



IEO | Independent
Evaluation
Office
United Nations Development Programme

THE EVALUATION OF UNDP SUPPORT TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

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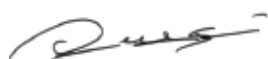
FOREWORD

Social protection is an important instrument for reducing poverty and a key component of development response to the challenges presented by climate change and economic transitions. The cost-of-living crisis and the triple threat of recession, higher inflation and higher debts have brought even greater challenges to the people in need of social protection, and in maintaining such support within national budgets. Many countries included some form of social protection in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrating the value placed on such assistance during times of crisis. While social protection is effective for those who receive adequate support, major gaps in basic coverage still exist. It is difficult for those without official identity or formal employment to access any assistance. Access to social protection assistance is a greater challenge for the informal sector, particularly for women workers, providing essential care to children and the elderly.

UNDP support to tackle the gaps in coverage by strengthening the governance of social protection systems, enabling programmes to reach those without access, and promoting instruments that can better respond during shocks is based on the organization's long-standing focus on poverty reduction and its multi-dimensional approach to development. This independent global thematic evaluation assessed UNDP's contribution to social protection policies and institutional processes and mechanisms for enabling inclusive social protection.

Drawing on evidence of UNDP's support globally, the evaluation confirms that the UNDP's broader development mandate brings great potential to enable governments to link social protection to a wider development focus and complement the sectoral approach of specialized agencies. UNDP has made significant contributions to strengthening national policies and institutional capacities on social protection in some countries but should leverage better its inclusive growth portfolio to enable concrete solutions for improving social safety nets and resilient livelihoods. UNDP's use of digital tools and its knowledge products have strengthened social protection processes significantly. UNDP support for better targeting of beneficiaries was crucial, enabling much needed social assistance for communities in vulnerable situations.

As we pass the half-way point to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and accelerate our efforts towards 2030, there is greater recognition of the value of social protection measures in achieving several SDG targets. This is an opportune moment to review UNDP achievements, identify what has worked well and where the challenges remain, and to use this learning to inform its future programmes. The evaluation emphasizes that workable linkages between social protection and economic empowerment, health, and environmental objectives are critical and UNDP efforts should underpin this, building on its extensive development portfolio. UNDP support in the humanitarian context should be leveraged to provide anticipatory action to ensure that timely short-term assistance contributes to long-term development. It is our hope that, by strengthening the nexus of social protection schemes with a green, just transition, and the use of technology to streamline social safety net assistance, UNDP will be able to further support national partners to promote sustainable development and ensure no one is left behind.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CRPWD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil society organization
IDP	Internally displaced person
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
ROAR	Results-oriented annual report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEIA	Socioeconomic impact assessment
SPIAC-B	Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation examines the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in favour of social protection. Conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP in 2022 and presented to the UNDP Executive Board at its annual session in June 2023, the evaluation provides evidence to promote organizational learning for improved effectiveness, based on IEO's assessment of the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP's approaches and contributions to social protection globally. It also takes a forward-looking view, providing recommendations to inform the strategic and programmatic direction of UNDP's support over the remainder of its current strategic plan (2022–2025) and the global efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 1.3 to: "Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."

The evaluation provides an overarching set of findings and conclusions, which recognize that UNDP has formed a significant and unique way to support current social protection needs while also helping countries deal with threats in the future, but that it has not fully leveraged this potential in a coherent body of support that would allow UNDP country offices to fully deliver a plan to improve existing social protection systems and ensure they are connected across government in ways that support achievement of the SDGs and the leave no one behind (LNOB) principle. The recommendations of this report provide suggestions, based on the evidence, for how the organization can make a greater contribution to this goal.

CONTEXT

A historical overview suggests that no country has been able to reduce poverty and improve living conditions on a broad scale without putting comprehensive social protection systems in place. The inclusion of social protection in the SDGs gave new prominence to social welfare policies on global political and social agendas. In response to urbanisation, poverty and under-development, rising social problems and needs, social protection interventions have sought to reduce poverty, inequality and social exclusion and to smooth incomes (across the life cycle and in periods of ill-health or in-capacity, or unemployment). Social protection systems seek to provide for those at risk of, or recovering from, environmental, economic or other shocks, and to strengthen state-citizen relations, providing people with financial assistance, as well as health-related services and labour market interventions.

In 2009, the United Nations (UN) system launched the Social Protection Floor Initiative, which draws together a broader coalition of stakeholders to promote and support the establishment of minimum levels of social protection (termed 'floors'), covering basic social security guarantees for health care, and income security for children, older persons, and those unable to work. As well as meeting pressing needs, floors are established to provide the basis for further expansion towards higher levels of social protection as economies grow.

Major gaps in social protection coverage exist, with differences across regions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) World Social Protection Report 2020–2022 indicates that only 47 percent of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while 4.1 billion people (53 percent) obtain no income security at all from their national social protection system.¹ There are significant variations across and within regions, with higher average coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia (84 percent) and the Americas (64.3 percent) and higher coverage gaps in Asia and the Pacific (44 percent), the Arab States (40 percent) and Africa (17 percent).

¹ ILO, 2020. 'World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future.'

Even where programmes are available, physical, financial and geographical barriers may disproportionately prevent access to benefits and services for certain groups, especially those in the informal economic sector. The coverage of contributory social protection schemes for women is particularly low, especially in the case of old-age pensions, unemployment benefits or maternity protection. One of the factors is that women are not as well represented in formal-sector employment as men.

Although social protection spending has increased across developing countries since the 2000s, it remains low by the standards of industrialized countries.² Since 2015, Sub-Saharan Africa has been the major recipient of social protection Official Development Assistance (ODA) and low-income countries have received a growing share of ODA, in line with a greater focus on poverty reduction in the sector. Expenditure remains minimal in comparison to the cost of basic social protection provisions, accounting for less than 6 percent of the estimated US\$41.9 billion annual social protection spending gap for low-income countries, calculated by Durán-Valverde et al. (2020).³ The financing gap required to ensure at least a minimum level of social protection for all has increased by approximately 30 percent since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. To guarantee at least basic social protection coverage, low-income countries would need to invest an additional \$77.9 billion per year, lower middle-income countries an additional \$362.9 billion per year and upper middle-income countries a further \$750.8 billion per year, equivalent to 15.9 percent, 5.1 percent and 3.1 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

UNDP RESPONSE

UNDP defines social protection as: “a set of nationally owned policies and instruments, organized around systems that provide income or in-kind support and facilitate access to goods and services to all households and individuals at least at minimally accepted levels, to (i) protect them from multiple deprivations and social and economic exclusion, as a matter of human rights and particularly during shocks or periods of insufficient income, incapacity or inability to work, and (ii) empower them by increasing productive capacities and enhancing capabilities. At an operational level, social protection systems are articulated around programmes, platforms and institutions that provide coherence and consistency and are organized around contributory or non-contributory forms of income support and around social assistance, social insurance and labour market interventions.”⁴

In the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, UNDP promotes the progressive expansion of inclusive social protection systems towards a sustainable coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Social protection is anchored not only in UNDP’s work to reduce inequality and eradicate poverty but is also connected to other thematic areas under its six Signature Solutions.⁵ This was further streamlined in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022–2025, which highlighted the rights-based approach to human agency and human development, in which social protection contributes to an equitable access to opportunities. The Strategic Plan 2022–2025 aims to increase social protection coverage through stronger social protection services and systems across sectors with increased investment, including policy measures and institutional capacities to enable access to social protection and a better quality and type of social protection services. The Strategic Plan’s Integrated Results and Resources Framework includes one output and two indicators directly related to social protection.⁶

² OECD. 2019b. ‘Optimising the role of development partners for social protection. Lessons from the EU Social Protection Systems Programme’. OECD Development Centre.

³ Durán-Valverde, F., J. Pacheco-Jiménez, T. Muzaffar and H. Elizondo-Barboza. 2020. ‘Financing gaps in social protection: global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond’. ILO Working Paper 14. Geneva: ILO.

⁴ UNDP. 2022. UNDP’s Social Protection Offer Version 2.0, October 2022. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

⁵ Output 2.1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021: ‘capacities developed for progressive expansion of inclusive social protection systems’. The outputs were measured by two indicators: Indicator 2.1.2.1: ‘Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes, disaggregated by target groups’; and Indicator 2.1.2.2: ‘Number of countries that have improved the range of services provided through their social protection systems to reach marginalized groups’.

⁶ Output 1.2: ‘Social protection services and systems strengthened across sectors with increased investment’. Indicator 1.2.1: ‘Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes targeting (i) women; (ii) urban poor; (iii) rural poor; (iv) persons with disabilities; (v) informal sector workers’. Indicator 1.2.2: ‘Number of countries that have increased types and quality of social protection services: (i) Type of services; (ii) Quality of services: Coverage, adequacy, access’.

The UNDP Social Protection Offer 2.0 ('Social Protection Offer') adopts an integrated vision to tackle three connected sets of issues: gaps in social protection coverage; weak governance of social protection systems; and shock-unresponsiveness of existing social protection mechanisms. The Social Protection Offer identifies three mutually supportive thematic areas in which UNDP has strong expertise, to serve as entry points to its social protection support: (i) responsible and accountable governance; (ii) resilience; and (iii) environmental sustainability. It maps out 12 social protection solutions that cut across the three thematic areas. Cross-cutting principles and enablers for the Social Protection Offer include gender equality and human rights (principles), and financing/fiscal space, digitalization and innovation, data and evidence (enablers).

UNDP's social protection portfolio over the period 2016–2022 consists of 855 projects implemented in 134 countries,⁷ amounting to a \$2.5 billion expenditure. Around 65 percent of UNDP social protection expenditure (\$1.6 billion over 2016–2022) was directed to national social protection systems, programmes and delivery mechanisms, and another 20 percent to broader support with the aim to strengthen capacities or conditions relevant to the social protection instruments (e.g. improved vulnerability indices) or the usage of social protection by its recipients (e.g. civic registration or localised banking services). A further breakdown of the primary category shows that around \$1 billion is related to social assistance (including supporting cash transfers and cash-for-work, health assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, social care services), and \$479 million is related to labour market interventions while less than \$100 million is related to social insurance.⁸

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation covers 2016 to 2022 and is global, encompassing all regions of UNDP operations (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS], and Latin America and the Caribbean). It addresses five overarching questions linked to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of Relevance, Coherence, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Sustainability.

The evaluation methods included literature review, detailed portfolio analysis, meta-synthesis of independent and quality decentralized evaluations, an online survey, key informant semi-structured interviews and select country case studies. Thirty-eight countries were selected for greater focus, of which 11 entailed case studies. For the literature review, 120 papers were consulted, all of which had been published since 2012. For the meta-analysis, 127 evaluations (independent and decentralized) conducted between 2016 and 2022, which have substantive direct or indirect references to UNDP social protection activities, were reviewed. Over 70 academic and research institutions from 48 countries responded to an online survey on the state of social protection in their country and UNDP's role since 2016. In total, 500 people were consulted for the evaluation through structured interviews.

Abridged findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented below; the full version of the findings, conclusions and recommendations can be found in Chapters 4 and 5.

⁷ Seventy-nine projects are in place across multiple countries, and 13 are in place across regions. While they were counted once in global statistics, they are counted for each country/region in the country/regional breakdowns below. Apart from multi-country and cross-regional projects, there are eight projects allocated to global units in the dataset (which are included within the 855 projects).

⁸ These figures provide the overall proportions in the UNDP portfolio based on the evaluation's assessment of the individual project outputs; precise analysis at the intervention level for the full portfolio was not possible with the data and resources available.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A majority of the expenditures in the UNDP social protection portfolio was in countries with a high and very high human development index ranking, and more than half of total expenditure occurred in upper middle-income countries. Well over a quarter of the total portfolio expenditure is concentrated in five large projects in three countries. The overall spending trends are driven by the Latin America and the Caribbean region. The Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC) represents nearly half of the total expenditures on UNDP social protection support (47 percent) and most of these countries belong to the middle-income countries/upper middle-income countries and high-income countries groups. In these countries, government cost-sharing represents a significant portion of the expenditure.

The UNDP Social Protection Offer is overall relevant and corresponds to the central themes of social protection policy and practice globally. The Social Protection Offer's main strength is the focus on linking social protection instruments with initiatives for risk prevention, recovery, environmental protection, livelihoods promotion and economic transitions. However, UNDP's global vision for its social protection support has not been adequately translated into practice at the country level. Country offices rarely offer a coherent vision to comprehensively advance, along with partners, the country's social protection system.

While UNDP support to policies and technical capacities is important for strengthening social protection systems, short-term and fragmented interventions with limited linkages with policy processes reduced UNDP's contribution. When social protection initiatives have been part of broader support for employment, the potential for sustaining outcomes achieved was greater.

UNDP's support to cash transfer programmes has enabled better targeting of beneficiaries and contributed to improving overall government systems for identifying beneficiaries. Cash transfer support in crisis contexts has been critical in providing sustenance and promoting livelihoods, but this approach has not yet been integrated with longer-term social protection systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the persistent challenges that remain in the delivery of social protection measures. UNDP support to cash assistance in its COVID-19 response was critical in promoting livelihoods and short-term employment, and the organization advocated for a temporary basic income (TBI) to help women and other vulnerable groups cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP has provided a wide range of support to strengthen health infrastructure and facilitate access to health services, and its timely procurement support accelerated health emergency responses. The promotion and strengthening of social care services is an emerging area of UNDP work. This support has yielded initial positive results, particularly in upper middle-income countries, and became especially important as the weaknesses in care services were exposed during the pandemic. UNDP has not yet fully explored the linkage between care services and the care economy, an area where UNDP's interdisciplinary approach could add value.

UNDP's engagement in social protection efforts for informal workers has been too limited to enable substantive national level outcomes. Although UNDP has several programmes linked to employment and livelihoods generation, its engagements are often too narrow to be classified as labour market interventions. While there has been a focus on strengthening the skills of poor and vulnerable workers, the small scale and scope of such initiatives have had little effect on inducing system-level changes, with the exception of some successful pilots and relevant lessons learned that can inform future government active labour market measures and programmes. UNDP support to social insurance has also been limited.

UNDP has not yet leveraged its engagement in disaster risk reduction, climate change planning, and conflict prevention to improve the responsiveness of social protection systems. UNDP's crisis responses are mostly delivered in parallel to country-owned social protection instruments and initiated post-shock. This enables a faster response in countries where the national social protection system is unable to meet needs but has limitations in strengthening the shock responsiveness of institutional mechanisms. In some countries,

UNDP has supported the piloting of climate-related insurance, a form of social protection of particular relevance to UNDP's mandate.

UNDP supported social protection measures for women in informal employment and enabled some governments to address the risk of gender-based violence and the unequal distribution of care work and to strengthen care systems. A lack of sustained engagement reduced contribution to gender-transformative social protection measures.

UNDP recognizes that social protection is a human right and should be universal. Its Social Protection Offer proposes several solutions to achieve universality, such as closing gaps in current coverage, identifying those who are 'invisible' to social protection systems, supporting those who may need social protection in the future, and supporting the fiscal arrangements required to finance an expansion in coverage. However, it has not articulated a clear strategy for implementing these principles throughout its support, especially in balancing universality with trades-offs linked to constrained resources and conditionality.

Concerted efforts to systematically address financing for social protection is lacking in UNDP's Social Protection Offer. UNDP's support to the development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF) offers an opportunity to help better align public and private financial flows; however, making the INFF operational to fill the gaps in planning and budget allocations for social protection remains a challenge.

UNDP support to digital registries and data platforms is an area where UNDP has strengthened social protection delivery. These initiatives have promoted interoperability and efficiency of services across social protection areas and actors. Digitalizing the delivery and/or the monitoring of the payment systems has also contributed to the improved transparency of social protection services. UNDP's collection and provision of high-quality socio-economic data in many countries holds some relevance to social protection policies and programmes, especially in the assessment of COVID-19 impacts, which is critical for informing corresponding social protection measures.

As a non-specialized agency, UNDP's multisectoral approach, which goes beyond specific technical capabilities of specialized agencies, brings a more comprehensive human development vision but has not yet gained traction internally or externally. Recent improvements in UNDP's regional social protection capacity have added coherence and impetus to the organization's multi-country initiatives, but these have not been matched by equivalent capacity or focus in country offices. Staff capacity to tailor and implement the UNDP Social Protection Offer has only recently increased and is concentrated in small teams at the regional bureau level. Improvements to the team in the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) and the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) have catalysed greater interest in social protection from the country offices, resulting in increases in the number of requests from the country offices for support in social protection.

UNDP is part of several relevant partnerships, such as the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), created on the request of the G20 Development Working Group to improve inter-agency coordination in support of country-led social protection measures. There remain limitations in facilitating the humanitarian-development nexus in social protection, despite the wide range of partnerships that UNDP has forged. Partnership with the private sector can be important to UNDP social protection work, given that the private sector can bring both agility in the delivery of services and new approaches to financing. UNDP is well positioned to facilitate greater private sector participation, but the pace of this engagement needs acceleration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: UNDP should leverage its comparative advantage to identify its niche in supporting social protection. UNDP should prioritize support to social protection systems, while making greater efforts to explore the convergence between social protection and programmes in other areas such as governance, inclusive growth, economic empowerment, health, resilience and environment.

Recommendation 2: UNDP should detail its programmatic approach for social protection and provide practical guidance for strategic positioning in different country contexts. UNDP country offices should select and focus on a limited number of high-payoff solutions from the range of areas covered in the Social Protection Offer, based on careful analysis of the specific context. UNDP should strengthen its social protection support to low-income and least developed countries.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should strive to strengthen the nexus of social protection schemes with a green, just transition. In this regard, it should strengthen its support to active labour-market programmes, going beyond its supply-side, skills-development projects and making them relevant to current technological and environmental trends.

Recommendation 4: UNDP should strengthen the linkages between humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems at the country level, and better link short-term and long-term approaches in the context of an adaptive and shock-responsive approach to social protection.

Recommendation 5: UNDP support to national identification systems highlights that the use of technology has the potential to streamline social safety net assistance at the country level. Building on its ongoing work, UNDP should strengthen further its support to digitalization for social protection while striving to bridge the digital divide.

Recommendation 6: Partnerships should be explored to allow a more holistic and integrated approach in supporting national social protection systems. UNDP should enable private sector engagement in the delivery of social protection services and in approaches for social protection financing.

Recommendation 7: UNDP should strengthen its contribution to gender-responsive social protection, particularly through its support to social care and informal sector workers.

Chapter 1.

EVALUATION RATIONALE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This evaluation, conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP in 2022, covers the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in favour of social protection and was presented to the UNDP Executive Board at its annual session in June 2023. This chapter presents the rationale and objectives of the evaluation, the evaluation scope and key questions, as well as the methodology applied.

1.1. Evaluation rationale and objectives

The evaluation provides evidence to promote organizational learning for improved effectiveness, based on the IEO's assessment of the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP's approaches and contributions to social protection globally. It supports UNDP's accountability towards its Executive Board and development partners by assessing the results of the organization's support against the goals stated in its strategic documents.

It also takes a forward-looking view, providing recommendations to inform the strategic and programmatic direction of the organization's support over the remainder of UNDP's current strategic plan (2022–2025) and the global efforts to meet SDG target 1.3 to: "Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."

1.2. Evaluation scope and focus

UNDP defines social protection as "a set of nationally owned policies and instruments, organized around systems that provide income or in-kind support and facilitate access to goods and services to all households and individuals at least at minimally accepted levels, to (i) protect them from multiple deprivations and social and economic exclusion, as a matter of human rights and particularly during shocks or periods of insufficient income, incapacity or inability to work, and (ii) empower them by increasing productive capacities and enhancing capabilities. At an operational level, social protection systems are articulated around programmes, platforms and institutions that provide coherence and consistency and are organized around contributory or non-contributory forms of income support and around social assistance, social insurance and labour market interventions"⁹

Drawing on UNDP's definition, the evaluation used a three-tier classification to identify the key ways in which UNDP supported country-owned social protection mechanisms and programmes (see Annex 3). The primary category was support to the country-owned instruments, which included support for social protection systems, programmes, and delivery mechanisms. The second category covered support to strengthen capacities or conditions relevant to the social protection instruments (e.g. improved vulnerability indices) or the usage of social protection by its recipients (e.g. civic registration or localised

⁹ UNDP. 2022. UNDP's Social Protection Offer Version 2.0, October 2022. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

banking services). The third category was support that provides social assistance on the projects' own terms and resources, without a primary objective to improve a country-owned social protection system, such as payment for ecosystem services or reconstruction initiatives.

Timeframe: The evaluation covers 2016 to 2022, a period that starts with the launch of UNDP's Social Protection Primer in the first year of the SDGs, and encompasses support delivered before and under the UNDP Social Protection Offer.¹⁰ This timeframe includes the COVID-19 pandemic, in which social protection played a significant role in response and recovery, and other global crises and economic transitions that followed.

Programme coverage: The evaluation assessed all types of UNDP support intended to improve and strengthen social protection policies and measures, as well as enablers and principles adopted in UNDP's Social Protection Offer. The evaluation also assessed UNDP's programmatic partnerships with national governments, the United Nations (UN) System, international, regional and bilateral partners, civil society and the private sector. Gender equality and women's empowerment in social protection assistance was prioritized by the evaluation.

Geographical coverage: This is a global evaluation covering all regions of UNDP operations (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS], and Latin America and the Caribbean). This includes least developed countries, middle-income countries, and countries in conflict. The evaluation included countries where UNDP provides important social protection support, and also assessed countries that have significant need but have received limited support from UNDP (see Sampling for in-depth study). The evaluation assessed the support UNDP provides at the country level, and from its regional offices and headquarters.

1.3. Evaluation questions

The evaluation addresses the following overarching questions:

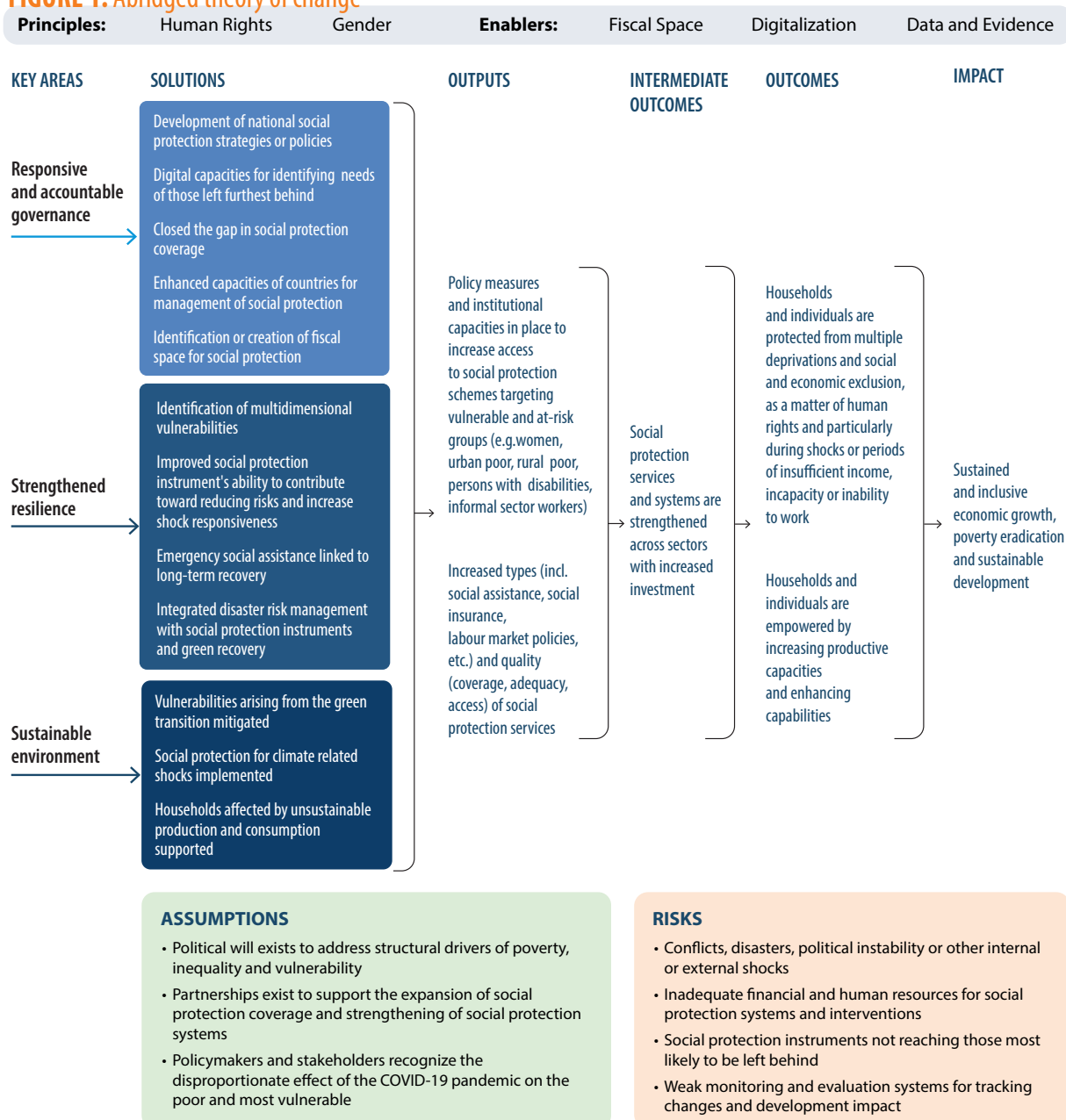
- **Relevance:** To what extent has UNDP support been relevant with respect to partner countries' needs for social protection through a life cycle approach, including emerging needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for women and girls, persons with disability and those most likely to be left behind, to achieve the SDGs and to build forward better?
- **Coherence:** To what extent have approaches, tools, and partnerships for social protection programming and implementation been adequately developed and coherently used?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent has UNDP efficiently used its human and financial resources to support partner countries in strengthening social protection systems?
- **Effectiveness:** To what extent has UNDP social protection support been effective in assisting partner countries in protecting at-risk groups, especially women and girls, persons with disability, and those most likely to be left behind, from multiple deprivations and social and economic exclusion, as a matter of human rights and particularly during shocks or periods of insufficient income, incapacity or inability to work, and in empowering those groups by increasing productive capacities and enhancing capabilities?
- **Sustainability:** To what extent have UNDP social protection interventions promoted national ownership, diversified resources, and built solid partnerships to ensure sustainability of results? What factors contributed to, or hindered, the sustainability of UNDP contributions to social protection in all its dimensions?

¹⁰ An early version of the Offer was released in February 2021, and the Social Protection Offer 2.0 was launched in October 2022.

1.4. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation assessed UNDP’s support to social protection using the five Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria: relevance; coherence; efficiency; effectiveness; and sustainability. A detailed evaluation matrix was developed to tailor the criteria and overarching evaluation questions into an assessment framework consisting of sub-evaluation questions, method of assessment, and data sources (see Annex 2). A theory of change was outlined to structure the range of UNDP support within the objectives of its Social Protection Offer, solutions it sought to provide, and the pathways and assumptions implied (see Figure 1). The theory of change helps to inquire whether UNDP has delivered relevant and coherent support, and to develop intermediary-level theory on the factors that influence its effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability in different contexts.

FIGURE 1. Abridged theory of change



Source: UNDP IEO.

Primary and secondary data relating to UNDP's performance and their operating environments were gathered and analysed in a series of steps described below. Further details on all components of the methodology are provided in Annexes 1–8.

