

FfD4 2nd PrepCom Side event on

How to design, deliver and finance gender-responsive social protection systems?

6th December 2024

1.15 - 2.30 pm Duration 1 h 15 min

New York (ILO office in New York)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) are pleased to convene a side-event offering actionable recommendations for FfD4 on how to design, deliver and finance gender-responsive social protection systems. The side event will highlight the centrality of gender-responsive social protection to address gender-specific risks and barriers that hinder women's full participation in economic and social life.

Invited high-level experts will share insights on how to harness the FfD4 process to make gender responsive social protection systems a reality for all women, by recognizing and addressing the challenges they face.

The discussion on gender-responsive social protection systems builds on the recently launched ILO paper *"Making social protection work for gender equality: What does it look like? How do we get there?"* and UN WOMEN's flagship report *"World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2024: Harnessing social protection for gender equality, resilience and transformation"*.

Background

Social protection policies are indispensable for enhancing gender equality and realizing women's rights. Yet in practice, many existing social protection systems have insufficiently addressed the gender-specific risks and structural constraints that women face across the life cycle, such as limited access to employment opportunities, occupational segregation, unpaid caregiving responsibilities and health vulnerabilities, thereby falling short of their potential to promote gender equality. The neglect of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities often worsens during emergencies as recent assessments of social protection responses to COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have shown. Addressing these gaps and biases requires a comprehensive, gender-responsive approach to designing, delivering, and financing social protection systems.

The added value of the ILO's 2024 paper is in providing a comprehensive perspective on how to enhance the gender-responsiveness of social protection policies and systems, anchored in international social security standards and guided by human-centred design and a life-cycle approach to system-building. Its key starting point is to underline that *all* life cycle benefits are relevant to gender equality and not only those relating to maternity or parenthood. However, in practice, the recognition of gender-specific risks seems to be heavily tilted towards maternity

while other life cycle risks, such as poverty in old age, unemployment or employment injury, are insufficiently addressed. To advance gender equality, both the design and delivery of social protection need to be cognizant of the full range of life-cycle risks and wide-ranging structural impediments that women face, permeating through families, economies and societies.

Drawing on diverse country experiences, the paper demonstrates promising policy action for making social protection policies and strategies more gender-responsive and transformative. Social protection can provide women—across *diverse* economic and employment situations, life-cycle stages, family types and other sociodemographic characteristics—the protection they need against poverty and a foundation for a decent standard of living, contributing to enhanced capabilities, agency and full participation in economic and social life. Realizing this potential is contingent on creating powerful synergies between social protection and labour protection, between transfers and services, and between social protection and other policies, especially care, formalization and fiscal policies.

UN Women's 2024 [World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 'Harnessing social protection for gender equality, resilience and transformation'](#) argues in an increasingly unstable world, robust, gender-responsive social protection systems could play a key role in protecting women and girls against poverty during times of crisis and strengthen their ability to cope with critical life course events. Joined up with gender-responsive employment policies and access to public services like education, health, child- and long-term care, social protection can provide women with sustainable pathways out of poverty and help transform societies towards sustainability, equality and social justice. Centering the dignity, agency and empowerment of women and girls at every stage – from policy and program design to delivery and implementation – is critical to harnessing the transformative potential of social protection.

Prepared with the contributions from almost 100 experts from academia, civil society and the UN system, the report shows that all countries – no matter their level of economic development or maturity of their social protection systems – can take steps to close gender gaps in routine social protection systems, policies and programmes, including by extending social protection to women in informal employment and better recognizing unpaid care responsibilities across the life course; to ensure social protection responses to conflict and crises address women's rights and needs, including through greater collaboration between social protection and humanitarian actors with women's organizations on the ground; to integrate social protection with employment and livelihoods support, access to care services and services for survivors of gender-based violence to maximize gender equality impacts; to advance towards rights-based, gender-responsive delivery systems that center the agency and dignity of women as both users and frontline providers of social protection; and to fill the financing gap for gender-responsive social protection and public services, through a combination of domestic and global resource mobilization efforts.

Indeed, financing is a crucial component of gender-responsive social protection, which must draw on both contributory (social insurance) and non-contributory (tax-financed) mechanisms to achieve broad and sustainable coverage. Social insurance, funded by contributions from employers and employees, plays a significant role in providing income security across employment types. However, social insurance alone often falls short of adequately covering informal, part-time, and vulnerable workers, among whom women are disproportionately



represented. Non-contributory, tax-financed social protection complements social insurance by offering universal benefits that ensure a minimum level of income security, health protection, and access to essential services. Together, these financing models provide a balanced, resilient foundation for gender-responsive social protection, ensuring that women can access benefits across different life stages and economic situations.

In addition, greater efforts are needed at the global level to ensure that that social spending is not crowded out by spiraling debt interest payments; resources for social protection are not decimated by tax evasion and avoidance; spending on social protection and other social services (health, education, care, etc.) is protected during IMF fiscal consolidation programmes; and more Official Development Assistance is channeled towards making social protection work for women and girls.

Participants

Opening remarks and moderation

- **Mia Seppo**, Assistant Director-General for Jobs and Social Protection (Opening remarks & moderation)

Presentation

- **Shahra Razavi, Silke Staab, Umberto Cattaneo & Loui Williams**, Joint presentation of ILO and UN Women reports (20 minutes).

Interactive panel

- **Marta Juanita Villaveces**, Vice-Minister of Finance, Colombia (7 minutes)
- **Michael Gort**, Ambassador and Deputy PR, Canada (7 minutes)
- **Jennifer Pribble**, Professor of Political Science and Global Studies (7 minutes)
- **Jamele Rigolini**, Senior Advisor for Social Protection and Jobs in the World Bank's Social Protection & Jobs Global Unit, WBG (7 minutes)
- **Lauren Whitehead**, UNICEF, Co-chair of the SPIAC-B gender working group (7 minutes)
- **Giulia Massobrio**, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) (7 minutes)