

## News from our societies: ICSW: A decade of global activities on social protection floors

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In June 2022 the advocacy network called Global Coalition for social protection floors (GCSPF) marketed 10 years of its existence. Formed by a large group of civil society organizations and trade unions<sup>1</sup> to coordinate and promote NGOs global social protection efforts, the Coalition emerged as an advocacy and lobbying network in anticipation of then forthcoming discussions on social protection issues at the 101st General Conference of the International Labour Organization in June 2012. The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) played an active role in the creation of the GCSPF, promoting connections among participating non-governmental organizations and helping with definition of its role, functions and agenda-setting. Since its inception activities of this knowledge-based transnational Coalition have been closely linked to the concept of the Social Protection Floors as defined by the ILO in its Recommendation 202 adopted by the 101<sup>st</sup> General Conference of the ILO in June 2012.<sup>2</sup> (Its brief description is presented below.)

To take stock of the achievements of the past decade the core team of the GCSPF convened in June 2022 a three- day online review conference aimed at discussing lessons learned, as well as to chart new policy approaches for the immediate and longer term future. This meeting reiterated the key founding principles of the Coalition such as inclusivity, solidarity, non-discrimination, gender equality, openness and transparency, all aimed at fostering a supportive team environment to achieve the shared objectives.

As noted above, all advocacy, awareness-raising and monitoring activities of the Global Coalition are built around the concept of the Social Protection Floors as defined by the ILO in its Recommendation 202.<sup>3</sup> To understand the nature and scope of GCSPF activities better it might be important to recap the essence of the ILO Recommendation 202. Adopted unanimously by 101<sup>st</sup> General Conference of the International Labour Organization in June 2012, the Recommendation envisions access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting:

- (1) Essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality;
- (2) Basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
- (3) Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and
- (4) Basic income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for older persons.

Social protection floors as identified in the Recommendation are nationally defined *sets of basic social security guarantees* which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty,

vulnerability and social exclusion. Apart from the above core guarantees the Recommendation stipulates social security extension strategies for ILO members that:

- (a) prioritize the implementation of social protection floors as a starting point for countries that do not have a minimum level of social security guarantees, and as a fundamental element of their national social security systems; and
- (b) seek to provide higher levels of protection to as many people as possible, reflecting economic and fiscal capacities of Members, and as soon as possible.

As noted in the Recommendation, building and maintaining comprehensive and adequate social security systems should be coherent with national policy objectives and seek to coordinate social security policies with other public policies.

Despite the fact that the ILO recommendations belong to “soft instruments” and are not legally binding, they represent important normative documents. Together with other instruments such as ILO Conventions (legally binding after the ratification), these normative texts are commonly referred to as *international labour standards*. The aim of the recommendations is to help member States with further actions in the specific area. It thereby aims at ensuring that all members of society enjoy at least a basic level of social security throughout their lives. The Social Protection Floors Recommendation complements the existing Conventions and Recommendations. In particular, it assists member States in covering the unprotected, the poor and the most vulnerable, including workers in the informal economy and their families.<sup>4</sup>

Logically, the *vision* of the Global Coalition is promoting the implementation and financing of social protection floors and the extension of social protection to all. Its *mission* is seen in working strategically, collaboratively and in a spirit of global solidarity, to provide a space and virtual platform for coalition members united by the common purpose of promoting the establishment and extension of social protection floors and systems. The members of the Coalition see social protection floors as a key tool to achieve universal provision of economic and social security through basic guarantees on income and essential social services throughout the life course. Given that the Recommendation 202 provides guidance to member States in building comprehensive social security systems and extending social security coverage by prioritizing the establishment of national floors of social protection accessible to *all in need*, the Coalition activities are closely aligned to the Recommendation narrative.

The described review and assessment meeting of June 2022 reiterated the key goals of the GCSPF set up at its inception, with minor later revisions and additions. The main *goals* are set as strategic influencing of various intergovernmental organs, first of all United Nations and its Specialized Agencies regarding agenda items deemed vital for the Coalition members. The critical mass in effective advocacy is achieved through collective action, and working together on shared priorities, particularly advocating for social protection floors. Member States and civil society organizations working within the remit of these organs are encouraged to debate and act positively on human rights-based social protection floors and social protection systems, outlining their benefits in the context of poverty eradication and development in general. They are also expected to coordinate initiatives and activities in this regard at all levels, national, regional and international; foster the formation of and cooperation between inclusive national and regional coalitions, strengthening collaboration between various stakeholders, and to raise the visibility of research by civil society organizations promoting inclusive, rights-based social protection floors and social protection systems to inform national and global policy discussions.<sup>5</sup>

