

Centre for Social Protection International Conference

Reimagining social protection in a time of global uncertainty

Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK

12–14 September 2023

CALL FOR PAPERS

In just two decades since the early 2000s, social protection established itself as a vibrant social policy sector in countries across the Global South, from Latin America to sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia. Social protection appeared in several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Even the poorest countries now have a National Social Protection Policy. More recently, social protection provided an invaluable set of instruments deployed by governments worldwide in national responses to COVID-19.

However, the global context today is very different to two decades ago, and is characterised by a range of emerging and intensifying uncertainties and challenges. Dimensions of uncertainty include: the war in Ukraine, its implications for global food and energy security and the associated cost of living crisis; post-COVID-19 recovery and efforts to get back on track towards achieving the SDG targets by 2030; the intensifying climate crisis and too slow transitions to green economies; and the increasing number and duration of protracted crises, acute conflicts, displacement, refugees, and economic migration.

Moreover, questions remain about the extent to which social protection is fully institutionalised and embedded, especially in low-income countries where the initial impetus and funding was provided by international development partners. This concern is reflected in persistent underfunding by governments in the Global South of social protection programmes: under-coverage, inadequate benefits, and few claims-based entitlements. What will remain when financial and technical assistance from development agencies is withdrawn?

Related to this, the rise of right-of-centre populist governments, economic shocks associated with COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, and austerity budgets in the Global North could all reduce official development assistance to the Global South, which in turn could affect spending on social protection.

All these uncertainties are relevant to how to think about social protection for the future: will social protection follow the 'high road' of further expansion and growth, or the 'low road' of stagnation and cutbacks? Importantly, they also present opportunities. A defining function of social protection is to protect vulnerable people against risks and shocks, and new technologies and common modalities and platforms are facilitating a convergence between social protection and humanitarian relief, as was amply demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the role of social protection in this shifting and uncertain global context? This conference will offer a forum for researchers and critical thinkers to discuss and debate the past, present and future of social protection policy and provision, especially but not only in the Global South.

We invite proposals on the following themes:

✚ ***Politics of social protection policy processes***

The contemporary wave of social protection has been criticised for failing to engage with broader social policy and development discourses, having been conceptualised, designed and financed in much of the Global South by development agencies with often contradictory ideological positions, and limited toolkits of preferred interventions. Now that social protection is on the agenda in most low- and middle-income countries, how do different groups of citizens make claims on the state? How is bargaining among different interests resolved? How to move forward towards nationally chosen and locally appropriate social protection systems within a holistic social policy framework?

✚ ***Social protection in acute and protracted crisis settings***

Protracted crisis settings are increasingly common, involving multiple compounding crises, such as conflict, displacement, climate shocks and stresses and institutional fragility. Questions of interest include: how do SP systems/providers cope with and adapt to sudden upheaval and highly uncertain and fluid settings? To what extent and in which ways does social protection strengthen livelihoods and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected settings? Also, what is the relationship between different providers and public authorities in delivering social protection (humanitarian, faith-based, donors, central and sub-national government)?

✚ ***Inclusive social protection***

Times of uncertainty and crisis can lead to new vulnerabilities or compound existing patterns of exclusion, such as disability and various dimensions of identity (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc). Inclusion of those most in need is fundamental. Yet a focus on expanding coverage towards Universal Social Protection should not be at the expense of adequate provision, programme effectiveness or respectful implementation. How can social protection be inclusive of and sensitive to persistent and newly emerging vulnerabilities? In a context of widening and deepening needs, how can interventions remain impactful and promote dignity?

✚ ***Programme and system innovation in contexts of uncertainty***

The rapid expansion of social protection has gone hand-in-hand with innovative practices in design, implementation and evaluation. From the use of mobile phones to pay cash transfers to employment of drones for geographical targeting, new technologies and digitisation have become integral to social protection. Beyond technology, novel ways of combining interventions and building cross-sectoral linkages aim to create more effective systems approaches, such as the development of single registries. What are the benefits and challenges of innovative practices? How can successes be harnessed, and which failures can we learn from, so they aren't repeated?

We invite academic and policy-oriented proposals for presentation of (i) full papers, (ii) poster or (iii) outputs using other formats (e.g. digital or arts-based), to be prepared ahead of the conference. Please specify the type of output in your proposal. Proposals must not exceed 500 words (one page). The conference will be conducted in English.

Submissions should be sent to CSPconference@ids.ac.uk. **DEADLINE: 15 January 2023**

This will be a face-to-face conference taking place over 2.5 days at IDS in Brighton, UK. It is hosted by the Centre for Social Protection. We acknowledge financial support from Irish Aid and UK Aid. There is no conference fee. Participants are responsible for their own travel and visa expenses and insurance. A limited number of bursaries are available to partially cover travel, accommodation, and visa costs. Please indicate whether your attendance is conditional on receiving a bursary.