

AUGUST 2025

## G20 FACTSHEET #8: UNIVERSAL SOCIAL FLOORS



# A World Defined by Justice and Care

## Introduction

Global citizens need to aspire for a world where every person, regardless of their circumstances, has access to basic health-care, income security, and the means to live with dignity. A world where no child goes to bed hungry, no worker is left destitute, and no pensioner is abandoned. Universal Social Protection Floors (SPF) aim to make this aspiration a reality. It is a global initiative which seeks to address deepening levels of inequality, poverty, and hunger. Today, we face a global hunger crisis, with nearly 29% of the population struggling to find enough to eat, and over 575 million people projected to still live in extreme poverty by 2030. These shocking statistics reveal the urgent need for action. Currently, only 12% of global development targets are on track to be met. So, in light of this, can the world's most powerful economies step up to ensure no one is left behind? What role can activists, workers, and civil society play in holding them accountable?

### SDGs SUPPORTED BY THE SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS RECOMMENDATION 202



**1** NO POVERTY



**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



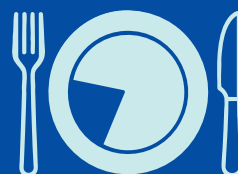
**10** REDUCED INEQUALITIES



**SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS** are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees that ensure everyone has access to essential health care and basic income security, particularly the most vulnerable groups. These floors form the foundation of comprehensive social protection systems, aiming to reduce poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

### Global hunger crisis

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### THIS FACTSHEET IS PART OF OUR SERIES ON THE 2025 G20

1. What is the G20?
2. International taxation
3. African debt crisis
4. Food security
5. Fossil fuel phase-out
6. Climate financing
7. Green industrialisation
8. Universal social floors
9. Women empowerment

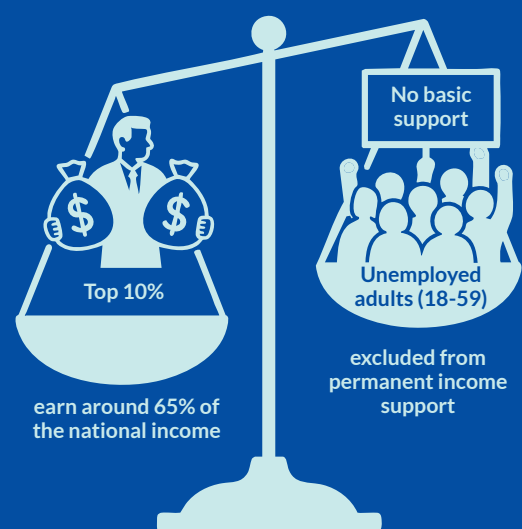
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FACTSHEET #8



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## Without Social Protection, Inequality Deepens



Lack of social protection isn't a gap — it's a policy failure that keeps millions trapped in poverty.

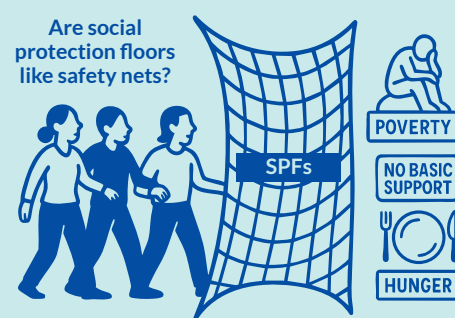
## What are universal social floors, and why do they matter?

Globalisation, climate change, technological disruptions, and geopolitical instability continue to deepen inequalities, poverty, and hunger, particularly in developing countries. These challenges often expose gaps in national systems and their ability to protect vulnerable segments of their populations.<sup>1</sup> For example, despite South Africa being one of the most unequal countries, with high unemployment and the top 10% earning around 65% of the national income,<sup>2</sup> social protection remains inadequate. Today, adults aged 18 to 59 (unless disabled) are still excluded from permanent income support.<sup>3</sup> This leaves many people in this age segment vulnerable to poverty should they not be able to secure any form of stable employment.

SPFs aim to address these systemic vulnerabilities and form the foundation of a fair and just society. They aim to ensure

that people have guaranteed access to healthcare and basic income security through child support assistance, disability and grants assistance, and some form of income security insurance for working-age adults.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) launched the Social Protection Floors Recommendation 202 in 2012, which guides countries on how to establish SPFs. This Recommendation is grounded in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which affirm that social protection is a globally recognised human right.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Recommendation supports the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).



**IN A WORLD WHERE POVERTY, HUNGER, AND INEQUALITY HAVE DEEPENED** and technological advancements risk people's jobs, SPFs are essential because they will help countries to:

- **End poverty through providing income security and preventing people from falling into extreme poverty.**
- **Reduce inequality through levelling the playing field and ensuring that everyone has access to basic needs.**
- **Build resilience through protecting the most vulnerable people during times of crisis.**
- **Stimulate economic activity by fostering a healthy population that enhances productivity and generates income, thereby supporting local businesses.**
- **Promote dignity, as they ensure that everyone, regardless of circumstance, can live with dignity.**

Despite existing tools, as of 2023, this would be an injustice because people will remain poor, not due to a lack of solutions, but rather because of the lack of political will among leaders to change the lives of ordinary people.

South Africa's constitution recognises socioeconomic rights like social protection as fundamental rights. This allows its citizens to enjoy a degree of social security.

