduce poverty.[40]

Social protection systems not only address immediate poverty and food security. They are also an important factor for inclusive growth at the micro-, meso- and macro-level, thereby contributing to permanently reducing poverty rates. At the macro level, they act as automatic stabilizers in times of crisis by stabilizing aggregate demand. By facilitating access to health and education, they contribute to enhancing the productivity of the workforce, facilitating investments in income-generating activities and entrepreneurship by enabling people to engage in higher-risk but also higher-return activities. Social protection investments also have direct economic multiplier effects. ILO research confirms that building a national social protection floor, for example, through expanding basic old-age pensions in developing countries, would increase GDP per capita in LICs and LMICs by 14.8 percent within 10 years. Similarly, a multi-country analysis of multiplier effects of social protection found that the cumulative multiplier exceeds 1 for 30 out of 42 countries. In addition, social protection can have broader positive economic impacts through channelling additional resources into resource-constraint communities, including in remote areas.

While most social protection benefits are paid in cash, they have direct impact not only on income, but also on various other dimensions of poverty,[41, 42] including improving food security by strengthening household purchasing power. Evidence shows that the quantity and diversity of food intake of households that receive cash benefits increases significantly while reducing food shortages and resorting to negative coping strategies.[43] A recent meta-analysis[44] provides evidence for the impact of social protection, particularly cash transfers, on improved linear growth and reduced stunting in children. It showed that the impact on nutrition outcomes is even stronger if combined with behaviour change communication. These findings indicate that ensuring income security is key to enable people to afford a healthy diet, which is a necessary condition for improving food security, in addition to ensuring the availability, accessibility, utilization and stability of food supply.

Comprehensive social protection systems also improve recipients' health and wellbeing. Social health protection ensures people can afford the health care they need,[45] which has immediate effects on uptake of health care and health outcomes. Moreover, social protection has a positive impact on a range of social determinants of health beyond improving food security (improved access to safe water, improved housing, ability to participate in social life, peace of mind etc.). In recognition of these interlinkages between health, health equity and social protection, the WHO recently approved a

recommendation to increase the comprehensiveness of social protection benefits and expand coverage of social protection systems across the life course because of the strong impact that comprehensive social protection has on a range of social determinants of health and health equity.[46]

The importance of universal social protection has been widely acknowledged by the international community. In order to promote the extension of social protection worldwide, the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030), launched in 2016, formulated 5 core principles reflecting the global consensus on how to extend social protection to all (see Box 1).

BOX 1. Call to action by the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030)

In recognition of social protection as a human right and as a key accelerator for achieving progress on the SDGs, the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030), a group of over 50 UN agencies, governments, social partners, civil society organizations and development partners committed to work on the extension of social protection to all based on 5 core principles:

- **Protection throughout the life cycle**: Establish universal social protection systems, including floors, that provide adequate protection throughout the life cycle, combining social insurance, social assistance and other means, anchored in national strategies and legislation;
- **Universal coverage**: Provide universal access to social protection and ensure that social protection systems are rights-based, gender-sensitive and inclusive, leaving no one behind;
- **National ownership**: Develop social protection strategies and policies based on national priorities and circumstances in close cooperation with all relevant actors;
- **Sustainable and equitable financing**: Ensure the sustainability and fairness of social protection systems by prioritizing reliable and equitable forms of domestic financing, complemented by international cooperation and support where necessary;
- **Participation and social dialogue**: Strengthen governance of social protection systems through institutional leadership, multi-sector coordination and the participation of social partners and other relevant and representative organisations, to generate broad-based support and promote the effectiveness of services.

More information: http://www.usp2030.org.

2.2. Economic Inclusion programmes

Complementing social protection systems, economic Inclusion (EI) programmes provide a bundle of coordinated multidimensional interventions that support individuals, households, and communities to increase their incomes and assets. Strengthening the income generating abilities of working-age individuals is equally important for preventing and reducing poverty. EI programmes often build on existing social protection, jobs, livelihoods and financial inclusion programmes, and natural resource management/climate resilient interventions. EI programme participants receive a package of cash transfers, business grants, life and business skills training, socio-emotional support through coaching and

access to finance and markets, which helps reduce food and nutrition insecurity and boost consumption and asset accumulation. This is the case for example in the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP).

Public work programmes are perhaps the most wide-spread form of EI programmes, covering about 6 percent of the population, on average (see Figure 5). The objectives of PWPs are three-fold: they provide immediate income and support to participants in the form of wages or sometimes food support in return for their labour, thus enhancing income security; they can enhance skills and thereby improve future employability of workers; and they create, maintain, or rehabilitate assets and/or provide services for communities and beyond. They are often implemented in crisis contexts to support recovery efforts. Finding the right balance between those three objectives is challenging and may generate trade-offs, especially in contexts of high poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and weak public assets and infrastructure. For those programmes to contribute to addressing poverty and hunger effectively, they need to be designed accordingly, for example by refraining from expecting hard manual labour from populations that are nutritionally challenged, ensuring that access to income and food are guaranteed even when people are unable to work because of illness, pregnancy and childbirth or the unavailability of work and ensuring that the rights and dignity of workers are protected.

Income generating opportunities promoted through EI in agriculture can ensure investments in robust and climate-resilient food systems. For example, public works and productive inclusion programmes can engage poor and vulnerable households in the green transition to net-zero carbon emissions. This includes creating productive opportunities for smallholder farmers, fisheries, and rural communities, with a particular focus on women. Creating nourishing, sustainable and decent employment along the food value chain can enhance livelihoods and improve food and nutrition security. Since many climate change hotspots cross national boundaries, innovative measures that will be able to be implemented across national borders should be explored. Local authorities and communities will need to set up well-structured transboundary multi-stakeholder platforms and governing bodies to allow the effective implementation of measures and make them adaptive to shocks.

The State of Economic Inclusion Report (SEI) 2021[47] conducted a comprehensive review of impact evaluations for 80 EI programmes across 37 countries. The findings revealed that a diverse array of EI initiatives exhibit promising and potentially sustained impacts across various outcomes, including food security, income, assets, consumption, and savings. With an increasing number of national governments scaling up EI programmes, the emerging evidence from programmes to scale is very promising.

- **Substantial improvements in food security and consumption:** EI measures in Niger increased consumption by 15 percent and food security by 19 percent 18 months after the interventions. Similarly, Zambia's Supporting Women's Livelihood (SWL) programme helped increase household consumption significantly by 19 percent and decreased food insecurity by 46 percent, measured in terms of 'Months Without Enough Food'.[48] In Afghanistan, the Targeting Ultra Poor (TUP) programme had transformative impacts, with per-capita consumption in the

treatment group increasing by 30 percent, and the programme resulted in poverty reduction by 20 percentage points after 2 years. In line with increases in consumption, the study found large impacts on food security. The likelihood that all household members are regularly eating at least two meals a day increased by 11 percentage points, and the number of households where no adult skips or cuts the size of their meals increased by 23 percentage points.[49] Tanzania's Productive Safety Net programme reduced poverty and increased household consumption on average by 19,5 percent, and the Low Dietary Diversity was reduced by 6,2 percentage points. Ownership of productive assets and livestock increased by 18,6 percent and household enterprises were shifting into more productive sectors. Trade increased by 3,8 percent.[50]

- **With access to finance and investments in household enterprises**, EI programmes are increasing income, business revenues, and asset accumulation for the poor and vulnerable. In Niger, remarkable increases in business revenue were observed, with households experiencing a notable 102 percent rise in monthly revenues, primarily attributed to newfound income streams from off-farm business activities.[51] In Zambia, households exhibited a 28 percent aggregate increase in household income, driven by a substantial 45 percent boost in household business profits arising from income-generating activities led by women.

- **EI programmes also help rural households increase the household's resilience to shocks over the long run.** Positive impacts on a poor household's capacity to cope with shocks, supporting food security and lessening the need to resort to negative coping alternatives are well documented.[52] Evidence suggests strong increases and diversification of women's economic activities, which is a key pathway to resilience. In Afghanistan, beneficiary households had 32 percent higher income and revenues 5 years post-intervention compared to control households. The EI programme helped households endure a series of droughts and conflict shocks over 5 years.[53] Strong impacts on savings and financial inclusion, which also contributes to resilience, are also observed. The receipt of transfers through Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme reduced the initial impact of a drought on beneficiaries by 57 percent, eliminating the adverse impact on food security within 2 years (Hidrobo et al. 2018).

- **Government programmes are also demonstrating positive impacts on psychosocial well-being and women's empowerment.** Positive effects for women's self-assessed life satisfaction, decreased stress and worry, and improved mental health was clear in almost half of the studies in a synthesis review.[54] Zambia's SWL program shows substantial improvements in participants' mental health, including perceived happiness, self-esteem, and a comprehensive mental health index incorporating symptoms such as depression and exhaustion. Similar positive effects on mental health, including life satisfaction, inner peace, and depression, were observed in Niger. In terms of empowerment, the Niger programme showcased significant positive effects on women's social well-being and social capital within their communities, indicating increased financial support, social support, social standing, and collective action. Furthermore, sustained

effects on the index of women's control over their own earnings and productive activities were noted. However, it is noteworthy that in both Niger and Zambia, the increased income and business revenues for women did not necessarily translate into enhanced decision-making power over household resources.[55, 56] In Zambia, limited evidence of a shift in decision-making power may be attributed to the targeting of women-headed households, which may have already been relatively more empowered.

