Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

Statistical Note on Social protection¹

(Updated draft, as of 7 February 2014)

1. Main policy issues, potential goals and targets

The Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”², stresses ‘the need to provide social protection to all members of society, fostering growth, resilience, social justice and cohesion’ and strongly encourage ‘national and local initiatives aimed at providing social protection floors for all citizens’.

Social protection also emerged as a core priority in various forums on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, both at national and international levels. Many forums focused on the need for better social protection, especially where economic and social insecurity is high and there are high levels of extreme poverty.

The report of the High Level Panel of the Post 2015 Development Agenda (HLP)³ argues that improved social protection mechanisms are indispensable means to eradicate poverty and establish a virtuous circle of inclusive economic growth leaving “no one behind”. The report proposes a target on improved social protection coverage⁴ as part of the poverty goal. The ILO Governing Body also supports a goal on social protection as one of four strategic pillars of the decent work agenda.

In the OWG sessions, linkages between social protection and food security were discussed and some countries proposed to include the implementation of social protection floor⁵ as component of a possible sustainable development goal on full and productive employment and decent work.

2. Conceptual and methodological tools

The following publications and documents provide the conceptual basis for social protection indicators:

- ILO. World Social Security Report 2010/11, providing coverage in times of crisis and beyond, “Chapter 1 Definitions, standards and concepts”⁶

- ILO. Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization. ⁷

- ILO. Resolution concerning the development of social security statistics, adopted by the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, April-May 1957.⁸

¹ The following countries and organizations contributed to the drafting and review of this statistical note: Australia, UK, ECE, EU, OECD and ILO.


⁴ Social protection coverage: defined as social protection being available to those who need it, not necessarily an increase in transfer recipients.

⁵ Progress in introducing, expanding and improving social protection floors could be measured by looking at progress in different components of the core package identified in the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, (No. 202) adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2012.


3. Existing and new indicators

Social protection had been omitted from the MDG targets and indicators. However, the widely-endorsed social protection floor approach provides a coherent and consistent policy tool which addresses multidimensional vulnerabilities in an integrated and inter-connected way. It is one of the foundations for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, as it can simultaneously address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

At global level, the core set of indicators to measure and monitor progress in the implementation of social protection floors, could include:

- Percentage of the population (including, if possible, information on coverage of migrants) with access to adequate and predictable social protection when they need it during their whole lifecycle, considering children, people in active age, pregnant women, older persons, and persons with disabilities;

- Percentage of the population protected against the financial costs of ill-health (e.g. through social health insurance or other mechanisms).

In addition to these core indicators, there should also be a dashboard of indicators that can be selected as appropriate for different countries. Some examples could include:

- percentage of older people receiving pension;

- percentage of families with children protected against the financial costs of ill-health (e.g. through social health insurance or other mechanisms);

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13 [http://www.who.int/entity/nha/docs/English_PG.pdf](http://www.who.int/entity/nha/docs/English_PG.pdf)


15 The indicators listed are examples of measures that could be considered. Additional research would be needed to better understand their applicability in different countries’ context. For instance, measuring the number of benefit recipients shows that it is not straightforward to determine shares of people “having access” to one or the other benefit – and this problem will be more serious in developing countries.
- percentage of people with disabilities receiving disability benefits;
- percentage of people without employment receiving support;
- percentage of poor receiving adequate support;
- percentage of the food insecure population assisted through formal social protection programmes.

Each of these indicators should be disaggregated by sex, and could also be further disaggregated as far as possible by income, ethnicity and other criteria to track the inclusion of different groups.

For monitoring the progress made at the national level in achieving the objective of improved social security coverage, ten statistical indicators and three legal framework indicators have been selected and introduced in *Decent Work Indicators: Guidelines for Producers and Users of Statistical and Legal Framework Indicators ILO Manual*, second version.\(^{16}\)

### 4. Data requirements, challenges and limitations

Data related to social protection are collected and disseminated by a number of organisations, including:

ILO’s Social Security Inquiry Database\(^{17}\) offers statistical information on social security programmes (financing, expenditure, benefit levels and coverage). This database provides an overview of the situation of social security systems worldwide as well as a detailed description of the mechanisms on the basis of how various programmes operate. The database covers 124 countries from all regions and sub-regions of the world, and it is updated regularly. Data are compiled by the ILO in cooperation with the International Social Security Association (ISSA), OECD, EUROSTAT, ADB, and other international organizations, with some collected directly from national agencies administering social protection programmes.

World Bank’s ASPIRE database\(^{18}\) consolidates comprehensive and harmonized data on Social Protection and Labor (SPL) programs and systems from 56 countries. It covers comparable performance indicators of social assistance, social insurance and labor market programs obtained from different data sources (e.g. administrative data, surveys).

Both the Eurostat database on social protection\(^{19}\) and the OECD database on social protection\(^{20}\) contain substantive information on social protection for their member countries. Eurostat jointly with representative of its Member States developed in the late 70’s the European System of integrated Social PROtection Statistics (ESSPROS)\(^{21}\). Under the ESSPROS System, the data on gross social benefits, the number of pension beneficiaries and the net benefit module is being collected. The ESSPROS framework enables a fully coherent comparison of social protection

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system in Europe - 28 Member States plus Switzerland, Island, Norway and Serbia. The ESSPROS data are made available to OECD and ILO and the EU data are used in a broader international context. OECD’s social protection databases not only cover social protection spending and beneficiaries, but also social benefit eligibility and amounts for both working-age and retirement-age populations.22

The Asian Development Bank Social Protection Index database contains annual data on social protection expenditures for Social Assistance (SA), Social Insurance (SI), and Labor Market Programs (LMP), and their respective number of beneficiaries for ADB member countries. It also contains the basic economic and social statistics of countries relevant to Social Protection (SP) Index calculation like GDP, population, labor force, and poverty indicators. The graphical presentation of the derived SPI in terms of SA, SI and LMP; breadth and depth; and poor and non-poor can also be viewed in this database.23

As social protection data compiled by various organizations are not standardized, the ILO and the World Bank have worked together at the Social Protection Interagency Coordination Board (SPIAC-B) to promote harmonization of (i) concepts, definitions and classifications, (ii) agencies' data collection mechanisms, and (iii) in-country capacity building for data collection and management.

5. Conclusions

The extension of basic social protection guarantees remains a major development challenge in many countries for the coming years. It is indispensable because it (i) contributes to building resilience against shocks and prolonged crises that threaten to undermine the progress made under the MDGs and to send the most vulnerable deeper into poverty, (ii) supports productivity growth by raising standards of health and education and (ii) immediate relief of poverty and food insecurity.

Progress can be tracked in a majority of countries, with a feasible expansion of data collection on social protection at the national and global level. Ideally, further support for statistical capacity building would help to strengthen assessment of the coverage and impact of systems.

The social protection indicators are intended to support monitoring progress towards the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all and poverty eradication in a given economy and should ideally be analyzed together in a holistic manner.

23 http://spi.adb.org/spidmz/index.jsp