For example, in South Africa, receiving social services such as primary healthcare, housing, and education is a constitutional right, and the country offers grants to children, pensioners, and people living with disabilities. Moreover, since the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa has run a temporary social relief of distress grant (SRD), which offers R370 to working-age adults without employment.

This SRD system has introduced some income support; however, there is still room for improvement and a need to transition the SRD grant into a permanent basic income. Collectively, South Africa's grants are reliably linked to many positive developmental outcomes in nutrition, education, and other measures of well-being, as well as meaningful reductions in poverty and inequality.<sup>5</sup> The measured success of the social protection system in South Africa demonstrates the value of creating a sound global social protection system, which will benefit vulnerable people, particularly in the Global South.

## The G20's social protection track record

The G20 recognised the importance of SPFs when they endorsed the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the world meets global developmental targets.

In 2022, the Indonesian G20 Presidency introduced the concept of adaptive social protection, which aims to integrate social protection systems with disaster risk management to protect people and communities from the adverse impacts of economic shocks, natural disasters, and pandemics.<sup>6</sup>

In 2024, Brazil focused on reducing inequalities and emphasised SPFs as a crucial tool to tackle poverty and hunger. Through a dedicated task force, Brazil launched the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. The Presidency also produced a Ministerial Declaration for Reducing Inequalities, which called for the expansion of social protection systems across formal and informal sectors.

While we, as activists and communities, can appreciate that the G20 is discussing social protection, we should remain mindful that action has been slow. We should not accept that millions of people worldwide still lack access to basic social security.



## South Africa's G20 Presidency: A unique opportunity

South Africa is well-positioned to lead the charge on SPFs, as it already has a relatively extensive social protection system through its social grants. Its drive for social protection should yield towards more action-oriented approaches. This is particularly important because South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world. For South Africa's presidency, the G20 will discuss SPFs in Task Force 1 on Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Employment, and Reduced Inequality, as well as the Development Working Group (WG). The task force aims to develop frameworks that will integrate social protection policies with broader economic and industrial strategies to address poverty and inequality. South Africa seeks to use these interventions to create decent jobs with adequate wages, social protection, security, and dignity.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneously, the Development WG will discuss the adoption of a voluntary framework for SPFs to encourage G20 members to establish and maintain these systems at a national level. These efforts build on the adaptive social protection introduced by Indonesia during its G20 Presidency in 2022. South Africa also noted the urgent need to mobilise between \$3.3 and \$4.5 trillion to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The country aims to utilise its Presidency to ensure that the G20 enhances regulatory frameworks and increases transparency and accountability among financial institutions, companies, and governments.

## How can activists and communities get involved?

Beyond government discussions on SPFs, we as activists and communities should be inspired by previous efforts to leverage people's power to push governments and global leaders to act. Activists across the globe have strived for a world that ushers in SPFs and ensures that no child goes hungry, no worker is left unprotected, and no elderly person is abandoned. We can work collectively to ensure that we:



**RAISE AWARENESS** - We should empower each other to educate our communities that poverty and inequality are a direct outcome of government inaction, not limited resources.



**PROTECT EXISTING SOCIAL PROTECTION BENEFITS** - We should consider ways to ensure our governments do not regress on progressive social protection benefits. The SRD grant is a good vehicle towards a universal basic income. As progressive as this initiative is, it has been subject to continued attempts to undermine it, particularly from South Africa's National Treasury. In South Africa, organisations such as the IEJ and #PayTheGrants have taken the government to court to prevent it from regressing on the SRD grant by imposing unjustified exclusions that prevent qualifying recipients from accessing the grant.



**COLLABORATE** - We must partner with different organisations, unions, and networks to amplify our voices. The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors is a good example of this. There are already over 100 civil society organisations and trade unions which form part of this coalition across many countries, particularly those in the Global South. This collaboration is essential because organisations can provide peer support to each other on the existing advocacy efforts in their countries.



**DEMAND ACTION** - We should consider which options are available to hold our leaders accountable. Find ways to push G20 countries to prioritise SPFs and ensure that their commitments are turned into action.



**ADVOCATE FOR FUNDING** - We should collaborate with other organisations to advocate for increased investment in social protection systems and other socioeconomic rights, both domestically and internationally. Countries and organisations are already fighting for the adoption of the United Nations International Taxation Convention, which aims to improve the domestic ability of countries (particularly in the Global South) to mobilise resources. We should consider amplifying these calls to ensure that countries have sufficient resources to finance social protection benefits.

## The debate does not end here

- What can citizens do to curb deepening poverty, hunger, and inequalities?
- How should governments work towards ensuring that SPFs are globally adopted?
- How do you plan to hold your government accountable for its SDG commitments?
- How can we better collaborate with other global movements focusing on curbing poverty, hunger, and inequalities?

## Endnotes

- 1 UBIC. 2023. Position Paper
- 2 World Inequality database. 2024.10 facts on global inequality in 2024
- 3 Howson K and Coleman N. 2023. Can basic income contribute to inclusive development in South Africa? A review of recent proposals
- 4 ILO. 2012. R202- Social protection floors recommendation
- 5 IEJ UBIC Factsheet series
- 6 OECD. 2025, The G20 and the promotion of equal opportunities.
- 7 G20 South Africa. 2025. Concept Note
- 8 World Inequality database. 2024.10 facts on global inequality in 2024