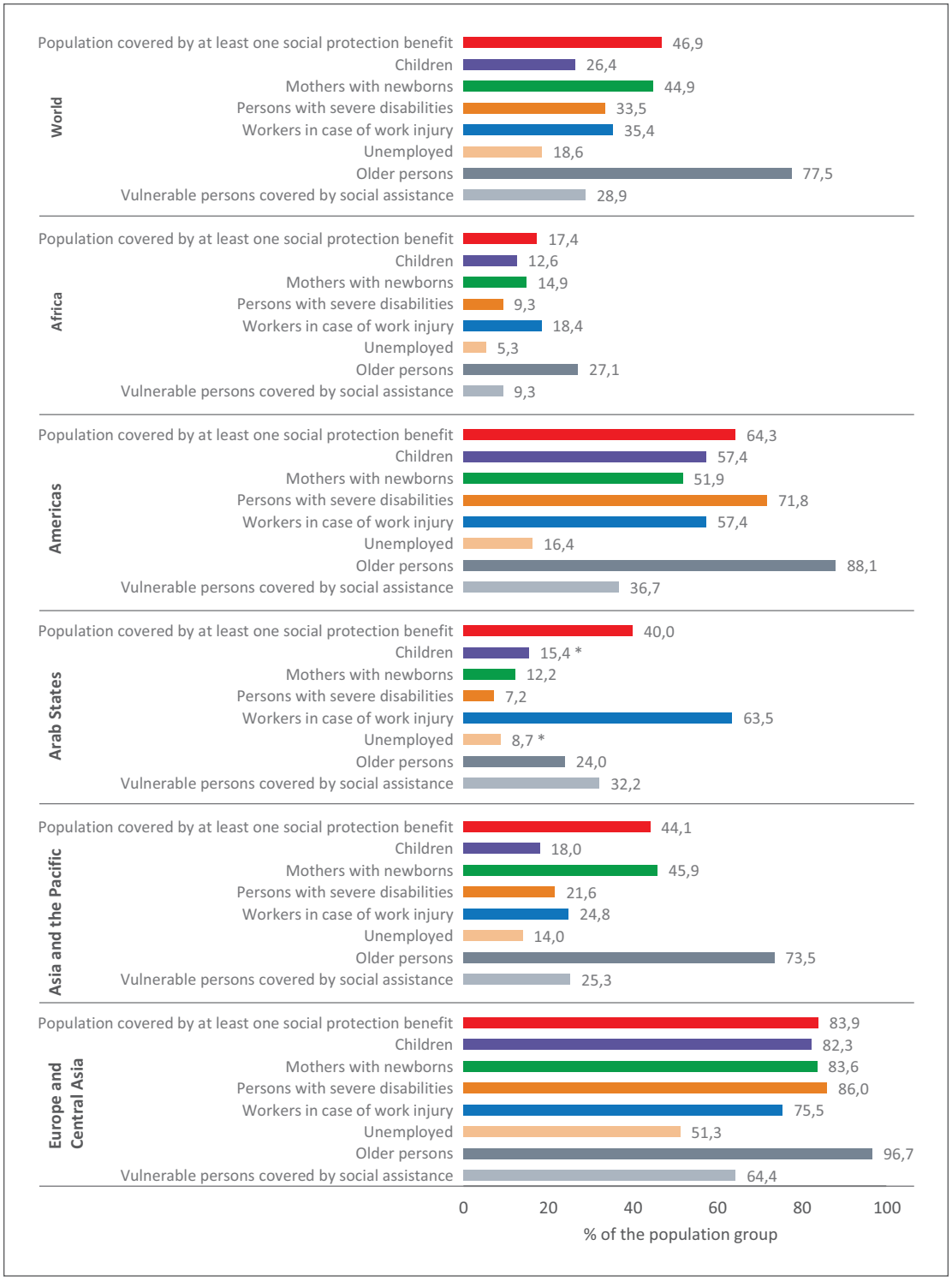
- While the evidence is nascent and limited to a few studies, when implemented through government systems, these multifaceted programmes have also been shown to be very **cost-effective and are high-return investments**. In Niger, the overall cost-effectiveness was very high, with a benefit-cost ratio of 127 percent, 18 months after the intervention. In Zambia, the cost-effectiveness was relatively lower as compared to Niger, but still, the programme breaks even with annual dissipation rates under 36 percent. Assuming persistent impacts, both Niger and Zambia yield positive and high internal rates of return at 73 percent and 36 percent, respectively.[57]

2.3. Current trends in economic inclusion efforts and social protection coverage

Despite the importance of social protection in the current multiple crises, progress on extending social protection is low and coverage of these programmes remain low, with significant differences across regions and income levels, as well as for different life-cycle risks. Figure 2 shows administrative data on effective coverage of statutory (cash) social protection schemes for the different life-cycle risks. Coverage is lowest in Africa for most risks and only 17.4 percent of the population is covered for at least one defined risk overall. Arab States and Asia and the Pacific each have coverage rates below 25 percent for children, people with severe disabilities and unemployment.[58] Coverage rates are highest in Europe and Central Asia with rates that are above 80 percent for children, mothers with newborns, persons with severe disabilities and older people. While, globally, 77.5 percent of older people are reported to benefit from at least one form of social protection, the coverage in LICs and LMICs countries is more limited (23.2 percent and 38.6 percent, respectively), with considerable geographical variation. The lowest levels of coverage for older people are reported in Sub-Saharan Africa (19.8 percent) and in the Arab States (24.0 percent). Children's access to inclusive social protection remains limited despite important progress in expanding coverage—only about 1 in 4 children, or 26.4 percent of children globally, have access to child or family cash benefits.[59]

Table 1 shows the rates for comprehensive coverage, i.e. the population who enjoy legal coverage in respect to all eight life-cycle risks of sickness, unemployment, old age, employment injury, child/family benefit, maternity, invalidity, survivors. It is estimated at one third of the global population in working age, with significantly lower coverage for women (26.5) than for men (34.3).

FIGURE 2. Effective social protection coverage, global and regional estimates, by population group, 2020 or latest available year



Source: ILO, World Social Protection Report, 2021, number of countries: overall coverage by social protection (at least one contingency) 161 countries; older persons, 174 countries; persons with severe disabilities, 133 countries; mothers with newborns, 149 countries; children, 118 countries; unemployed, 165 countries; vulnerable population, 141 countries; employment injury, 149 countries.

TABLE 1. Percentage of working-age population legally covered by comprehensive social security systems, by region and sex, 2019

Region	Total %	Male %	Female %
World	30.6	34.3	26.5
Africa	7.3	10.8	3.9
Americas	42.1	45.3	37.7
Arab States	24.2	36.1	8.6
Asia and the Pacific	29.0	32.9	24.7
Europe and Central Asia	52.7	55.0	49.7

Note: Global and regional aggregates are weighted by working-age population.

Source: ILO World, Social Protection Report, 2021.

Compared to the administrative data, household surveys of 66 low and middle-income countries show a similar coverage gap: only 49.4 percent of people live in households receiving at least one social protection benefit, leaving just over half the population without coverage (see Figure 3).[60] Non-contributory social assistance provides benefits to 39.2 percent of the population, followed by contributory social insurance programmes at 18.7 percent, and labour market programmes at 3.1 percent. Regarding the social insurance coverage, the data provides information on individuals or households receiving benefits. It does not capture population contributing to social insurance and potentially covered in case a contingency occurs. Labour market programmes or economic inclusion measures include Training (vocational, life skills, cash for training), Employment incentives/wage subsidies, Employment measures for disabled, Entrepreneurship support /startup incentives (cash and in-kind grant, microcredit), Labour Market services and intermediation through Public Employment Services, as well as contributory and non-contributory unemployment benefits. Less than half of the countries have labour market programmes in place (30 out of 66) and the coverage is only 3.2 percent of the population.

FIGURE 3. Coverage of social protection programmes by type of programme—total and Q1

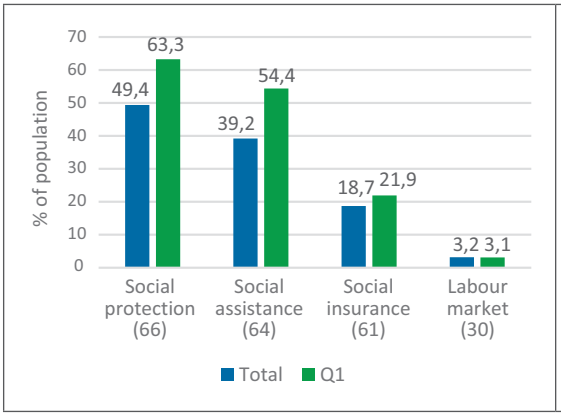
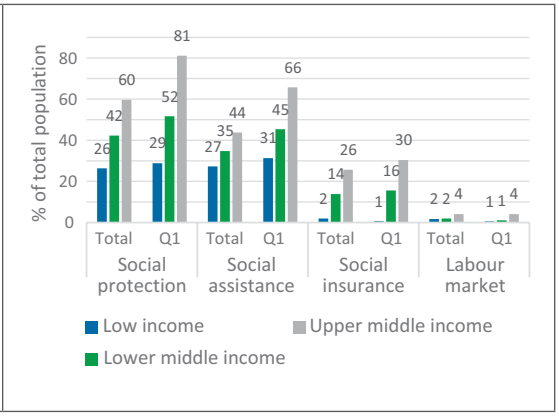


FIGURE 4. Coverage of social protection programmes by area and income level — total and Q1