Sampling for in-depth study: The evaluation covered all countries in which UNDP has implemented social protection initiatives since 2016 through a systematic desk review of internally reported results in the results-oriented annual reports (ROARs) and (where existing) project evaluations. Thirty-seven countries¹¹ were selected for greater focus using the criteria and guidance in Annex 5. Between six and eight countries were selected for each of five UNDP operating regions, using criteria to ensure the data collection covered a significant proportion of the regional expenditure on social protection, geographic and contextual diversity, and examples of success, limitations or innovation for UNDP. The sampling also includes a few countries where there is a significant need for social protection but which currently receive low levels of support from UNDP, as well as countries for the shock-responsive social protection focus area.

Each of the 37 selected countries and Kosovo¹² were mapped against the five elements below, which relate to core components of UNDP's Social Protection Offer, and the list was reviewed to avoid gaps and limit clustering:

- Areas of UNDP support (social assistance; social insurance; active labour market intervention)
- Thematic areas (poverty reduction; governance; resilience; environmental sustainability)
- Principles (gender equality and women's empowerment; and human rights)
- Enablers (fiscal space; digitalization; data and evidence)
- Whether the country has experienced a co-variate shock since 2016 (for the assessment of shock-responsive social protection)

In addition to the country focus, the evaluation covered regional and headquarters social protection initiatives of UNDP through key informant interviews and document reviews.

Data collection: The evaluation methods used include a literature review, detailed portfolio analysis, meta-synthesis of independent and quality decentralized evaluations, an online survey, key informant semi-structured interviews and select country case studies. The evaluation paid particular attention to those groups that are most likely to be left behind, comprising marginalised and at-risk communities, including women and girls, youth, persons with disability, people living with HIV (PLHIV), and informal workers. Protocols were developed for each method listed below and used to ensure rigor in data collection and analysis as well as to ensure audience suitability and adherence to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.¹³

a. Literature review: A review of research, studies, and publications from development partners and academia was conducted to assess the relevance and coherence of UNDP's support to social protection in relation to: 1) the institutional positions of other providers of social protection support; 2) the historical and current context for social protection; and 3) current approaches and best practices in delivering social protection support. In total, 120 papers were reviewed, all published since 2012, with the exception of papers used for the historical perspective of social protection. The bibliography of documents reviewed is listed in Annex 9.

¹¹ Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Barbados and Eastern Caribbean States, Botswana, Cambodia, Chad, Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Montenegro, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Syria, Togo, Turkmenistan, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen. In addition, Kosovo (understood in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 [1999]) was also selected, representing the 38th location.

¹² References to Kosovo should be understood in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

¹³ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2020. Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation.

b. Portfolio analysis: Considering that UNDP’s social protection portfolio is spread across programme areas, significant efforts (see Annex 3) were taken to establish an accurate portfolio of initiatives, which include 855 projects amounting to \$2.5 billion over the period 2016–2022. An analysis was performed to classify projects by those with key social protection components, those with an indirect impact on social protection, and those with no likely connection to social protection.

c. Meta-synthesis: Information related to the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP social protection interventions was extracted from 127 evaluations (independent and decentralized) conducted between 2016 and 2022 which have substantive direct or indirect references to UNDP social protection activities. These evaluations were identified based on a key word search (in English/French/Spanish) from two key sources: the IEO’s Artificial Intelligence for Development Analytics (AIDA) platform (<https://aida.undp.org/landing>) as well as the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC) (<https://erc.undp.org/>). This information was used as evidence and triangulation of UNDP’s performance and synthesized by theme and intervention area to produce transferable lessons (see Annex 8).

d. Case studies: The case studies provide empirical evidence of UNDP’s support for social protection in 11 countries. Each study used a structured format based on relevant components of the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment tools.¹⁴ The studies assess the performance of UNDP’s work in relation to the three major components of country-owned social protection instruments: 1. System (policies, frameworks, regulations, governance and coordination mechanisms, finance); 2. Programmes (interventions under social assistance, social insurance, and active labour market programmes, and social care); 3. Delivery mechanism (beneficiary registration and management systems, payment modalities). A fourth assessment area captures how social protection is integrated into the work of UNDP country offices. Each assessment was based on triangulated secondary and primary data collected via desk review on national indicators, policies and programmes, the survey of national research institutions, key informant interviews with social protection stakeholders, and key informant interviews with UNDP staff and partners. Findings from the case studies were linked to the findings from their respective regions and related thematic areas and used as standalone examples in the report (see Annex 6).

e. Academic/research institution survey: Seventy-four academic and research institutions from 48 countries responded to a survey on the state of social protection in their country and UNDP’s role in social protection since 2016. Institutions specialized in social protection were purposefully sampled from countries where UNDP has had programming since 2016, and provided both quantitative and qualitative responses within a set of multiple choice, Likert-scale and open-ended questions.

f. Key informant interviews: In total, 500 people were consulted for the evaluation: 200 UNDP staff (140 at country level, 40 at regional and 20 at headquarters); 60 staff from other UN agencies (30 at country level, and 30 at headquarters and regional level); 30 staff from donors and other development agencies; and 210 in-country partners (120 government, 90 academia, civil society organizations [CSOs] and beneficiar-ies). In addition, written feedback was also obtained from key stakeholders, including regional bureaux and member states.

Limitations: The evaluation faced no serious limitations in addressing the questions or scope summarised above, but there were some data issues which the evaluation addressed in its design. Establishing a portfolio of UNDP’s support for social protection proved challenging because the required project, financial and marker data for the period is located across several databases that are not currently reconciled. Projects are also not tagged exclusively to social protection. These sourcing challenges limited the level of financial analysis that could be applied to UNDP’s interventions.

There are no impact or large-scale quantitative assessments of UNDP support in this area, which made it difficult to determine whether UNDP’s assistance to partner countries is effective in establishing an adequate

¹⁴ See: <https://ispatools.org/all-tools/>.

level of social protection to “protect[...] at-risk groups, especially women and girls, persons with disability, and those most likely to be left behind, from multiple deprivations and social and economic exclusion”. As such, the effectiveness of UNDP’s support in this area is assessed by whether it, often in conjunction with the support of others, has strengthened country-owned social protection instruments (Intermediate Outcomes in the Theory of Change [see Figure 1]). Observation of the protection coverage was limited to countries which offer quantitative data on social protection delivery. Understanding the adequacy of the social protection improvements for recipients was further challenged where COVID-19 travel disruptions limited the evaluation team’s interactions with recipients to virtual group sessions.

1.5. Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is sequenced as follows: **Chapter 2** includes a brief overview of the issues that social protection support is to address, key concepts, and common challenges countries experience in delivering social protection. **Chapter 3** provides an overview of UNDP’s social protection approach and portfolio; **Chapter 4** presents findings on programme relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and factors impacting UNDP’s performance; and **Chapter 5** provides conclusions, along with recommendations and management response.

Chapter 2.

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

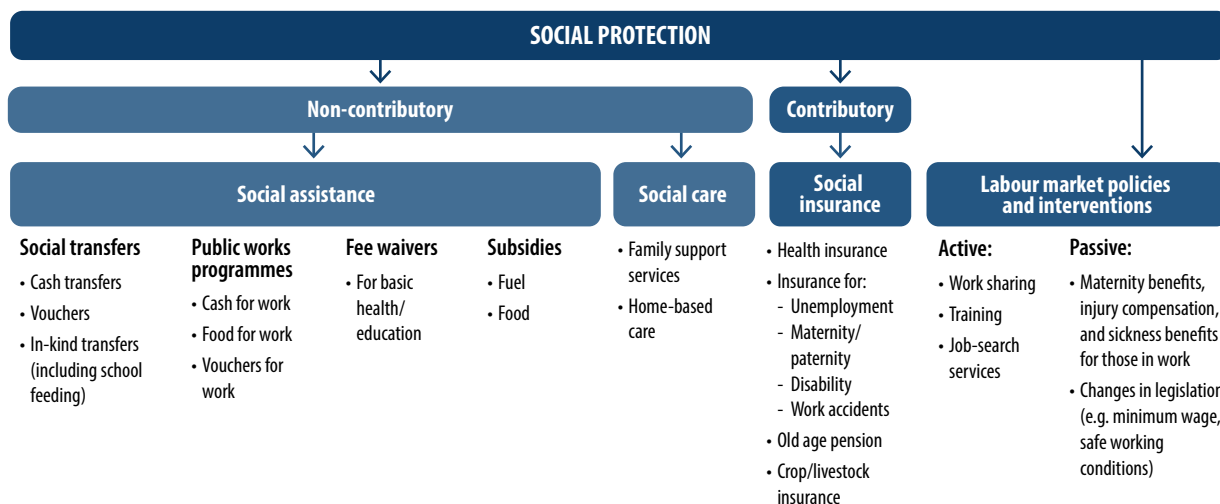
This chapter provides a brief overview of the issues that social protection support is designed to address, including emerging challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic transitions, and environmental shocks. It outlines the core concepts and components that social protection mechanisms use in responding to these problems, and the common challenges countries experience in delivering social protection. Major contextual and institutional differences are described throughout the chapter.

2.1. Emergence and evolution of social protection in response to needs

A historical overview suggests that no country has been able to reduce poverty and improve living conditions on a broad scale without putting comprehensive social protection systems in place.¹⁵ A significant shift has occurred since the late 1990s in low- and middle-income countries due to the exponential growth in social protection policies, and particularly cash transfers. The inclusion of social protection in the SDGs gave new prominence to social welfare policies on global political and social agendas. In response to urbanisation, poverty and under-development, rising social problems and needs, social protection interventions have sought to reduce poverty, inequality and social exclusion and to smooth incomes (across the life cycle and in periods of ill-health or incapacity, or unemployment). Increasingly, social protection systems seek to provide for those at risk of, or recovering from, environmental, economic or other shocks, and to strengthen state-citizen relations. Many forms of social protection provide people with financial assistance – whether as a cash transfer, in-kind transfer (including school feeding), pension, or compensation – although social care provides a set of health-related services, and labour market interventions also involve training for skills development and improvements to work-conditions. Figure 2 provides an overview of the major forms of social protection, and distinguishes between the instruments that require the intended recipient to make a contribution in order to receive the assistance, and those that do not.

¹⁵ UNDESA. 2018. 'Promoting Inclusion through Social Protection. Report on the World Social Situation 2018'. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

FIGURE 2. Social protection instruments¹⁶



Source: Carter et al. (2019).¹⁷

Paradigmatic differences inform different definitions of social protection. While there is consensus about the desirability of social protection provisions in general, there is significant variation on what this means in practice – in terms of how it is conceived, what it consists of, how it is implemented and for whom it should be provided.¹⁸ Current definitions of social protection are forged at the intersection of two broad paradigms.¹⁹ Social protection in industrialized countries has emerged within a social policy/public finance approach. An alternative approach emerged, particularly in developing countries in the 1990s, against a background of economic crises, structural adjustment and globalization, entailing a developmental approach to social protection in contexts of high levels of poverty, to be addressed by a wide range of state and non-state actors. The first approach tends to be narrower in scope (type of programmes), but broader in terms of reach – with the aim of protecting living standards for all (especially workers). The second approach tends to be programmatically broader, but with a clear focus on poverty reduction and on providing support to the poorest.²⁰ Amidst the plethora of interpretations of social protection and its role in development, the consensus that the primary goal of social protection in developing countries is to address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable groups, has contributed to the accelerated propagation of the social protection agenda.²¹ While there is overlap between these paradigms both conceptually and institutionally, there is variation in the relative importance attributed to their functions and core programmatic components and their linkages with other spheres of public policy. To a large extent, social insurance, social assistance and labour market policies have been fully established in high-income countries, but their development in the global South, particularly in low-income and lower middle-income countries has been uneven, with an increasing emphasis on social assistance. Similarly, different emphasis is placed across low-, middle- and high-income countries on the mix between the social protection functions of protection (through relief), prevention (of deprivation), promotion (of human capital) and transformation (through rights, empowerment and inclusion).²²

¹⁶ Some classification systems consider Public Works Programmes as Active Labour Market Programmes.

¹⁷ Carter, B., K. Roelen, S. Enfield and W. Avis. 2019. Social Protection Topic Guide. Revised Edition. K4D Emerging Issues Report 18. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barrientos, A. 2010. 'Social Protection and Poverty'. Social Policy and Development. Programme Paper Number 42. Geneva: UNRISD.

²⁰ Ibid. See also: UNDP 2016. 'Leaving No One Behind: A Social Protection Primer for Practitioners'. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

²¹ UNDESA. 2021. 'Global research on governance and social protection'. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

²² Devereux, S. and R. Sabates-Wheeler. 2004. 'Transformative Social Protection'. IDS Working Paper 232. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

Organizations take different positions and apply emphases that reflect their institutional mandate. Institutions, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO),²³ position themselves closer to the first approach centred on social protection components, while the World Bank’s definitions emphasize the focus on poverty reduction and enhancing pro-poor growth.²⁴ Reflecting the increasing convergence of these paradigms, the UNDP definition of social protection (see paragraph 4) encompasses instruments and functions of social protection.

TABLE 1. Emphasis of social protection definitions by different development partners

Development partner	Emphasis of social protection definition
United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)	Social protection as a human right, and a tool for achieving child well-being and children’s rights, following a life cycle approach
World Bank	Social protection as a means of reducing poverty and enhancing pro-poor growth
European Union (EU)	A basic level of social protection as a right for all, especially children, vulnerable persons of active working age, and older persons
International Labour Organization (ILO)	Social protection as a human right for all and a core pillar of decent work
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Social protection as a contributor to macroeconomic stability
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Social protection as a human right and a tool to reduce poverty and inequality between groups, and realize the SDGs
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – Australia	Social assistance for building resilience for the poor and vulnerable
Department for International Development (DFID) – United Kingdom	Social protection as a strategic tool to tackle extreme poverty, help the vulnerable and strengthen resilience in response to crises
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) – Germany	Social protection as a human right to reduce poverty and inequality

Source: Compiled from Carter et al. (2019)²⁵; UNDP (2016).²⁶

²³ The ILO defines social protection (or social security) as: “the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle. Social protection includes nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection, old-age benefits, disability benefits and survivors’ benefits. Social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (mainly social insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed schemes (universal/categorical schemes and social assistance)”.

²⁴ In the World Bank’s ‘2012–2022 Social Protection and Labour Strategy: Resilience, Equity and Opportunity’, social protection is defined as: “Systems, policies, and programmes that ‘help individuals and societies manage risk and volatility and protect them from poverty and destitution—through instruments that improve resilience, equity, and opportunity”.

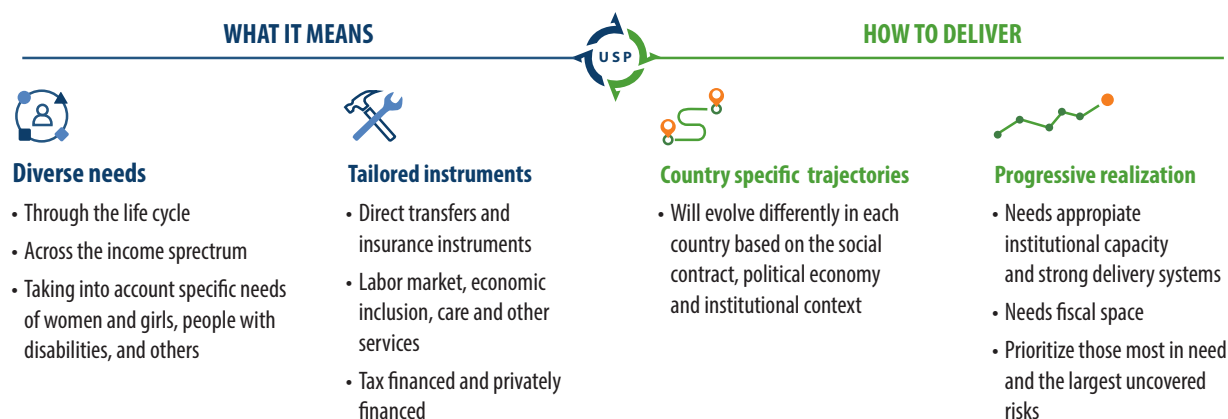
²⁵ Carter, B., K. Roelen, S. Enfield and W. Avis. 2019. Social Protection Topic Guide. Revised Edition. K4D Emerging Issues Report 18. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

²⁶ UNDP. 2016. ‘Leaving No One Behind: A Social Protection Primer for Practitioners’. New York United Nations Development Programme.

While international organizations have been united in advocating for social protection, there are major differences in terms of their preferred models, their underlying objectives and the discourses employed.^{27,28,29} Significant areas of contestation exist among the key actors in the field, particularly between the ILO and the World Bank, with regard to addressing inequality and redistribution, universal versus residual (targeted) approaches, risk and resilience and the concept of graduation, as well as institutional priorities and design preferences.³⁰ The mandates of bilateral donor agencies also tend to reflect cultural differences, often rooted in the dominant ideologies of welfare in their own countries.³¹ McCord emphasizes that the dispute affects the global social protection sector and can result in a situation where key actors are engaged in supporting a range of alternative social protection interventions, rather than complementary ones.³²

Recognition of the importance of social protection has led to increased global cooperation. In 2009, the UN system launched the Social Protection Floor Initiative, which draws together a broader coalition of stakeholders to promote and support the establishment of minimum levels of social protection (termed 'floors'), covering basic social security guarantees for health care, and income security for children, older persons, and those unable to work. As well as meeting pressing needs, floors are established to provide the basis for further expansion towards higher levels of social protection as economies grow. Following the inclusion of social protection in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection under the co-leadership of the World Bank and the ILO was launched, aiming to support governments in designing and implementing universal social protection systems. The publication of the document 'UN collaboration on social protection: Reaching consensus on how to accelerate social protection systems-building'³³ (ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] and the United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2022) also represented an important step towards a more consensual approach among the different UN agencies and bodies to support countries to achieve progress towards universal social protection.

FIGURE 3. Charting a course towards Universal Social Protection



Source: World Bank (2022).³⁴

²⁷ Seekings, J. 2021. 'International actors and social protection'. In E. Schüring and M. Loewe, eds., Handbook on Social Protection Systems, pp 492–507. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

²⁸ McCord, A. 2013. 'The public pursuit of secure welfare: Background paper on international development institutions, social protection & developing countries'. London: Overseas Development Institute.

²⁹ OECD. 2019. 'Optimising the role of development partners for social protection. Lessons from the EU Social Protection Systems Programme'. OECD Development Centre.

³⁰ McCord, A. 2013. 'The public pursuit of secure welfare: Background paper on international development institutions, social protection & developing countries'. London: Overseas Development Institute.

³¹ Seekings, J. 2021. 'International actors and social protection'. In E. Schüring and M. Loewe, eds., Handbook on Social Protection Systems, pp 492–507, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

³² McCord, A. 2013. 'The public pursuit of secure welfare: Background paper on international development institutions, social protection & developing countries'. London: Overseas Development Institute.

³³ See: https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/books-and-reports/WCMS_845757/lang--en/index.htm.

³⁴ World Bank Group. 2022. 'Charting a Course Towards Universal Social Protection: Resilience, Equity, and Opportunity for All'. World Bank Group, Washington, DC: World Bank, available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/38031>. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

2.2. Social protection and its linkage to the sustainable development agenda

In the post-2015 development agenda, social protection is endorsed as an instrument for achieving both poverty eradication and inequality reduction (see Table 2). The relationship between social protection and other SDGs has also received attention, including good health (SDG 3), climate action (SDG 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). More broadly, as an intersectoral intervention, social protection can serve as a strategic integrator that harnesses synergies for enhanced impact by simultaneously addressing several of the SDG targets.

TABLE 2. References to social protection in the SDGs

SDG	References to social protection
1.3 No poverty	Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
3.8 Good health and well-being for all	Achieve universal health care coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all
5.4 Gender equality	Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
8.5 Decent work and economic growth	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
10.4 Reduced inequalities	Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

Source: UN.³⁵

Social protection, poverty and resilience (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10). Under SDG 1 ('End poverty in all its forms everywhere'), governments have committed to implement social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, with a focus on achieving substantial coverage for the poor and vulnerable (target 1.3). A wealth of international evidence of the impacts of social protection on poverty,³⁶ food security,³⁷ human

³⁵ UN. 2015. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. 70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/70/1. New York: United Nations.

³⁶ Bastagli, F., J. Hagen-Zanker, L. Harman, V. Barca, G. Sturge, T. Schmidt and L. Pellerano. 2016. 'Cash transfers: what does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features'. London: Overseas Development Institute; Ralston, L., C. Andrews and A. Hsiao. 2017. 'The Impacts of Safety Nets in Africa What Are We Learning?' Washington, DC: World Bank.

³⁷ Bastagli, F., J. Hagen-Zanker, L. Harman, V. Barca, G. Sturge, T. Schmidt and L. Pellerano. 2016. 'Cash transfers: what does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features'. London: Overseas Development Institute.

capital outcomes^{38,39} and inequality^{40,41,42} has motivated and fuelled the deployment of social protection instruments for the achievement of these SDGs. This contributes to a view of social protection as an investment rather than as a consumption expenditure.⁴³ With regard to vulnerability and resilience, social assistance schemes have been shown to reduce vulnerability through impacts on health, nutrition, empowerment, social inclusion, asset accumulation, productive investment and employment.⁴⁴ By building and protecting human capabilities and productive capital, these pathways can build resilience and prevent people from falling below a critical threshold of well-being as well as provide incentives for a just transition to a green economy.

Shock-responsive, climate-linked and adaptive social protection (SDGs 13,15). The field of shock-responsive and adaptive social protection builds on the growing areas of expertise in social protection as a tool for responding to the covariate impacts of climate change and conflict, as well as the emerging lessons from the social protection needs and responses to COVID-19.^{45,46} The specific challenge presented by covariate shocks is the implication that many individuals fall in need of different social protection benefits simultaneously (and/or individuals who already receive support may need additional resources to meet their basic needs). At the same time, the consequences of the shock may limit the capacity of the existing system to deliver relief (e.g. following disaster or conflict). These shocks are primarily triggered by cyclical, weather-related seasonal variations or exceptional circumstances (e.g. earthquake) that give rise to a humanitarian crisis. They will also pose different challenges to existing social protection systems depending on their speed of onset (rapid or slow), predictability, duration (short- or medium-term or protracted), geographical distribution and political profile.⁴⁷

Social protection can contribute to responding effectively to natural, economic and political crises and thus bridge the humanitarian-development divide. Cash transfers are utilized, for example, in both crisis and stable contexts.^{48,49} The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, for instance, highlights the importance of inclusive policy and social safety nets, to reduce risk, protect development gains, and build back better.⁵⁰ Currently, countries with underdeveloped social protection systems are those that are experiencing disproportionate effects of climate change.⁵¹ By building on the overlap between the aims of social protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, there is considerable scope for integrated policies and programmes that address both social and environmental factors, based on a long-term, preventive approach.⁵²

³⁸ OECD. 2019. 'Can social protection be an engine for inclusive growth?' Paris: Development Centre Studies, OECD Publishing.

³⁹ Davis, B., S. Handa, N. Hypher, N. Winder, P. Winters and J. Yablonski. 2016. 'From Evidence to Action: The Story of Cash Transfers and Impact Evaluation in Sub-Saharan Africa'. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Hujo, K. 2021. 'Social protection and inequality in the global South: Politics, actors and institutions'. *Critical Social Policy* 41 (3): 343–363, available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/02610183211009899>.

⁴¹ Roelen, K. 2016. 'World social science report, 2016: Challenging inequalities: pathways to a just world'. International Social Science Council; Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

⁴² UNDESA. 2021. 'The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021'. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

⁴³ Midgley, J. 2013. 'Social development and social welfare: implications for comparative social policy'. In *A handbook of comparative social policy*, Kennett, P. ed., pp 182–204. Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar.

⁴⁴ Carter, B., K. Roelen, S. Enfield and W. Avis. 2019. *Social Protection Topic Guide. Revised Edition. K4D Emerging Issues Report 18*. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

⁴⁵ Bowen, T., C. del Ninno, C. Andrews, S. Coll-Black, U. Gentilini, K. Johnson, Y. Kawasoe, A. Kryeziu, B. Maher and A. Williams. 2020. 'Adaptive Social Protection: Building Resilience to Shocks'. International Development in Focus. Washington, DC: World Bank.

⁴⁶ Bastagli, F. and C. Lowe. 2021. 'Social protection response to COVID-19 and beyond: emerging evidence and learning for future crises'. ODI Working Paper. London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

⁴⁷ See: https://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/OP344_Conceptualising_shock_responsive_social_protection.pdf.

⁴⁸ EC. 2019. 'Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. A Game Changer in Supporting People through Crises'. Tools and Methods Series – Reference Document No 26. Brussels: European Commission.

⁴⁹ Gentilini, U., S. Laughton and C. O'Brien. 2018. 'Humanitarian Capital? Lessons on Better Connecting Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection'. Social Protection & Jobs Discussion paper 1802. World Food Programme; World Bank.

⁵⁰ See: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf.

⁵¹ UNDP. 2016. 'Leaving No One Behind: A Social Protection Primer for Practitioners'. New York United Nations Development Programme.

⁵² FAO. 2019. 'Managing climate risks through social protection. Reducing rural poverty and building resilient agricultural livelihoods'. Rome: FAO and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre.

Social protection, peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). Social protection is increasingly recognized as a key element of social contracts.⁵³ Recent research explores the potential of social protection to be provided and accessed in ways that build trust and social accountability.^{54,55} Empirical evidence has also informed a more nuanced understanding of how the design, reach, and implementation of social protection policies are shaped by citizen-state relations and how, in turn, their implementation shapes citizen-state relations.^{56,57}

Partnerships (SDG 17). State and non-state actors are involved in the delivery of social protection. Their roles and the relationships between stakeholders determine the scope, direction, governance and financing of social protection systems. National governments carry the ultimate responsibility for social protection provision for its citizens, and institutional responsibilities typically include ministries of labour, health, finance, agriculture, social security institutions, as well as local level governments. Local non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, other civil society organizations (CSOs) and traditional authorities may fulfil a service provider role in social protection or an advocacy role. Partnerships with grassroots actors can facilitate last-mile delivery and the inclusion of hard-to-reach individuals and communities, particularly in complex and fragile environments or in contexts where government operational functions are limited by capacity or geographic challenges,⁵⁸ thereby helping ensure that no one is left behind. The private sector can play several roles (see finding 20). Areas in which international organizations have played a significant role in supporting social protection systems globally⁵⁹ include conducting analytical work, assisting governments to develop social protection strategies and policies, supporting pilot programmes, providing budgetary support, and building national functional and technical capacities, and evidence generation.

2.3. Social protection challenges

Social protection systems operate in a context of high, and sometimes growing, levels of informality and inequality, marked by limited fiscal space, institutional fragmentation and competing priorities, climate change, digital transformation and demographic shifts. Many countries still face significant challenges in closing social protection gaps. Gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection systems are associated with significant underinvestment in social protection, particularly in Africa, the Arab States and Asia. The literature review conducted by the evaluation highlights several areas of gaps and challenges in social protection. Major gaps include: coverage; access; comprehensiveness; and financing (see Section 2.5).

Coverage: Major gaps in social protection coverage exist, with differences across regions. The ILO World Social Protection Report 2020–2022 indicates that only 47 percent of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while 4.1 billion people (53 percent) obtain no income security at all from their national social protection system.⁶⁰ There are significant variations across

⁵³ Loewe, M., T. Zintl and A. Houdret. 2021. 'The social contract as a tool of analysis: Introduction to the special issue on Framing the evolution of new social contracts in Middle Eastern and North African countries'. *World Development* 145: 104982, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.104982>. See also: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X2030108X>.

