



A Safety Net Against Poverty

Disability-Inclusive Social Protection

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Summary

- ▶ Social protection systems are fundamental in reducing and preventing poverty. External shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the importance of these systems.
- ▶ Persons with disabilities face greater exposure to risks and vulnerabilities throughout the life cycle which can be addressed by social protection systems.
- ▶ Social protection systems and policies must consider disability-specific requirements, as well as the additional costs of living for persons with disabilities.
- ▶ The perspective towards disability in social protection systems should move away from a model based on the inability to work, and towards a human rights-based model as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

A) Social Protection in a Nutshell

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), social protection “is a human right which responds to the universal need for protection against certain life risks and social needs.”¹

Social protection usually refers to a variety of programmes and policies designed to guarantee basic income security and adequate standards of living across the life cycle, as well as access to essential social services such as healthcare and education in the face of socio-economic hardship, these policies address vulnerability and reduce and prevent poverty. Social protection also supports sustainable development by ensuring people can invest their energy on full and meaningful participation in society.

Social protection schemes can be contributory or non-contributory, targeted or universal. Social protection can be provided either in kind or in cash. They can address risks and needs across many topics, including child unemployment, or maternity benefits. Social protection can be provided either in-kind or in-cash.

A key element of social protection is to decide who is eligible for what form of support. This can be achieved in many ways, such as through income thresholds, or social assessments.

The common thread for effective social protection programmes is their contribution to the objective of guaranteeing income security and health protection.

B) Persons with Disabilities and Social Protection

Persons with disabilities often face multiple barriers and discrimination. This puts them more at risk of poverty. It can also deprive persons with disabilities of basic services and opportunities, putting their livelihood at stake. Therefore, effective social protection is especially important for persons with disabilities.

Relevance of Social Protection

A lot of the issues addressed by social protection apply to both persons with and without disabilities, but the impact is usually far greater for persons with disabilities. In addition, some issues that should be addressed by social protection are very much disability-specific:

- ▶ **Labour Market Exclusion:** Persons with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from the labour market. Those who work often do so in the informal sector, making the achievement of a stable income much more challenging.²
- ▶ **Healthcare:** Healthcare, including rehabilitation, is more difficult to access for persons with disabilities because of discrimination, stigma, physical inaccessibility, or excessive cost.³

1 ILO (2021): International Labour Standards on Social Security.

<https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/social-security/lang--en/index.htm>.

2 UN DESA (2018): Disability and Development Report. <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>.

3 Evans, D., Hsu, J. & Boerma, T. (2013): Universal Health Coverage and Universal Access. Bulletin of the WHO, vol 91. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/91/8/13-125450.pdf>.

- ▶ **Added Cost of Disability:** Where a person without a disability would face a certain cost of living, a person with a disability would face the same cost, plus a series of costs incurred due to disability. This includes, for example, the cost of human support, costs due to inaccessibility of services; costs of assistive devices and medical supplies, or costs related to rehabilitation.⁴
- ▶ **Gender:** Due to intersectional discrimination, women with disabilities are more likely to be impacted by these issues than either men with disabilities or women without disabilities.⁵ Social protection programmes must take into account the multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination.
- ▶ **Humanitarian Conflict:** All the issues stated above are further exacerbated in vulnerable humanitarian situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

However, most of the time existing social protection tools do not adequately address these disability-specific needs and costs or are designed in such a way as to exclude persons with disabilities from their scope. Furthermore, many countries have no or minimalistic social protection systems, due to lack of investment at national level.

References in the policy framework

Internationally, reference to social protection can be found as early as 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also a key element in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights.⁷ In 2012, the ILO published its Recommendation No. 202 on Social Protection Floors. It calls for states to establish universal basic social protection guarantees that can ensure basic income security and access to basic goods and services. Once this basic floor of social protection is set up, it should serve as a foundation for more advanced social protection initiatives.⁸

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under Sustainable Development Goal 1, includes target 1.3: to implement “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.”⁹

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in its Article 28 creates an obligation for states to follow a twin-tracked approach to social protection (mainstream programmes available to persons with disabilities without discrimination, and disability-specific programmes including disability-specific measures).

Beyond Article 28, the CRPD embraces a broad understanding of social protection, considering its principles of non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, equal opportunities, accessibility, and equality between men and women.¹⁰

4 *ibid.*

5 Devandas Aguilar, C. (2017): Social Protection and Persons with Disabilities. *International Social Security Review*, vol. 70, no. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issr.12152>.