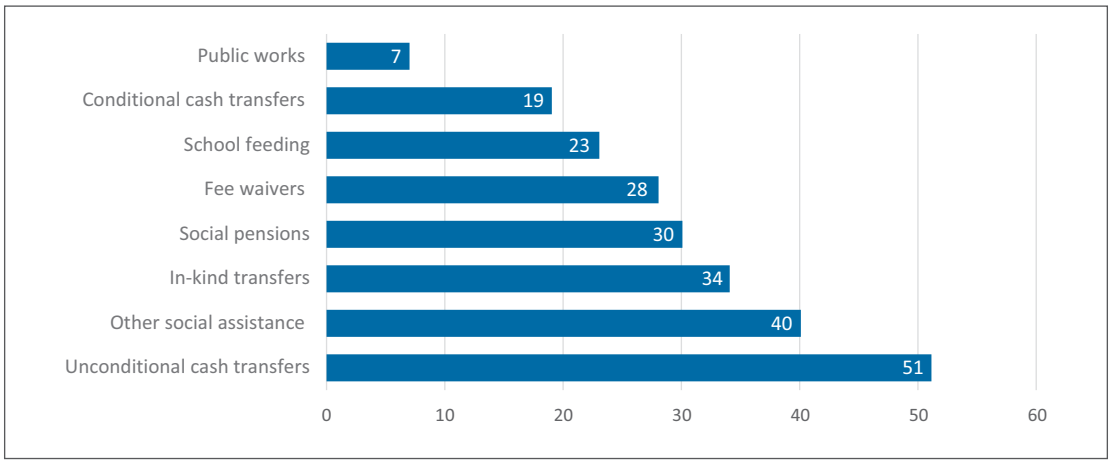
Note: Coverage is: (Number of individuals in the total population or poorest quintile who live in a household where at least one member receives the transfer)/(Number of individuals in the total population). Quintile distribution based on pre-welfare aggregate (net of 50 percent of social insurance and labour market transfers and 100 percent of social assistance transfers). The total coverage is slightly less than the sum of these programmes because some households receive multiple benefits.

Source: ASPIRE.

Social protection coverage generally increases with a country's economic development: 26 percent in LICs, 42 percent in LMICs, and 60 percent in upper-middle-income countries —UMICs (see Figure 4). Social assistance benefits targeted to the poor cover 54.4 percent of the poorest quintile. This highlights a significant gap in coverage for the poorest countries and within these countries among the poor.

Figure 5 shows the different types of social assistance programmes included under this category and the number of countries that have introduced this benefit. Unconditional cash transfers are most widespread: 51 countries among the 64 countries included in the dataset provide this benefit. Public works programmes are the least common, with only 6 countries implementing them.

FIGURE 5. Type and prevalence of social assistance programmes



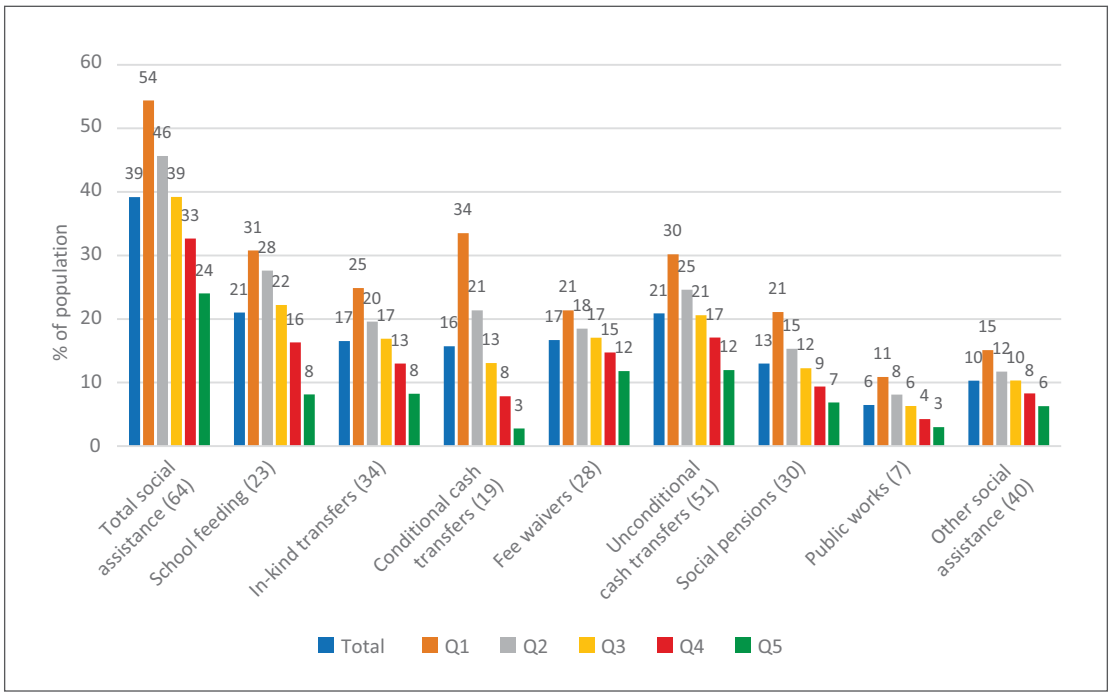
Source: ASPIRE.

Figure 6 breaks down the coverage for different categories of social assistance programmes (contrasting the reach of cash transfers with in-kind assistance)[61] and by population quintiles. The coverage of the total population ranges from 21 percent for unconditional cash transfers and school feeding programmes, to 17 percent for in-kind transfers and fee waivers, to only 6 percent for public works programmes. For nearly all programme types, coverage declines consistently as household's income level rises. Coverage also varies between countries, for example for school feeding programmes, on average, 18 percent of schoolchildren in LICs receive school meals, compared to 39 percent in LMICs, 48 percent in UMICs and 61 percent in high-income countries.[62]

Across all countries, social protection coverage in rural areas is 46 percent, compared with 40 percent in urban areas, with global poverty rates estimates at 46 percent in rural areas and 16 percent in urban areas.[63] In LICs and LMICs, 27.7 percent of the rural population is covered by some form of social assistance programme, 5.4 percent by social insurance programmes and 2.1 percent by labour market programmes. Despite an increasing trend, the coverage for rural populations is generally lower than average in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and Pacific. Coverage gaps for rural populations result from multiple barriers to access social protection. Barriers occur at the policy or legal level, as well as in programme

design and delivery. For example, agricultural workers may not be legally covered, the features of social protection systems may not be sufficiently adapted to the specificities of the agri-food sector, such as the seasonality of income, the unsafe working conditions, the high prevalence of child labour, the important vulnerability to climate-related risks and dependence on natural resources, amongst others. Finally, the agricultural sector typically provides low incomes and wages, which limit the capacities of the workers to contribute to social insurance schemes (see section 3 for policy solutions).

FIGURE 6. Coverage of social assistance programmes for total population and by quintile



Notes: Coverage is: (Number of individuals in the total population or poorest quintile who live in a household where at least one member receives the transfer)/(Number of individuals in the total population). Quintile distribution based on pre-welfare aggregate (net of 50 percent of social insurance and labour market transfers and 100 percent of social assistance transfers).

Source: ASPIRE.

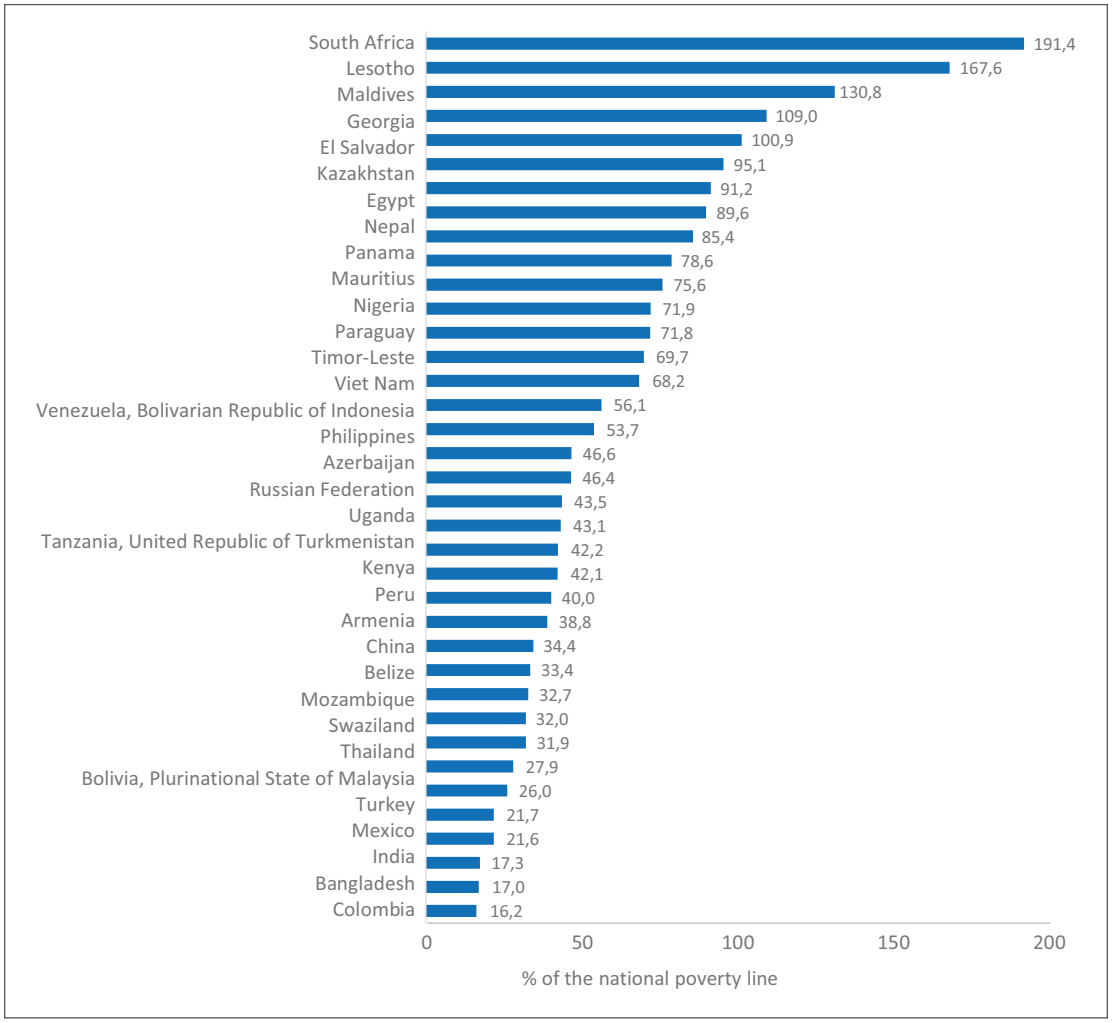
Indigenous populations, such as pastoralists, face similar constraints or worse. Pastoralists are an essential part of agrifood systems, and they make important contributions to national economies and to employment, while preserving landscapes and biodiversity. Yet, governments often do not recognize their rights to equal participation in society, including accessing public services and social protection benefits. Generally, indigenous peoples face difficulties in accessing adequate social protection and often have to rely on mutual support. A review of research on redistribution practices or mutual support in different pastoralist settings in East and West Africa reveals a wide range of institutions: various forms of social circulation of livestock within extended families and lineage groups (including pre-inheritance, dowry, loans, and gifts after a loss of means of production); contributions for specific occasions such as weddings and funerals or for the care of vulnerable groups; collective and shared agricultural or pastoral work practices; and forms of religious alms-giving.[64, 65, 66, 67, 68] However, different studies reveal a general weakening of these