⁵⁴ Sabates-Wheeler, R., N. Wilmink, A. Abdulai, R. de Groot and T. Spadafora. 2020. 'Linking Social Rights to Active Citizenship for the Most Vulnerable: the Role of Rights and Accountability in the "Making" and "Shaping" of Social Protection'. *The European Journal of Development Research* 32 (1): 129–151. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-019-00223-5>.

⁵⁵ Devereux, S. and J. McGregor. 2014. 'Transforming Social Protection: Social Justice and Human Wellbeing'. *European Journal of Development Research* 26: 296–310.

⁵⁶ Alik-Lagrange, A., S. K. Dreier, M. Lake and A. Porisky. 2021. 'Social Protection and State–Society Relations in Environments of Low and Uneven State Capacity'. *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (1): 151–174, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-101929>.

⁵⁷ Koehler, G. 2021. 'Effects of social protection on social inclusion, social cohesion and nation building'. In Schüring E. and M. Loewe, eds., *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*, pp. 492–507.

⁵⁸ UNDP. 2013. 'Strengthening the Governance of Social Protection: The Role of Local Government. Regional Analysis'. Bangkok; New York: United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Capital Development Fund.

⁵⁹ OECD. 2019. 'Optimising the role of development partners for social protection. Lessons from the EU Social Protection Systems Programme'. OECD Development Centre.

⁶⁰ ILO, 2020. 'World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future'.

and within regions, with higher average coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia (83.9 percent) and the Americas (64.3 percent) and higher coverage gaps in Asia and the Pacific (44.1 percent), the Arab States (40.0 percent) and Africa (17.4 percent). According to data from the World Bank's Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity (ASPIRE), just over one third of all people and one half of people in the poorest quintile of their country receive some form of social assistance, with poorer countries having even lower coverage. In low-income countries, on average only 23 percent of those in the poorest quintile receive some sort of social assistance, while the corresponding figure in high-income countries is 73 percent. On average, social assistance benefits represent around 19 percent of the income of people in the poorest quintile, and many programmes do not automatically adjust their benefits for inflation or regularly review their adequacy.⁶¹

Access: Even where programmes are available, physical, financial and geographical barriers may disproportionately prevent access to benefits and services for certain groups. Globally, only 29 percent of people considered vulnerable (children, people of working age and older people not covered by social insurance) receive social assistance. The coverage of contributory social protection schemes for women is particularly low, especially in the case of old-age pensions, unemployment benefits or maternity protection. One of the factors is that women are not as well represented in formal-sector employment as men. Globally, only 26.4 percent of working-age women are covered by contributory old-age protection, compared to 31.5 percent of the total working-age population.⁶² Ensuring adequate social protection for women and men requires addressing labour market insecurity and inequalities, including gender gaps in employment and wages. Extending social protection to those in the informal economy is of key importance: approximately 1.6 billion women and men make their living in the global informal economy with little or no social protection. Women, young people and migrants who are overrepresented in non-standard employment are likely to be excluded from social insurance and labour market programmes that tend to only benefit those in formal employment. By exacerbating exclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has further threatened the achievement of the leave no one behind (LNOB) principle. Overall, expanding age, disability and gender-responsive social protection coverage, in particular to the most vulnerable people, including informal workers, the rural poor, women, children, older persons, migrants, refugees and persons with disabilities, is among the most critical interventions that will need to be resourced and strengthened to generate synergies across the SDGs. Clearly, this will be a long-term task.

Comprehensiveness and adequacy: Comprehensive social protection systems integrate different social protection programmes (including social assistance, social insurance, active labour market programmes and social care services) to ensure that everyone is protected against both systemic shocks and ordinary life cycle risks. Countries with effective health and social protection systems in place that provide universal coverage have been better prepared to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. During 2020–2022, countries around the world planned or implemented more than 3,000 social protection and labour market measures;⁶³ yet, many of these remained temporary. Institutionalized, integrated, long-term, universal and legally embedded human rights-based approaches to social protection that empower all segments of society to play a role in the development of their communities are key to reducing inequalities and building resilience in the face of future shocks and stressors. Ensuring adequacy of social protection also entails the range and scope of available benefits, the levels of cash benefits, the comprehensiveness and quality of health benefit packages, as well as factors such as the predictability of benefits and the duration of benefit payments. Growing areas of risk, such as threats related to climate change, require the development of new social protection instruments to ensure that new gaps do not emerge or increase.

Moreover, while there have been a multitude of **digital innovations** in social protection registration, delivery and disbursement, there are still gaps in the development of integrated, accessible, equitable,

⁶¹ World Bank Group. 2022. 'Charting a Course Towards Universal Social Protection: Resilience, Equity, and Opportunity for All'. World Bank Group: Washington, DC, available at: <http://localhost:4000/entities/publication/84ba2380-624c-553a-b929-2882e72c7468>. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO. Calculations based on data from the ASPIRE database, available at: www.worldbank.org/aspire.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, Global Factsheet, November 2021, available at: https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Global%20Factsheet_Version%203_Nov%202021_final.pdf.

affordable and sustainable technological solutions. Additionally, access to many services, including education, health, emergency information and cash benefits, increasingly requires access to mobile phones and the Internet as well as infrastructure, such as electricity services, to ensure connectivity.

2.4. Social protection and the emerging global context

COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic, with its triple hit to health, education, and income, contributed to a regression of the Human Development Index for the first time since 1990. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weakness in health and social care systems, in particular, and highlighted the need to embed social protection in cross-sectoral responses cushioning the negative social impacts on the population and helping to achieve the SDGs. The momentum around social protection in developing countries across the world, particularly in response to COVID-19, offers opportunities to review and refresh the development policy agenda. The Secretary-General's report on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19⁶⁴ calls for a scale-up of social protection to cushion the knock-on effects on people's lives, including through debt-relief, in collaboration with the IMF, the World Bank and other financial institutions. In the same vein, the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2020 calls for the UN development system to ensure crucial investments in social protection and decent work in response to COVID-19.⁶⁵

The cost-of-living crisis: The 2022 UNDP Report, 'Addressing the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Developing Countries: Poverty and Vulnerability Projections and Policy Responses',⁶⁶ concludes conservatively that, at the global level, the cost-of-living crisis alone has pushed over 51 million people into extreme poverty and an additional 20 million into moderate poverty. Many governments in emerging and developing economies are confronting very tight fiscal constraints and rapidly rising debt-servicing payments. The Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022 has added a new heavy layer of complication as it has led to rapidly rising prices for both food and fuel. Thus, at the level of monetary policy, central banks – especially those in developed economies – now face the dilemma of whether to raise interest rates in order to combat the inflationary pressures exerted by rising food and fuel prices while at the same time trying to support at least moderate rates of economic growth, especially in order to contain the growing adverse pressures on the poor and vulnerable. But the policy space in many developing and emerging economies appears to be a severely limiting constraint since a recent significant rise in their domestic debts is quickly becoming unsustainable. Thus, policymakers are confronting increasingly constricted options. If they tighten monetary policies in attempting to contain supply-driven inflation, the result could well be 'the worst of both worlds', namely, stagflation (i.e. both a recession and increases in inflation). According to the World Bank's discussion paper on 'Tracking Global Social Protection Responses to Price Shocks',⁶⁷ as of September 2022, a total of 609 social protection and related measures to counter inflation had been announced or implemented across 158 economies, with subsidies being the most common measure, followed by social assistance (mainly in the form of cash transfers) and tax-related measures. Both universal and target programmes were widely used during the crisis.

Triple threat of recession, higher inflation, and higher debts: Near-term projections suggest that the global economy could be confronted with the triple threat of recession, higher inflation, and higher debts, limiting the room for expansionary fiscal policies, especially for developing and emerging economies. Economic growth is likely to slow – if not drop precipitously – while inflation remains relatively high (especially for food and fuel). In addition, national debt levels are most likely to remain high or, more likely, to worsen significantly. If such projections are prescient, the conditions confronting policymakers in developing and emerging economies could be dire, and may occur alongside a need to protect employment during significant digital and energy transitions. In this regard, the need for social protection programmes

⁶⁴ United Nations, 2020. 'Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19', available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

⁶⁵ United Nations General Assembly. 2020. 'Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System'.

⁶⁶ UNDP, 2022. 'Addressing the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Developing Countries: Poverty and Vulnerability Projections and Policy Responses'.

⁶⁷ See: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099240009222235145/pdf/P17658501ab8730040bdd30a901d04e538d.pdf>.

– especially various forms of social assistance, particularly for the poor and vulnerable – have become imperative, especially since economic vulnerabilities are most likely to worsen as well as become more widespread. In its latest World Social Protection Report,⁶⁸ the ILO argues against continued underinvestment in social protection in favour of a ‘high road’ response, in which expenditure increases towards universal and comprehensive social protection as part of a human-centred and just recovery.

2.5. Financing social protection systems

Although social protection spending has increased across developing countries during the 2000s, it remains low by the standards of industrialized countries.⁶⁹ Since 2015, Sub-Saharan Africa has been the major recipient of social protection Official Development Assistance (ODA) and low-income countries have received a growing share of ODA, in line with a greater focus on poverty reduction in the sector. However, since ODA for social protection only represents 1.2 percent of total ODA, this suggests that it still remains a relatively low priority area of development. Expenditure also remains minimal in comparison to the cost of basic social protection provision, accounting for less than 6 percent of the estimated \$41.9 billion annual social protection spending gap for low-income countries, calculated by Durán-Valverde et al. (2020).⁷⁰

The financing gap required to ensure at least a minimum level of social protection for all has increased by approximately 30 percent since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. To guarantee at least basic social protection coverage, low-income countries would need to invest an additional \$77.9 billion per year, lower middle-income countries an additional \$362.9 billion per year and upper middle-income countries a further \$750.8 billion per year, equivalent to 15.9, 5.1 and 3.1 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.⁷¹ Current levels of expenditure on social protection are insufficient to close persistent coverage gaps, despite large (although unequal) mobilization of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The longer-term objective is that scaled-up social protection systems need to be funded domestically through progressive fiscal systems; however, as the literature has demonstrated, international actors, the private sector, as well as non-governmental social services organizations also have a part to play (especially in supporting social protection systems and in fragile contexts where state provision is weak).⁷² UN agencies have researched options for financing social protection.⁷³ Analysis conducted by the Overseas Development Institute shows that ODA expenditure on social protection has actually increased, particularly since the financial crisis in 2007/2008.⁷⁴ This increase reflects the expansion in donors’ social protection country portfolios following the crisis and the increased profile of social protection as an instrument for delivering development outcomes, especially through shock-responsive and adaptive social protection.

⁶⁸ International Labour Office. ‘World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future’. Geneva: ILO, 2021.

⁶⁹ OECD. 2019b. ‘Optimising the role of development partners for social protection. Lessons from the EU Social Protection Systems Programme’. OECD Development Centre.

⁷⁰ Durán-Valverde, F., J. Pacheco-Jiménez, T. Muzaffar and H. Elizondo-Barboza. 2020. ‘Financing gaps in social protection: global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond’. ILO Working Paper 14. Geneva: ILO.

⁷¹ ILO. 2021b. ‘World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads - in pursuit of a better future’. Geneva: International Labour Office.

⁷² McCord, A., C. Cherrier, N. Both and F. Bastagli. 2021. ‘Official development assistance financing for social protection. Lessons from the COVID-19 response’. London: Overseas Development Institute.

⁷³ For example, ILO report on ‘Fiscal space for Social Protection. A handbook for assessing financing options’, available at: https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/books-and-reports/WCMS_727261/lang--en/index.htm and UNICEF, ESC-WA and UNDP report on ‘Social expenditure monitor for Arab States – Toward making budgets more equitable, efficient and effective to achieve the SDGs’, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/20036/file/Social%20Expenditure%20Monitor%20for%20Arab%20States%20Toward%20Making%20Budgets%20more%20Equitable,%20Efficient%20and%20Effective%20to%20Achieve%20the%20SDGs.pdf>.

⁷⁴ McCord, A., C. Cherrier, N. Both and F. Bastagli. 2021. ‘Official development assistance financing for social protection. Lessons from the COVID-19 response’. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Chapter 3.

UNDP SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACH AND PORTFOLIO

3.1. UNDP global strategy and approach to social protection

The figure below summarises the sequence of UNDP strategic guiding documents that give direction on social protection. Taken together, these documents track the evolution of social protection strategies within UNDP at both integrated/institutional and thematic/sectoral levels.

FIGURE 4. Key strategic UNDP documents on social protection



Source: Prepared by the IEO.

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, in 2016, UNDP developed a social protection primer for practitioners⁷⁵ to provide the practical solutions to strengthen social protection systems and to address the systemic and interlinked objectives of the SDGs. The primer delineated the approach and guiding principles of social protection: (i) protecting and promoting human rights; (ii) ensuring non-discrimination; (iii) fostering gender equality and women’s empowerment; (iv) remaining risk-informed and sensitive to environmental concerns; (v) providing a continuum of protection (life cycle approach); and (vi) promoting universality. Despite recent global setbacks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and dramatically rising food and fuel costs, the primer continues to be a key document for UNDP in providing advice and technical assistance on social protection to countries.

UNDP further streamlined its programme for social protection in the 2017 Strategy of Inclusive Growth.⁷⁶ Scaling up of redistributive programmes was prioritized through support to the development of national strategies, policies and laws on social protection, the framework and approach for building social protection systems, gender responsiveness in social protection, including the informal sector, and support for providing basic goods, especially for poor households and other at-risk communities.

In the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, UNDP promotes the progressive expansion of inclusive social protection systems towards sustainable coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Social protection is anchored not only in UNDP’s work to reduce inequality and eradicate poverty but is also connected to other thematic areas under its six Signature Solutions.⁷⁷ This is further streamlined in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022–2025,

⁷⁵ UNDP. 2016. *Leaving No One Behind: A Social Protection Primer for Practitioners*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

⁷⁶ UNDP. 2017. *UNDP Inclusive Growth Strategy 2017*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

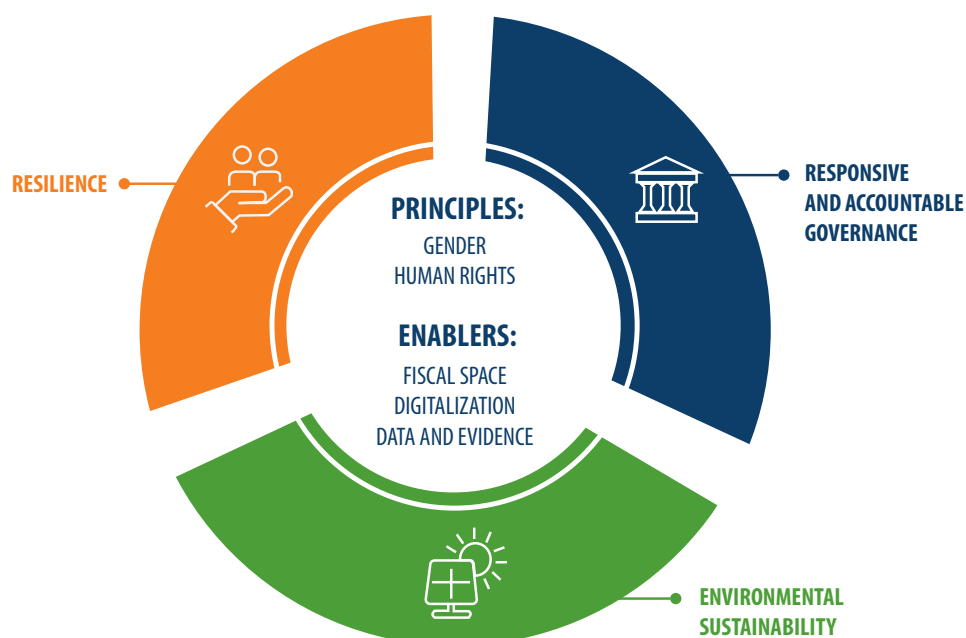
⁷⁷ Output 2.1.2 of the Strategic Plan 2018–2021: ‘capacities developed for progressive expansion of inclusive social protection systems’. The outputs were measured by two indicators: Indicator 2.1.2.1: ‘Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes, disaggregated by target groups’; and Indicator 2.1.2.2: ‘Number of countries that have improved the range of services provided through their social protection systems to reach marginalized groups’.

which highlights the rights-based approach to human agency and human development, in which social protection contributes to an equitable access to opportunities. The Strategic Plan 2022–2025 aims to increase social protection coverage through stronger social protection services and systems across sectors with increased investment, including policy measures and institutional capacities to enable access to social protection and a better quality and type of social protection services. The Strategic Plan’s Integrated Results and Resources Framework includes one output and two indicators directly related to social protection.⁷⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to address important gaps in social protection coverage, systems and shock-responsiveness. Social protection is part of the UNDP COVID-19 response,⁷⁹ through the use of cash transfers, initial forms of universal health coverage and access to other basic services, as well as addressing gender inequality, discrimination and bias.

Building on the social protection component of UNDP’s Social Protection Offer, which aims to provide not only immediate relief but also looks beyond recovery towards 2030, the UNDP Social Protection Offer adopts an integrated vision to tackle three connected sets of issues: gaps in social protection coverage; weak governance of social protection systems; and shock-unresponsiveness of existing social protection mechanisms. The Social Protection Offer identifies three mutually supportive thematic areas in which UNDP has strong expertise, to serve as entry points to its social protection support: (i) responsible and accountable governance; (ii) resilience; and (iii) environmental sustainability. It maps out 12 social protection solutions that cut across the three thematic areas. Cross-cutting principles and enablers for the Social Protection Offer include gender equality and human rights (principles), and financing/fiscal space, digitalization and innovation, data and evidence (enablers) (see figure 5). The Social Protection Offer is not intended as a single package but rather a set of options where UNDP can contribute and partner with other UN agencies to deliver in an integrated manner in areas where it has strong value propositions and/or collaborative advantages at the country level.

FIGURE 5. Thematic areas and cross-cutting principles and enablers



Source: UNDP Social Protection Offer (2022).

⁷⁸ Output 1.2: ‘Social protection services and systems strengthened across sectors with increased investment’. Indicator 1.2.1: ‘Number of countries with policy measures and institutional capacities in place to increase access to social protection schemes targeting (i) women; (ii) urban poor; (iii) rural poor; (iv) persons with disabilities; (v) informal sector workers’. Indicator 1.2.2: ‘Number of countries that have increased types and quality of social protection services: (i) Type of services; (ii) Quality of services: Coverage, adequacy, access’.

⁷⁹ UNDP. 2020a. Beyond Recovery. Towards 2030. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

Currently, within UNDP, the social protection portfolio is coordinated by the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) Inclusive Growth stream. At the regional level, each bureau has an inclusive growth/social protection focal team (1–2 staff) who manage regional level initiatives and provide support to country office programme staff on request in the design and implementation of social protection interventions at the country level. While the Social Protection Offer is coordinated by the Inclusive Growth team, the roll-out of the Social Protection Offer cuts across various teams in the Global Policy Network. For example, the work related to the expansion of the care systems is mostly conducted by the gender team, which also has 1–2 focal persons in each region.

3.2. Programme portfolio

UNDP’s social protection portfolio over the period 2016–2022 consists of 855 projects implemented in 134 countries,⁸⁰ amounting to a \$2.5 billion expenditure. The regional breakdown of projects, budget and expenditure is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Regional breakdown of UNDP social protection portfolio

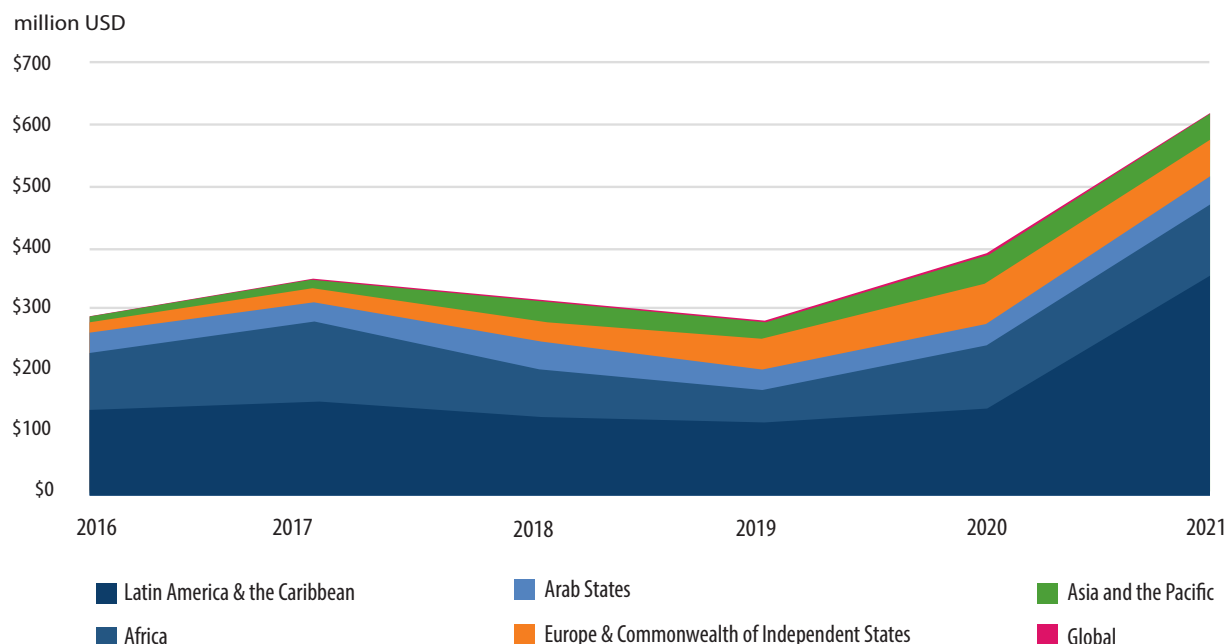
REGION	Total No of Projects	Total Budget (2016–2022) in US\$ million	% of Total Budget	Total expenditure (2016–2022) in US\$ million	% of Total Expenditure
Latin America and the Caribbean	250	1,606.2	45.4%	1,183.6	47.0%
Africa	289	864.6	24.5%	633.3	25.1%
Arab States	92	441.6	12.5%	257.7	10.2%
Europe & Commonwealth of Independent States	128	354.5	10.0%	269.7	10.7%
Asia and the Pacific	101	255.9	7.2%	170.6	6.8%
Global/HQ managed projects	8	11.6	0.3%	4.3	0.2%

Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

Overall expenditure had remained at relatively consistent levels between 2016 and early 2020, and thereafter more than doubled as new funding was found and existing funds were reallocated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall increase is driven by a large increase in Latin America and the Caribbean, where government funding was channelled through the health and education sectors and labour market interventions. All other regions registered a smaller overall increase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁸⁰ Seventy-nine projects exist across multiple countries and 13 across regions. While they were counted once in global statistics, they are counted for each country/region in the country/regional breakdowns below. Apart from multi-country and cross-regional projects, there are eight projects allocated to global units in the dataset (which are included within the number of 855 projects).

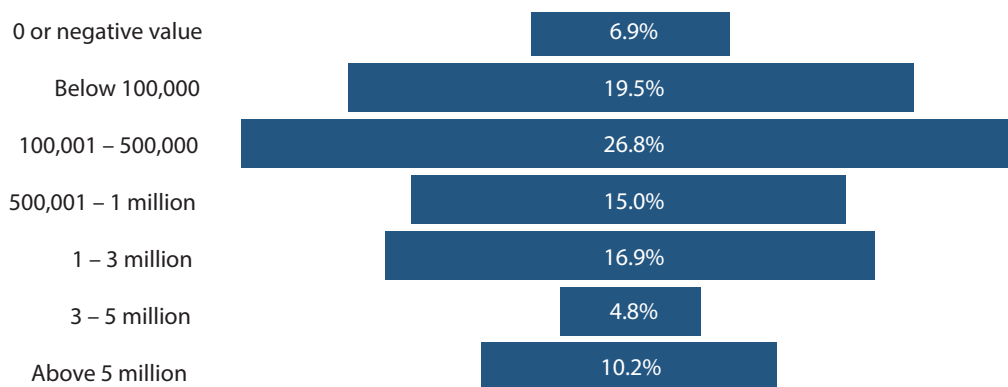
FIGURE 6. UNDP social protection expenditures by region by year



Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

Distribution of expenditure: Overall, the UNDP social protection portfolio consists of many small projects. Thirteen countries have projects with expenditure under \$100,000. Two thirds of the 855 projects (68.1 percent) were below \$1 million of expenditures between 2016–2022. Among them, the largest numbers were in Africa (21.8 percent), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (19.3 percent). Projects with expenditure between \$100,000 and \$500,000 have the largest share (26.8 percent of the total number of social protection projects). Projects with expenditure over 5 million represent 10.2 percent of the total number of UNDP social protection projects, of which Latin America and the Caribbean have the largest share (3.7 percent), followed by Africa (2.5 percent), Arab States (1.6 percent), and Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia (1.2 percent each). In terms of project duration, 17.9 percent of the projects lasted one year or less, and almost two thirds of the projects (65.8 percent) had a duration of up to three years.

FIGURE 7. Distribution of social protection projects by expenditure scale



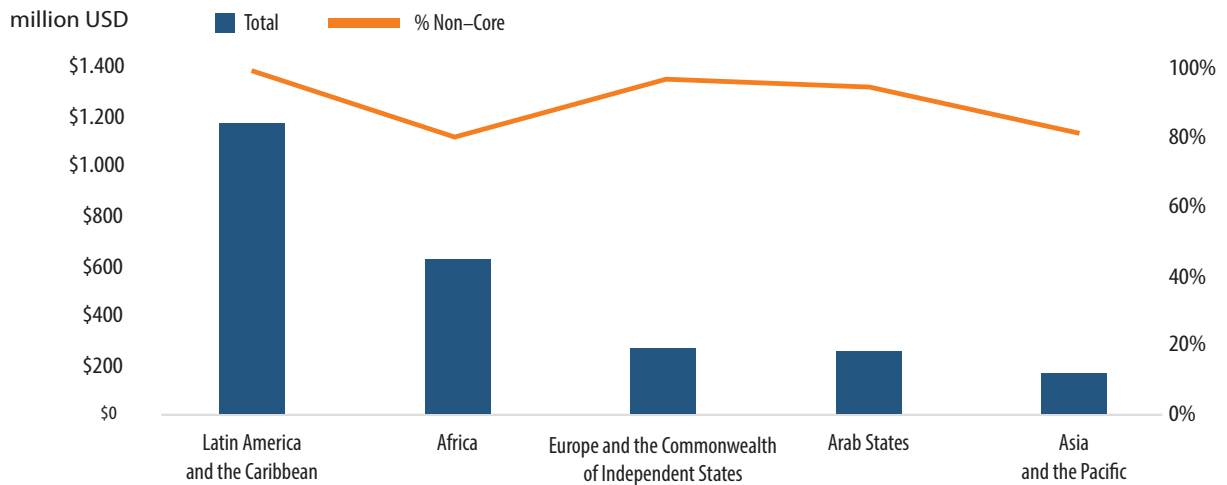
Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

Signature solutions and social protection thematic areas: Over half of UNDP social protection interventions are associated with the Signature Solution ‘Keeping people out of poverty’ (51.5 percent) and far smaller proportions are associated with Signature Solution ‘Governance for peaceful, just and inclusive societies’ (7.5 percent), Signature Solution ‘Environment: nature-based solutions for development’ (1.7 percent) and ‘Crisis prevention and increased resilience’ (1.3 percent). The remaining two signature solutions on women and energy, have minimal social protection expenditure (under 1 percent each).⁸¹

Types of interventions: Around 65 percent of UNDP social protection expenditure (\$1.6 billion over 2016–2022) was directed to national social protection systems, programmes and delivery mechanisms, and another 20 percent to broader support to strengthen capacities or conditions relevant to the social protection instruments (e.g. improved vulnerability indices) or the usage of social protection by its recipients (e.g. civic registration or localised banking services). A further breakdown of the primary category shows that around \$1 billion is related to social assistance (including supporting cash transfers and cash-for-work, health assistance during COVID-19, social care services), \$479 million is related to labour market interventions while less than \$100 million is related to social insurance.⁸²

Source of funding: UNDP core resources represent 7.4 percent of its total expenditure in social protection over the evaluation period, although with significant variance between regions. Core funding is a significant source of the organization’s social protection spending in Africa and in Asia and the Pacific, accounting for about 20 percent of UNDP’s total resources for social protection in each region. In contrast, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 99 percent of UNDP social protection expenditure comes from non-core funding. Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Arab States also receive high levels of non-core funding (over 95 percent).