6 UN DESA (2018): *op. cit.*

7 UN General Assembly (1966): *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3.

8 ILO (2012): *Recommendation Concerning National Floors of Social Protection, R202* [Englisch]. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c77a49f7.html>.

9 UN General Assembly (2015): *Transforming our World – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>.

10 See particularly Art 28, Art 19 and Art 24-28 in UN (2006): *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf.

C) Our Work

Light for the World engages governments in our partner countries on this topic but has not been involved into setting up social protection systems as such. Additionally, a lot of our interventions in the field of disability-inclusive community development and economic empowerment aim to increase people with disabilities' resilience, to support them in their income security, and make them as self-reliant as possible. This work relies on and is facilitated by strong social protection systems.

- ▶ **Graduation Approach:** In Burkina Faso, our economic empowerment and livelihood programmes make use of the graduation approach, a multi-faceted approach to economic empowerment: asset handout, training/skilling, access to micro-finance, business coaching, etc.¹¹
- ▶ **Mainstreaming:** We provide technical assistance to ensure disability-inclusive design of mainstream social protection programmes, for instance for a large EU-funded Programme in Bangladesh. In North-East India, we provided disability inclusion awareness training and targeted support within the public Rural Livelihoods Programme.¹²
- ▶ **Youth:** In Uganda, we support the Ministries of Gender and Labour in the context of the Make 12.4% Work programme in attracting youth with disabilities for their social protection initiatives.¹³

D) Recommended Action

Successful social protection for persons with disabilities rests on inclusive mainstream programmes, disability-specific targeted programmes, as well as the efficient identification of persons with disabilities, for example through the Washington Group set of questions.¹⁴

Governments and international organisations, especially ILO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as non-governmental organisations in the development sector should work towards inclusive comprehensive social protection:

- ▶ **Disability Paradigm:** All actors should shift from a perspective based on the ability or inability to work, towards a broader rights-based approach. Indeed, having a disability does not mean you cannot work, and just because you can work it does not mean that you do not have a disability.
- ▶ **Adequate Funding:** Governments should adequately fund inclusive social protection, including social protection floors as recommended by the ILO. This should include investments in disability-specific programmes.
- ▶ **Existing Legislation:** Governments should ensure their legislative framework on social protection includes persons with disabilities and that their social protection system is accessible without discrimination, in line with the CRPD.

11 Innovators for Poverty Action (o.D.): Ultra Poor Graduation Model. <https://www.poverty-action.org/impact/ultra-poor-graduation-model>.

12 Bruijn, P. (2014): Inclusion Works. . Light for the World. https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/lfdw_org/files/download_files/inclusionworks.pdf.

13 Make 12.4% Work (2021): About Us. <https://wecanwork.ug/about/>.

14 Washington Group on Disability Statistics (2021): The Question Sets. <https://washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/>.

- ▶ **Participation:** Disability-inclusive social protection programmes and schemes should be designed, implemented, and monitored with the full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.
- ▶ **Mainstreaming:** Questions of disability-inclusive social protection should not be limited to disability-specific actions by the governmental department in charge of disability, but disability should also be mainstreamed across the board in all fields relevant to social protection.
- ▶ **Cost Recovery:** Disability-inclusive social protection programmes and schemes should be designed in a way that ensure that the added costs of disability are taken into account, as well as then the costs of assistive devices.
- ▶ **Alignment:** Disability benefits programmes and schemes must be designed in a way that ensures there is no adverse interaction with other income replacement programmes.
- ▶ **Eligibility:** Governments and organisations should ensure that they include all forms of disability, including the invisible or less obvious ones when assessing eligibility for disability-specific or mainstream social protection programmes and schemes.
- ▶ **Accessible Information:** All information related to disability-inclusive social protection programmes and schemes should be made available in accessible formats.
- ▶ **Data:** Quality data should be collected and disaggregated by disability, gender, age, and other relevant criteria.

E) Further Reading

- ▶ ILO & IDA (2019): Joint Statement on Inclusive Social Protection. <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectWiki.action?id=3209&pid=2840>.
- ▶ IDA & UNPRPD (2020): Factsheet on Social Protection and COVID-19. http://unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2020-04/SP%20inclusive%20leaflet_COVID%2019_2.7_fin.pdf.
- ▶ UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015): Social Protection and Persons with Disabilities, A/70/297. <https://undocs.org/a/70/297>.

About Light for the World

Light for the World is a global disability and development organisation, breaking down barriers to enrich society and unlock the potential in all of us. Our vision is an inclusive society for all where no one is left behind. We enable eye health services and empower people with disabilities in some of the poorest regions of the world.

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