

Social Protection Brief No. 39

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Social Protection Working Group

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About this working group:

The working group aims at exchanging information and discussing ongoing research related to social protection. Researchers dealing with social protection and interested in an international exchange are also welcome to join.

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New Publications (Peer-reviewed)

Global Social Protection. Institutional Perspectives. By Bender, K. & Kaltenborn, M. (Eds.), (2025). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing

This innovative book provides a multidisciplinary institutional approach to social protection, combining insights from economics, law, philosophy, political science, and sociology. It examines the role of institutions in the effective functioning of social protection systems and explores the factors driving or hindering institutional change.

Expert authors investigate the rationales that underpin social protection, emphasising institutional design and the need to address the transformation of social protection systems in low- and middle-income countries. They assess the role of social protection in tackling poverty and social exclusion in these nations, as well as the challenges of operational barriers and limited coverage. Chapters blend conceptual insights with empirical applications to highlight the complementary nature of diverse institutional research. Ultimately, the book addresses the ethical considerations and international legal standards of social protection and concludes that a renewed framework is required to improve human rights globally.

Presenting a holistic understanding of the field, *Global Social Protection* is a vital read for scholars and students of comparative social policy, sociology of development, and development studies. It will also benefit policymakers and practitioners engaged in social protection and development cooperation.

UN social summits as Global Social Policy? By Koehler, G. (2025). *Global Social Policy*. Online First.

In 2025, multilateralism is under great pressure. Many United Nations (UN) member states violate the binding principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, often only superficially commit to non-binding declarations such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the Paris Agreement, and are delaying or even cutting funding to the UN system. Considering these compounded challenges, does it make sense for the overstretched UN to convene a World Summit for Social Development, to take place in Doha, Qatar, in November 2025? To gauge actual or potential impact of this (or any) UN summit, it is useful to disaggregate 'the UN' into five constituencies—member states; the UN secretariat, funds, programmes ('UN'); the international financial institutions (IFIs); civil society and academe. 1 Several questions arise. Did the progressive, social justice and solidarity remit of the first social summit get traction? Did it change the concept of social policy by casting social development as a global endeavour? Did it spawn national, regional and international initiatives, in national governments or civil society?(How) has academic research been involved and what might it contribute in the future? The essay traces the genesis of the 1995 summit for social development, in terms of actors and their positions, compares the dynamics of the second social development summit and sketches possible approaches for future engagement by supportive academics.

Emerging social assistance regimes in middle income countries: Turkey in comparative perspective. By Öktem, K.G. & Leisering, L. (2025). *Global Social Policy*. Online First.

Countries in the global South have expanded social security significantly since the late 1990s. What kind of social security are they heading for? Are they following models from the global

North, or are genuinely Southern models building up? Focussing on middle income countries (MIC) and on the last safety net, social assistance, the article investigates the social assistance regime that has emerged in Turkey and situates the Turkish case in the broader context of the global South and North. We draw on Turkish policy documents and on partially self-constructed quantitative data on the global South and North. While most MIC have adopted social assistance programmes, which are a Northern model, we find that the institutional design, the objectives, the institutionalisation, and the scale of social assistance differ fundamentally from European models. The case of Turkey confirms this finding, and also exemplifies the formative influence of international organisations on MIC. While some distinctive features may indicate deficiencies of 'Southern' social assistance, others may be seen as appropriate adaptations of a Northern model to development contexts.

Reports, Policy Briefs, and Other Publications

[Change Course Now! Only International Justice Can Create Social Security.](#) By Brot für die Welt (2025). Analysis No. 110.

Social security is a human right and a key to combating hunger, poverty and inequality. Social security promotes cohesion in societies. People with social security, and countries with social protection systems, get through crises such as pandemics or natural disasters better. They can also recover more quickly economically afterwards. In view of the increase in extreme weather events due to the climate crisis, the expected refugee and migration movements caused by crises and conflicts and the increasing division of societies, the right to social security urgently needs to be strengthened. That is why Bread for the World in cooperation with its partner organisations is advocating for social protection systems worldwide, in many partner projects as well as in our political work in Europe. In fact, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has devoted particular attention to promoting social security systems in countries of the Global South in recent years. The task now is to anchor the international commitment to this in the long term and to take a closer look at why progress has been so slow to date.

[How the Social and Solidarity Economy can Promote \(the Right to\) Social Protection.](#) By Alonso, E.B. & Van Ongevalle, J. (2025). *Policy Brief, KU Leuven Research Chair Decent Work and the SDGs.*

This policy brief presents key insights of a study on how the social and solidarity economy can promote (the right to) social protection.

Key Takeaways

- The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) helps extend social protection by combining economic activity with social and environmental goals.
- It fills protection gaps, empowers vulnerable groups, and drives collective action for policy change.
- Success depends on local trust, strong partnerships, and supportive legal frameworks, yet challenges such as weak regulation and limited capacity call for stronger public commitment and coordination.