FIGURE 8. UNDP social protection portfolio expenditure and percentage of non-core funding by region



Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

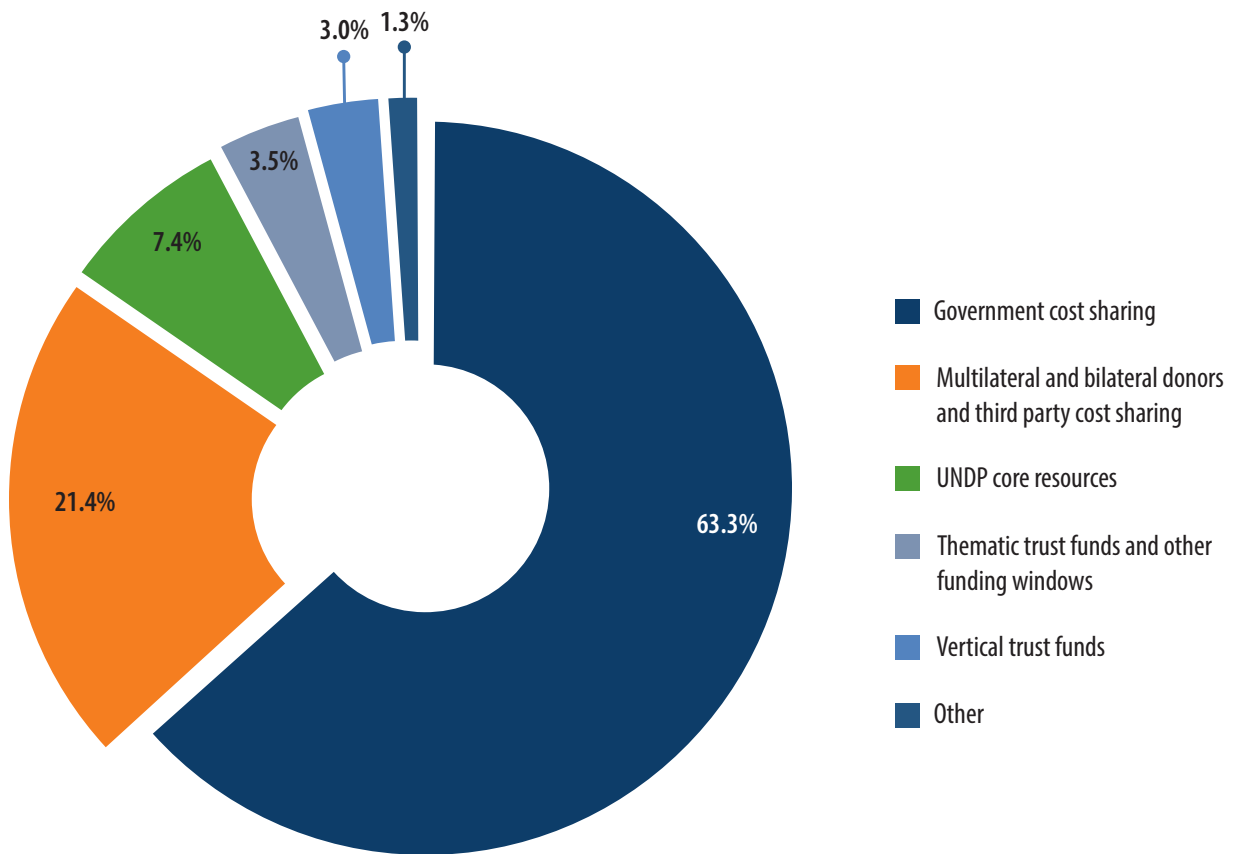
⁸¹ A considerable percentage of activities (36.8 percent) is not yet categorized under a signature solution.

⁸² These figures provide the overall proportions in the UNDP portfolio based on the evaluation’s assessment of the individual project outputs; precise analysis at the intervention level for the full portfolio was not possible with the data and resources available.

Government cost-sharing represents a significant source of UNDP social protection funding. Such funding predominantly came from upper middle-income countries, such as Argentina and the Dominican Republic, representing 16.8 percent and 13.8 percent respectively of the global UNDP social protection funding envelope. Among the main cost-sharing partners are other middle-income countries and high-income countries, such as Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Dominica, Peru, Turkmenistan, Cameroon, Paraguay, Panama, and Uruguay.

Bilateral development partners are key contributors to the UNDP social protection funding. The largest contributor is the European Commission (7.0 percent of the total expenditure). Other main donors have included the vertical funds, the multi-partner trust fund, the International Development Association and other bilateral cooperation.

FIGURE 9. Social protection expenditures by funds category (2016 – September 2022)



Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

Chapter 4.

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the key findings of the evaluation, assessing the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP support to social protection, as well as the major contributing factors. The chapter starts with a finding on the global distribution of UNDP support, followed by an assessment of UNDP's global approach to social protection. Thereafter, the findings focus on the results of UNDP support. The first set of results are framed by their contribution to social protection systems, programmes and delivery mechanisms, and a specific focus on UNDP's contribution to the shock-responsiveness of social protection instruments. The second set of results are framed by the key principles and enablers in UNDP's Social Protection Offer – gender, human rights, fiscal space, digitalization and data and evidence.

4.1. Global distribution of UNDP support

Finding 1: A majority of expenditure in the UNDP social protection portfolio was in countries with a high and very high human development index ranking, and more than half of total expenditure occurred in upper-middle-income countries. Well over a quarter of the total portfolio expenditure is concentrated in five large projects in three countries.

An important part of UNDP's social protection portfolio is the upstream support to policy development and institutional strengthening for the governance of social protection systems at the national level, including technical advisory support. At the programme level, UNDP's portfolio includes cash transfers (in both development and crisis contexts), access to health and social care services, social protection for informal workers, labour market support and – to a very limited extent – social insurance. Support to delivery mechanisms through digitalization to improve the identification and targeting of beneficiaries is another important part of UNDP's social protection portfolio.

About two thirds of expenditure in UNDP's social protection portfolio (which included expenditure from all sources of funding) was in countries with a high and very high human development index (33.8 percent and 30.7 percent, respectively). Most of the expenditures on social protection support (53.3 percent) occurred in upper-middle-income countries and involved cost-sharing with governments in these countries. The second largest group was lower middle-income countries (20.9 percent), followed by low-income countries (13.8 percent) and high-income countries (9.3 percent).⁸³ Least developed countries represented about a quarter (24.2 percent) of the total expenditure, while Small Island Developing States and land-locked developing countries represented 18.6 percent and 13.7 percent, respectively.

Well over a quarter (28.5 percent) of the total portfolio expenditure is concentrated in five large projects in three countries (Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Senegal), which have a combined expenditure of over \$700 million. These projects contain a social protection focus as part of a larger set of objectives, and it is difficult to isolate the expenditure on the social protection component. For example, the Gestión de Políticas Alimentarias II (food policy management) project in Argentina has a total expenditure of \$216.6 million, equivalent to 8.6 percent of UNDP's overall portfolio expenditure in the same period, and the Abordaje comunitario contra el hambre (community approach against hunger) project, also in Argentina, accounts for another 5.6 percent. Both projects are mainly funded by the Government of Argentina. Similarly, the MINERD Equipos and MINERD Gestion Logistica (procurement of equipment and logistics for the Ministry of Education) projects in the Dominican Republic together account for 8.4 percent of UNDP's total

⁸³ Note: 2.6% is not categorized based on the country income level.

social protection expenditures globally. The expenditure of these two projects in 2021 alone was over \$200 million. Of the total \$633.3 million in Africa, the Programme d'urgence de Développement Communautaire (community development emergency programme) in Senegal accounts for \$147.5 million. An important point is that a significant proportion of resources of these large government-funded projects was spent on procurement and not on technical assistance for core social protection system strengthening.

After Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Senegal, the next seven highest-spending countries have expenditures dropping to the \$50–70 million range for the 2016–2022 period. These top 10 countries, taken all together, account for 57 percent of UNDP's total social protection expenditure.

The overall spending trends are driven by the Latin America and the Caribbean region. The region represents nearly half of the total expenditures on UNDP social protection support (47 percent) and most of these countries are middle-income countries/upper-middle-income countries and high-income countries. In these countries, government cost-sharing represents a significant portion of the expenditure. UNDP support is embedded in the country-led, country-owned social protection programmes and provides institutional strengthening and procurement support. Africa represents a quarter (25.1 percent) of the total social protection expenditures, although its spending is highly concentrated in a very small number of countries. For example, if the community development emergency programme in Senegal cited above is not included, the expenditures in Africa – the region with the highest number of least developed countries – drops to 19.2 percent of the total UNDP social protection expenditures. On a more positive note, Africa is the region which received the majority of UNDP core resources channelled to social protection (67 percent or \$125 million over the period 2016–2022).

The Africa region has a considerable amount of 'pass-through' funds, where UNDP is the administrative agency for funds executed by other agencies or development actors.⁸⁴ A closer review of the list of projects globally by the evaluation also found that, even though some projects are tagged as related to social protection in UNDP's systems, no clear link was actually found (with such projects accounting for around 6 percent of the total expenditures). Another 7.5 percent of the expenditures were on projects that have provided social assistance on their own terms and resources, without a primary objective to improve a country-owned social protection system, and have included, for example, payment for ecosystem services or reconstruction initiatives.

4.2. UNDP's global approach to social protection

Finding 2: The UNDP Social Protection Offer is overall relevant and corresponds to the central themes of social protection policy and practice globally. The main strength of the Social Protection Offer is its focus on linking social protection instruments with initiatives for risk prevention, recovery, environmental protection, livelihoods promotion and economic transitions.

There is a growing consensus among development actors (and donors especially) about the need to shift away from fragmented, externally-funded social protection projects towards systems that are harmonised within and across government institutions and development partners.⁸⁵ UNDP's global position matches with this focus in both the Primer (2016) and the Social Protection Offer (2022) which, as mentioned above, recognize social protection as "a set of nationally owned policies and instruments, organized around systems that provide income or in-kind support and facilitate access to goods and services to all households

⁸⁴ Activities supported by the multi-partner trust fund in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, accounted for 8.4 percent of the regional expenditures.

⁸⁵ OECD. 2019b. 'Optimising the role of development partners for social protection. Lessons from the EU Social Protection Systems Programme'. OECD Development Centre; White, P. 2016. Social Protection Systems. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 49. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham; de Neubourg, C., V. Cebotari and J. Karpati. 2021. 'Systematic approaches to social protection'. In E. Schüring and M. Loewe, eds., Handbook on Social Protection Systems, pp 189–209, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

and individuals". The rationale for systemic approaches to social protection is to enable greater levels of coordination and integration between fragmented programmes, reduce duplication and gaps, and help expand coverage.

The UNDP Social Protection Offer is relevant since at least five of the 12 solutions in the Social Protection Offer relate to core components of country-owned systems, mostly under the Governance thematic area, and are intended to improve the policies, strategies, beneficiary identification, financing, and capacities for managing the system (see figure 10). The most significant area of UNDP support in this regard is through the development of complementary platforms and services, such as management information systems or e-governance platforms, which can facilitate social protection specifically or a broad range of government functions. This kind of assistance represents the most prominent intersection of UNDP's technical expertise with mainstream social protection system approaches found in the evaluation.

FIGURE 10. Three thematic areas and 12 solutions of the UNDP Social Protection Offer



Source: UNDP's Social Protection Offer (2022).

Although noting the linkage of social protection to all SDGs, and the health and education goals in particular, UNDP's Social Protection Offer has focused on technical areas where the organization has a stronger track record. For instance, UNDP's governance expertise has potential relevance to social protection in that it can: 1) support the functioning of existing social protection instruments to ensure that countries

have the policies, capacities and financing to operate effectively; and 2) work laterally across government departments to connect social protection with other relevant policies and programmes. The attention placed in the Social Protection Offer on the need for strengthening technically sound capacities in management finance and implementation, as well as mechanisms for accountability and grievance management, is aligned with emerging models for social protection systems strengthening. Building these capacities can also have meaningful overlaps with UNDP's resilience thematic area since errors in national databases can lead to people being overlooked and thus an increase in inequalities.

UNDP's intention to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of the existing social protection mechanisms is aligned with the emerging focus on shock-responsive social protection, which is generally understood to require more effective efforts within the social protection sector and together with other sectors mandated to prepare for, and respond to, shocks in order to jointly and comprehensively address needs before, during and after a shock occurs. This thematic area is relevant to the realities that many countries are facing, and their identification of the need for social protection that is shock-responsive and informed by an understanding of compound risks.⁸⁶

In recent years, social protection has been increasingly viewed as a critical investment to build long-term and sustainable resilience to shocks. Such a strategic shift calls for preparatory and anticipatory actions that enable populations that are at risk to adapt to the shocks prior to their effect. This vision is reflected in UNDP's Social Protection Offer, which recognizes the role that social protection can play in building capacities before, during and after a shock. UNDP's Crisis Offer also recognizes the heightened need to maintain effective social protection systems during a crisis, especially as a mechanism to help refugees, but it frames social protection as a sector in which assistance could be required during the response rather than an instrument that can support preparedness or prevention.

More recent UNDP efforts focus on the intersections between social protection and climate, environment and energy, with a large global portfolio of projects focused on natural resource management, livelihoods, and energy access and the green transition. While there is a growing body of research highlighting examples of eco-social policies,⁸⁷ in both developed and developing countries, the policy links between social protection and environmental sustainability are still often overlooked and tend to be designed in isolation of each other. Environmental sustainability also has strong links with the resilience thematic area. The intention behind the solutions for environmental sustainability in UNDP's Social Protection Offer, as well as for resilience as described above, aligns well with the need to move away from a predominantly technical focus on discrete social protection instruments and plays to UNDP's strengths as an integrator with a sustainable development mandate, rather than as an agency specialized in social protection. With the launch of the Sustainable Energy Hub in 2022, UNDP proposed five areas of support for employees affected by a transition away from fossil fuels including, for example, upskilling, reskilling, and establishing a social investment programme with social assistance, such as directed cash transfers.⁸⁸

The high relevance of social protection as an area of work is reflected in UNDP's regional programme planning. In line with the Strategic Plan, the five regional programme documents include outputs and indicators related to strengthening institutional capacities to advance social protection systems and services. The three thematic areas and 12 related solutions proposed in the UNDP Social Protection Offer are recognized but with differing emphases and integrations across the regions. In Africa, the regional programme prioritizes the expansion of social protection to workers in the informal economy and elevates environmental sustainability as a key thematic area of its Social Protection Offer. Through the Africa

⁸⁶ The 2022 Human Development Report highlighted the uncertain times that the world is experiencing, and the disruption and distress brought by various types of crises (economic, social, political, health, conflict).

⁸⁷ For example, the Bolsa Verde in Brazil provides cash benefits and vocational training to low-income households that make a living from collecting forest products or farming in protected or other designated areas, in return for commitments to adopt more sustainable use of natural resources to reduce deforestation (UNRISD 2016). In Eastern Africa, research has shown that social transfers make a strong contribution to the capacity of individuals and households to absorb the negative impacts of climate-related shocks and stresses (Ulrichs et al. 2019).

⁸⁸ See: <https://www.undp.org/energy/our-work-areas/energy-social-protection>.

Borderlands Centre, UNDP has generated significant research on community-based social protection mechanisms. The regional programme for Africa also has a project on community-based social protection and works with the Africa Borderlands Centre on the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Europe and the CIS, UNDP plans to work with others to promote inclusive labour markets and more effective social protection and social care policies. In Arab States, the most recent regional programme outlines work with others to strengthen social protection systems and social safety nets and ensuring gender sensitivity and coverage for those within the informal economy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Asia and the Pacific, the emphasis is to promote and support universal and shock-responsive social protection to address vulnerabilities and exclusions and support social protection in the context of recent debt distress and financial crisis.

Finding 3: UNDP’s global vision of its support to social protection has not been sufficiently translated into practice at the country level to enable coherent solutions.

The Social Protection Offer includes several initiatives that cut across the thematic components of governance, resilience and environment. These include typical social protection interventions (e.g. supporting the development of social protection policies and strategies, cash transfers, active labour market solutions, including training and reskilling, and basic income as a shock-mitigating instrument) as well as interventions with less explicit connection to social protection but which provide relevant capacities for social protection systems (e.g. risk and vulnerability assessments, collection of data on multidimensional poverty, including those affected by environmental degradation, and payment for environmental services programmes).

Despite UNDP’s position that country instruments are central to the expansion and improvement of social protection coverage, the Primer and the Social Protection Offer do not provide clear instructions on the need to conduct or utilize concrete needs assessments of the national systems, programmes and delivery mechanisms as the basis for designing appropriate solutions.⁸⁹ This shortcoming means that, in practice, country offices define social protection interventions differently depending on the national definitions and priorities, and rarely offer a coherent vision that can comprehensively advance, along with partners, the country’s social protection system. There is limited reference to UNDP’s social protection approach in country programme documents, even in some of the countries with prominent social protection projects.

Most of the governance activities in the Social Protection Offer are intended to support the functioning of existing social protection instruments, to ensure that countries have the policies, capacities and financing to operate effectively and to extend programme coverage to those that are not reached by social protection. Extending social protection to new groups requires additional government capacities (in some cases starting with raising awareness of the needs of the neglected groups) and introduces potential risks to the social protection system that need to be mitigated. The governance solutions focus on the operating capacities of institutions, rather than the political economy factors that influence the extent to which political elites are committed to social protection, the form this commitment takes, and the resulting policy decisions, institutional configurations and financing mechanisms. The Social Protection Offer recognizes that people may be intentionally excluded from social protection but does not recommend initiatives to address the political and ideological factors that lead to exclusion, and the role of civil society, which might advocate to improve these conditions, is only nominally referenced in the document. Furthermore, the notion that social protection can promote conditions that improve governance and civic relations (e.g. citizen engagement and social cohesion) is discussed in the Primer, but the Social Protection Offer has not discussed the potential of social protection to be provided and accessed in ways that build trust and social accountability. Such strategic approaches have only been pursued in RBLAC, and in some cash-for-work initiatives in fragile contexts.

⁸⁹ Across the Arab region, for example, Egypt is the only country which has UNDP interventions designed within a comprehensive assessment of the national social protection system.

UNDP's Social Protection Offer mentions a 'whole-of-government' approach to social protection, moving beyond a focus on any one instrument to the harmonisation of relevant policies and programmes across multiple ministries and with civil society. Nevertheless, the focus on lateral connections between social protection and other ministries and departments is described in less detail in the Social Protection Offer. Few country offices have adopted a whole-of-government approach to social protection or engaged with the key ministries in a way that could capitalize on cross-sectoral synergies, despite UNDP's strengths of working at this level for the SDGs as well as for specific issues.

Although the Social Protection Offer underlines the objective to make country-owned systems more responsive before an emergency event occurs, UNDP does not describe a clear approach or provide guidance on how emergency assistance that supports shock-responsiveness can align with or be integrated into national social protection systems, thus missing an opportunity to enhance the response capacity of national programmes. Typical interventions in crisis contexts involve livelihood projects that have a component of cash-for-work as part of their wider livelihood support, but the overall design and reporting of such initiatives does not tend to make such linkages and contributions to social protection visible, leading to fragmented activities across portfolios. UNDP also had challenges in taking forward resilience approaches and enabling humanitarian and development linkages in social protection responses at the country level.

Although linking social protection and environmental initiatives is an important feature of the UNDP strategy, the synergies are recent and are not yet developed into clear social protection programmes offered by country offices. The Africa region's adoption of social protection solutions for green transitions, climate-related shocks, and environmental degradation has the potential to add coherence to peripheral social protection activities in environmental sustainability and climate change.

4.3. Social protection systems, programmes and delivery mechanisms

A. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Finding 4: While UNDP support to policies and technical capacities is important for strengthening social protection systems, short-term and fragmented interventions with limited linkages with policy processes reduced UNDP's contribution. When social protection initiatives have been part of broader support for employment, the potential for sustaining outcomes achieved was greater.

UNDP contributed to strengthening policies and institutions that are relevant for the national social protection system in several countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Botswana, the Dominican Republic, Mauritius, Montenegro, Senegal, Uruguay, and Viet Nam). Specifically, contributing to social protection-related policies and strategies, streamlining internal management processes and structures, trainings and provision of infrastructure, equipment and technological support and the generation of data and evidence have been important in the implementation of social protection measures. In some cases, UNDP has been able to effectively link upstream policy support with downstream support for service provision.

More positive results were noted in countries where UNDP has been providing longer-term support to social protection reforms, along with strong commitment and leadership by the national governments. There are several examples where the potential of such support in enabling changes in social protection has been important. In Montenegro, UNDP has supported social protection reforms over the last decade (since 2011), consistently engaging in the establishment of the social welfare system and social services as well as enhancing e-governance within the social sector. Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, UNDP significantly engaged in the creation of the current social protection system in the country and its key pillars through strategic support to the single beneficiary system, the administration of social subsidies and the strengthening of the national health insurance system. Since then, UNDP has been focusing

on sustaining and further fostering other key institutions. UNDP has contributed effectively to country-owned national reform initiatives in Viet Nam (since 2013, together with other UN agencies) as well as in Bangladesh (since 2014) and Mauritius (since 2010). These initiatives have led to a clearer and more comprehensive vision of social protection, stronger structures, and increased social protection coverage for vulnerable populations, as well as contributed to poverty reduction.⁹⁰ It was also evident that, in these countries, UNDP's COVID-19 support was better integrated within the national social protection system.

Such examples across the regions have also demonstrated that the most tangible and transformative results achieved so far have happened where UNDP has provided consistent support to the assessment of social protection needs and gaps, developing concrete proposals and bringing diverse knowledge and know-how, shaping country-specific institutional arrangements and legal frameworks and strengthening national capacities through longer-term stable funding and close partnerships with key government stakeholders to develop the capacities needed to assume ownership of the interventions that UNDP supports. Such a comprehensive approach has not only contributed to the effectiveness of UNDP support and sustainability of the outcomes achieved but has also helped position UNDP as an immediate point of reference and source of expertise on social protection.

Support to strengthening national and subnational capacities to develop and implement social protection policies has been notable in some countries. UNDP has supported capacity strengthening (e.g. trainings, modelling and piloting social protection services), empowerment of the most vulnerable groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, older persons, young people, PLHIV, women-headed households, and people working in the informal sector who are not supported under any social protection scheme) as well as advocacy (e.g. across Europe and the CIS, Cambodia, Viet Nam). In some of these countries, such as Montenegro and Kazakhstan, UNDP has supported the development of social welfare e-government systems, interoperability and other types of software development within the public sector. These efforts have combined the delivery of hardware and software with policy and institutional development advisory services, which have been regarded as relevant for boosting wider public sector reforms.

UNDP upstream support usually targets broader social inclusion policies, and advancing inclusive labour market participation has been an important component. When social protection initiatives have been part of broader support for employment, the potential for sustaining the outcomes achieved has been greater. UNDP has provided support to designing inclusive policies and legislation in social services and employment measures that have included social protection measures, along with interventions that link social policies and programmes to policies that generate productive employment that helps reduce social exclusion (e.g. in Peru and North Macedonia).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, national care system strengthening has been an important component of UNDP work, addressing the challenges of care systems in the region and their implications for the autonomy of women and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.⁹¹

⁹⁰ The implementation of the Master Plan for Social Assistance Reform and Development by the Vietnamese Government increased social assistance coverage from 1.63 percent in 2016 (1.7 million women and 1 million men) to 2.95 percent in 2019 (1.9 million women and 1 million men). The minimum benefit also increased from 180,000 to 270,000 Vietnamese Dong (VND), a rise of 66 percent per month per beneficiary. Overall, although there is no explicit link between this and the National Targeted Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction, UNDP support to social assistance has also contributed to poverty reduction by providing additional support to poor and other vulnerable groups. See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12781>.

⁹¹ This is a key issue in Latin America and the Caribbean. UNDP. 2021. 'Regional Human Development Report 2021 – Trapped: High inequality and low growth in Latin America and the Caribbean'.

BOX 1. Supporting national care systems in Latin America and the Caribbean

UNDP support for national care systems has included policy and capacity development as well as evidence generation.

In Uruguay, UNDP supported the creation and implementation of the National Care System, which acts as the fourth pillar of the country's social protection system. With co-financing by private companies, trade unions and the government, UNDP enabled the design of three pilots, which led to the establishment of innovative care centres (called Siempre) for the children of workers. Also of significance is UNDP's support to develop government capacities to expand the national plan for children and family care centres, and its contribution to the mainstreaming of gender into the national care system.

In the Dominican Republic, UNDP has supported the development of the National Care Communities by piloting the design and implementation of the National Care Policy in two prioritized territories through an inter-agency joint programme.

In Peru, UNDP is providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations for the development of the National Care System, which comprises the institutional framework. UNDP is partnering with ILO, UNICEF and UN Women to conduct an assessment of the demand and supply factors in current care services for very young children, older children, older persons and persons with disabilities. This effort has included the development of coverage scenarios and the costing of new services for the different population groups included in the system.

An emerging area of UNDP's institutional strengthening work has been its support for audits and evaluations of national social protection programmes (e.g. in Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, India, and Panama), including in designing impact evaluations of governments' flagship cash transfer programmes (Colombia and Ecuador).

An important factor affecting UNDP's contribution in terms of establishing/strengthening social protection systems has been the stability of national governments. In countries in which there has been a lack of continuity of public administration as well as weak institutions, frequent changes of governments and political parties, there have often been substantial changes in institutional settings and policies, and the suspension of programmes initiated by previous governments. This has significantly impaired long-term planning, jeopardized the success of initiated reforms and/or institutional strengthening and has adversely affected the sustainability of the achieved results. Even in countries with relatively well-established institutions and social protection systems, such as Uruguay or Montenegro, the change of government can serve to slow down implementation of ongoing policies and/or result in changes in the existing policies that can reverse achieved results.

B. CASH TRANSFERS

Finding 5: UNDP's support to cash transfer programmes has enabled better targeting of beneficiaries and contributed to improving overall government systems for identifying beneficiaries.

UNDP has been engaged in cash (conditional and unconditional) and non-cash transfers, especially food. Cash transfers target poor and vulnerable households and combine social protection with poverty reduction objectives. Cash transfers have been relatively more prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean and in East Asia and the Pacific, compared to South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where there have been more in-kind and liquidity alleviation programmes. The focus of UNDP's initiatives has been on supporting the governments in establishing or improving (digital) social registries and platforms for cash transfers.

BOX 2. Improving beneficiary targeting for cash transfers

The integrated information system and beneficiary identification system were important components of UNDP support. The utility of such systems was evident during the COVID-19 response. As the examples below show, the success of such initiatives depends on country ownership, including their institutionalization.