institutions, while, as mentioned above, in many cases, formal social protection schemes remain inaccessible to those populations or inadequate for their needs unless efforts are undertaken to facilitate access.[69]

2.4. Adequacy of benefit levels

A comprehensive assessment of the adequacy of benefits is difficult methodologically and in terms of data availability. In many countries, benefit levels are not meeting needs and are insufficient to lift households out of poverty, with some countries for example paying old-age pensions at a level below 25 percent of the poverty line, as shown in Figure 7. Today, this issue is even more important given high levels of consumer price inflation, including food prices, and the increasing frequency of compounded crises.

FIGURE 7. Non-contributory old-age pensions as a percentage of the national poverty line, single person, selected countries, 2017 or latest available year



Source: ILO, World Social Protection Report, 2021.

Another way to look at adequacy of SP benefits, from household survey data, is to compare the SP benefits received by a household with the consumption or income of that household. Social protection programmes have different objectives, from income replacement in the case of contributory pensions, unemployment benefits, public works, or social pensions, to addressing specific consumption or income gaps combined with behavioural nudges, complementary services, or social inclusion packages for social assistance programmes. Income-replacement programmes deliver the highest benefit levels, with social insurance programmes accounting for 36.1 percent of the recipient household's welfare[70] (Figure 8). Labour market programmes and social assistance transfers, account for 19.7 percent of the welfare for the population from the poorest quintile. The level of these benefits varies with a country's income level, with higher-income countries offering three times higher benefits than for LICs (12 percent versus 35 percent), as shown in Figure 9.

FIGURE 8. Adequacy of benefit level of social protection programmes by type of programme—total and Q1

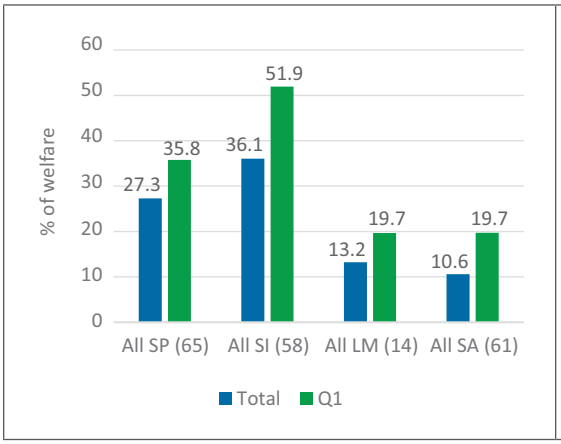
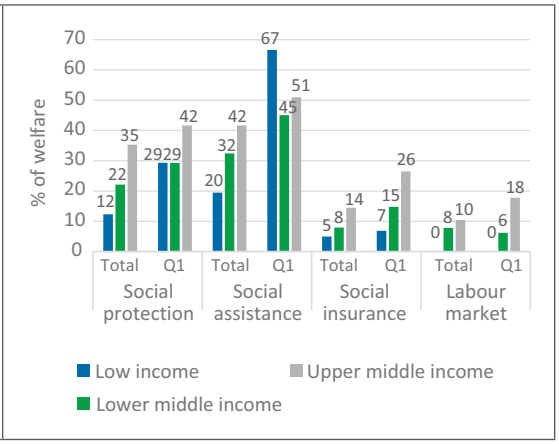


FIGURE 9. Adequacy of benefit level of social protection programmes by area and income level—total and Q1



Notes: Benefit level is: (transfer amount received by all direct and indirect beneficiaries in a population group)/(total welfare aggregate of the direct and indirect beneficiaries in that population group). Quintile distribution based on post transfer welfare aggregate.

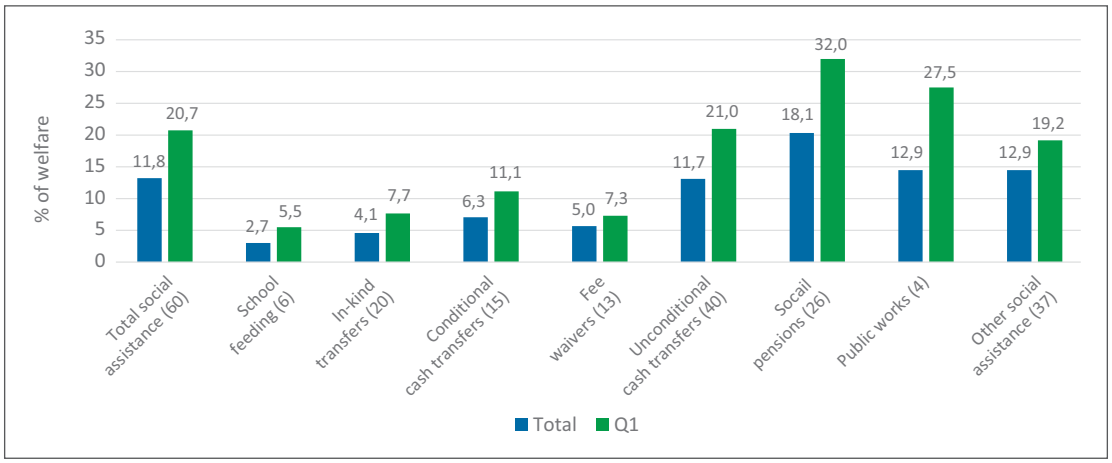
Source: ASPIRE.

Social assistance programmes aiming to improve food security or other in-kind programmes typically focused on a specific gap or commodity have lower transfer values compared to cash transfer programmes. This is illustrated in Figure 10, which presents the transfer values of different types of social assistance programmes for the total population and the poorest quintile.

While food-based social assistance programmes, such as school-feeding programmes, have a low level of benefit, representing on average around 5 percent of the welfare of total population beneficiaries and almost 8 percent of beneficiaries belonging to Q1,[71] they have multiple impacts beyond their monetary value in terms of school attendance, nutritional outcomes, generation of employment, local economic multiplier effects—if meals are procured locally, and increasing caregivers' (usually women's) time budgets. Budgetary implications of sustainable domestic financing of school-meals programmes should be closely monitored and transparently analysed so as to ensure no potentially negative impact on other areas of expenditure across the education sector, as well as the social sector more broadly.[72]

In comparison, conditional cash transfers provide income at approximately 11.1 percent of recipient's welfare, which is still low when comparing to social pensions that represent 32 percent of the welfare of the beneficiaries that belong to the bottom 20 percent of the population, as shown in Figure 10. The relatively higher level of pensions must be seen alongside the fact that older people receiving them may not have any other source of income.

FIGURE 10. Benefit levels of social assistance programmes—total population and Q1



Notes: Adequacy of benefit level is: (transfer amount received by all direct and indirect beneficiaries in a population group)/(total welfare aggregate of the direct and indirect beneficiaries in that population group). Quintile distribution based on post transfer welfare aggregate.

Source: ASPIRE.

Globally, rural populations face low benefit adequacy, at around 22 percent of household welfare[73]. The nature of agricultural work—irregular, seasonal, and hazardous—can limit the effectiveness of social insurance programmes, while social assistance programmes may struggle with irregular, unpredictable payments, high administrative costs, and accessibility[74]. Enhancing access to these programmes is essential, potentially through decentralized offices, digital technologies for registration and payment, flexible social insurance contribution schedules, and support for the organization of rural workers.

2.5. Adaptive Social Protection and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic response

Social protection is a crucial component of a comprehensive approach to crisis management, critical to mitigating the impact of crises on the food security of individuals, as well as food production systems.

Adaptive social protection systems are designed for rapid scaling, particularly crucial during shocks and crises when expanding the system fast becomes a priority. Expansion can occur horizontally, extending the reach of social protection systems to cover more people, or vertically, increasing the benefit levels for individuals already receiving benefits. This scale-up requires a rapid response and the mobilization of financial and logistical capacities on a large scale, which can be challenging. Governments and organizations need to have

effective and integrated delivery mechanisms in place to reach and register the most vulnerable populations, ensure efficiency in delivering assistance, and coordinate efforts.