Geopolitical Competition and Social Protection Financing in Sub-Saharan Africa: Insights from the Strategic Triangle of China, the US and France. By Voznak, O. (2025). *Preprint*.

This policy-oriented paper examines how strategic triangular diplomacy among China, the United States, and France shapes the financing and governance of social protection systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on theories of power, interdependence, and great-power competition, it explores how geopolitical rivalry translates into distinct models of development cooperation and welfare support. The study highlights both the risks of fragmented aid and the opportunities for policy complementarity, calling for greater African ownership and coordination in social protection financing.

Integrating Risk Management and Shock-Responsive Social Protection: Lessons from Critical Infrastructure Resilience. By Voznak, O. (2025). *Preprint*.

The growing exposure of societies to hybrid and unconventional threats—including terrorism, cyberattacks, and cascading failures in critical systems—underscores the urgent need to bridge the gap between risk management and social protection. This research, developed within the doctoral project Optimization of Risk Management in Selected Infrastructural Elements in Relation to Unconventional Aspects of Terrorist Attacks (Tomas Bata University in Zlín), explores how the resilience of critical infrastructure forms an integral part of social protection systems in times of crisis.

Rethinking Social Development for A New Eco-Social Contract: An UNRISD Contribution to the Second World Summit for Social Development. By Hujo, K. & Carter, M. (2025). *Briefing Paper. UNRISD*

As governments gather in Doha, Qatar, for the second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2), the world is confronting an era of intersecting crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, growing inequalities, geopolitical tensions, democratic backsliding, and violent conflicts. As a result, trust in existing social contracts—the collective agreements that shape our societies, norms and responsibilities at multiple governance levels—is eroding. The triple planetary crisis underscores the urgent need to redefine humanity's relationship with nature and reimagine the foundations of social and economic development, while new challenges associated with digital technologies and artificial intelligence require decisive action and new governance frameworks.

This paper examines the major challenges facing social development today that need to be addressed to accelerate SDG implementation and pave the way for a new global eco-social pact that can guide multilateral cooperation and national development policies beyond 2030. Drawing on findings from global and regional consultations conducted by UNRISD in 2024 and 2025, complemented by recent UNRISD research, this briefing paper offers key insights and policy recommendations to support a transformative and actionable political declaration at WSSD2. It calls on policy makers to move beyond expressions of intent to time-bound, measurable commitments and concrete implementation strategies; the UN to develop global governance structures that address power asymmetries and enable inclusive and sustainable development pathways; and civil society actors to mobilize grassroots advocacy for economic, environmental and social justice, while actively monitoring WSSD2 outcomes to ensure governments' accountability to their commitments.

Exploring the Institutional and Political Implications of the Social Registry Model: Evidence from Kenya. By UNRISD. UNRISD Think Piece Series Beyond Copenhagen: Rethinking Social Development for the 21st Century

Social registries are becoming a prominent feature of social protection systems in many parts of the world. Social registries, developed to enable registration of beneficiaries and allocation of poverty-targeted cash transfer programmes, have become a core aspect of the World Bank's work on social protection, as well as various UN agencies. However, evidence suggests that developing a social registry requires considerable state capacity and resources and can cause institutional and political tensions, as well as inclusion and exclusion errors. The case of social registries is an example showing that the administrative and political problems associated with poverty targeting are only exacerbated in low-income countries and might not constitute the most efficient use of scarce public funds.

Upcoming Events

Eradicating poverty without growth: can it be done? OU Global Development Annual Lecture. 20 November 2025 – 4-5 pm GMT. Berrill Lecture Theatre, Walton Hall, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.

In the second annual lecture in the series, Olivier De Schutter, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights will address the theme: Eradicating poverty without growth: can it be done?

Professor De Schutter, expert on social and economic rights and on economic globalization and human rights, will present an alternative roadmap to current and previous approaches to the theme and put out a call for action rather than optimism.

Kavita Ramdas, a globally recognised advocate for gender equity and justice, will offer reflections before the floor is opened for in-person and online engagement.

Fostering Human and Social Development Amid Climate Change—the Power of Social Protection for All. UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) Side Event. 12 November 2024 – 3-4:30 pm GMT-3. Side event room 5, zone C, Blue Zone, Belém, Brazil.

This side event explores how social protection for all can advance climate resilience and a just transition, highlighting progress, opportunities and challenges.

The event will explore the following questions:

- How do climate change and the transition towards a low-carbon and resilient economy affect different groups in society and why is social protection for all important in addressing these challenges?
- What solutions are governments – from Asia to Africa to Latin America – finding to extend and adapt their national social protection systems so that they can effectively tackle the impacts of climate change and climate policies on poverty, jobs and livelihoods, health and inequality.
- What is the role of international cooperation in supporting these goals?

By providing a platform for diverse human voices and country experiences, the event supports the launch of the Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centred Climate Action which countries are being invited to voluntarily adopt at the COP30 Leaders' Summit and which includes ambitious commitments on social protection.