In Montenegro, UNDP supported the government in developing a dedicated e-social protection system (the Integrated Social Welfare Information System [ISWIS]), which enabled the government to have significant budget savings thanks to better targeting. The system provides a 'one-stop shop' feature to apply for social protection cash – an innovation that has significantly reduced the time, paperwork and financial resources needed for a family to apply for social cash transfers, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the system.

The national poverty identification system (IDPoor) in Cambodia, implemented by the Ministry of Planning, is the main targeting mechanism for poor and vulnerable households. UNDP's work since 2013 has emphasized the expansion of population coverage, namely, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, PLHIV, women-headed households, and the expansion of service coverage and delivery through strengthening systems, tools and capacities. This work entailed added urgency and breadth during the COVID-19 pandemic, when UNDP assisted the Royal Government of Cambodia to refine targeting, digitalize and expand coverage of its cash transfer programme resulting in emergency cash transfer to 700,000 vulnerable households affected by lockdown and other impacts of the pandemic. The adjusted methodology enabled the identification of 108,000 near-poor households that received at least a one-off cash transfer support of \$40–\$75 per household during the four-month lockdown in mid-2021. UNDP, using the Rapid Financing Facility, assessed the impact of cash transfers during the pandemic, increasing the inclusiveness of the ID-Poor system, and establishing a M&E system and a stakeholder feedback mechanism. The joint evaluation undertaken by UNDP and the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the COVID-19 Cash Transfer programme indicated its contribution to GDP recovery (+0.45 percent), job creation (+0.62 percent) and poverty reduction (-3.4 percent) in 2021. The findings contributed to the government decision to expand the scope, including the implementation of two additional shock-responsive cash transfer for near-poor households in 2022 based on the improved targeting methodology, namely households severely affected by floods, reaching 99,169 households in 15 provinces, and vulnerable households during high inflation reaching 260,526 households (1,340,942 persons in total, of whom 710,467 are women). To complement the cash transfer programme, UNDP and the Cambodian Government are currently piloting a complementary social protection programme – Graduation Based Social Protection – to build resilience and a pathway for poor households to graduate from poverty, linking social assistance to productivity and local markets. In 2021 and 2022, through randomised control experimentation, 1,587 households received a social protection package, which includes cash for consumption support, productive assets, and training, building on the productive capacity of targeted households and fostering a spillover effect for community development. The Cambodian Government is exploring the possibility of scaling up the pilot and adopting it as a national programme.

UNDP has been instrumental in the establishment and strengthening of the Unique Beneficiary System in the Dominican Republic, by supporting the consolidation of the integrated information base of vulnerable households, improving multidimensional targeting, and expanding interoperability of the database with other social protection institutions. In Honduras, UNDP has developed an innovative cash transfer solution through the project, 'Bonus for Electronic Notification to Independent or Self-Employed Workers who have been affected by the COVID-19 containment measures', by designing and implementing beneficiary targeting and cash transfer mechanisms, strengthening data registration mechanisms and implementing accountability and communication mechanisms and strategies. UNDP has strengthened the Centro Nacional de Información del Sector Social (CENISS)⁹² data registration mechanisms through implementation of online citizen self-registration through which the service agents have helped fill out the citizen self-registration forms to ensure the inclusion of populations without Internet access. The hardware provided by UNDP has expanded the memory capacity of the CENISS databases in order to include the informal sector workers of the economy. Moreover, UNDP has designed and implemented a cash transfer mechanism through electronic coupons.

Interviews with stakeholders suggest that government cash-transfer and other social assistance programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean may have overlooked a significant portion of the population that was not in the social or any administrative registries and was not receiving social protection benefits due to high informality and/or their transition between formal and informal markets, a sudden loss of income/employment, the high cost of participation in social protection systems (in terms of time and efforts) and administrative barriers and red tape. These conditions have resulted in incomplete government responses, not necessarily because of fiscal limitations but because of the relative invisibility of these groups of the population. UNDP engagement in this area, supporting identification and targeting of beneficiaries has been transformative in several countries (see Box 2). The unique registry of beneficiaries has enabled governments to identify and select households in conditions of extreme poverty, thereby ensuring the objectivity and transparency of interventions and better directing scarce public resources to the poorest households.

There remain opportunities to streamline cash transfers of non-state agencies, which continue to be less organized, particularly in countries with no state mechanism for beneficiary identification. One of the main challenges in the case of development cooperation-related cash transfer is the duplication of recipients, and the possibility of the neediest households being inadvertently left out.

In development contexts (or non-crisis contexts), while the approach UNDP chose to support cash transfers is important, linkages of social protection efforts with livelihood programmes are limited. Despite its employment and livelihoods portfolio, UNDP has made limited use of opportunities to link with social protection mechanisms to reduce the vulnerability of the poorest households, beyond some prominent examples in the Western Balkans. UNDP support to livelihoods has consistently pointed out that a predictable flow of cash through social assistance improves livelihoods choices and stimulates productive investments. UNDP has not yet systematically facilitated the conditions under which households use cash transfers to build productive capacities and livelihoods choices.

Finding 6: Cash transfer support in crisis contexts has been critical in providing sustenance and promoting livelihoods, but this approach has not yet been integrated with longer-term social protection systems.

Across programmes in crisis-affected countries, UNDP has provided cash assistance and cash-for-work, which was needed for speedy recovery. There are several examples that make a strong case for cash assistance while the applicability of cash-for-work has varied across countries. For example, in Lebanon, during the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion, UNDP provided cash assistance for stock recovery to 83

⁹² The name of CENISS has recently been changed to 'Observatorio de Desarrollo Social'.

businesses benefiting 231 Lebanese residents, while also supporting more than 1,700 persons with disability with immediate assistance. At the same time, cash-for-work in Lebanon as part of the host community support while contributing to generate immediate income and expanding coverage of the existing cash-transfer scheme funded by the World Bank, was not sufficient since sustainable employment and livelihood solutions were needed.

Overall, the use of cash assistance (including cash-for-work) forms a significant portion of UNDP's assistance in the crisis context. This has not changed considerably since the evaluation of the 2014–2017 UNDP Strategic Plan and Regional Programmes, which found that most of UNDP's resilience expenditures go to short-term employment creation and other livelihoods opportunities. While some of this programming is no doubt effective and appropriate, it is overrepresented in UNDP's recovery portfolio. An evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach also commented that "the cash-for-work initiatives moved UNDP away from more efficient infrastructure development options suitable for the middle-income-country context, and from those that will also provide long-term solutions".⁹³ While there are a few examples where UNDP has been able to situate cash-for-work initiatives within integrated approaches across themes and sectors (e.g. Yemen), in most cases, cash-for-work initiatives do not link well with and contribute to country-owned protection systems or employment schemes. In the Liptako-Gourma borderlands between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, for example, cash-for-work in waste collection and management, and the maintenance of community infrastructure and road construction is used as part of the livelihoods intervention package for boosting resilience and supporting a stabilisation mechanism. While much of the livelihoods-related spending is targeted, it is not linked well to broader, national systems of social protection.

In fragile countries with protracted crises (including environmental problems, disaster risk, and citizen insecurity), including the Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and some Central American countries, the focus of national social protection programmes has largely been on cash transfers and other types of social assistance programmes implemented by the governments, but there have been general institutional weaknesses, a significant lack of reliable data and the lack or fragility of beneficiary registration systems. UNDP's engagement in terms of identification and targeting of beneficiaries has been important as can be seen in the previous finding. UNDP experience in Haiti has demonstrated that, in a humanitarian setting, the strategy adopted for risk prevention and mitigation, as well as the development of local capacities, improves the effectiveness of cash transfers.

UNDP has sought to situate cash-for-work initiatives within integrated approaches across themes with limited success. For example, the 3x6 approach,⁹⁴ implemented in several countries, consists of three organizing principles and six fundamental steps that are implemented in three distinct phases, and aims to support the transition from emergency development efforts (e.g. cash-for-work) to sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable population groups during the transition out of crisis situations or post-crisis contexts. While the approach is sound, UNDP has experienced challenges in completing the three stages. Often, it was not easy to continue beyond the first phase. Also, bridging the divide between humanitarian and development interventions has led to some perceived tensions in terms of effectiveness of the temporary labour schemes and the need for longer-term employment generation. In Lebanon, for instance, the 'graduation out of poverty' approach attempted to move out of a humanitarian focus but has not yet incorporated an effective development agenda to ensure sustainability. Some positive examples aiming at connecting cash-for-work to job creation have been implemented in Turkey.

The sustainability of cash-for-work programmes has different dimensions. At the macro level, particularly in many of the crisis contexts in which cash-for-work programmes are being implemented, sustainability has been challenged by the insecurity situation, disruption of public services and political uncertainty. At the local level, livelihood promotion largely stops at localised temporary cash or in-kind handouts

⁹³ See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9898>.

⁹⁴ UNDP. 2016. 'Global toolkit on the 3x6 approach: Building resilience through jobs and livelihoods', available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/global-toolkit-3x6-approach-building-resilience-through-jobs-and-livelihoods>.

without the creation of an enabling environment for promoting productivity. In terms of sustainability of social protection support, crisis contexts lacked financing, legal and policy structures, mechanisms and population or social registries. Community-based approaches and backstopping from local government were necessary to ensure the sustainability of projects' operated schemes. The Nepal experiences of providing labour-intensive schemes for earthquake-affected communities has demonstrated that low-cost and simple technology-based schemes (mainly small-scale construction and mitigation work) can be most effective, result in a high degree of ownership among communities, revive the local economy, and foster the sustainability of the scheme. But this may not apply to all crisis contexts as the Lebanon experience shows.

UNDP was sometimes approached to support large-scale cash assistance during crisis response. In such instances, it was crucial to ensure feasibility in the design, given the institutional capacity and other factors, as demonstrated with UNDP's support to cash transfers in Haiti. There are important lessons from the Haiti response. Conditional cash transfers were avoided in response to Hurricane Matthew, as compliance monitoring would have delayed the response and added administrative burden to the implementing ministries.⁹⁵ While accountable targeting processes are important, the Haiti experience has shown that care should be taken to ensure that such processes do not stall the implementation and drive up the cost of delivery.

Finding 7: COVID-19 brought to the fore the persistent challenges that remain in the delivery of social protection measures. UNDP support to cash assistance in its COVID-19 response was critical in promoting livelihoods and short-term employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed several weaknesses in social protection systems, including weaknesses in terms of linkages/alignment of the social protection systems with labour markets which comprised predominantly informal work, and contract and seasonal workers. This gap has limited the ability of social protection systems to respond effectively and contribute to the recovery phase.

UNDP has advocated for a TBI to help women and other vulnerable groups cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNDP's paper on Temporary Basic Income: Protecting Poor and Vulnerable People in Developing Countries⁹⁶ defined TBI as emergency cash assistance that is explicitly temporary (e.g. up to 9–12 months), while retaining some of the features that characterize a Universal Basic Income. TBI would not be universal but would be targeted at people with livelihoods below a vulnerability-to-poverty threshold, which is at least 70 percent above the value of the poverty line. The paper also discussed different options and cost estimates for TBI, as well as the key implementation challenges involved in rolling out TBI. They include how to expand coverage and combine digital and cash payments systems to reach excluded populations, how to fund a TBI without raising new taxes, and how to address the complex political economy challenges posed by implementing a TBI floor. A TBI simulator⁹⁷ was developed, showing the TBI amount needed to lift the vulnerable out of poverty for 132 countries, depending on policy choices. Another paper on Temporary Basic Income and the Road to Gender Equality⁹⁸ was also published, focusing on the possibilities and estimated costs of a TBI for women's economy security.

UNDP support to TBI is evolving with some positive examples. The first phase of the TBI for Marginalized and Excluded Women in Nepal project, jointly funded by UNDP and UN Women, provided cash transfers as unconditional humanitarian emergency support to vulnerable and excluded women in order to help them meet their survival needs. Most of them started livelihood activities to sustain their incomes, while many paid off hospital and medical bills. Some even utilized cash to pay off personal loans borrowed during lockdowns in order to compensate for the lack of food and medicines. Through collaboration with a government-owned bank, the project facilitated cash transfers and provided financial literacy

⁹⁵ See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/early-lessons-learnt-cash-transfer-interventions-post-matthew-haiti>.

⁹⁶ See: <https://www.undp.org/library/dfs-temporary-basic-income-tbi>.

⁹⁷ See: <https://data.undp.org/content/tbi/>.

⁹⁸ See: <https://www.undp.org/publications/dfs-protecting-womens-livelihoods-times-pandemic-temporary-basic-income-and-road-gender>.

to the beneficiaries.⁹⁹ Although there have been initial encouraging results, these are not sufficient for substantive policy dialogue. A feasibility study of basic income in Nepal is underway with the objective of providing recommendations for the second phase of the TBI project, which is intended to address the social protection system particularly for informal sector workers through strengthening local government capacities in addressing vulnerabilities including those induced by the pandemic. A similar TBI pilot is being implemented in Malaysia. Also, TBI is one of the four policy directions recommended for affected poor and vulnerable individuals in the Policy Memorandum commissioned by UNDP for Sri Lanka.

C. HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES

Health and care services are not included in UNDP's operational definition of social protection systems which "are organized around contributory or non-contributory forms of income support and around social assistance, social insurance, and labour market interventions". However, the UNDP Social Protection Offer includes 'access to health care' as part of its vision to support countries to have functional social protection systems and extend coverage of social protection. The Social Protection Offer also includes the development and expansion of the care economy (through care services and schemes to reduce unpaid care) as part of recovery programming in social protection. Therefore, this section aims to discuss UNDP's support in these areas.

Finding 8: UNDP has provided a wide range of support to strengthen health infrastructure and facilitate access to health services. UNDP's timely support to procurement has accelerated health emergency response. Given its engagement in the Global Fund, UNDP is well positioned to enable processes for speedy and affordable health care support.

There are significant social protection challenges in health systems in terms of the capacities of the public authorities and scarcity of services for meeting the health needs and demands of the citizens. UNDP has had extensive experience in the procurement of medicines and other health care products, especially through the projects funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Support beyond procurement includes inventory management services for medicines and supplies, overseeing internal distribution of drugs to eliminate drug stock-outs, and addressing weak infrastructure (e.g. the lack of electricity and storage facilities). Given the significant social protection challenges in health systems, UNDP support has been highly relevant. In Trinidad and Tobago, the UNDP primary health care initiative has provided technical assistance and capacity-building to the government to enhance the delivery of health care services in primary health care facilities by deploying UN Volunteer (UNV) doctors, increasing the opening hours of health facilities and thus improving service delivery to the middle-to-low-income brackets of the population. UNDP also provides support to strengthen M&E tools and mechanisms. For example, in Guinea-Bissau, a partnership between UNDP, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the World Bank is introducing real-time monitoring using mobile tablets to digitize malaria data in 45 health facilities. The utilization of this technology is now strengthening the capacity of the national government to map, track, prevent and treat malaria outbreaks in real time. Health care waste management is another highly technical area of intervention in which UNDP has been involved, including support to national regulations to promote sustainable practices as many countries still lack policies and specific guidelines for the management of medical waste. Support in this area proved to be most effective when a capacity development approach is adopted.¹⁰⁰

Building on this experience, during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP provided support for vaccinations and associated medical equipment, such as Personal Protective Equipment. Many countries across all regions have received this support. In several cases, UNDP redirected financing from existing

⁹⁹ In total, 2,387 most vulnerable and excluded women received cash as unconditional humanitarian emergency support to help them meet their survival needs; 2,387 project beneficiaries' accounts were credited and more than 1,500 were provided financial literacy sessions. Prayash: 'Temporary Basic Income for Marginalized and Excluded Women, Annual Progress Report 2021', pp. 6–7.

¹⁰⁰ See: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/reflections/Waste_Management.pdf.

projects in an effort to address immediate demand for health assistance in order to respond effectively to the pandemic. UNDP's COVID-19 response has recorded a total expenditure of \$1,014 million since 2020 for supporting resilient health systems, including critical health procurement support.¹⁰¹

UNDP helped governments extend the digital data package (e.g. Guinea-Bissau) to allow the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders to understand, monitor and respond more effectively to the pandemic, and supported the planning and building of the e-health system (Montenegro). UNDP also implemented grants from the Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable communities, including PLHIV, persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ+) and sex workers. Substantial support to persons with disability were also noted. Based on the UN's COVID-19 socio-economic response dashboard, the Panama Regional Hub analysis identifies close to 12 million beneficiaries in Latin America and the Caribbean of such health care support, most through maternal health services (5.3 million), followed by vaccination programmes (4.1 million) and nutrition programmes (2.3 million). Support related to an effective health insurance system was limited and will be discussed under social insurance.

A key issue is the limited extent to which these short-term immediate response measures have been linked to the overall longer-term effort to support universal health coverage, a key component of social protection, and part of what UNDP plans to support as mentioned in its HIV and Health Strategy 2022–2025, 'Connecting the dots: Towards a more equitable, healthier and sustainable future'. UNDP is widely recognized for the roles it plays in the Global Fund's projects and programmes and could leverage this in its support to health system strengthening. In this regard, one of the key lessons identified by the IEO's reflection paper on UNDP support to the health sector¹⁰² is the attention to institutional strengthening. Even in crises, country offices should focus not only on the efficient delivery of medicines and other goods to beneficiaries, but also support the establishment of robust national procurement systems that are open and transparent and enable relative savings for the country, and there is scope for balancing the two.

Finding 9: The promotion and strengthening of social care services is an emerging area of UNDP work. This support has yielded initial positive results, particularly in upper-middle-income countries, and became especially important as the weaknesses in care services were exposed during the pandemic. UNDP is yet to fully explore the linkage between care services and the care economy, an area where UNDP's interdisciplinary approach could add value.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weakness of the care system in many countries. Lack of care workers and inadequate access to care services have been evident in many countries, especially for groups in vulnerable and marginalised conditions. From a care economy perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the existing unequal distribution of the unpaid and often unrecognized care work of women at home, which has long limited their labour force participation and productivity. Globally, women perform as much as three times more unpaid care work as men. After the pandemic outbreak, the time spent by women in care activities soared while their participation in the labour force dropped.¹⁰³ Therefore, there is an urgency for social protection to address the duality of the needs for an effective care system, as well as a more equitable care economy. UNDP response to the care crisis is not only urgent but also demands a more consolidated response.

In addition to the support to strengthening national care systems (e.g. in the Dominican Republic, Peru and Uruguay) discussed in finding 4, UNDP support has also contributed to promoting access of vulnerable groups to care services. UNDP has implemented a wide range of effective interventions in support to modelling social services and empowerment of the most vulnerable groups, including victims of gender-based violence, children, and persons with disability, for example across Europe and the CIS, Lebanon, Djibouti and Papua New Guinea. In some cases, UNDP's work has been taken up and expanded. For instance, UNDP modelled family

¹⁰¹ See: <https://open.undp.org/covid-response>.

¹⁰² See: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/reflections/health-sector.pdf>.

¹⁰³ Mariotti, I., et al. 2021. 'UNDP Global Policy Network Brief: Investing in care – a pathway to gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery'.

outreach work and gender-based violence care services in Montenegro, which are now more widely available and diversified (provided by both government and licensed CSO service providers). In North Macedonia, UNDP's support to the deinstitutionalization process resulted in a number of social care mechanisms which have been beneficial for fostering alternative social care of persons with disability as well as of children.

Supporting the care services creates an opportunity for UNDP to make improvements in the care economy, much of which is conducted informally by women, and with limited recognition, compensation, or employment benefits. UNDP has taken strategic steps in this direction through the Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025 and under Signature Solution 6 on gender equality of the strategic plan. UNDP has supported some knowledge generation initiatives, such as the global policy brief on 'Investing in care: a pathway to gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery',¹⁰⁴ the Africa Care Economy Index¹⁰⁵ and, in RBLAC, the development of a regional Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with focus on women, based on information from 10 countries and the inclusion of dimensions, such as time use and social protection (see finding 18 on data and evidence for more details), as well as a specialized UNDP/ILO/UN Women course on social protection, gender and care, toolkits for georeferenced mapping and costing care systems and the piloting of care system designs (Bogotá, Montevideo). Thus far, the actual benefits in relation to strengthening of the care economy have mostly been delivered as side products of the process of strengthening national care systems. There are some positive examples of UNDP supporting initiatives for promoting employment in the care sector in Europe and Central Asia but, overall, systematic support to strengthening national care economies still remains largely untapped by UNDP, in terms of including job creation as part of active labour market interventions. Also, little work has been done on the transnational care economy, including supporting social protection schemes for transnational care workers, where there is considerable potential for UNDP to play a connector role between countries.

D. INFORMAL SECTOR, LABOUR MARKET SUPPORT AND SOCIAL INSURANCE

Finding 10: UNDP's engagement in social protection efforts for informal workers has been too limited to enable substantive national level outcomes. New programming and research are pointing to ways forward.

Informal workers typically receive irregular income and lack savings and access to the banking system, capital and social services, and thus they experience greater vulnerability to crises. During the COVID-19 crisis, especially in low- and middle-income countries, the fractured labour market and social protection systems that do not cover the 'missing middle' informal labour have been prominent.¹⁰⁶

In Africa, it has been estimated that eight of 10 workers are engaged in informal employment, meaning they are largely excluded from protection offered by labour law and social insurance.¹⁰⁷ Informality is high in rural areas (88.3 percent) and urban areas (76.3 percent) and, in the agricultural sector, almost all jobs are informal (97.9 percent). Such rates are higher for women in sub-Saharan Africa (92.1 percent) than for men (86.4 percent).¹⁰⁸ In Latin America and the Caribbean, where there are more middle-income and upper-middle-income countries, the labour markets are more dynamic and workers transition back and forth between formality and informality. In Asia and the Pacific, two in three workers are employed informally, that is 1.4 billion workers, 600 million of whom are found in the agricultural sector. As a result, half of the region's workforce is poor or on the brink of poverty, surviving on \$5.5 a day. With more than half of the region's

¹⁰⁴ Mariotti, I., et al. 2021. 'UNDP Global Policy Network Brief: Investing in care – a pathway to gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery'.

¹⁰⁵ Valiani, S. 2022. The Africa Care Economy Index.

¹⁰⁶ See Rutkowski, M. (2020). 'COVID-19 reinforces the case for fundamental reform of our social protection systems', available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/covid-19-reinforces-case-fundamental-reform-our-social-protection-systems>; Kidd, S. D. Athias, ; and A. Tran. 2020' Addressing the COVID-19 economic crisis in Asia through social protection' p. 8. UNDP AsiaPacific Economist Network, May 2020, available at: https://www.undp.org/publications/addressing-covid-19-economic-crisis-asia-through-social-protection?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&qclid=CjwKCAjwiJqWBhBdEiwAtESPaNWNmbrJB38nzZNH9fTGDsdmAMvi5di4mHjR8FEF5sggwBc7vWo9pxoCW-glQAvD_BwE.

¹⁰⁷ ILO. 2018. Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (3rd ed.).

¹⁰⁸ ILO. 2020. 'The transition from the informal to the formal economy in Africa'. Global Employment Policy Review. Background Paper No. 4, December 2020.

population excluded from any social protection, the workforce is highly vulnerable to systemic shocks, such as pandemics or economic downturns.¹⁰⁹ UNDP's regional report, 'Inequality and social security in the Asia-Pacific region'¹¹⁰, noted the exclusion of a large proportion of the population from the social security system, often referred to as the 'missing middle' and called for the expansion of social security to informal workers.

UNDP's Regional Programme for Africa (2022–2025) specifically highlights the need to expand social protection to people in the informal sector. And the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issues of informal workers' lack of social protection coverage. To address the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers and enterprises, UNDP developed an 'Integrated Offer on Informal Economy in Response to COVID-19 in Africa'. UNDP also formed a task team with ILO in Africa to work together in three policy areas: transition to formality; social protection; and youth employment. In May 2022, the task team on the informal economy organized a policy dialogue on 'Informal Economy in Africa: Which way forward? Making policy responsive, inclusive and sustainable'. The dialogue brought together informal economy actors, representatives from governments, and employers' and workers' organizations, including representatives of informal sector workers, as well as development partners, to identify challenges and ways forward, including progressing towards increasing formality in Africa. UNDP also published a report on Informality and Social Protection in African Countries: A Forward-looking Assessment of Contributory Schemes¹¹¹, which has served for policy advocacy and as inputs for technical advisory and South-South exchanges. In addition, guidelines for country offices¹¹² to implement social protection response measures have been developed. UNDP's Africa Borderlands Centre has also conducted research on social protection mechanisms available to informal sector workers, including pastoralists in a number of countries.

The UNDP's Regional Human Development Report in Latin America and the Caribbean argues that the current architecture of social protection policy in the region can result in a problematic trade-off since social assistance programmes may induce beneficiaries to remain in informality in cases where the benefit (cash or in-kind) is delivered conditional on their informality status. Or they might create a poverty trap when programmes are based on the conditions of being poor.¹¹³ To help countries overcome this poverty trap, UNDP is supporting the discussions in Paraguay and the Dominican Republic on the barriers to employment formalisation and on how to address the informality trap of the labour force and improve the targeting and coverage of social protection services as well as develop effective exit strategies for households that should no longer receive subsidies to improve their access to employment.

At the global level, UNDP collaborates with ILO to launch and implement the Joint Global Initiative on Fostering Pathways to Formality. UNDP is also working on creating an Informal Economy Facility, which seeks to serve as a one-stop shop offering tools, knowledge products, capacity development, knowledge sharing, and networking opportunities, technical expertise, and other resources to help country offices and their partners with the design, implementation, and scaling-up of solutions to protect and empower actors of the informal economy. Notwithstanding this and regional differences, at the country level, the focus on informal workers, while increased in recent years, is not at the pace that the situation demands, given the magnitude of the informal sector. Most of UNDP's work is centred on process facilitation, such as registration mechanisms (Cambodia¹¹⁴, India¹¹⁵), use of mobile apps and telephonic payments (Togo), worker-centric platform for

¹⁰⁹ UNESCAP. 2022. 'The workforce we need: social outlook for Asia and the Pacific', available at: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/work-force-we-need-social-outlook-asia-and-pacific>.

¹¹⁰ See: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-02/UNDP-RBAP-Inequality-and-Social-Security-in-Asia-Pacific-2022.pdf>.

¹¹¹ See: https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/informality-and-social-protection-african-countries-forward-looking-assessment-contributory-schemes?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CEN-TRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCCQIA2-2eBhCIARIsAGLQ2RkDZA19F9FCddiD5XvYV9GvTIL5ILH_oDNruiH9nct-7t9P_dEkgpcaAn8bEALw_wcB.

¹¹² See: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/africa/c8b4b094213f7ddc5678e9b3339d-c6e28565455a1411606285aff1c193ad65f4.pdf>.

¹¹³ Ivarez, M., De Los Santos, D., Pardo, R. 2022. 'Mapping the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 in LAC and the adopted responses for recovery', United Nations Development Programme Regional Center for Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹¹⁴ Through the On-Demand IDPoor programme, informal workers can apply for an IDPoor card to access social protection benefits without having to wait for the three-year listing cycle.

¹¹⁵ Through the Utthaan initiative, UNDP supported 9,000 waste pickers, mostly informal workers to obtain national identity cards, enabling them to access the government's social security. UNDP is partnering with the private sector to scale up this initiative.

self-employed women (Bolivia) or developing legislations and strategies (Paraguay, Ecuador,¹¹⁶ Cambodia¹¹⁷). While such efforts are important, there is scope for more substantive engagement, including promoting contextualised social insurance models. Concrete initiatives are yet to manifest in addressing systemic barriers affecting the high percentage of unemployed and informal workers that make up a large share of labour force across regions.