To establish such delivery mechanisms, countries require robust and effective identification, enrolment, delivery, and payment systems, which are all important elements of robust social protection systems. Strong partnerships across government ministries, spanning from disaster management to finance and social protection, are indispensable. It is also critical to establish anticipatory financing mechanisms that enable timely deployment of financial resources for a rapid response to crises. Additionally, ensuring the integration of humanitarian and crisis response efforts with national social protection systems can ensure efficient, equitable and sustainable approach to poverty reduction and resilience building.

For example, in Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which regularly provides cash and food transfers to programme beneficiaries, has adopted contingency plans to expand benefits during crises, particularly through the expansion of public works initiatives informed by an early warning system and other assessments instituted by PSNP administrators and partners. Similarly, Mexico's regular cash transfer programming has operational rules to adapt to emergencies, which include provisions for exceptionally waiving in times of crisis the verification of children's school attendance and other co-responsibilities typically required to disperse payments. Such adaptive social protection measures are designed to allow for social protection programmes to expand or otherwise respond quickly during emergencies.[75]

Table 2 provides an overview of social protection measures that strengthen resilience and redress inequalities produced through climate change.

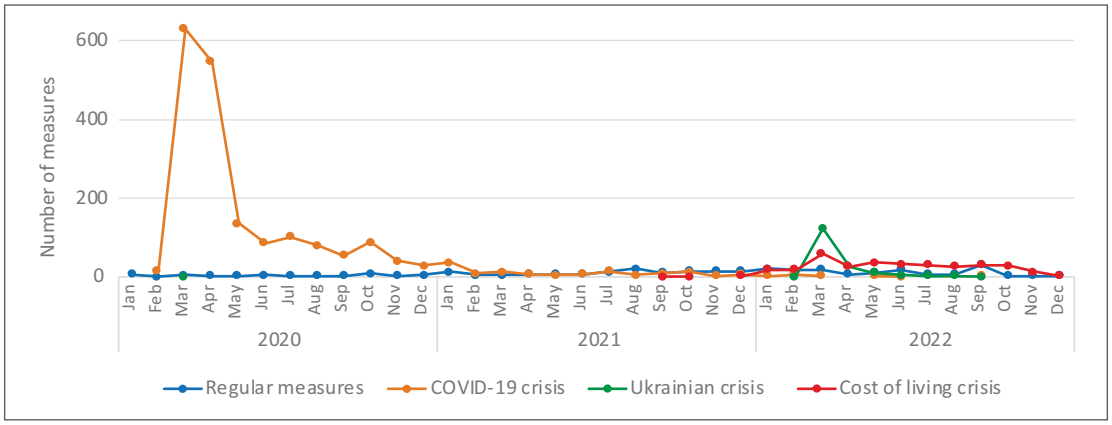
TABLE 2. Leveraging social protection for climate change adaptation and mitigation

Policy instrument	Pathway/impact	Country examples
Compensation for loss and damage caused by climate shocks	Delivering assistance before/after shocks to protect FSN needs and avoid negative coping strategies	Kenya, Pakistan, Malawi, Asia-Pacific Pilot Programmatic Partnership
Climate adaptation	Enabling shifts to improved natural resource management and livelihood diversification, public employment programmes that build protective infrastructure	Brazil, Paraguay, Colombia, Nicaragua, Uganda
Climate mitigation	Restoring natural resources through public employment programmes, compensating workers when phasing out polluting industries, re-skilling for green jobs	Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Armenia, Brazil

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of social protection measures became a crucial component of many responses to the unfolding crisis. Between 20 March 2020 and 14 May 2021, 222 countries or territories had planned or implemented 3,333 measures related to social protection and labour markets. However, only 23 percent of the social protection responses were considered to be gender-sensitive[76] and only 9 percent

specifically referred to persons with disabilities. Social assistance, constituting an average of 61 percent of these initiatives, emerged as the most widespread form of support across various regions and income groups. This was followed closely by supply-side labour market programmes at 20 percent and social insurance at 19 percent. On average, countries have devoted 2 percent of GDP to social protection COVID-19 responses, ranging from about 1.3 percent in LICs to 2.5 percent in high income settings.[77] Figure 11 shows the unprecedented magnitude of social protection measures announced in response to COVID-19, compared to measures that followed the onset of the war in the Ukraine and the cost of living crisis.

FIGURE 11. Number of measures announced in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Ukrainian crisis and the cost of living crisis, 2020–2022



Source: ILO Social Protection Monitor.

The measures introduced played a vital role in enabling individuals to access healthcare efficiently while also providing assistance in terms of job security and income stability for the most impacted, including own-account workers. Social protection measures not only enhanced resilience but also played a role in averting poverty, unemployment, and informality, serving as a significant force in mitigating the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic and protecting against some of the longer-term impacts on human development.[78] COVID-19 also provided important lessons and inspired valuable innovations for social protection planners, both in programme design and delivery mechanisms.

In addition to the scale of the required interventions, the lock-down measures and physical distancing requirements led to a big push in the adoption of digital technologies for the delivery of benefits at various steps along the delivery chain: outreach, communication, identification, registration, and complaints and appeal mechanisms were organized through mobile application and online platforms. Electronic payments were introduced or extended through mobile money or bank transfers. In many countries, the pandemic also drew attention to the lack of coordination across different government agencies and the barriers that existed for integrated responses across health, social protection and employment programmes, resulting in efforts to improve the interoperability of different entities across the public administration.[79]

However, the failure to better protect certain groups of the population, to ensure a rapid delivery of benefits and to sustain the coverage level have led some to conclude that "the world is not sufficiently prepared to respond to major crises today or in the future, including conflicts in many parts of the world and the all-encompassing climate crisis".[80] The measures only rarely lead to a lasting improvement of the coverage and adequacy of social protection measures since responses were typically one-time payments or short-term support: the average period over which benefits were paid was 3 months. Also, the response was slow in many cases. On average, countries took 83 days to pay beneficiaries from the day the first set of "stay at home" restrictions were implemented.[81] At that point, many households likely had already started adopting negative coping strategies.

The pandemic also affected incomes, wages and remittances of rural populations, increasing their levels of poverty and hunger. The share of households reporting income loss due to the pandemic in rural areas was as bad as or worse than in urban areas.[82] However, despite political commitment, social protection measures were focusing mostly on urban areas, leaving rural households, including food insecure households and informal workers of the agricultural sector, without any support. Thus, food insecurity increased generally in rural areas of LICs with fragile and patchy social protection systems and traditional food systems.

The pandemic was another testimony to the fact that countries that have comprehensive social protection systems covering the population with adequate benefits and services are better placed to respond to crises. On the one hand, large proportions of their population are already 'protected', with the option of increasing benefit levels to cater to increased needs. While the COIVD-19 response trackers have drawn a lot of attention to new measures of modifying existing or introducing new benefits, a substantial part of the population across the world benefited from automatic responses of social security institutions providing sickness benefits, partial or full unemployment benefits or facilitating access to health care. On the other hand, countries with comprehensive social protection systems have a stronger 'toolbox' of social protection schemes to leverage and adapt. During COVID-19, where systems were in place, emergency responses could be delivered to a larger number of people and at greater speed, emphasising the case for investing in systems ex ante rather than taking ad-hoc action at the onset of a shock or crisis.

3. Investments that work: integrated policies, actions and interventions

3.1. Social protection, food security and nutrition and the need for integrated policies

Social protection programmes not only address poverty and food insecurity, but they also have a strong impact on the development of human capabilities, inclusive economic growth, decent work, social equity, access to services, gender equality and facilitating just transitions, which in turn also directly affect poverty, food security and nutrition. Awareness of the interconnectedness of these issues is essential for reinforcing positive impacts on food security and nutrition.

Countries are adopting various strategies in response to the threats listed in section 1, often combining social protection with additional measures to improve food security. For example, Equatorial Guinea focuses on short-term fiscal measures and strengthens social assistance to cushion the vulnerable populations and directly support those most affected by rising costs. Nigeria is directing efforts towards addressing acute malnutrition, particularly in northeastern states. Honduras, Kenya, and Madagascar are channelling resources into improving their agricultural sectors, diversifying food sources, and enhancing governance related to food security. Additionally, Kenya and Chad have allocated significant funds for drought management and food provision. Social protection is pivotal in these strategies, providing immediate relief and long-term resilience. In Honduras, social protection policies play a significant role in reducing poverty and improving food security. Chad's National Response Plan, which includes supporting vulnerable populations through subsidies, is a direct effort to strengthen its social protection system. These selected examples illustrate the essential role of social protection in mitigating the impacts of food insecurity across different nations.[83]

In particular, the integration of social protection and economic inclusion interventions, for example through synergies between social protection and agricultural interventions is key to generate multiple positive economic, social, and environmental impacts.[84, 85] Therefore, putting in place a governance structure that articulates several objectives and facilitates the cooperation of multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, is central to enhance the social protection role in combatting hunger and food insecurity.

Despite some promising developments and mounting evidence of the positive effect of social protection on malnutrition, many humanitarian and development actors, including donors, continue to prioritize traditional and siloed approaches to tackle poverty and malnutrition. As a result, nutrition assistance continues to be mainly delivered either as part of the humanitarian response or within the health system and therefore separately from the national social protection system. In addition, the absence of effective coordination mechanisms and lack of collaboration across different sectors results in missed opportunities and inefficient use of resources to leverage social protection for nutrition. However, there are notable exceptions: the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, with a membership of 66 countries and 4 Indian States, has been supporting a multi-sector approach to tackling malnutrition that includes social protection interventions and promoting a multi-sector co-ordination. The Interagency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) Tool on Food Security and Nutrition also provides important guidance on how food security and nutrition outcomes can be maximized in social protection interventions.[86]

By reaching people who are poor and often also nutritionally at-risk, and by increasing their ability to purchase food, social protection programmes, in particular cash benefits, are inherently able to address some of the determinants of malnutrition, by increasing the resources that are available to a household. At the same time, social protection, including social assistance, maximizes its impact on malnutrition only if deliberately designed for this purpose, based on an in-depth understanding of the diverse nutritional needs that population groups may have including evidence disaggregated by sex, age and disability, and by incorporating specific nutrition goals, indicators and actions.[87] It is, therefore, vital to leverage national social protection programmes as a means and platform to tackle malnutrition, by promoting adjustments either to routine operations of social protection programmes or that are ready to be triggered in the context of a crisis.

