



## Social protection in post-2015

# Post-2015: Social Protection for All

## Conference Background Note (April 2015)

### Social Protection is a human right for all

The overall starting point for the Belgian position is the **rights-based approach** to Social Protection. This rights-based approach is recognized by several Conventions, authoritative documents and statements. The right to social security is recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the universally accepted – by governments and representatives of employers and workers – Recommendation 202 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international and regional legal instruments. In the recent past, the EU has also taken a clear position in favour of a rights-based social protection framework.

We support the strategy of the ILO on social protection. The rights-based approach is indeed the basis for the ILO approach on the extension of social protection, the minimum standards of social security and Recommendation 202 concerning national floors of social protection. Ever since the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944 the ILO has the **mandate** to help establish universal social protection coverage. Despite the extensive historical framework on social

protection it was however not included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As things stand, we have built a comprehensive intellectual framework for social protection, but it seems rather difficult to turn this framework into concrete action.

We welcome the work of the ILO and the World Bank Group, as co-chairs of the Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), to assure that social protection will be an integral part of the post-2015 agenda.

### Tackling inequalities and poverty and a truly sustainable and inclusive economy beyond 2015

Social protection works as a **social safety net** ensuring, and providing protection against risks **during the whole life-cycle** (i.e. sickness, unemployment, ageing, children, invalidity,...). Ideally the social protection system consists of a social protection floor available for everyone, combined with more specific systems and programs that give a more extensive coverage and encompass different situations in the best possible way. This way social protection can, for example, play an important role in raising **resilience** of populations, especially poor and

vulnerable ones. In times of economic crisis or in the event of a natural disaster, social protection can reduce the economic and social costs and alleviate the risk of pushing millions of people into **poverty**.

**Redistribution of income** is an effective measure to reduce income disparities and stabilize the revenues and lives of low earners. Redistribution through social security systems is in particular a good way to reach the most vulnerable and helps **tackling inequalities** in a direct way. At least as important as redistributive effects are the effects of social protection on economic growth. An efficient social protection system can stimulate the emergence of a virtuous circle that leads to **stable, inclusive and resilient economic growth** through its effects on human capital (health, education, activation,...) and purchasing power and its role as a macro-economic stabilizer. Social protection creates stronger, fairer and more cohesive societies, which in turn are the foundations for long term **peace and prosperity**.

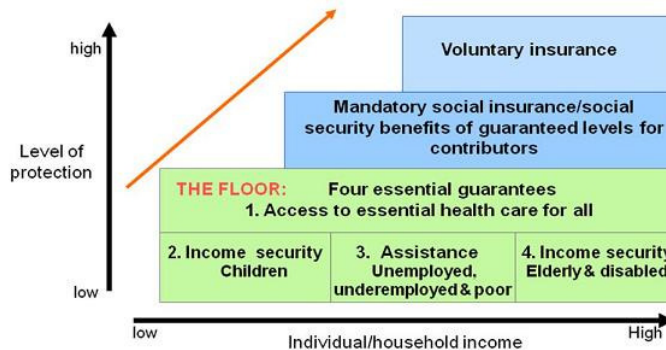
By its very nature and the different roles it fulfils social protection is thus linked to different MDGs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed for the post-2015 agenda by the Open Working Group on SDGs. Social protection has already **proven results** in many different countries as a prerequisite to tackle poverty and inequalities. Practice also shows its vital role in establishing more equal opportunities, education, essential healthcare, establishing sustainable and inclusive growth, good governance, gender equality, stability and conflict prevention and even humanitarian aid.

### The social protection staircase: the floor and more comprehensive social protection

To be effective and efficient any social protection system needs to be **tailor-made** as the circumstances and development level differ throughout the world. This need for flexibility has been present since the first ILO policies on social protection. The Recommendation 202 (R202), adopted in 2012, has completed the ILO policy on social protection. According to R202 the first priority should be the rapid implementation of

**national social protection floors** (horizontal dimension). These floors are nationally defined minimum levels of **income security** in the form of social transfers (for children and older persons and in case of illness, unemployment, maternity or disability) that ensure basic income as well as universal, **affordable access to essential social services** (health care). In the next phase or in already more developed countries, efforts should be made to attain and safeguard **higher levels of protection** (vertical dimension). Hereto countries can use the social security minimum standards (Convention No. 102) that define minimum levels of benefits, population coverage levels and validity periods for the nine traditional branches of social security: access to medical care, sickness, unemployment, old age, survivors' benefits, accidents at work, family benefits, maternity allowance and invalidity.

Both dimensions (horizontal and vertical) thus play an important role and allow sufficient flexibility to ensure relevance for all countries. Combined, the goal of extension of the floor to the whole population and the goal to strengthen the level of protection to those in need form the **social protection staircase**. Belgium strongly supports this approach as it enables **progressive realization of horizontal and vertical extension of coverage and levels of protection towards universal and comprehensive social protection systems**.



### Social protection for all is affordable and sustainable

The **“cost”** of a **global social protection floor** for all is estimated at around **2 % of global GDP**. In developing countries the cost to ensuring basic income security and essential healthcare is

estimated between 1 and 6 % of the national GDP. Many examples in developing countries have proven the affordability of social protection systems. In the majority of countries it solely depends upon **political will** to create the necessary fiscal space to invest in social protection. The key to ensure the sustainability of social protection systems is that it should be financed by **domestic resources**. As in many developing countries there is a large informal sector, this will need gradual efforts to **formalize the informal sector** and improve the efficiency of the tax system. In addition any social protection system should regularly be **evaluated** towards its efficacy and efficiency as demographic and other evolutions might change the circumstances and needs. When society pays for solidarity, it is in all of our interest that this is organized in the **most effective and efficient way** possible. For the least developed countries international aid and support would obviously be necessary to establish social protection systems.

Let us remember, however, that, beyond the financial aspect, an effective, efficient and sustainable social protection system is foremost an **investment in current and future generations**.

## The place of social protection for all in the post 2015 agenda

**Social protection is included** in the report of the Open Working Group on SDGs. Although it is not included on the level of the goals themselves it has received broad attention. We welcome the fact that with **Target 1.3** (*Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable*) social protection has received a specific target. However, the above-mentioned report also insists on other important aspects related to social protection:

- Essential **health** care, part of the concept of social protection, under Goal 3
- Social protection is mentioned in Target 5.4 under the **gender equality** goal
- Social protection is part of the **Decent Work** agenda included under Goal 8
- Social protection is also mentioned as a means to achieve **greater equality** in Target 10.4

The priority is now to make sure that social protection is an integral part of the framework to be adopted in September 2015. We want to keep stressing its universal and multidimensional role. We underline the need to further reflect on how to measure and achieve progress on social protection for all through the post-2015 agenda.

It is vital that a good **indicator** is taken up for social protection under **Target 1.3**. For us it should focus on universal coverage but we have full confidence in the work of the experts thereon. If the necessary support is given, the precious work of the ILO and World Bank, in collaboration with other UN actors and international organizations, will bear fruit.

Currently only 27 % of the world can benefit from comprehensive social protection. We believe the post-2015 agenda is key to address this. To succeed we believe in the productive power of **stronger collaboration** within and between countries, with civil society and social partners and between international organizations.

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