Finding 11: Although UNDP has several programmes linked to employment and livelihoods generation, its engagements are often too narrow to be classified as labour market interventions. While there has been a focus on strengthening the skills of poor and vulnerable workers, the small scale and scope of such initiatives have had little effect on inducing system-level changes, with the exception of some successful pilots.

Active labour market interventions seek to improve the participation of poor and vulnerable workers in the labour market through skills development and training as well as more formal connection to job opportunities. Skill development and greater access to the labour market can help enhance people's job opportunities, which may lead to access to other longer-term social protection benefits, such as health insurance.

UNDP has promoted human-centred design of active labour market measures, bringing together social welfare centres and employment offices to design integrated measures. At the programme level, UNDP has endeavoured to assist strengthening the capacity of national labour market institutions to design relevant models and practices to help deliver integrated services at the local level, that focus on the most vulnerable groups among the unemployed. Long-term support has included direct support to provide work experience and/or build skills of the long-term unemployed in order to help boost their motivation to actively enter the labour market. For example, in North Macedonia, a UNDP initiative has aimed to address some of the core issues of unemployment and bridge the 'skills gap' in three key industries, namely textiles, construction, and renewable energy through the design and testing of training modules, including post-secondary education, as well as basic non-formal training. UNDP's support has resulted in successful pilots and relevant lessons learned that can inform future government active labour market measures and programmes (e.g. in the Western Balkans). While such initiatives generated necessary momentum, evaluations and stakeholder interviews have taken note of the challenges posed by limited fiscal and human resource capacities, antiquated practices and the lack of understanding of the need for new approaches to address more modern market demands.

Vocational training has been carried out in several countries. UNDP has fostered access to technical-vocational training services and the improvement of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, through the strengthening of public policies and the forging of alliances with the private sector. The sustainability of vocational training interventions requires coordination and synergy between its support to financing, enabling policy infrastructure and linkage with employment and soft components, such as quality of curricula. There has been mixed success in enabling such linkages, with some prominent examples from Europe and Central Asia. The pilot programmes provided skills and initial support, however, securing jobs or starting enterprises was not easy. There were limited efforts in terms of enabling linkages with social insurance that can help cope during the transition to better employment or the establishment of an enterprise.

In several countries, even though there are certain project/programme components linked to employment/livelihood generation and greater integration of the poor and vulnerable, especially women, youth, and persons with disability, UNDP's engagements are often difficult to classify as labour market interventions. Based on the reviewed projects and interviews with the UNDP country offices, the work of UNDP that can be loosely classified as labour market-oriented ranges from institutional strengthening for the labour insertion of youth to endeavours supporting enterprise development for women, persons with

¹¹⁶ UNDP supported the design of innovative policy instruments and models to incorporate youth in the informal economy into the social protection system.

¹¹⁷ UNDP is collaborating with ILO to advocate for a multi-tiered pension system design and integrated formalization strategy.

disability and other vulnerable populations to policy analysis and research and data generation. These interventions mostly have localised livelihood generation objectives and are not systematically designed for linkages with social protection mechanisms nor of scale.

UNDP's involvement in labour market programmes has focused on the supply side, which has led to a mismatch between the specific efforts to develop skills and the actual needs of the labour market. UNDP initiatives aimed at skills development and support to micro-enterprise employment have not been necessarily linked to a larger labour market demand at the macro level. As mentioned by one respondent, UNDP's skills/employment endeavors look more like standard 'income-generation' projects that do little to tackle labour market informality and help informal/self-employed/transitioning workers gain significant access to social protection. Overall, as noted by the evaluation of UNDP's support for youth economic empowerment, UNDP interventions "were skewed towards fostering employability through skills development, instead of fostering demand for labor including youth employment schemes and paid less attention to most structural challenges".¹¹⁸

UNDP has utilized active labour market programmes and interventions as a tool in crisis settings in combination with cash-based social assistance interventions. Examples of work crossing the humanitarian development nexus have included programmes that cover labour-intensive cash-for-work initiatives, community asset rehabilitation and capacity-building at the local level. Particularly, UNDP's extensive social cohesion activities within communities through stabilisation efforts are important in providing temporary social protection (cash-for-work or active labour market measures), although institutional processes are in a nascent stage.

Finding 12: UNDP support to social insurance has been limited. It has supported piloting of climate-related insurance, an offer of particular relevance to UNDP's mandate.

Social insurance programmes are typically contributory in nature, and therefore largely confined to formal sector workers and their families in most countries. Nevertheless, increasing efforts are being made to provide social insurance to informal workers as a counterpart to social assistance and social safety net measures. Social insurance schemes that allow for short-term savings, completed by financial and behavioral incentives to encourage savings, could benefit the informal workers in times of need and promote their financial inclusion.¹¹⁹

UNDP support to social insurance is very limited in terms of expenditure (accounting for less than 4 percent of total expenditure and mostly in upper-middle-income countries). The few examples identified are mainly pilot initiatives in health insurance and policy support for extension of social insurance to informal workers. Other than specific cases of UNDP's significant contribution to strengthening the social protection system, including social insurance (e.g. Dominican Republic¹²⁰), the focus of UNDP's few social insurance projects was on health insurance (e.g. Togo) through a registration mechanism and by collecting contributions using mobile apps and telephone payments. However, long-term sustainability of these initiatives is questionable due to a lack of sustainable financing systems, or link to private financing. UNDP supported legislation and policy development for social insurance (North Macedonia, Bangladesh, Paraguay). UNDP's Accelerator Lab in Paraguay is exploring ways to promote innovative access to social insurance for informal sector workers and develop pilot proposals for upscaling into policies.

Climate-related insurance is a specific area of relevance to UNDP's social insurance work, given its potential to improve the resilience of vulnerable populations. Climate insurance can help the poor adapt to climate change, reduce their vulnerability ex-ante through social and weather-based insurance, transfers, livelihoods, and asset diversification. UNDP support to climate and disaster-risk insurance has been limited, although there are some examples of such support. In the Philippines, UNDP was successful in supporting a pilot for the scale-up of risk transfer mechanisms for vulnerable agricultural communities in Mindanao. It introduced a weather-index-based insurance system covering over 2,000 farmers and helped formulate national legislation

¹¹⁸ See: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/youth.shtml>.

¹¹⁹ UNDP South Africa. 2022. 'Policy Brief: Developing Social Insurance Schemes for the Informal Sector in South Africa'.

¹²⁰ UNDP provided institutional strengthening support to the National Health Insurance Agency to improve the quality and quantity of provided services.

mandating access to weather-index-based insurance coverage. The pilot will likely be upscaled across the country but will also require follow-up support. UNDP had less traction in supporting the establishment of national weather-index insurance to benefit more than 45,000 small producers in Sudan. At the mid-term stage of this effort, little progress has been made. A limitation of this work is that the project paid the insurance provider to cover the costs of the producers' premiums, rather than establishing a market-based insurance system with affordable premiums for producers, thus ensuring its sustainability, or obtaining resources from government and from non-governmental organizations to fund the premiums on a pilot basis.¹²¹ The establishment of the bundled microinsurance product in Fiji by the Resilience in the Pacific Small Island Developing States project was recognized as one of the successes as it was scaled up by the Government,¹²² and there are plans to introduce the product in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

UNDP, through the Climate Promise initiative, also supported studies on the willingness of vulnerable groups, such as farmers and fishers, to pay for insurance with a special focus on the gender inequalities that prevent women from accessing insurance (e.g. in Antigua and Barbuda). As part of UNDP's role as a provider of environmental protection support at national and local levels, the development of climate-related insurance products is gaining more attention. In 2022, UNDP launched the Insurance and Risk Finance Facility that aims to build an environment conducive to the development of insurance and risk transfer products that build financial resilience and reduce vulnerabilities to climate, socio-economic, health and disaster risks and shocks.¹²³ Through this facility, UNDP is supporting countries with insurance solutions offering faster pay-outs to poor urban dwellers affected by flooding.

E. SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

A shock-responsive social protection system is prepared to respond to covariate shocks that affect a large number of households simultaneously — whether natural disasters, food shortages, economic crises or disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19. Such systems can be scaled up or scaled down quickly to cope with sudden changes in both context and demand during shocks and crises. Shock-responsive social protection relies primarily on working through the government systems and avoid, to the extent possible, parallel systems of assistance.¹²⁴ Several countries have pioneered fairly effective systems, and development partners, such as the World Bank, have been providing large-scale support to shock-responsive and adaptive social protection. Targeting and financing are among the key challenges.

Finding 13: UNDP is yet to leverage its engagement in disaster risk reduction, climate change planning, and conflict prevention to improve the responsiveness of social protection systems. UNDP's crisis responses are mostly delivered in parallel to country-owned social protection instruments and initiated post-shock. This enables a faster response in countries where the national social protection system is unable to meet needs but has limitations in strengthening the shock responsiveness of institutional mechanisms.

UNDP implements several forms of interventions relevant to shock responsiveness, although with limited connection to the social protection systems to date. These include multidimensional risk and vulnerability assessments, assessments of early warning systems, and the mapping of various shocks and crises that affect populations. Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, Myanmar, the Philippines, and most countries in the African and Latin American regions undertake such interventions under disaster risk management and climate change adaptation programmes. Although a majority are not yet connected to the social protec-

¹²¹ See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9525>.

¹²² The product was launched in November 2017 covering 12,500 sugarcane farmers in Fiji. In 2018, the Government of Fiji registered 100,000 civil servants and social welfare recipients under the scheme and, at the time of the mid-term review, the total number of users was around 140,000. See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9634>.

¹²³ See: <https://irff.undp.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/irff-engagement-initiative-factsheet.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Proponents of shock-responsive social protection have adopted the principle of working through and supporting national systems where feasible and appropriate, and several agencies provide preparatory support to enable country-owned programmes to increase the value or duration of benefits for existing recipients (vertical expansion) and/or increase the number of beneficiaries (horizontal expansion) in the event of a shock. Where external humanitarian support is required, the preferred option is to deliver support by 'piggybacking' if it is feasible to use, and possibly improve, the national programme throughout the response. Working separately from the system (shadow alignment or parallel systems) is reserved for situations where the government system is insufficient or inappropriate for meeting needs. 'Shock-Responsive Social Protection Systems', Working Paper 1. Oxford: Oxford Policy Management.

tion system, these initiatives build relevant capacities in other parts of governments and, therefore, have the potential to increase the responsiveness of national instruments. But there is a lack of a strategy that can work towards protective, promotive, preventive and transformative approaches.

The most notable examples of UNDP's contributions to building shock-responsive capacities are in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. In the Dominican Republic, UNDP, together with UNEP, was instrumental in the development and use of the climate change vulnerability index within the single beneficiary system's household targeting tools, which helps identify target beneficiaries of social benefits and plan disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery efforts. UNDP's contribution to building the country's social protection system facilitated the government's response during the pandemic and the ability of the national institutions to identify and target beneficiaries during disasters caused by natural phenomena. In Barbados and Eastern Caribbean States, UNDP in collaboration with UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) has been working on introducing innovative financing strategies to ensure minimum and sustainable expansion of coverage in disaster risk management. Development of a disaster risk management module as part of the Core Diagnostic Instrument allowed for better integration between the national social protection system and disaster risk management and helped expand social protection programmes and make them more adaptive.

In several countries which face climate-related and other natural shocks, most activities are focused on post-fact emergency response and recovery support, with very limited examples of anticipatory support to improve a social protection system's shock responsiveness prior to a shock.

Shock-responsive social protection is not endorsed as an approach by all governments. The development of standalone response mechanisms to deal with a limited set of hazard events can divert investment away from universal social protection coverage, leaving vulnerable populations in economic uncertainty at the end of humanitarian response.¹²⁵ In Senegal, government officials noted the need to use social protection to address the impacts that worsening droughts and flooding are having on crops and new threats to food and fertiliser prices caused by the war in Ukraine, and the Government of Senegal has opted to promote the universalisation of social protection rather than increase the punctuality of humanitarian responses by including agricultural workers in the existing social protection schemes and subsequently upgrading the support available through the introduction of livelihood skills and training components. Most African countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia, have also adopted national social protection policies and strategies that prioritize the extension of coverage to all. This is an area where UNDP can develop solutions that can bridge shock-responsive social protection and universality.

UNDP is assessing the potential to further use social protection as a means to reduce degradation, minimise the economic impact of degradation on households, and increase resilience with regard to climate shocks. UNDP initiatives that provide social assistance with the primary condition that recipients support environmental outcomes are nascent, with a small number of highly diverse projects being implemented. These initiatives often address community priorities but have not made sufficient connection to national programmes to expand formal coverage. In several countries, UNDP promotes the restoration of deforested and degraded areas by providing direct payments to landowners who conserve native forests and other vital ecosystems. Some form of natural resource management is present in many of UNDP's local climate initiatives. However, these pilot conditional schemes have not been up-scaled and translated into fully functioning, national-level infrastructure in order to be able to secure adequate financial resources for local resilience.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ See: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_834216.pdf.

¹²⁶ A small scoping study on Payments for Ecosystem Services and a small pilot project on carbon offset payments for protecting mangroves were mentioned in the 2021 Terminal Evaluation for Coastal Resilience Building in Timor Leste (<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12760>). However, these have not been up-scaled and translated into a fully functioning, national-level infrastructure offset scheme to secure financial resources for coastal resilience. Payments for Ecosystem Services were also mentioned in the mid-term evaluation of the Ethiopian Integrated approach for resilience and food security but had not yet been implemented. See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9150>.

As a relatively new area of focus in developing countries, further guidance is warranted for community-level interventions. For example, the payment conditions required to achieve the environmental outcomes can exclude the poorest groups from receiving support, and the intended environmental outcomes should be assessed for their relevance to local climate adaptation plans. Few countries have incorporated payment-for-ecosystem services, localised crop insurance, or community social protection mechanisms into their national social protection systems, and therefore the scale and sustainability of these mechanisms will rely on the demonstration of positive results and viable links to climate and other financing.

4.4. Principles

UNDP's Social Protection Offer describes gender equality and women's empowerment and human rights as two principles that the organization will seek to promote through its social protection support. This section discusses the significance and implications of UNDP's adoption of these principles and assesses 1) the extent to which UNDP has incorporated these principles into its own work, and 2) the extent to which it has promoted these principles in country-owned social protection instruments and the work of other providers of social protection support.

A. GENDER-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Finding 14: UNDP supported social protection measures for women in informal employment and enabled some governments to address the risk of gender-based violence and the unequal distribution of care work and to strengthen care systems. Lack of sustained engagement reduced contribution to gender-transformative social protection measures.

The UNDP Social Protection Offer draws attention to the reality of women's socio-economic position, including their role in unpaid care, the economic and social costs of reproduction and of caring for dependents, and the overrepresentation of women in informal employment. Describing these as essential issues for consideration in social protection, UNDP has taken a step beyond a basic gender-targeting approach for women's participation in labour market or welfare programmes. This is in line with established best practices, given both the positive impacts of the application of a gender lens on the inclusiveness and effectiveness of social protection programmes and the potential of gender-sensitive social protection in closing the gender gaps in many ways, not only socially and economically but also with respect to eliminating harmful social norms.

During the pandemic, UNDP and UN Women launched the COVID-19 global gender response tracker,¹²⁷ monitoring among other aspects, the social protection measures developed by countries and territories across the globe, analysing them from a gender perspective, and highlighting good practices for replication and scalability. The global trend as of July 2021 points out that, of 3,099 social protection and labour market measures, only 19.6 percent (606 measures) took gender into account. These include 12.3 percent that target or prioritize women's economic security and 7.3 percent that provide support for rising unpaid care demands.¹²⁸ Although there may be gaps or biases due to a lack of information, the overall lack of attention to gender highlights the inadequacy of social protection systems and their shock-responsiveness in planning for, and prioritizing, the specific needs of women and girls.

The tracker was commended for its value in compiling data, enabling generation of comparable evidence, and displaying common practices.¹²⁹ Building on its success, efforts are being made to adapt the tracker for use in monitoring measures contributing to environmental protection and gender equality in partnership with the OECD (development of a new dashboard including Gender Response Tracker with a Green

¹²⁷ See: <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.

¹²⁸ COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, Global Factsheet, November 2021, available at: https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Global%20Factsheet_Version%203_Nov%202021_final.pdf.

¹²⁹ The tracker was the second most viewed page on the Data Futures Platform in 2022.

Lens), as well as to analyse best practices in gender and all forms of crisis response. Efforts are also being made to increase awareness across UNDP about the tracker and its potential value as a tool to promote gender-responsive social protection.

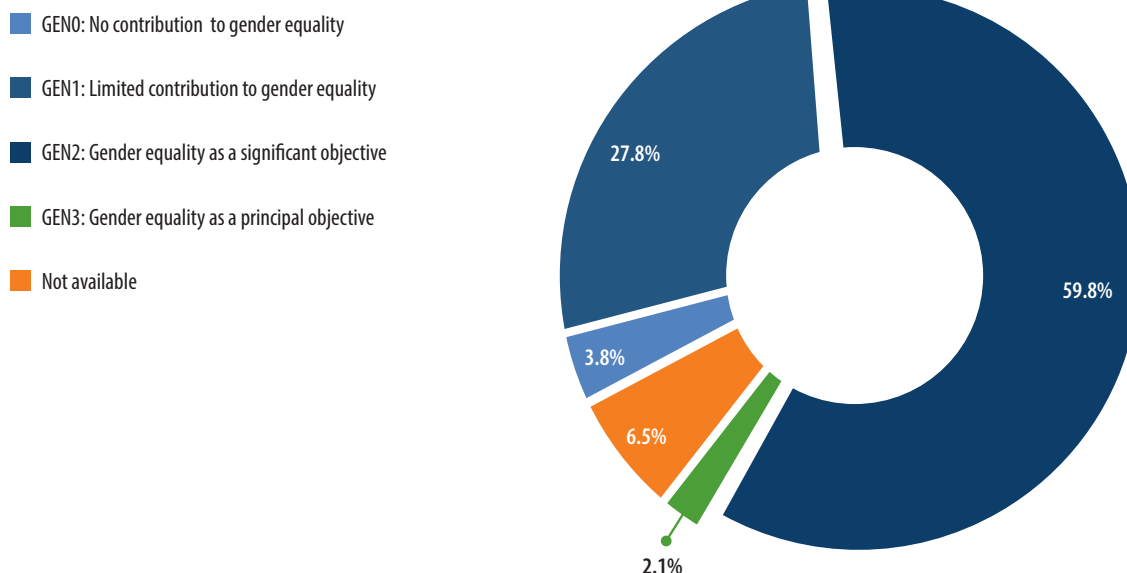
Review of UNDP's interventions specifically targeting social protection shows strong integration of gender and vulnerability aspects as bases for development of social services and system-level support (e.g. in Albania, Dominican Republic, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Viet Nam). In Montenegro, the work on system-level changes in the social welfare system and social services has a catalytic potential for enhancing access to rights, especially for the most vulnerable women (and their families) who have encountered high risks of social exclusion and violence. The Integrated Social Welfare Information System is able to perform gender-disaggregated analysis and to provide a broader overview of the status of the most vulnerable populations for the purpose of modelling social transfers. In the Dominican Republic, the analysis and costing tools for Social Protection Floors for women was developed based on official statistics, which has contributed to the development of capacities for the elimination of gender gaps in the social protection and security system. UNDP has been working with ILO and UN Women to support a gender review of the applications of all social protection programmes, leading to agreements on costed action plans to address gender gaps and women's needs, which is being applied in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and other countries in Central America.

UNDP interventions in the areas of social care and informal economy have meaningfully integrated gender, as have interventions related to domestic violence. UNDP supported skills development and training for women, for example, via a worker-centric platform where women can learn new labour skills (e.g. in Bolivia), vocational training and job creation targeting women. The modelling of gender-based violence care services, together with an integrated information system including the domestic violence database supported by UNDP in Montenegro, has enabled the efficient processing of domestic violence cases jointly by the police and social welfare centres. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP has been working with regional counterparts in ILO and UN Women to support a gender review of all social protection programmes, which led to costed action plans that are now applied to address women's social protection needs (e.g. in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador).

At the country level, analysis of the gender markers demonstrated that gender equality has been generally included in programmes as a significant objective (GEN2) in UNDP's social protection portfolio, while interventions that have gender equality and women's empowerment as a primary objective (GEN3) are still lacking. Of social protection projects, 51.7 percent – accounting for 59.8 percent of social protection expenditure – have gender equality as a significant objective (GEN2), and 6.7 percent of the social protection projects – accounting for 2.1 percent of social protection expenditure – have a principal purpose to advance gender equality and women's empowerment (GEN3). However, 31.6 percent of the expenditure are either expected to contribute to gender equality in a limited way (GEN1) or not expected to contribute to gender equality noticeably (GEN0).

FIGURE 11. UNDP social protection expenditure by gender marker

Expenditure by Gender Marker in % (2016 – Sept 2022)

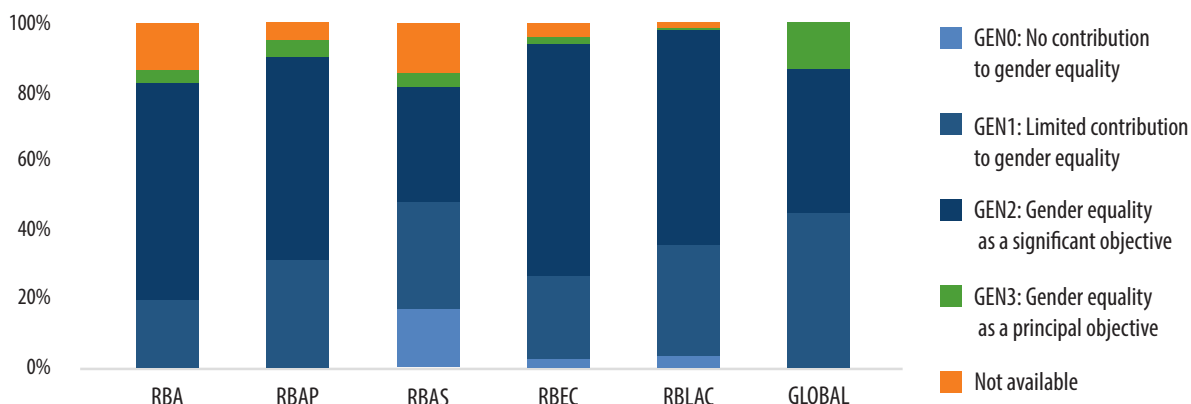


Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

An analysis of the gender marker by region showed that the region with the highest total percentage of GEN2 and GEN3 expenditures are Europe and the CIS with 69.3 percent of total expenditure, followed by Africa with 66.7 percent. GEN2 expenditure in Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for 62.4 percent of total expenditure, and GEN3 expenditure accounted for another 0.4 percent of the total social protection expenditure in the region. The Arab States spent the least amount and the least percentage in GEN2 projects among all the regions; 33.3 percent of its social protection expenditures have gender equality as a significant objective, a much lower percentage compared to 58.9 percent of Asia and the Pacific, the region which has the second lowest percentage of GEN2 expenditure.

FIGURE 12. Social protection expenditure by region by gender marker

Expenditure by region by gender marker (in %)



Source: IEO analysis based on data downloaded from Atlas Power BI as of September 2022.

B. UNIVERSALITY

Finding 15: UNDP recognizes that social protection is a human right and should be universal. However, it has not articulated a clear strategy for implementing these principles throughout its support, especially in balancing universality with country realities.

Although the right to social protection is enshrined in international law,¹³⁰ many countries still do not provide legal guarantees and not all development agencies working on social protection adopt a universality approach. UNDP recognizes that all members of society are entitled to social protection, which aligns the organization with the wider UN system's position. UNDP's Social Protection Offer approached the current shortcomings in achieving universality by proposing several solutions: closing gaps in current coverage; identifying those who might currently be 'invisible' to social protection systems; supporting those who may need social protection in the future because of green transitions and climate change; and supporting the fiscal arrangements required to finance an expansion in coverage.

UNDP is a partner of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030) alongside the ILO, the World Bank and other UN agencies and development partners. Universality has become a prominent objective, for instance, of UNDP in Latin America and the Caribbean, as discussed in the Regional Human Development Report¹³¹ and the regional programme.

In its country programmes, trade-offs with the universal social protection approach have not been sufficiently considered by UNDP. The progressive realisation of universal social protection implies the need to start by prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable for support. This is particularly important in the case of social assistance programmes to ensure that social protection systems maximise both the equity and efficiency of public spending. While there is a tendency in social protection literature to regard means-tested, categorical and universal approaches as opposites, in reality, most countries require a phased mix of these to ensure adequate and comprehensive systems for entire populations. However, ensuring the right balance between both equity and fiscal adequacy has been a challenge, especially in countries with large unmet needs for social protection and a low tax or contributory base. The social safety net approach, focusing on the poorest and prioritizing those most in need, is at times in tension with the demands of broad-based social protection, particularly when the political sustainability of benefits is being considered. Although targeting is appropriate for efficiently delivering UNDP's emergency assistance, in more stable contexts, short-term, discrete initiatives are more expensive and can undermine the potential to build a national system that can deliver universal social protection.

A related issue to the human rights principle is conditionality. The requirement that people meet certain conditions in order to receive assistance has been promoted by governments and development agencies. This situation arises in several countries in which UNDP offers conditional cash transfers. Conditionalities can also be administratively burdensome compared to universal social protection since some form of means testing would often be required alongside compliance monitoring. UNDP's conditional support is mostly short-term assistance and is usually unconnected to country-owned social protection programmes, but the forms of conditionality developed in isolated pilots would require greater consideration when UNDP advocates for their wider adoption in countries that have not established social protection floors.

In practice, UNDP has targeted its social protection support to different vulnerable groups in its country programmes and, in some cases, promoted the universal coverage of people in these categories. Vulnerable groups targeted by UNDP social protection interventions included persons with disabilities, PLHIV, women subject to domestic violence and sexual abuse, marginalised indigenous people, migrants, informal workers, underemployed and unemployed youth, and people affected by conflicts.

¹³⁰ Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Conference and with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In some cases, there were targeted social protection interventions for excluded groups while, in other cases, social protection activities are nested within a broader programme for vulnerable groups. But geographic and demographic targeting in order to provide access to some social protection benefits to these vulnerable groups is often the end goal of UNDP interventions, not a phase in progressive expansion towards universality based in human rights.

4.5. Enablers

UNDP's Social Protection Offer describes three enablers (financing/fiscal space, digitalization and innovation, and data and evidence) as key areas where the organization can focus its support to leverage improvements to country-owned social protection instruments. This section assesses to what extent UNDP has utilized these enablers within its social protection support, and what has been achieved through their use. The section also discusses the relevance of these enablers to the gaps and challenges in social protection, and their coherence with the support provided by others.

UNDP's focus on providing technical advisory support on sustainable financing in order to ensure the implementation of social protection programmes in the long-term was, until recently, largely the specialist domain of selected multilateral and bilateral agencies. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been growing recognition by national governments that social protection is a long-term investment for strengthening social and human development, rather than just a short-term expenditure, and therefore it should be prioritized in budgeting plans, in order to potentially expand the fiscal space to effectively address structural inequalities. Similarly, the widespread adoption of digital solutions in the management of social protection programmes, especially in terms of collecting, cross-referencing and managing data in order to improve the effectiveness of targeting of beneficiaries, and enhancing the modalities for the delivery of benefits has significantly increased the scope for innovation. In relation to data and evidence, it is widely acknowledged that the rise in social protection over the past 30 years is in large part due to the systematic processes of data collection and analysis which have generated extensive evidence detailing the complex and multidimensional character of poverty and inequality. As social protection activities become more complex, ambitious (in terms of scope and scale) and intersectoral, the explicit inclusion of data and evidence as an enabler in the UNDP Social Protection Offer can promote ongoing learning in terms of measuring progress and informing the design of social protection interventions.

A. FINANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION

Finding 16: Concerted efforts to systematically address financing for social protection is lacking in UNDP's offer. UNDP's support to the development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) is an opportunity to help better align public and private financial flows, but making the INFF operational to fill the gaps in planning and budget allocations for social protection remains a challenge.

Issues of financing social protection, costs of individual programmes and systems, and the interface of social protection with taxation systems are widely debated and pose many challenges. In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (the outcome document of the 2015 Third International Conference on Financing for Development), UN Member States committed to "fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, with a focus on those furthest below the poverty line and the vulnerable, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, children, youth and other persons".¹³²

¹³¹ The report argued the need for universal social protection, understood not as a guaranteed basic income necessarily but protection and access to services and assets to generate income for everyone exposed to risks and shocks. UNDP 2021. 'Trapped: High inequality and low growth in Latin America and the Caribbean'.

¹³² UN. 2015a. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. New York: United Nations.

The ability of low-income countries to mobilize domestic resources is exacerbated by global recessions and high levels of debt distress. Emerging lessons on funding from the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the importance of exploring alternatives that are either less expensive in terms of debt (e.g. concessional loans or social impact bonds) or that do not increase the debt level, such as reallocating budget or community-based financing. Rising debt levels among developing countries has emerged as a recent troubling international trend.

While domestic financing is key for sustained social protection expansion and sustainability in the medium- to long-term, donors continue to have an important role, including by funding and supporting social protection systems (rather than just supporting individual programmes). UNDP is in a position to add value to discussions on finance as it is able to bridge finance across the range of SDGs and has experience and established relationships with relevant line ministries. In this regard, work under UNDP's Sustainable Finance Hub is contributing to the development of the supplementary ecosystem to enable the national level design and implementation of the INFFs, and to promote financial systems that are oriented to deliver the SDGs, in tandem with key UN agencies at the global level.

The INFFs are designed to lay out national strategies for financing and implementing national development strategies. The methodological guidance for INFFs has its origins in the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development. The inception phase entails an initial development finance assessment which determines the baselines for the financing available, budgets and spending and identifies gaps and possible financing channels to address them, although this is not a requirement. UNDP has published a guidebook¹³³ to help technical teams shape and guide their analyses. Social protection issues are one of six themes highlighted in the guidebook. The other priorities are environment and climate change, equality, gender equality, health, and job protection and creation.

The global report on 'The state of integrated national financing frameworks in 2022'¹³⁴ stated that 86 countries globally are using INFFs to drive finance towards the SDGs, the objectives of the Paris Agreement and COVID-19 recovery. In Africa, it is reported that around 36 countries have initiated the INFF process; over half of the strategies have included a thematic focus on social protection. According to the INFF Sustainable Investment Stocktake report, financing strategies in 35 countries mainstream or support development plans that prioritize social sectors, particularly health, education and social protection.¹³⁵ Although the INFF process demonstrates the ability of UNDP to convene key actors around a shared agenda, it is unclear to what extent the INFF will unlock significant new development financing, as also noted in IEO's evaluation, 'Financing the Recovery: A Formative Evaluation of UNDP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and SDG Financing'. The evaluation recognized that the INFF could play an important role in putting the SDGs at the front and centre of financial planning that strengthens alignment of public and private financing with the SDGs. The structure and short-term financing (two years) of what is a medium- to long-term approach will need to be addressed if the perception of the INFF as an external, donor-led approach is to be overcome and its future assured as an important development financing approach.¹³⁶ UNDP, together with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), OECD, the European Union (EU), Italy and Sweden, recently launched the INFF Facility, aiming at brokering the demand and supply of technical support, strengthening partnerships and facilitating exchanges between countries regionally and globally.

UNDP support to studies and data has contributed to improved analysis of social protection efforts and financing, and studies on financing for social protection programmes are useful (Gambia, Indonesia, Lebanon). UNDP is exploring innovative financing mechanisms to enable extension of social protection,

¹³³ UNDP, 'Development Finance Assessment Guidebook: Supporting governments to build forward better through integrated national financing frameworks' (undated), available at: <https://sdgfinance.undp.org/sdg-tools/development-finance-assessment-dfaguidebook>.

¹³⁴ See: <https://inff.org/resource/the-state-of-integrated-national-financing-frameworks-in-2022-or-report>.

¹³⁵ UNDP, 2022. INFF Sustainable Investment Stocktake – prepared for the G20 Development Working Group, available at: <https://inff.org/resource/2022-inff-sustainable-investment-stocktake>.

¹³⁶ See: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/recovery-finance.shtml>.

aware that dependence on value-added tax (VAT) is regressive and exacerbates inequalities. UNDP is also exploring options on the potential to integrate blended financing mechanisms and to engage the diaspora for financing social protection.

At the country level, there is little evidence on how the donor-funded social assistance and labour/livelihood projects would be taken up and budgeted by governments, how fiscal space would be created, or what additional domestic sources of funding could be harnessed. Efforts to promote productivity and job growth are rarely linked to the goals of extending social protection, although the two aims are mutually supportive through tax revenues and contributory schemes. Another issue is the absence of analysis on the fiscal space and financial sustainability in some of the core social protection interventions that have been supporting the development of a system-level response. For example, the 2016 Action Plan for the Mauritius Marshall Plan makes no mention of financial sustainability, and it does not appear that an actuarial study has been supported at any stage by UNDP to justify the approach taken or evaluate its impact or cost effectiveness compared to other potential approaches.

B. DIGITALIZATION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Finding 17: UNDP support to digital registries and data platforms is an area where UNDP has strengthened the digitalization and social protection delivery. These initiatives have promoted interoperability and efficiency of services across social protection areas and actors. Digitalizing the delivery and/or the monitoring of the payment systems has also contributed to the improved transparency of social protection services.

UNDP support to digitalization has covered a broad range of digital solutions which have varied applications to social protection. A recurring way in which UNDP's technical expertise has intersected with the expansion of social protection systems has been through support to the development of digital platform e-registries, which have enabled more effective targeting of social assistance, for example with cash transfer programmes. Poverty and vulnerability are not static conditions; they are constantly changing and this has been the case especially recently with regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Digitalization of social protection data, therefore, is crucial since it helps to keep the records of beneficiaries more accurate and up-to-date. There are some interesting, albeit limited, examples of UNDP using digitalization and innovation as an enabler for strengthening and expanding social protection in target locations (e.g. Kosovo). Most prominent are those that have embedded modernisation of the social protection system within public sector reform which have improved the accountability and access of social protection services (e.g. Montenegro).

Examples of digitalization support aiming at improving the transparency, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness of social protection have included the development and implementation of digital identity and registration mechanisms, e-registries (e.g. in Angola, Malawi, Mauritius and Senegal), digital money transfers (e.g. in the Philippines), cross-sectoral electronic databases or social protection portals (to administer and unify data collected and provide locally-relevant and gender-relevant information on various social protection schemes [e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, the Pacific and Peru]); and e-governance systems and services enabling more efficient delivery of services (e.g. Bangladesh, Montenegro, United Republic of Tanzania and Uzbekistan). Some of the e-payment systems support has the explicit purpose of promoting transparency and accountability (e.g. Honduras) while, for others, such effects have been an unexpected positive outcome (e.g. Viet Nam). A key lesson in this regard is that, in countries where UNDP's digitalization and public sector reform interventions include modernisation of social protection systems, such interventions have wider transformational potential for accountability and transparency of targeting and coverage, as well as for promoting access to services for the most vulnerable. Another issue is related to the 'digital divide', which is 'real and growing', as noted by IEO's reflection paper on digitalization in conflict situations.¹³⁷ In this regard, digitalization efforts that contribute to closing the digital divide, or at least not exacerbating it, should explicitly include the most vulnerable as part of their core beneficiaries at

¹³⁷ See: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/reflections/Digitalization.pdf>.

the design stage, produce materials in accessible formats, and ensure that communication strategies use inclusive language, including in terms of gender.

In countries where UNDP invests efforts in enhancing the interoperability of public systems and digitalization (e-services), integrating social protection has been easier. Such interventions resulted in stronger and more apt social protection targeting and coverage mechanisms. Investing in creating interoperability among public sector databases (e.g. cadastre, civil registry, social welfare and tax office systems) helped enhance and make more efficient entire business processes and policymaking across social protection systems. Integrated Social Welfare Information System (ISWIS, or commonly known as the e-social card) in Montenegro helped optimise information systems and their interoperability for promoting more efficient and effective systems of social protection and the quality of service for the poor and vulnerable. The Single Information System for Electronic Data Exchange (SISEDE) ensures interoperability between key electronic state registers, the domestic violence database and the court IT system in order to improve the efficiency of the justice and social welfare system, thereby allowing social welfare centres and police to electronically and in a timely manner exchange and process gender-based violence case reports and ensure effective case management for the victims' protection, and generate official statistics on domestic violence.

At the corporate level, UNDP has also accelerated digitalization tools to improve support at the country level. The digital strategy 2022–2025 sees digitalization as key to sustainable development, helping to reach the most vulnerable populations. Digitalization is mentioned as an enabler for social protection in most of the programming documents both at regional and national levels. In 2022, UNDP set up the Singapore Global Centre on Digitalization, which is focused on trying to help to create the environment and support network that will enable the full potential of digitalization to be realised, especially at the country level.

C. DATA AS AN ENABLER

Finding 18: UNDP has collected and provided some relevant and high-quality data, including related to social protection. The UNDP contribution has been important in enabling an assessment of the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is critical for informing corresponding social protection measures.

UNDP took the technical lead in the development of the socio-economic impact assessments (SEIA), providing a basis for the development of response plans to the COVID-19 pandemic. By June 2020, 63 assessments had been developed in a short space of time, an extraordinary achievement given the backdrop of lockdown and the health crisis.¹³⁸ By the end of 2021, 144 SEIAs had been completed.¹³⁹ In some cases, the assessments moved beyond forecasts, to policy needs and response assessments. Social protection featured prominently as part of integrated responses identified through the SEIAs. The key issues highlighted were the continued loss of jobs and livelihoods, the inadequate coverage of social protection and the challenges to address the needs of the informal economy and workers. The graph below shows the focus of SEIAs in countries across the five pillars of the UN Framework (protecting health, social protection and basic services, jobs/small- and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs]/ informal workers, macroeconomic response, social cohesion and community resilience) and the cross-cutting dimensions of environmental sustainability and gender equality. SEIAs recommend rethinking social protection measures which, in many cases, will need to include universal health coverage, a universal basic income (even if temporary), as a means of extending the coverage of the social safety net with well-articulated targeting measures (e.g. in the Morocco and Viet Nam SEIAs).¹⁴⁰ The Digital Socio-Economic Impact Assessments tool has enabled SEIA findings to be fed into a global data insight platform to enhance evidence-based design and policy interventions, by visualising on dashboards and digital maps nearly real-time insights for decision makers on recovery policies and interventions.

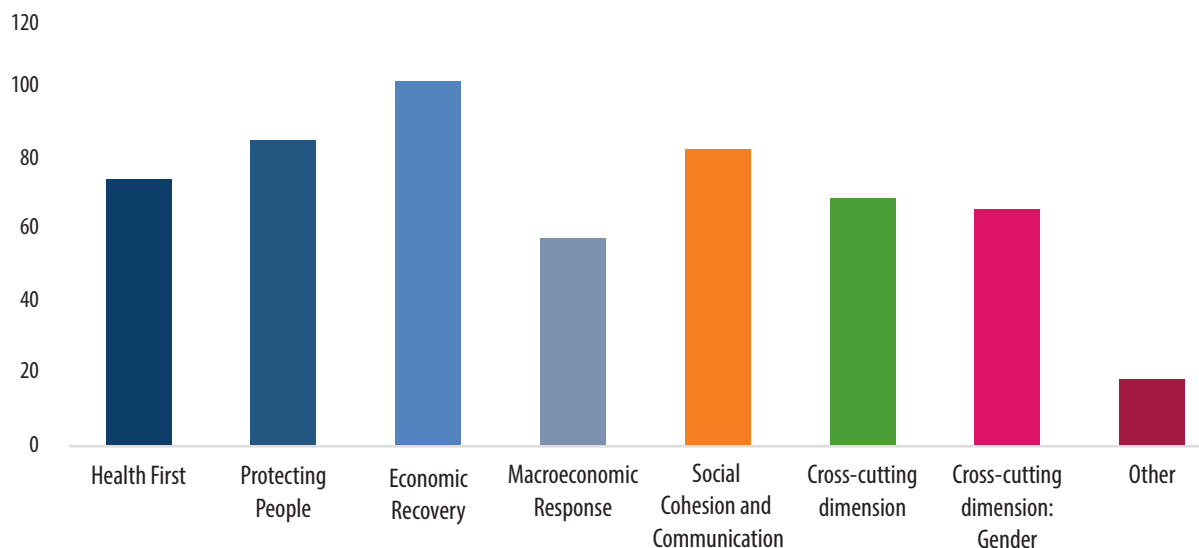
¹³⁸ UNDP. 2020. 'Brief 2: Putting the United Nations Framework for socio-economic response to COVID-19 into action: Insights'.

¹³⁹ UNDP. 'Financing the Recovery: A formative evaluation of UNDP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and SDG financing'.

¹⁴⁰ UNDP. 2020. 'Brief #2: Putting the UN Framework For Socio-economic Response to COVID-19 Into Action: Insights'. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

FIGURE 13. Focus of the SEIAs

Focus of SEIAs across the five pillars and cross-cutting issues of the framework



Source: UNDP (2020b, 9).¹⁴¹

Data collection and analysis has been one of the key areas of UNDP intervention in social protection, adding value across the regions. The Human Development Report and its associated indices, the data platform on the State of Social Assistance in Africa and the gender response tracker¹⁴² (which compiled government responses to COVID-19 and looked at gender responsiveness [see the finding on gender, finding 14]) are noteworthy examples. The data are used as a basis for evidence-based policymaking and for advocacy purposes. The publication and data platform on the State of Social Assistance¹⁴³ in Africa are based on comprehensive data collected from country sources. The database shows both the supply side (provision of social assistance) and the demand side (e.g. with data on poverty levels and dependency ratios) to enable estimations of the extent of need. A life cycle approach was taken to classify schemes, although there were challenges in disaggregation since data is often not disaggregated by the schemes themselves. 'The State of Social Assistance in Africa' was published in 2019 and recognized as UNDP's major publication on social protection.¹⁴⁴ In collaboration with the Africa Women's Development and Communication Network, UNDP produced the Africa Care Economy Index, which evaluated 54 African states' performance in the recognition, support and redistribution of care work.¹⁴⁵ This is also an important contribution as the index provides an analytical framework to devise strategies, messages and build the capacity of women CSOs, regional partners, and other stakeholders in order to engage, influence policies and hold policymakers accountable. In several countries, UNDP collaborated with other UN agencies and development partners in the conduct of surveys and assessments to contribute to the policy discourse.

A key aspect of UNDP's work on social protection is the support that it provides in the development and implementation of diverse indexes and measurements for public policies, including social protection policies. UNDP has been promoting the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) successfully. The publication, 'The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index', is also valuable because of its ability to reveal the 'common deprivation profiles' of the 1.2 billion people who were still impoverished in 2020/2021. In 2023, the RBLAC

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See: <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.

¹⁴³ See: <https://social-assistance.africa.undp.org/> and <https://social-assistance.africa.undp.org/>.

¹⁴⁴ Seekings, J. 2021. 'International actors and social protection'. In E. Schüring and M. Loewe, eds., Handbook on Social Protection Systems, pp 492–507. Northampton Edward Elgar.

¹⁴⁵ Valiani, S. 2022. The Africa Care Economy Index.

will launch a report on the MPI with a Focus on Women, based on information gathered in 10 countries. This MPI for women focused on a novel set of dimensions that had not been previously studied thoroughly, including indicators related, for example, to time use, economic autonomy, access to ICTs, and housing. The ultimate objective of such studies is to help governments to target their efforts and deploy their resources most effectively to deal with both poverty and vulnerability. While these studies/indexes are important by themselves, the level of adoption and use varies among the countries/regions, and efforts to broaden their use need to continue.

In addition, UNDP has also drawn on its expertise in crisis contexts and on its country-level presence across regions to compile knowledge products in the form of thematic and regional reports as well as blogs and articles. These publications document innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses,¹⁴⁶ lessons learned at the regional level (e.g. in Asia and the Pacific¹⁴⁷ and in the Arab region¹⁴⁸), country-level lessons learned in shock-responsive social protection (e.g. Bangladesh¹⁴⁹) and practical resources for country offices, such as policy proposals (e.g. for the TBI, a minimum guaranteed income above the poverty line¹⁵⁰ or the guidance note on 'The Rapid Financing Facility [RFF]: Guidance on social protection').¹⁵¹ In some cases, the immediate impacts of these knowledge products can be demonstrated. In Togo, lessons learned from national responses to the Ebola crisis influenced the design and implementation of COVID-19 responses. Recognizing how humanitarian responses to Ebola side-lined women, the Government of Togo decided to pay women a higher benefit than male recipients in the country's Novissi emergency cash transfer scheme for informal workers, which reached over 12 percent of the population.¹⁵²

4.6. Programme management and other cross-cutting issues

Finding 19: UNDP's multisectoral approach, which goes beyond specific technical capabilities of specialized agencies and brings a more comprehensive human development vision has not yet gained traction internally or externally. Limitations remain in facilitating the humanitarian-development nexus in social protection, despite the wide range of partnerships that UNDP has forged.

UNDP is part of several partnerships related to social protection. At the global level, UNDP is a member of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), created on the request of the G20 Development Working Group and chaired by the ILO and the World Bank, to improve inter-agency coordination in support of country-led social protection measures. Bilateral frameworks for collaboration with specialized agencies for social protection have the potential to enable a more coherent response at the country level. With ILO, UNDP established the Global UNDP-ILO Framework of Action, where social protection is identified as one of the seven priority areas of cooperation.¹⁵³ Under this framework, ILO and UNDP are currently formulating a joint programme on 'Fostering Pathways to Formality', which aims to expand social protection for informal workers and enhance the productivity and resilience of workers and economic units of the informal sector to facilitate their gradual transition to the formal economy. In addition, against the backdrop of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, which has the ambition of creating at least 400 million jobs, primarily in the green, digital and care economies and extending social protection floors to 4 billion people by 2030, UNDP and ILO committed to collaborate to

¹⁴⁶ Hammad, M., F. Bacil, F. Alvarenga, C. Bilo, F. Veras and A. Machado. 2021. 'Next Practices — Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond'. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, UNDP.

¹⁴⁷ UNDP. 2020c. 'Lessons from past disasters in Asia and the Pacific'. Bangkok: United Nations Development Programme Bangkok Regional Hub.

¹⁴⁸ Iyer, D., W. Merouani and N. Abdelraouf. 2021. Social protection systems and the response to COVID-19 in the Arab region. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

¹⁴⁹ Khan, S. and S. Khan, 2021. 'Addressing COVID-19's uneven impacts on vulnerable populations in Bangladesh: The case for shock-responsive social protection'. Development Futures Series. New York: UNDP.

¹⁵⁰ Molina, G.G. and E. Ortiz-Juarez. 2020. 'Temporary Basic Income: Protecting Poor and Vulnerable People in Developing Countries'. New York: United Nations Development Programme Global Policy Network.

¹⁵¹ UNDP. 2020d. Rapid Financing Facility (RFF). Guidance on social protection. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

¹⁵² Hammad, M., F. Bacil, F. Alvarenga, C. Bilo, F. Veras and A. Machado. 2021. 'Next Practices - Innovations in the COVID-19 social protection responses and beyond'. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, United Nations Development Programme.

¹⁵³ See: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/statement/wcms_756457.pdf.

develop a common roadmap for the Global Accelerator, with a particular focus on informality. With FAO, UNDP established a memorandum of understanding (MoU), where Pillar 1 includes poverty alleviation in rural areas and the extension of social protection to the agricultural sector. Under this framework, work on the MPI was extended to develop a Rural MPI. Based on these metrics, solutions were put forward to address rural multidimensional poverty, including social protection in the informal agricultural sector.

UNDP has been working with other UN agencies (principally UNICEF, ILO, and the World Health Organization [WHO]) through the regional issue-based coalition on social protection (in Arab States/Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Asia and the Pacific). The coalition has launched a virtual platform for joint work and advocacy as well as mapping of social protection work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) regions. In Asia and the Pacific, within the scope of the coalition, UNDP has partnered with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and ILO on the joint National Rapid Baseline Survey on Social Protection to inform the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection. In Arab States, prior to the issue-based coalition, UNDP has co-lead with ILO the regional working group on social protection and played a key role in steering the discussion around the expansion of social protection to refugees in the context of the response to the Syrian crisis. UNDP also provides technical and financial assistance to TRANSFORM, an inter-agency innovative training initiative that strengthens individual and institutional capacity for the management of national social protection systems in Africa. In such partnerships, UNDP brings a strong poverty focus and the potential to work with and across government ministries in a significant number of countries, whereas the ILO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO have far stronger technical expertise in social protection. However, the partnerships are yet to translate into efforts to consolidate inter-agency response, building on the comparative advantages of the agencies.

UNDP's comparative advantage in social protection support, as perceived by development actors at the country level, is its ability to address social protection at a cross-sectoral level compared to the sectoral focus of other UN agencies, such as the ILO, which has the lead mandate in this area, although such cross-sectoral social protection efforts are not evident in the least developed countries, where they are most needed, or in crisis-affected countries.¹⁵⁴ Within the UN system, the ILO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO are more prominent players in the arena of social protection. UNDP's broader mandate is an advantage for it to form alliances with other actors to tackle social protection as a solution to, or component of, other development issues, but this has not been articulated in a clear offer that would support resource mobilization.

There are several instances of cooperation between UNDP and ILO, UNICEF, WFP and other agencies at the country level. Such partnerships have been cited as a way for UNDP to contribute or leverage its support to a wider social protection agenda, compensating for limited internal capacity on social protection. The availability of donor resources and partnerships with UN agencies and other development partners are important in determining the approaches to engage expertise and facilitate dialogue. UNDP has been able to work closely with UN agencies, and also with bilateral partners and the World Bank (e.g. in Viet Nam) to provide policy advice and secure resources to engage high-quality consultants. Joint interventions with financial contributions from the SDG Fund have added value to reform processes by engaging multidisciplinary support provided by UN agencies in line with their specific mandates, towards providing more holistic upstream support to host governments.

The SDG Fund was used as a driver for partnerships with other agencies for joint programmes in countries. The focus of the 'Joint SDG Fund: Integrated Policy for SDG Acceleration' is on identification and activation of 'leverage points', namely those policy and/or institutional changes that produce a catalytic 'chain-reaction' across sectors and stakeholder groups. The joint programmes aim to spearhead systemic changes that yield social impact across the SDGs focusing on social groups left behind. The fund has invested \$69 million since launching in 2019, including on numerous social protection-related projects in Africa. The

¹⁵⁴ See: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/9523>.

Joint SDG Fund launched the window for ‘Leaving No One Behind – Social Protection’ in 2019, and UNDP is an implementation partner of joint programmes funded by this window. There have been tangible outcomes of Fund-related collaborations. In Europe and the CIS, SDG Fund joint programmes helped UNDP’s social protection interventions contribute towards stronger disability rights advocacy and/or technical assistance to the host governments to integrate the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within national legislation and mechanisms. The review of available project documents and available evaluation reports of SDG-funded social protection projects showed that such projects were useful for building partnerships among UN agencies, but the UN agencies remained relatively siloed with regard to interventions under the broader umbrella of SDG Fund programmes.¹⁵⁵

Finding 20: Partnership with the private sector can be important to UNDP social protection work, given that the private sector can bring both agility in the delivery of social protection services and new approaches to financing. UNDP is well positioned to facilitate greater private sector participation, but the pace of this engagement needs acceleration.

The private sector plays several roles in social protection:¹⁵⁶ firstly, enterprises contribute to the social insurance of their workforce as employers and pay taxes; secondly, private markets can offer private insurance products (e.g. life insurance, pension plans and health insurance) as well as social services (e.g. health, education and care for a fee); thirdly, private investments contribute to infrastructure and services, complementing public financing and, lastly, the private sector is increasingly taking on more roles in social protection delivery, mainly due to new technologies and digitalization.

UNDP, through its Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development, has explored engagement with the private sector in the design and delivery of skills development programmes. Leveraging the role of the private sector in skills development is expected to contribute to enhancing employability and increasing jobs and livelihoods opportunities for the disadvantaged, including migrants and refugees.

Partnerships with the private sector to expand insurance coverage against disaster and climate shocks have been pursued, particularly under the umbrella of UNDP’s environmental activities. Involvement of the private sector in the conceptualisation of natural disaster insurance increases the marketability of the product and contributes towards the objectives of risk transfer. However, establishing the legal framework for the insurance product takes time and requires leadership support from the government.

In crisis situations, UNDP has engaged with the private sector using their technologies to facilitate the delivery of cash assistance (e.g. to make cash instalments through a mobile money transfer mechanism for post-disaster housing construction in Haiti).

Social protection financing is an area where there is great potential for contribution from the private sector. Further engagement with the private sector could leverage significant new funding and UNDP will need to assess these opportunities against their financial and reputational risks, including risks related to inclusion and LNOB concerns. New and alternative financial instruments for facilitating development financing need concrete measures and full government support to be successful.

Finding 21: Recent improvements in UNDP’s regional social protection capacity have added coherence and impetus to the organization’s multi-country initiatives, but these have not been matched by equivalent capacity or focus in country offices.

Staff capacity to tailor and implement a UNDP Social Protection Offer has only recently increased and is concentrated in small teams at the regional bureau level. Improvements to the team in the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) and the Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) have catalysed

¹⁵⁵ See, for example: ‘Evaluation of UN Joint programme in Uzbekistan and in Montenegro’.

¹⁵⁶ UN. 2021. Secretary-General’s Policy Brief Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery. New York: United Nations.

greater interest in social protection from the country offices, resulting in increases in the number of requests from the country offices for support in social protection. Position papers on key social protection topics have been produced.

Social protection is often woven into one or more programme areas, and it is not always clear which parts are considered social protection. This is reinforced by the limited reference to UNDP's social protection approach in Country Programme Documents, even in countries with prominent social protection projects. The results-oriented annual reports (ROARs) and Country Programme Documents often list social protection work conducted under a broad umbrella of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the LNOB approach. This means that cross-cutting issues in the country portfolios, such as environmental awareness, capacity-building, human rights, gender equality, and support against gender-based violence, are classified as social protection, without a strong connection to the country-owned systems that could absorb and sustain such initiatives. Although the multi-disciplinary nature of social protection means some interventions may not neatly fit into a single thematic area of the UNDP Social Protection Offer,¹⁵⁷ sufficient attention is not paid to isolate the role played by UNDP's social protection interventions in reporting, and it remains challenging to calculate the number of people supported by UNDP's social protection support.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ For example, social protection initiatives for informal workers, could be spread across all three thematic areas of the Social Protection Offer, as well as intersecting with the cross-cutting themes (e.g. gender) and enablers (e.g. digitization).