Social protection benefits can only play that role if coverage and benefit levels are significant. For example, transfers in Latin American countries were found not to have substantial impacts on reducing poverty and inequality because of low coverage and benefit levels.[88] Other cash transfer programmes have been found to increase food consumption, health visits, prenatal monitoring, and the probability of children being weighed.[89.] However, they have had mixed impacts on child stunting, wasting and anemia, dietary intake, health status, and vaccination coverage.[90] In many countries, this is because both coverage and benefit levels of cash transfer programmes are too low to make a real difference in people's lives.

Reviews demonstrate that social assistance programmes, if they are well-designed, are highly effective in improving women's and children's dietary and physical development outcomes.[91] This impact is maximized when pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, and children under the age of two are targeted, covering the first 1000 days of their lives,[92, 93] when fortified/protein enhanced[94] foods are provided[95, 96, 97] and when social behaviour change[98, 99] strategies are delivered in conjunction with the provision of the transfer. Early childhood is the period when the least public resources are invested, with the majority of child social protection schemes and programmes targeting school-aged children. This despite the fact that early childhood is a very sensitive period in life and investments in early childhood development bring the largest returns over the long term.[100] For example, a research study of Pakistan's Ehsaas Nashnuma Programme conducted in 2019 found a 15 percent reduction in the prevalence of stunting and other forms of malnutrition in children who received cash transfers, SBC and SNF between 6-23 months. In LAC, exposure to a cash transfer programmes has led to better cognitive development in Honduras[101] Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Colombia.[102] These child benefits have shown the strongest impact if designed as universal or quasi-universal categorical entitlements.[103]

Similarly, social pensions for older people have manifold impacts beyond improving the wellbeing, health and dignity of the individual entitled to receive the benefit: they also improve the well-being of children in the household, they generate local economic multipliers, in particular in rural areas, and reduce inequalities.[104] For example, the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) has proven to be an effective instrument to improve the lives and livelihoods of poor older Malawians and their household members and increase women's decision-making power and choices.[105]

Design features to address nutritional outcomes through social protection systems include:

- Design of the **eligibility criteria when extending coverage** to systematically include nutrition considerations in eligibility criteria and targeting mechanisms, avoiding a situation where those who are most nutritionally at-risk are excluded. Nutrition-sensitive programming often specifically targets pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, and children in their first 1000 days, or under age 5 when possible, in the most vulnerable areas.

- Integrating or coordinating social and beneficiary registries with health and nutrition databases. **Fostering interoperability** across management information systems (MIS) between the social protection and health sector can bridge this challenge.

- Fully explore the value added of employing **digital technologies** for delivery and for improving the capacity to anticipate and respond to shocks to reach those most at risk of hunger and malnutrition. Famine, food insecurity and acute malnutrition are often predictable and recurrent.

- Ensuring that the benefits provided, e.g. in-kind or cash transfers, or school meals, account for nutrition needs. It is pivotal to ensure that the transfer package is **adequate,** for example setting transfer values in consideration of the cost of a healthy diet.

- **Modality, duration and frequency of benefits** should be determined based on nutritional objectives and seasonal needs and they should be complemented with targeted nutrition interventions, such as fortification that improve nutritional adequacy of the existing package and using social behaviour change strategies to foster healthier choices.

- Food procurement and provision, e.g. school feeding programmes, in-kind, food for work, etc., should be centred around **healthy options** like proteins, vegetables, whole grains and biofortified/fortified staples.

- There should be explicit and **strategic linkages** across social protection programmes and other sectoral services to enhance nutrition outcomes and address the needs and preferences of the most nutritionally at-risk groups.[106] Encouraging early screening and referrals through the regular use of health services, strengthening social welfare case management and referral systems, and the provision of social behaviour change measures through social protection schemes can contribute to the prevention of malnutrition.

- It is also important to apply a **gender lens** across the programme cycle, strengthening women's empowerment, which represents both a goal of social protection programmes and an intermediate result on the pathways to achieve nutrition impacts.

Table 3 provides an overview of pathways through which different policy measures produce improvements in food security and nutrition in different country contexts.

Moving forward, it is essential to prioritize the integration of food-security-sensitive social protection measures into national policies and programmes. Governments, international organizations, and stakeholders should collaborate to strengthen social protection systems, improve coordination, and ensure adequate funding. Additionally, research and data collection should inform evidence-based decision-making and monitor the impact of social protection interventions on food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation. By adopting a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach, we can harness the potential of social protection to address the complex challenges of food and nutrition insecurity and poverty, ultimately improving the well-being and livelihoods of vulnerable populations.

The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions presented in Box 2 below is a key UN initiative adopting precisely such an integrated approach by designing policies that will maximize impact on creating decent employment and extending

social protection simultaneously, focussing on addressing the climate crisis, the care crisis and digitalisation. The initiative brings together key UN agencies and partners and provides a vehicle for pathfinder countries to formulate roadmaps for coordinated support. All pathfinder countries that have already drafted their Global Accelerator Roadmaps, selected food systems as the strategic sector to work on to leverage the greatest impact.[107]

TABLE 3. Overview of the impact on poverty and hunger of different policy instruments and country applications

Policy instrument	Pathway/Impact	Country examples
Unconditional Cash Transfers	Increase household incomes, thereby improving access to food and other goods and services	Rwanda VUP-Direct Support, China rural minimum living standard guarantee (Dibao) program, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Conditional Cash Transfers	Increase household incomes, thereby improving access to food and other goods and services and reward behavior change	Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, Mexico
School meals	Direct access to food and incentivize school attendance to improve child nutrition and education outcomes, stimulate local food markets (if supplies are procured locally)	Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, China, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Kenya, Peru
Improved food distribution systems	Increased accessibility of food	India and Mexico
Multi-sectoral intervention packages (cash+)	Integrated approaches to simultaneously tackle economic, health and behavioral dimensions	Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Lesotho, Pakistan, Peru, Mexico, Malawi, Nepal, Zambia

BOX 2. The Global Accelerator on jobs and social protection for just transitions

The Global Accelerator offers **sustainable and integrated solutions** to tackle the multiple crises and create a virtuous cycle of sustainable development where combined investments in social protection and decent job creation generate high economic and social returns and facilitate the transition to a resilient, sustainable, and inclusive economy.

The Global Accelerator includes **three mutually supportive areas of work**:

- Pillar 1: in-country development of integrated and coordinated **policies and strategies** for decent work and social protection that facilitate just transitions;
- Pillar 2: establishment of national financing frameworks and the mobilization of **public and private domestic and international resources** to invest in universal social protection and inclusive, environment- and gender-responsive employment interventions; and
- Pillar 3: improvement of **multilateral cooperation** on jobs and social protection for just transitions, including with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to provide more coordinated support for countries.

Since its launch in September 2021, the initiative has set up a governance structure, a technical support facility, it has engaged with 30 countries and launched operations in 10 pathfinder countries, set up a dedicated window with the Joint SDG Fund for resource mobilization and mobilized more than 22 million USD.

3.2. Building rights-based universal social protection systems

To maximize their potential, it is crucial that social protection systems provide legal entitlements, as to translate the human right to social security into national law, and to ensure the needed predictability, enforceability and certainty in order to achieve the intended developmental outcomes, namely income-smoothing, facilitating economic risk-taking and stimulating investments.[108]

Social protection benefits that are legally anchored also contribute to building trust in public institutions and enable citizens to hold their governments accountable. For the latter, effective complaint and appeal mechanisms that are accessible for all and that safeguard the rights and dignity of protected persons are crucial to ensure due process. These should also be specified in law.

Rights-based social protection systems are inherently adaptive, flexible and shock responsive: they provide benefits in case of unemployment, old age, survivorship, sickness, disability or poverty. When an economic, environmental or other shock occurs, the number of people in need that are entitled to receive benefits increases and social protection systems act as automatic stabilizers, provided that the system has the administrative capacity and the financing to absorb the rapidly increased number of beneficiaries. Since this can be challenging during crises, some countries may also need humanitarian assistance in emergency situations.

Most countries have constitutional provisions that safeguard the right to social security or social protection, typically referring to the right to live "a life in dignity", "a decent standard of living" or "to receive indispensable subsistence", which would of course entail freedom from hunger. The implementation of constitutional rights necessitates legislation that specifies how such rights arise, how they materialize and how they can be enforced. While the vast majority of countries have a legal framework governing the provision of contributory benefits under social insurance schemes, non-contributory benefits are not as frequently established in law, especially in many middle-income and most low-income countries. For example, the Mexico without Hunger National Programme, which provided food aid to over 7 million Mexicans suffering from malnutrition and hunger, did not have a corresponding legislative basis and could easily be discontinued after the change in government. Likewise, in Cambodia, the School Feeding Programme, does not have a basis in law.[109] If legislated, laws should specify in particular the following aspects, as stipulated in paragraph 7 of the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202):

- **The material scope of coverage:** the risk or contingency covered, or the circumstances under which a person can obtain a benefit.
- **The personal scope of coverage:** who is covered, in respect of which benefits. In some cases, the scope of coverage is defined broadly, but entitlements are restricted to those who meet certain conditions; in other cases, the scope of coverage is defined by specifying the personal attributes of those who are intended to qualify for coverage.
- **The type and nature, or range, and duration of the benefits** available to the persons covered in the event of a contingency, risk or situation covered by the law

and for which protection is afforded. This may include child and family benefits, sickness and health-care benefits, maternity benefits, disability benefits, old-age benefits, survivors' benefits, unemployment benefits and employment guarantees, and employment injury benefits, as well as any other social benefits in cash or in kind.