Embedding its activities in sound, up-to-date analytical information and insights, the Coalition continuously advocates for civil society involvement in policy discussions on social protection

systems, including floors, at various intergovernmental fora, both at the United Nations and its Specialised Agencies. GCSPF members prepare statements, policy-briefs and regularly convene side-events (in the form of analytical seminars) during the annual sessions of the United Nations Commission for Social Development and Commission on the Status of Women, typically aligning these events to the priority themes discussed by the Commissions. Another organs where the Coalition representatives regularly participates in discussions and lobbying are Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development Follow- Up and High-Level Political Forum convened annually under the auspices of ECOSOC. International Labour Organization, with some important activities that it organises represents another vital policy platform where civil society participants associated with the Coalition can deliver statements, submit advocacy videos or launch various pertinent publications.

The Covid-19 pandemic could not but have a profound impact on the activities of the Coalition. This global calamity has created new obstacles as well as unprecedented demand for social protection assistance, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged population segments in the face of inability of many developing countries to meet the needs of the affected population groups. In this light the Coalition strongly supported at the 47<sup>th</sup> regular session of the Human Rights Council the initiative of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on establishing “The Global Fund for Social Protection: International Solidarity in the Service of Poverty Eradication”. The establishment of a solidarity-based *Global Fund* is seen as a required multilateral initiative aimed at making social protection floors available to all people and urgently needed to respond to global insecurity, poverty and loss of livelihoods. On September 2020 over 200 civil society organizations called for Global Fund for Social Protection while the launching event of the call for such Global Fund was held at the global e-conference “Turning the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity: What’s next for social protection?” took place from 5 to 9 October 2020. The efforts aimed at creation such a Global Fund have already become one of the priorities in the work of the Coalition.<sup>6</sup>

*Universality* in the provision of social protection has been and remains one of the most important goals of the GCSPF. It is seen in light of the need to provide social protection to all members of society, fostering social justice, integration, cohesion and resilience. Its validity has been reiterated by the June 2022 meeting. It is noted that the objective of universal, human rights-based, social protection is embedded in numerous international laws and agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the ILO Convention 102 on Social Security, as well as the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202. The UN Sustainable Development Goals affirm States’ commitment to social protection floors. Extending social protection is also a declared objective of the Global Partnership on Universal Social Protection, bringing together the World Bank, ILO, OECD, African Union, IADB and numerous other stakeholders.

Using opportunities provided by the annual sessions of the ECOSOC functional commissions such as the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women, the Global Coalition strives to draw attention to the unique capacity of social protection to reduce insecurity and deprivation across the world. The most important role played by social protection in eradicating poverty and achieving various sustainable development goals has been recognized by the international community in the key normative documents. Social protection is referred to in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a fundamental element contributing to better outcomes in the areas of health, gender, decent work, inclusive growth, and inequality reduction.

This recognition has significant political importance for setting far-reaching goals of the Coalition and launching new political initiatives at the intergovernmental fora. One of the above was a call made at the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development for elaboration and adoption of a dedicated ECOSOC resolution on social protection systems, including floors as a

necessary political step towards universal and comprehensive social protection for all. This statement was closely aligned with respective ICSW statements made during several earlier sessions of the Commission, reflecting the support of the Global Coalition provided to the ICSW initiative. These important political steps in social policy area may require, however, further collaborative efforts of the civil society organization with other stakeholders to bring such initiatives for fruition.

During the past decade the GCSPF has grown in size and increased its portfolio. Its advocacy campaigns have become better focused and consistently implemented. In its statements and supporting analytical documents the Coalition underscores not only the importance of providing the basic social security guarantees, but also a need for Member states to consider different approaches with a view to implementing the most effective and efficient combination of benefits and schemes tailored to national circumstances and progressively realized in the national context.

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## Notes

1. As of now there more than 100 GCSPF members. The regional distribution of the membership is as follows: 25 are from Africa, 23 from Asia, 28 from Europe, 7 from Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 19 from North America and 5 from Latin America, along with 11 that have a regional or global focus. <https://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/about/members-of-the-global-coalition/> While the Coalition does not have a permanent Secretariat, the administrative coordination of the Global Coalition has been provided by Instituto del Tercer Mundo (Third World Institute, ITeM) based in Montevideo, Uruguay, with the financial support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) of Germany.
2. [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:3065524](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3065524)
3. [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:3065524](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3065524)
4. <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/introduction-to-international-labour-standards/conventions-and-recommendations/lang-en/index.htm>
5. <https://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/about/terms-of-reference/>
6. <https://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/civil-society-call/>