¹⁵⁸ As noted in the evaluation of UNDP's 2014–2017 Strategic Plan.

Chapter 5.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Building on the evaluation findings presented in the previous chapter, the conclusions and recommendations focus on the strategic issues of UNDP social protection support at the global and country level and UNDP positioning within different paradigms and approaches to social protection. The recommendations take into consideration recent corporate social protection strategies, priorities of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the partnerships UNDP forged and other change processes underway.

5.1. Conclusions

Conclusion 1:

The UNDP comparative advantages in social protection assistance are rooted in its multisectoral approach and its potential to link social protection to key development programmes, which goes beyond the specific technical capabilities of the specialized agencies. The UNDP offer described a more comprehensive human development vision, anchored in its support to employment and livelihoods promotion, crisis response, governance and resilience – areas that are critical for advancing social protection. This positioning, however, is not fully evident in UNDP social protection programming at the country level, where, notwithstanding some successful initiatives, most UNDP support remains fragmented and at small scale.

The UNDP approach to social protection is increasingly relevant and of growing significance in both development and crisis contexts. By responding to government demand, it has made significant contributions to strengthening national policies and enhancing the institutional capacities of national social protection programmes, especially in the identification and targeting of beneficiaries. Social protection policies supported by UNDP have increased the possibility of budget allocation to social protection and reduced ad hoc government responses to disasters. Social policies and institutional measures to strengthen national cash-transfer programmes have enabled the effective reach of vulnerable communities. UNDP has made important contributions in crisis contexts to enable much needed social protection support for communities in vulnerable situations to cope with economic reverses.

The positioning and comparative advantage of UNDP are not fully evident in its social protection programming. The absence of well-conceptualized, programmatic solutions for social protection that can be integrated into UNDP programmes in other key development areas and operationalized at the country-office level for synergetic effects has reduced the UNDP contribution. With the exception of several successful and transformative initiatives, most UNDP support to core social protection components (social assistance, social insurance and active labour-market interventions) remains fragmented and at small scale, limiting the UNDP role and contribution. Inconsistencies exist between the high-level approaches, principles and enablers in the strategic documents and the integrated programmatic solutions and models that are available for different country contexts, reducing the focus and depth of UNDP support. Furthermore, the innovative examples of UNDP support for social protection have rarely been shared and used to further develop UNDP approaches in other countries.

Conclusion 2:

UNDP has provided more support to social protection in middle- and upper-middle-income countries than to low-income and least developed countries, mainly because of the availability of funding from host Governments. UNDP has not articulated a clear strategy for balancing universality with country realities.

The majority of expenditure in the UNDP social protection portfolio is in middle- and upper-middle-income countries, mainly because of the availability of funding from host Governments. UNDP had limited success in diversifying financing for social protection-related support in low-income and least developed countries. While UNDP is developing investment instruments and modalities with the private sector, it has yet to engage the private sector in social protection assistance, thus significantly reducing the potential of its contribution in both mature and nascent financial sectors.

UNDP recognizes that social protection is a human right, and its support should be universal in its coverage while also promoting the social safety net approach with a strong focus on the poorest and the most vulnerable in some countries. Although important, targeting the poorest and those at the risk of being left behind has not resulted in systems that provide universal social protection as a human right. UNDP has not presented viable options to enable Governments to navigate resource constraints and look into the cost benefits of universal social protection floors, which are affordable even in low-income countries when fiscal space can be created. This is an area in which UNDP is well positioned to engage.

Conclusion 3:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed critical social protection gaps in all countries. The socioeconomic impact assessments that UNDP facilitated have the potential to enable streamlined government responses. While UNDP responded to some key social protection gaps, overall support to social insurance and active labour-market interventions is evolving and insufficient for strengthening policy and the enabling environment. Despite the impetus generated by COVID-19 responses, overall efforts to strengthen labour-market policies and programmes are losing momentum, requiring concerted efforts by Governments and international cooperation, particularly given the continuity of the crises and the overall challenging context in which social protection systems operate.

The pandemic highlighted that effective social protection systems and tools are crucial to safeguard the poor and vulnerable during emergencies. Assessment of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on households, communities and businesses was critical for context-specific responses. These assessments have helped to identify vulnerable groups that needed assistance, as well as institutional and systemic gaps that needed to be addressed to achieve an inclusive and better recovery. More concerted engagement is needed for integration of active labour-market policies, social insurance and related assistance within income support schemes. Social protection still operates in a context of high, and growing, levels of informality and inequality, marked by institutional fragmentation and limited fiscal space given the current crises. Competing priorities have contributed to loss of momentum by Governments and development partners.

Limited engagement in social insurance and active labour-market areas has represented a missed opportunity for UNDP. Across regions, there is a huge informal sector where the firms and workers are often outside legal regulations and the diverse and fragmented labour-market structures call for context-specific responses. Going beyond the discourse on informality, targeted responses or universality, UNDP has yet to leverage its current inclusive growth portfolio to enable concrete solutions in the areas of social care, labour markets and the informal sector to improve social safety nets and resilient livelihoods.

Conclusion 4:

In fragile and crisis contexts, UNDP cash-based interventions targeting vulnerable groups have yielded positive dividends. In the absence of institutionalization of social safety net measures and linkages with medium- to longer-term planning, UNDP short-term support was limited in its ability to link cash assistance to development policy processes and enable sustainable national mechanisms.

UNDP support to cash transfers and cash for work was critical to fulfilling basic needs during crisis responses. Informal workers and wage labourers are more vulnerable to economic shocks and crises; hence, UNDP prioritized targeting such groups. UNDP support was more successful when measures were taken to institutionalize cash for work, particularly establishing linkages with social and economic policies. Strategies that simultaneously addressed strengthening local capacities enabled more efficient cash transfers. At the same time, having too many procedures for accountability purposes slowed implementation and increased the cost of delivery.

Programme models such as the '3x6'¹⁵⁹ approach focus on immediate income for affected populations, injecting capital into the local economy but also providing options for achieving longer-term income security through measures that enhance livelihood and employment. However, the integration of social protection instruments is limited. UNDP support has consisted of mostly fragmented recovery efforts following a crisis or shock (including climatic shock), normally in the form of short-term livelihoods support and provision of community assets and infrastructure, and lacking anticipatory actions. UNDP shock responses are mostly delivered in parallel to country-owned social protection instruments, which enables a faster response in countries where the national social protection system is unable to meet the needs, but without improving national instruments.

Given the complexity of multiple crises, the synergies and linkages between the humanitarian and development responses are necessary for sustainable practices. While there were successful partnerships with the UN and with the international financial institutions to enable this, overall, there remain significant gaps in the nexus approach to social protection.

Conclusion 5:

In several countries, UNDP use of digital tools and its knowledge products have greatly strengthened social protection processes. Data systems and platforms have been a key enabler in faster and better targeting of social protection measures.

Digital systems improved inclusiveness and efficiency in identifying social protection programme beneficiaries and enhancing their access to receiving public services and entitlements. Supporting digital social registries has been an area of added value of UNDP to social protection which improved the interoperability of systems among social protection sector entities. An important outcome of this work is strengthened coverage and delivery of national social protection programmes. Moreover, digital social data systems have also helped better monitor the social protection benefits being delivered, and thus increased transparency of social protection programmes.

In addition to digitalization, there is also a strong potential for UNDP to strengthen its contribution to social protection work through its engagement in the generation of data and evidence. UNDP has made important contributions to fostering policy debates through its knowledge products and discussion papers, particularly on social assistance, social care and informal economy. The indices developed by UNDP such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index can be used to track both the incidence and intensity of poverty and can be a potentially powerful tool for targeting social protection benefits effectively.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, UNDP. 2016. 'UNDP Global Toolkit on the 3x6 approach: Building resilience through jobs and livelihoods', New York: United Nations Development Programme.

Conclusion 6:

Social protection systems and mechanisms in general are often gender-blind or do not adequately reach women, who are underrepresented in the formal sector and hindered by other factors in accessing services. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by data from the COVID-19 global gender-response tracker. The UNDP contribution to gender-inclusive social protection systems is too limited in scale to enable transformative national practices and processes to expand adequate social protection to women.

Despite the disproportionate impact of crises on women, social protection and social safety nets have yet to pay sufficient attention to this imbalance. Gender-sensitive social protection measures and social safety nets are too few to address the current gaps in country policies and programmes. The social protection programmes at the country level underscore the importance of understanding the context in which programmes are implemented, for example, cultural norms that pose constraints on women's work, women's multiple social roles and gender power dynamics. UNDP promoted gender-responsive social protection and paid attention to the reality of women's socioeconomic position, including their role in unpaid care, the economic and social costs of reproduction and of caring for dependents, and the overrepresentation of women in informal employment. Outside of some prominent positive examples, the limited scope of UNDP engagement did not enable change processes sufficient to address different social and economic risks that women face and improve the inclusiveness of social protection measures.

Conclusion 7:

UNDP has recognized the emerging global context which has significantly impacted the demand for effective national social protection systems. This recognition has not yet translated into specific programmatic guidance for better positioning country offices in their social protection offer.

The UNDP social protection offer recognizes the emerging global challenges related to the cost-of-living crisis, a climate emergency and the new economic paradigm called for by these crises including a green and just transition out of crises, within the context of an evolving technological revolution. However, beyond this formal recognition, the renewed UNDP offer for reskilling and upskilling has been limited in its support to the workforce, particularly in the informal sector, for dealing effectively with the anticipated job-displacing impact of the fourth industrial revolution, for an effective transition to sustainable economic practices. The linkage between social protection and environmental and green transition initiatives is still nascent, although this is an area where UNDP is well placed to contribute.

5.2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

UNDP should leverage its comparative advantage to identify its niche in supporting social protection. UNDP should prioritize support to social protection systems, while making greater efforts to explore the convergence between social protection and programmes in other areas such as governance, inclusive growth, economic empowerment, health, resilience and environment.

There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of addressing social protection gaps since the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic challenges. This is an opportunity for UNDP to build on its multisectoral approach and strategically contribute to social protection systems and tools. UNDP should prioritize longer-term engagement in select areas through well-tested social protection solutions. For example, UNDP may have a niche in supporting the governance of social protection systems including supporting reforms; development of policies and strategies; and institutional capacity strengthening including coordination mechanisms for social protection programming.

UNDP should improve synergies among the programme areas at the regional and country levels to identify potential entry points that can enable longer-term and sustainable social protection signature solutions. UNDP programmes in the areas of governance, inclusive growth, economic empowerment, environment, health and resilience need to be leveraged for enabling a holistic and interlinked approach that can effectively address social protection needs and priorities. UNDP should also consider the linkage between social protection and structural transformation including digitalization, energy and green transition.

UNDP engagement with the Global Fund and its experience in supporting governments to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic should be leveraged to improve national health care systems. Similarly, its engagement with the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund should be leveraged to link environmental initiatives with social protection schemes.

Recommendation 2:

UNDP should detail its programmatic approach for social protection and provide practical guidance for strategic positioning in different country contexts. UNDP country offices should select and focus on a limited number of high-payoff solutions from the range of areas covered in the social protection offer, based on careful analysis of the specific context. UNDP should strengthen its social protection support to low-income and least developed countries.

UNDP should translate the global offer into clearly defined programmatic solutions. At the country level, UNDP should undertake careful analysis of gaps that a country office can realistically aim to address and select the solutions that are likely to attract government commitments, partnerships and resources. UNDP should capacitate country offices to specialize in their selected solutions and be in a position to facilitate development financing for social protection, particularly in low-income and least developed countries.

UNDP should clarify how it will address universal and targeted efforts as well as life cycle (seeking to address social protection over the life cycle) versus productive approaches to social protection (linking working-age adults into labour markets). While these strategies are not incompatible, they do require strategic direction and practical programme models.

Recommendation 3:

UNDP should strive to strengthen the nexus of social protection schemes with a green, just transition. In this regard, it should strengthen its support to active labour-market programmes, going beyond its supply-side, skills-development projects and making them relevant to current technological and environmental trends.

UNDP should advocate for future-looking and proactive social protection interventions and facilitate national policy dialogue, to promote better labour-market participation and thus improve social protection coverage and resilience to livelihood risks. This includes promoting the integration of skills development, including reskilling and upskilling vis-à-vis the trends in labour-market demands, into national social protection policies and programmes. The need is particularly prominent in the context of technological development and the potential to link interventions aiming at bridging the digital divide with more advanced skills development for vulnerable groups. This support is particularly relevant for a just transition out of crises, in the context of economic restructuring, increased energy costs and the need for enterprises to adapt to climate change. UNDP should seek cooperation with other actors, especially ILO, in such activities. Engagement with the private sector is important to ensure matching the skills-development efforts with actual market needs and improve employability.

UNDP should develop well-tested programme models to strengthen its active labour market support, with distinct approaches for crisis and normal development contexts.

Recommendation 4:

UNDP should strengthen the linkages between humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems at the country level, and better link short-term and long-term approaches in the context of an adaptive and shock-responsive approach to social protection.

The distinction between stable and humanitarian contexts is gradually disappearing, especially as climate-related shocks become more commonplace. For adaptive social protection, it is critical that UNDP actively engage in bridging humanitarian social assistance with institutionalized social safety net systems and measures. Within the UN system, UNDP should work with the humanitarian agencies to promote practices that seamlessly link humanitarian social assistance with longer-term labour-market solutions. In crisis contexts, UNDP should further support development programme models, such as the '3x6' approach for enabling more comprehensive options to link short-term social assistance with longer-term labour-market options. UNDP should support efforts to strengthen the linkage between humanitarian social assistance and national social protection systems at country level.

UNDP should strive to strengthen the nexus of social protection schemes and disaster risk management and further prioritize longer-term risk mitigation. This means a greater focus on anticipatory actions and forecast-based financing strategies. Insurance schemes for catastrophic events have the potential for transforming disaster risk management and financing and should be explored further. UNDP should also help countries to strike a better balance between targeted social protection approaches, such as social safety nets, and universal social protection approaches that enhance overall protection and resilience to life-cycle risks.

To develop effective shock-responsive social protection systems, in addition to strong social registries and good delivery systems, solid partnerships across national institutions from disaster management to finance and social protection are critical. UNDP should leverage its ability to convene across sectors to strengthen its support in this area.

Recommendation 5:

UNDP support to national identification systems highlights that the use of technology has the potential to streamline social safety net assistance at the country level. Building on its ongoing work, UNDP should strengthen further its support to digitalization for social protection while striving to bridge the digital divide.

UNDP should leverage the current work on digitalization of social protection mechanisms to strengthen and enhance the transparency and inclusiveness of delivery mechanisms. UNDP should scale its work on digital identification systems and processes, including data registries to streamline national social protection assistance.

Already marginalized groups are often more represented among those with limited access to digital services and modalities. In line with the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, UNDP should engage in and facilitate advocacy efforts to advance policy and programmes to alleviate the digital divide. Building on its support of digital platforms for trade and e-commerce, UNDP should strengthen income-generating opportunities for those at the risk of being left behind.

Recommendation 6:

Partnerships should be explored to allow a more holistic and integrated approach in supporting national social protection systems. UNDP should enable private sector engagement in the delivery of social protection services and in approaches for social protection financing.

UNDP should further strengthen its partnerships with the specialized agencies with related mandates and technical expertise on core topics of social protection, and with other development partners to provide more integrated support and avoid duplication and fragmented interventions. For example, the extensive UNDP portfolio on livelihoods, inclusive growth and the green economy could be further leveraged for labour-market support through expanded partnerships with ILO. Similarly, partnership with WHO is crucial for UNDP in its support to national health care systems.

UNDP should systematically facilitate private sector engagement in government-led social protection measures, particularly linking social protection and business development while paying attention to risks related to inclusion and concerns about leaving no one behind. It should enable private sector and government interface for reinforced complementarities in developing social safety net measures. Leveraging its presence in climate change and community-level support, UNDP should promote climate insurance models in collaboration with the private sector. It should also strive to enable private sector engagement in social protection financing. The Istanbul International Centre for Private Sector in Development should support country offices in developing programme models and tools for harnessing private sector engagement.

Recommendation 7:

UNDP should strengthen its contribution to gender-responsive social protection, particularly through its support to social care and informal sector workers.

Given the significant engagement of women in care activities and informal work, this is an area where UNDP should strive to enable change processes towards more gender-responsive social protection. UNDP should continue working on gender-sensitive data on vulnerability and access to social protection systems, informality in labour markets and the care economy. It should explore new avenues to improve access to social protection for women by identifying and addressing factors beyond employment and income that may affect the accessibility of care and social protection such as time and mobility.

Building on the human development and multidimensional poverty indices that UNDP publishes, the gender-response tracker and data on social protection, UNDP should support advocacy for gender-sensitive social protection mechanisms and processes engaging key stakeholders.

To enhance social protection outcomes, UNDP should strategically collaborate with UN agencies (ILO, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF, UN Women) and other agencies in these efforts.

5.3. Management response

Recommendation 1:

UNDP should leverage its comparative advantage to identify its niche in supporting social protection. UNDP should prioritize support to social protection systems, while making greater efforts to explore the convergence between social protection and programmes in other areas such as governance, inclusive growth, economic empowerment, health, resilience and environment.

Management response:

UNDP accepts recommendation 1 and recognizes the importance of exploring the convergence of social protection with other relevant practice areas, including leveraging its existing vertical fund portfolios. To advance this, UNDP is already investing in capacities and resources across three critical areas: integrated programming and policy; data; and knowledge. Capitalizing on its comparative advantage and in partnership with government, development partners, the private sector and civil society, UNDP will support countries in strengthening their social protection systems, making them shock-responsive, risk-informed, inclusive and gender-responsive.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1 Under the global programme “governance for people and planet,” carry out mapping of governance-related “leverage points” to support social protection systems (including data/governance indicators related to social protection).	Q4, 2023	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS)		
1.2 Develop the social action for environment and resilience framework to ensure the systematic integration of social protection elements in the vertical funds pipeline.	Q4, 2023	BPPS, regional bureaux		
1.3 Ensure that social protection dimensions are mainstreamed within the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature and its related action tracks and targets.	Q3, 2023	BPPS		

Recommendation 2:

UNDP should detail its programmatic approach for social protection and provide practical guidance for strategic positioning in different country contexts. UNDP country offices should select and focus on a limited number of high-payoff solutions from the range of areas covered in the social protection offer, based on careful analysis of the specific context. UNDP should strengthen its social protection support to low-income and least developed countries.

Management response:

UNDP accepts recommendation 2 and recognizes the need to unceasingly provide practical guidance to country offices in terms of strategic positioning across development contexts. As a trusted development partner, UNDP will continue to provide integrated services, working with United Nations country teams and supporting Governments in the formulation of strategies and initiatives to respond to complex development challenges, utilizing a range of global assets, and bespoke tools and services. UNDP is committed to extending support to countries in assessing and identifying the risks and vulnerabilities faced by their populations, enabling the development of risk-informed social protection solutions tailored to specific needs of each country. The UNDP social protection offer will continue to be deployed on a country-demand basis, but the resource allocation to its programmatic work will follow the formula as agreed with the Executive Board, prioritizing the most vulnerable first. When targeting the constraints of low-income and middle-income countries, including least developed countries, UNDP will continue to strengthen its work on social protection financing schemes, debt sustainability and policy design and implementation. Further, while recognizing that the social protection needs are greatest in low-income and least developed countries, where basic systems are often not in place, expansion of social protection coverage in middle-income countries is constrained due to fragile revenue sources that are acutely under pressure amid recovery and macrofiscal crisis. In these contexts, UNDP is committed to provide policy advisory and technical support as well as analytics to support reform of national social protection system towards a more inclusive system that prioritizes the vulnerable segments of the population, including through scoping sustainable financing options.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
2.1 Work with low-income and middle-income countries, in particular LDCs, to assess the opportunities and barriers for scaling up solidarity mechanisms and community-based mechanisms to complement existing public and private social protection coverage.	Q4, 2023	BPPS, Regional bureaux		
2.2 Scale up support to the least developed countries, in line with the Doha Programme of Action (2022-2031), to design, plan and implement inclusive, shock-responsive and fiscally sustainable social protection mechanisms and elevate the agenda of social protection.	Q4, 2024	BPPS, Crisis Bureau, Regional bureaux		

Recommendation 3:

UNDP should strive to strengthen the nexus of social protection schemes with a green, just transition. In this regard, it should strengthen its support to active labour-market programmes, going beyond its supply-side, skills-development projects and making them relevant to current technological and environmental trends.

Management response:

UNDP fully accepts recommendation 3 and commits to strengthening the connection between social protection and green transition. This will be achieved by mitigating risks for vulnerable groups resulting from the green transition, establishing inclusive and gender-responsive social protection for climate-related shocks, and supporting individuals and households affected by environmental degradation and unsustainable production. To strengthen active labour-market policies, UNDP will support countries in expanding inclusive labour-market solutions while considering the emerging challenges and opportunities with digital transformation and the future of work.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
3.1 Utilize the Data Futures Platform to model the scenarios of the interlinkages between social protection and green transition and its impact.	Q4, 2024	BPPS		

◀ (cont'd)

3.2 Develop a framework for private sector engagement in skills development, including financing schemes, tools and guidance on priority areas such as digital, green and twenty-first century skills and the future of work (contributes also to recommendations 5 and 6).	Q4, 2024	BPPS		
3.3 Develop guidance for country offices to design active labour-market programmes that enable job creation and build a resilient workforce in the context of the green transition.	Q2, 2024	BPPS		
3.4 Support to programme countries in the development of a loss and damage assessment framework which adequately integrates social protection interventions to protect the most vulnerable to climate shocks	Q2, 2024	BPPS, Re-regional bureaux		

Recommendation 4:

UNDP should strengthen the linkages between humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems at the country level, and better link short-term and long-term approaches in the context of an adaptive and shock-responsive approach to social protection.

Management response:

UNDP accepts recommendation 4 and recognizes the need to strengthen the linkages between humanitarian assistance and national social protection systems with the aim to address poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, contributing to strengthening resilience. In crisis- and conflict-affected countries, adaptive social protection initiatives will be designed to target the most vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons, refugees and those affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
4.1 Develop guidance on integrating social protection within insurance schemes, focusing on small-scale producers and building on the ongoing work with the insurance industry.	Q2, 2024	BPPS		
4.2 Take stock of UNDP experience in social protection and inclusion of internally displaced persons and, in collaboration with relevant United Nations partners, develop policy guidance to inform programmatic interventions at country level.	Q4, 2023	BPPS, Crisis Bureau		

◀ (cont'd)

4.3 Roll-out of the guidance on livelihoods and economic recovery in crisis and post-crisis settings, including a module on social protection, through a series of regional and country trainings.	Q4, 2023	Crisis Bureau, BPPS, Regional bureaux		
4.4 Scale up support to small island developing States and coastal cities to implement social protection measures based on the multi-poverty vulnerability index to build socioeconomic resilience of the urban poor and marginalized.	Q4, 2023	Crisis Bureau, BPPS, Regional bureaux		

Recommendation 5:

UNDP support to national identification systems highlights that the use of technology has the potential to streamline social safety net assistance at the country level. Building on its ongoing work, UNDP should strengthen further its support to digitalization for social protection while striving to bridge the digital divide.

Management response:

UNDP fully accepts recommendation 5 and is committed to expanding the use of digitalization in the field of social protection. UNDP will continue to advocate for countries to use digitalization to build and maintain social registries, diversify digital payment systems, increase transparency, improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and employ digitalization and machine learning to develop predictive analytics for fraud detection in social insurance schemes and other social protection services and benefits. At the country level, UNDP will work with Governments in building digital platforms that enable citizens to access and benefit from social protection programmes, as well as facilitate dialogue and collaboration between Governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders to develop joint digital initiatives and projects. To this end, UNDP work on digital public infrastructure, such as digital identity platforms and payment systems, will serve as fundamental building blocks for digital innovations and services that benefit all.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
5.1 Utilize the UNDP digital fitness programme, the digital advocates network and the digital community of practice to better leverage digitalization in support of social protection initiatives, including a digital guide on social protection.	Q4, 2024	Chief Digital Office, BPPS		
5.2 Strengthen efforts to encourage interoperability between foundational registries (civil registration and national management) and social protection registries through inclusive digitalization processes.	Q4, 2023	BPPS, Regional bureaux		

<p>5.3 Develop a framework for private sector engagement in skills development, including tools and guidance on growth and priority areas such as digital skills, green skills, twenty-first century skills, and future of work as well as the financing interventions in such areas (contributes also to recommendations 2 and 6).</p>	<p>Q4, 2024</p>	<p>BPPS</p>		
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Recommendation 6:

Partnerships should be explored to allow a more holistic and integrated approach in supporting national social protection systems. UNDP should enable private sector engagement in the delivery of social protection services and in approaches for social protection financing.

Management response:

UNDP fully accepts recommendation 6 and is committed to leverage existing partnerships and pursuing new ones, particularly with the private sector, to allow for a more holistic and integrated approach to supporting national social protection systems. UNDP prioritizes partnerships as a means to enhancing social protection systems and expanding coverage of social services to the population. UNDP will continue to work closely with government entities in respective countries and is committed to developing partnerships with United Nations agencies and other international institutions, particularly in the context of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

UNDP agrees on the need to prioritize further private sector engagement in the delivery of social protection services, job creation, skills development and financing social protection. This should also envisage greater engagement in the design and delivery of job creation and skills-development initiatives. By working with key public and private sector entities, UNDP will strengthen the responsiveness and inclusiveness of national skills systems, empower small and medium enterprise to gain the necessary skills for an inclusive digital transformation, and help reduce inequalities, exclusion and marginalization of the disadvantaged as a result of the changing nature of the work. UNDP will also continue to place a strong emphasis on supporting and bringing private sector financing for community-based action.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
<p>6.1 Leverage partnerships for the roll-out and implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition to enhance national social protection systems.</p>	<p>Q4, 2024</p>	<p>BPPS</p>		
<p>6.2 Develop new financial instruments on biodiversity credits, including the piloting of Tiger Recovery Bond, to direct financing towards community livelihoods and well-being.</p>	<p>Q4, 2024</p>	<p>BPPS</p>		

Recommendation 7:

UNDP should strengthen its contribution to gender-responsive social protection, particularly through its support to social care and informal sector workers.

Management response:

UNDP fully accepts recommendation 7 and is committed to advancing gender equality through the development of gender-responsive national and subnational social protection strategies and programmes as well as addressing institutional gender norms that adversely affect service delivery. In addition to building resilience, UNDP will continue to focus on addressing the root causes of gender-related constraints (e.g., women's overrepresentation in informal employment) and in supporting the development of well-functioning care systems that recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. Related to environmental sustainability, UNDP will continue to focus on women's economic security and empowerment to mitigate risks that ensue from the green transition, as well as in addressing gender-related vulnerabilities due to climate shocks.

Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
7.1 Create a global learning lab on gender-equal economies to elevate institutional capacities to design and implement programmes that integrate the gender-equal economies agenda with the expansion of care systems and social protection.	Q4, 2023	BPPS		
7.2 Develop the equanomics global flagship to scale up existing good practices and models and to strengthen evidence-based policymaking.	Q4, 2023	BPPS		

ANNEXES

Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the IEO at: <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/22268>

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

Annex 2. Evaluation Matrix

Annex 3. Process for identifying UNDP's Social Protection portfolio

Annex 4. Categorization of social protection programmes and UNDP support

Annex 5. Sampling Criteria

Annex 6. Case Study tool

Annex 7. Regional analysis template

Annex 8. Meta-synthesis methodology

Annex 9. Literature reviewed



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