- **The level or amount of the benefits to be provided:** what will a person receive, in cash or in kind, if they are entitled to a benefit.

- **The qualifying conditions**, also referred to as conditions of entitlement or eligibility criteria, that have to be met to qualify for a benefit, which should be formulated clearly, with the necessary definitions.

Recognized as a human right, social protection is important for all members of society because we all face the same life cycle risks.[110] However, as discussed in section 2, many countries are still far from reaching universal coverage. The United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights promulgates that States parties are required to take steps to ensure the progressive realization of the right to social security, to the maximum of their available resources, including through international assistance and cooperation while needing to demonstrate that they are moving as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards that goal. As such, State parties have the clear obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to social security, which is closely linked to the right to food.[111]

3.3. Ensuring sustainable, equitable and sufficient financing for social protection

To effectively prevent poverty and hunger through rights-based social protection, related schemes and programmes will have to be underpinned by sustainable and equitable financing mechanisms, which is considered as macro-critical.[112] Social protection systems are strong redistributive mechanisms based on redistribution and progressive financing and expenditure mechanisms.[113] Ensuring progressivity also on the revenue side (taxes), not only in the expenditure side (transfers) is important to maximize impact, as illustrated by many countries in Latin America. There, countries start from a similar level of pre-taxes and transfer inequalities compared to high-income countries, but it remains high after taxes and transfers whereas high income countries achieve a high degree of redistribution.[114]

Previous reports to the G20 also highlighted the importance of ensuring the sustainable and equitable financing of social protection systems as a precondition for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.[115] The financing gap to achieve universal coverage of a social protection floor is estimated to be USD 1,191.6 billion or 3.8 percent of the GDP of the developing countries considered in the study. More than 60 percent of the gap (USD 750.8 billion) corresponds to the share of UMICs, about 30 percent (USD 362.9 billion) to LMICs and 6.5 percent (USD 77.9 billion) to LICs.[116] The amount needed to support building social protection floors in LICs would seem affordable when considering global wealth if there was sufficient solidarity. Similarly, the estimated cost of a world without hunger of about USD 39 to 50 billion annually looks not without reach.[117]

To achieve progress in closing the financing gaps, members of USP2030 partnership agreed on a joint statement[118] on guiding principles to ensure sustainable, equitable and sufficient financing and domestic resource mobilization for social protection highlighting the following points for government action:

- Assign greater priority to social spending within government budgets.
- Enhance the progressiveness and effectiveness of the tax system to increase tax revenue and ensure equity in financing efforts.
- Increase revenues from social insurance contributions by expanding coverage of social insurance schemes to previously uncovered workers.
- Improve the efficiency and transparency of public financing of social protection across all relevant levels and agencies of government and partners.
- Ensure adequate provision of shock-responsive financing.
- Engage in inclusive national and social dialogue to determine the reforms and financing of the social protection system.

While national social protection systems are predominantly financed by domestic resources, usually through a combination of social security contributions and general taxation[119], countries with insufficient economic and fiscal capacities may need to seek international cooperation and support that complement their own efforts, at least temporarily. In view of the urgent challenges around poverty and hunger, exacerbated by multiple crises, including the climate crisis, such international support provides an important lifeline for millions of people, and the opportunity to invest part of these resources into building social protection systems that can reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience. This can also include supporting countries to develop multi-year financing plans for expanding social protection coverage over time. With regards to the international financing, the USP2030 guidance makes the following recommendations:

- Increased and better coordinated international financial support for social protection.
- Debt relief and restructuring.
- International tax reform to increase revenues.
- Coordinated international policy advice.

Further, there is growing recognition of the key role social protection has to play in advancing inclusive, just and effective climate action through climate adaption, mitigation, loss, and damage. It is essential to scale-up flows of climate finance for social protection—in line with the principles for achieving universal social protection—as a strategic investment in achieving climate-resilient and low-carbon development that leaves no one behind.[120] This includes expanding and strengthening the portfolio of social protection measures

supported in the UNFCCC climate funds, including the new Loss and Damage Fund, as well as exploring options to channel emerging and innovative forms of both public and private climate finance towards social protection.

A more detailed discussion of sustainable financing can be found in the related G20 "Report on Funding and Resource Mobilization to Fight Hunger and Poverty".

3.4. Pathways for progressively expanding social protection

In their efforts to progressively extend social protection, governments have to make difficult choices about the pathways and priorities for reaching universal social protection. Most governments develop social protection extension strategies with the aim of prioritizing the most vulnerable and those most in need by either targeting certain vulnerable groups like children, older people, people with disabilities, etc., or by targeting poor households or a combination of both.

BOX 3. Achieving better impacts through higher-coverage, lifecycle-based programmes

The effectiveness of social protection programmes in reducing poverty and improving food security depends on a combination of the extent of horizontal coverage (population reached) and the adequacy of benefits. Universal or near-universal programmes aimed at children and older people reach large numbers of households. Moreover, old-age pensions tend to have higher transfer values, while universal child benefits tend to result in larger total transfers for poorer households, who tend to have more children and for whom transfers are proportionally more important relative to household consumption. As a result, paradoxically, these broad-based lifecycle transfers are often associated with higher impacts on poverty and inequality than programmes designed with the specific goal of alleviating poverty by targeting poor households.

For example, in Georgia the universal old-age pension was responsible for nearly 70 percent of the reduction in child poverty, compared with just 20 percent for the national flagship Targeted Social Assistance programme, due to a combination of high coverage and relatively higher transfer values.[121] While just 12-14 percent of children lived in households covered by social assistance transfers, some 36 percent lived in households with an old-age pensioner.[122]

In Brazil, pensions had a much larger impact on inequality than the flagship *Bolsa Familia* programme, despite the latter achieving relatively high coverage compared with similar programmes globally. Whereas *Bolsa Familia* was responsible for 0.6 percent reduction in inequality, pensions (including old age, invalidity and survivors) explained 11 percent of the reduction, a more than 18-fold difference. The authors concluded that the low impact for some programmes was at least partly explained by relatively lower transfer values. In addition, the study found that between 1988 and 2010 the rural pension dramatically reduced poverty among older people and significantly reduced poverty across all age groups.[123]

Similar results can be observed in countries that achieve very high or universal coverage through social insurance systems. For example, in the United States, the Social Security programme lifts many more people out of poverty than any other programme in the country. In 2018, Meyer and Wu found that Social Security "single-handedly slashes poverty [among the elderly] by 75 percent, more than 20 times the combined effect of the means-tested transfers [SSI, SNAP, Public Assistance, the EITC and housing assistance].[124] Similarly, Romig and others have found that social security consistently lifts more people across all age groups above the poverty line than any other programme, including more than 1 million children and 5 million people of working age.[125] This is due to a combination of low coverage and low transfer values of means-tested programmes: for example, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) benefits still leave a beneficiary family "at or below 60 percent of the poverty line in every state".[126]

Pathways towards universal social protection coverage for a world without hunger and poverty will require a combination of different schemes and programmes, in cash or in-kind, through non-contributory schemes, providing universal, categorical, or poverty-targeted benefits such as social assistance, and through contributory social insurance and by building human capital, productive assets, and access to jobs. The specific combination of schemes and benefits will differ from country to country and depend on countries' situation, priorities and preferences, but always in pursuit of the objective to enable anyone who needs social protection to be able to access it.[127]

For example, schemes and programmes can change the eligibility parameters step by step for a progressive introduction of categorically targeted social protection benefits in line with a gradual increase of government budgets dedicated to social protection. Many countries gradually increase the age threshold for child benefits or lower the pension age. For example, Nepal commenced its pension at 75 years of age in 1994, in 2008, reduced the age of eligibility to 70 years and, starting in 2023, reduced it to 68 years.[128] The effectiveness of social protection programmes in reducing poverty and improving food security depends on a combination of the extent of horizontal coverage (population reached) and the adequacy of benefits.

China is one of the countries standing out in achieving remarkable rates of poverty reduction, accounting for close to three-quarters of global poverty reduction since 1980. This can be attributed to a number of policy measures, including in the education sector, industry, infrastructure and economic policies, entailing also a package of social protection benefits. A key focus was the rapid modernization of agriculture to stimulate rural economic development, focusing on impoverished areas and encouraging private sector engagement and partnerships in rural regions. The increase in the returns on assets, particularly land and labour owned by the poorest individuals, was also achieved through the development of human capabilities and investment in people, particularly through education, skills development and vocational training, employment opportunities or access to financing, and by promoting the participation of smallholder producers in rural markets.[129]

These policies to improve income generating capacities of the rural population were complemented with a comprehensive set of social protection schemes for those unable to work. Social protection schemes included a combination of contributory and non-contributory old-age pension schemes and medical insurance / assistance, work-injury insurance, unemployment insurance, maternity insurance, community care services and a rural and urban minimum guaranteed income.[130] The rural pension schemes[131] and the medical insurance[132] have both reached close to universal coverage. While the separation of schemes into rural and urban populations leads to coverage gaps for rural migrant workers, evidence shows the cash benefits to be contributing significantly to poverty reduction.[133]

3.5. Extending social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy

Workers in the informal economy face multiple challenges, including often low and volatile earnings, difficult working conditions and barriers in accessing contributory

and non-contributory social protection schemes and programmes, which renders them particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition.[134] Paradoxically, this is a reality also for many workers in the agrifood sector, including subsistence farmers, pastoralists, seasonal and casual workers, many of whom are migrant workers.

