

Recurrent Discussion Committee: Social security

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► Office explanation on universal social protection

1. The term **universal social protection** is firmly grounded in the international rights framework: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102), and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202). **Universal social protection refers to actions and measures to progressively build and maintain nationally appropriate social protection systems that are comprehensive, sustainably financed and provide adequate protection over the life cycle.**
2. In line with human rights instruments and international social security standards, in particular Recommendation No. 202, universal social protection encompasses the following aspects:
 - a. **Universal coverage in terms of persons protected:** According to ILO Recommendation No. 202, nationally defined social protection floors should be established as a priority to guarantee at least a basic level of social security for everyone throughout his or her life course, ensuring that all in need can effectively have access to social protection. Universal social protection however does not stop at a basic level of protection. Recommendation No. 202 also sets out that countries should progressively ensure higher levels of social security for as many people as possible and as soon as possible. Social protection systems should respect and promote the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and responsiveness to special needs; social inclusion (including those persons in the informal economy); and respect for people's rights and dignity.
 - b. **Comprehensive protection in terms of risk covered:** Universal social protection also requires comprehensive protection in case of a broad set of social risks and contingencies. Such comprehensive protection should encompass in particular the core areas of social protection systems, including sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, old-age benefits, employment injury benefits, child or family benefits, maternity benefits, invalidity/disability benefits and survivor benefits, which are reflected in Convention No. 102 and in SDG target 1.3. In addition, Convention No. 102 also includes access to medical care, which is reflected in SDG target 3.8 on universal health coverage.
 - c. **Adequacy of the protection provided:** Universal social protection needs to be adequate to achieve the expected policy outcomes in line with ILO standards. For social protection floors, the basic social security guarantees should prevent or at least alleviate poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion, and allow life in dignity. For the higher levels of protection, adequacy is measured by reference to the wage levels at the country level, based on the provisions of C102 and the other up to date standards.

3. Universal social protection is provided through national social protection systems that need to be **sustainable** and **equitable**. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to achieve universal social protection. Recommendation No. 202 calls on countries to progressively build national social protection systems, coherent with national policy objectives. Protection can be provided through a range of means, methods, and approaches, and needs to be adapted to national circumstances, in line with ILO social security standards.
4. Universal social protection has a key role to play in achieving the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, and is reflected in particular in SDG target 1.3 on “social protection systems and measures for all, including floors”, as well as SDG target 3.8 on universal health coverage.
5. Similar to the Global Partnership on Universal Health Coverage (UHC2030), the *Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030)* represents a multi-stakeholder initiative to support the implementation of SDG 1.3.¹ Founded in 2016 and co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank, USP2030 calls on all countries to live up to their commitment to develop nationally owned social protection systems for all, including floors, by undertaking the following five actions, to support the global commitment to universal social protection:
 - a. ACTION 1. *Protection throughout life cycle*: Establish universal social protection systems, including floors, that provide adequate protection throughout the life cycle, combining social insurance, social assistance and other means, anchored in national strategies and legislation.
 - b. ACTION 2. *Universal coverage*: Provide universal access to social protection and ensure that social protection systems are rights-based, gender-sensitive and inclusive, leaving no one behind.
 - c. ACTION 3. *National ownership*: Develop social protection strategies and policies based on national priorities and circumstances in close cooperation with all relevant actors.
 - d. ACTION 4. *Sustainable and equitable financing*: Ensure the sustainability and fairness of social protection systems by prioritizing reliable and equitable forms of domestic financing, complemented by international cooperation and support where necessary.
 - e. ACTION 5. *Participation and social dialogue*: Strengthen governance of social protection systems through institutional leadership, multi-sector coordination and the participation of social partners and other relevant and representative organizations, to generate broad-based support and promote the effectiveness of services.
6. For further information, please refer to the ILO brief *Universal social protection: Key concepts and international framework*, 2019.

¹ USP2030 currently has 47 member countries and organisations.