

ILO: 4 billion people worldwide are left without social protection

New ILO report shows that massive efforts are still needed to ensure that the right to social security becomes a reality for all.

News | 29 November 2017

GENEVA (ILO News) – Despite significant progress in the extension of social protection in many parts of the world, the human right to social security is not yet a reality for a majority of the world's population, says a new flagship report from the International Labour Organization (ILO).

According to new data presented in the [World Social Protection Report 2017/19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#), only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent – 4 billion people – are left unprotected.

The new research also shows that only 29 per cent of the global population enjoys access to comprehensive social security – a small increase compared to 27 per cent in 2014-2015 – while the other 71 per cent, or 5.2 billion people, are not, or only partially, protected.

“The lack of social protection leaves people vulnerable to ill-health, poverty, inequality and social exclusion throughout their lifecycle. Denying this human right to 4 billion people worldwide is a significant obstacle to economic and social development. While many countries have come a long way in strengthening their social protection systems, major efforts are still necessary to ensure that the right to social protection becomes a reality for all,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

The report recommends an increase of public expenditure on social protection to extend social protection coverage, especially in Africa, Asia and the Arab States, to provide at least a basic social protection floor to all.

It highlights that universal social protection contributes to eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, promoting economic growth and social justice, as well as achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), and shows how many developing countries have developed universal schemes. The report stresses the need to extend social protection to workers in the informal economy as a way of formalizing and improving their working conditions. “However, short-term austerity policies continue undermining long-term development efforts. Fiscal consolidation adjustments have significant negative social impacts and jeopardize the achievement of the SDGs,” said Isabel Ortiz, Director of the ILO Social Protection Department.

“Fiscal space for extending social protection exists even in the poorest countries. Governments should be proactive in exploring all possible financing options to promote the SDGs and national development through decent jobs and social protection,” she added.

Main findings

The ILO report looks at specific aspects of social protection, providing global and regional findings based on new data in the following areas:

Social protection for children:

- The report shows that only 35 per cent of children worldwide enjoy effective access to social protection. Almost two thirds of children globally – 1.3 billion children – are not covered, most of them living in Africa and Asia.
- On average, just 1.1 per cent of GDP is spent on child and family benefits for children aged 0-14, pointing to significant underinvestment in children.
- Cash transfers for children have expanded in low- and middle-income countries over the past decades. However, coverage and benefit levels often remain insufficient. A number of countries even reduced social protection for children in the wake of fiscal consolidation policies.

Social protection for women and men of working age

- Social protection coverage for persons of working age is still limited. Only 41.1 per cent of mothers with newborns receive a maternity benefit, and 83 million new mothers remain uncovered.
- Other findings in this area include the fact only 21.8 per cent of unemployed workers are covered by unemployment benefits, while 152 million unemployed workers remain without coverage.
- New ILO data also shows that only 27.8 per cent of persons with severe disabilities worldwide receive a disability benefit.

Social protection for older men and women

- The research says that, worldwide, 68 per cent of people above retirement age receive an old-age pension, which is associated with the expansion of both non-contributory and contributory pensions in many middle- and low-income countries.
- With expenditure on pensions and other benefits for older people accounting for 6.9 per cent of GDP on average with large regional variations, the report underlines that benefit levels are often low and not enough to push older people out of poverty. This trend is often fuelled by austerity measures.
- Some states are reversing their pension privatizations due to the fact that privatization policies did not deliver the expected results. Countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Hungary, Kazakhstan and Poland are returning to public solidarity-based systems.

Universal health coverage

- The report shows that the right to health is not a reality yet in many parts of the world, especially in rural areas where 56 per cent of the population lacks health coverage, compared to 22 per cent in urban areas. An estimated additional 10 million health workers would be needed to achieve universal health coverage and ensure human security, including in emergency situations such as an Ebola crisis.
- Long-term care – mostly needed by older people – still excludes more than 48 per cent of the world's population, with women disproportionately affected. Only 5.6 per cent of the global population lives in countries that provide long-term care coverage based on national legislation for the whole population.
- Because of this, an estimated 57 million unpaid “voluntary” workers provide the bulk of long-term care coverage. Many of them are women who carry most of the burden of informal care for family members. More investment in care services could alleviate old-age poverty and generate millions of jobs to address the shortage of skilled care workers, estimated at 13.6 million globally.

The World Social Protection Report offers a broad range of global, regional and country data on social protection coverage, benefits and public expenditures on social protection. By presenting new estimates on effective social protection coverage, it provides the 2015 baseline for the [Sustainable Development Goal](#) (SDG) indicator 1.3.1.

Adopted in 2015, the UN's SDGs reflect the joint commitment of countries to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including floors” for reducing and preventing poverty (SDG 1.3).

This commitment to universalism reaffirms the global agreement on the extension of social security achieved by the [ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202](#), adopted by governments, workers and employers from 185 countries in 2012.

Tags: social protection

http://embargo.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_601903?lang=en