The extension of social protection to so far uncovered workers is essential for promoting decent work, reducing their vulnerability and enhancing their resilience, including with regard to access to healthy food. Many countries have successfully extended coverage to previously uncovered categories of workers, including agricultural workers, self-employed workers and domestic workers, as well as migrant workers, by removing legal, financial, administrative and information barriers, including through monotax mechanisms (see below), adapted contribution modalities—including subsidized contributions for those with limited contributory capacities, adjusting to seasonal earnings patterns, more decentralized structures and digital technologies and benefit packages that meet priority needs.[135]

These measures have not only enhanced access to social protection, but also contributed to reducing decent work deficits and facilitated transitions from the informal to the formal economy. Social insurance is an effective tool to prevent poverty and ensure income security and access to health care, as it is built on solidarity and redistribution, and can reduce financial pressures on tax-financed benefits. Formalizing businesses can also increase the tax revenue basis, generating fiscal space also for non-contributory benefits. The digital transformation offers unique opportunities to better track consumption and income and generate data and information regarding contributory capacities of individuals or unregistered business activities. Social protection extension and formalisation strategies are important tools for governments to plan concrete steps for the extension of social insurance to those with contributory capacity.

In order to facilitate access to social protection for workers in the informal economy with limited contributory capacities and support their formalization, governments have introduced monotributo/monotax mechanisms that simplify administrative processes for the self-employed and workers in small business units and facilitate the payment of taxes and social security contributions. While taxes and contributions are lower than in general, workers are covered under the regular schemes. Such mechanisms to facilitate access to social security schemes have their roots in Latin America, starting with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and have subsequently been introduced in other countries in different variants, including Cabo Verde, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Senegal. These mechanisms facilitate the extension of social security to previously unprotected populations and have particularly strong gender impacts, allowing women working in micro- and small firms, whether as employees or as employers, to be formalized and included in social security.

Extending social protection coverage for agricultural workers and rural populations requires addressing the specific barriers that so far keep many persons excluded from social protection. Successful policy solutions for extending coverage to agricultural workers accommodate to the specificities of the agrifood sector and provide adapted solutions.[136] One example is the rural pension scheme in Brazil that covers both agricultural workers and rural producers through an adapted mechanism, or establishing links between agricultural

cooperatives and national social security institutions.[137] Another example is the strong reduction in rural poverty in China achieved, among other factors, by a significant extension of social protection, in particular pensions and social health insurance, in a short period of time.[138] Making adequate contributory and non-contributory schemes accessible for rural populations requires additional efforts to ensure that the programmes are designed in a transparent and inclusive way, and that benefits are easily accessible through decentralized structures and, where possible, digital mechanisms.

4. Learning from experiences: Capacity building and knowledge sharing on what works in social protection and economic inclusion

Evidence and lessons learnt about the impact of specific interventions in specific contexts and conditions are important for successful implementation. There are no blueprints for accelerating the extension of comprehensive and adequate social protection systems or for the design of economic inclusion interventions that maximize impact. Governments need to analyse, which solutions will work best in their context. Learning from other countries' lessons and exchanging experiences has accelerated social protection developments in the past, contributing to the spread of social assistance cash benefits, social pensions, public works, school feeding or monotax mechanisms across the world. North-South, trilateral and South-South cooperation, and partnerships like USP2030 (Box 1) and SPIAC-B are important fora to exchange knowledge, foster coordination and improve collaboration. South-South and trilateral cooperation is particularly valuable for this since welfare regimes and social protection policy making is, to a certain extent, path-dependent: Different labour market contexts and specificities of the economies, existing systems and past policy choices determine reform pathways and what are the best choices for the future. Learning from success stories of countries with similar experiences and circumstances has greater relevance since these experiences can be more readily adapted to similar contexts.

In the area of South-South Cooperation on Social Protection, Brazil has been a forerunner, with the launch, in 2008, of the Brazil-Africa Cooperation Programme on Social Protection, which included study tours for African countries in Brazil and led to the creation of the African Social Protection Network. These exchanges with Brazil and Mexico were instrumental to inform the design of social registries in several African countries.[139]

Even in contexts where they are faced with low trust, low public revenues and low state capacity, governments need to find viable solutions to address poverty and hunger. Social protection systems have great potential for (re-)building trust between the citizen and the State if the public administration is able to organize the reliable delivery of benefits or services and build sufficient delivery capacity. Process is equally important as content and includes building an enabling environment of rule of law, sufficient institutional capacity in the public administration and a public that understands and supports social protection policies. Social partners, civil society organisations and social dialogue play a key role for enhancing the understanding of social protection and negotiating the modalities for social protection benefits and services.

Already in 2015, in response to a request from the G20, the social protection sector launched an online platform to facilitate such exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as to foster learning and collaboration in extending social protection: www.socialprotection.org.[140] The platform brings together different actors such as governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks, leveraging the work developed by these different stakeholders and avoiding duplication. With currently almost 14,000 members it is the leading exchange-hub on latest developments in social protection, through weekly webinars and an extensive library offering curated content, the platform provides cutting edge information on any aspect of social protection. The members come from across the globe and the majority from the South, showing the great interest for information and also the great impact of such a platform offering relevant content easily accessible and in different languages. The agency-neutral branding was a key success factor for the platform to work as a neutral knowledge broker that all members were interested to contribute to and participate in. This is a remarkable success in a context of competition for resources and ideas. The platform succeeded in building a genuine social protection community and delivers invaluable services for social protection experts and practitioners, its financial sustainability is uncertain in light of current cuts in development cooperation financing.

5. Conclusions and way forward

In conclusion, the multiple crises and transformations that the world is confronted with have thrown us off-track in the progress made towards reaching the SDGs. At the same time, the progress that was made previously provides important lessons for current efforts to accelerate progress in fighting hunger and poverty. There is a strong international consensus that universal social protection systems are a central element of this endeavour. This report has shown that a comprehensive life-cycle approach is essential to address poverty in its multiple dimensions. This requires a package of legal entitlements that meet different needs and vulnerabilities with different mechanisms, taking into account different capacities of the people benefitting from the interventions so that all members of society are able to enjoy at least a basic level of income security and access to health care.

The following **key messages** emerge from this review:

- Poverty, hunger and malnutrition are mutually reinforcing and create a vicious cycle of deprivation and lost human capital. The COVID-19 pandemic, ensuing conflicts and the worsening climate crisis have eroded progress made over the past decade in the fight against poverty and hunger. In fact, global hunger has risen by 1.3 percent since before the pandemic and today, 700 million people live in extreme poverty, 148 million children are stunted, and over 40 percent of the world's population is overweight or obese of which over 70 percent live in LMICs.

- However, beyond crises, conflict and climate change, many structural factors, such as inequalities, pervasive discrimination, low productivity, unfavourable macroeconomic policies and trade regimes, as well as the weakness of public institutions, have contributed to poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

- Social protection addresses multiple dimensions of poverty and can improve nutrition outcomes, including impacts on stunting, wasting, and incidences of diarrhoea. Similarly, economic inclusion interventions can support people to manage and grow their livelihoods and become resilient in the face of future shocks and stresses.

- However, globally, less than half of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, leaving 4.1 billion people without protection, with significant regional variation. In Africa, only 17.4 percent of the population is covered by at least one benefit; in the Arab States region, 40 percent, and Asia and the Pacific, 44 percent.

- While there has been a significant improvement in the pension coverage for older persons (77.5 percent), less than one in five unemployed workers receive unemployment benefits (18.6 percent), only one in four children receives child benefits (26.4 percent) and one in three persons with disabilities (33.5 percent) receives disability benefits. Only 30.6 percent of the working-age population enjoys comprehensive coverage across the life cycle (34.3 percent for men and 26.5 percent for women).

- Despite the significant social and economic returns on investing in social protection systems, financing gaps remain substantial, estimated to be USD 1,191.6 billion or 3.8 percent of the GDP of low- and middle-income countries. To close financing gaps in LICs, USD 77.9 billion per year is needed to establish a social protection floor that would provide an effective safeguard against poverty and hunger.

- Experiences in countries provide important lessons regarding the design of interventions to maximise the impact across the SDGs:

    - **Integrated approaches** that combine social protection with access to other goods and services, such as interventions for food and nutrition security, skills development, employment services, health and care services, access to finance or agricultural inputs can help to overcome structural barriers.

    - **Institutionalized social protection systems and benefits anchored in national legislation** guarantee sustainability and equity across changes in government, ensure predictability of benefits, transparency and accountability, and foster trust in public institutions.

    - **Progressive building of coherent social protection systems,** combining social insurance and tax-financed social protection benefits, and complemented by public services, is essential for meeting the diversity of needs of the population.

    - **Strong implementation mechanisms** build on a combination of digital solutions and in-person support along the delivery chain.

- **Domestic resources** as the predominant source of social protection financing ensure the sustainability of the system, yet some countries might request complementary international support to build their social protection systems.

- To get back on track to achieve the SDGs, the international community already supports important global initiatives that support countries in the implementation of extending social protection through integrated approaches, in particular:

  - The UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, which ensures coordinated support by UN agencies, development and financing partners for pathfinder countries in implementing integrated approaches.

  - The socialprotection.org platform that is the most actively used tool for capacity building and knowledge management across the social protection community.

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