

Family- sensitive social protection

(Talking points for the consultative meeting, Doha, 26 - 27 June 2018)

1. The immediate organisers of the consultation in Doha, DIFI and ESCWA, should be commended for this initiative: this collaborative project on family-sensitive social protection has undisputable value in many ways. In political terms it is an important contribution to the ongoing intergovernmental policy debates on the nexus of social protection and proactive family policies. In practical terms the outcome has substantial significance for the elaboration of various schemes on the ground aimed at supporting families and households around the world, much beyond the countries in the ESCWA region. The project could be also seen as an important contribution to the international discourse on a range of issues pertinent to social welfare design, including structural reforms underway in many countries.
2. Multiple crises put social protection of individuals and families on the forefront of social policy making. Even though historically the right to social security is recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—both documents contain provisions on the right to social security which is closely linked to contemporary understanding of the right to social protection, this human right remains largely unrealised.
3. But social protection is not only a human right, it is also an investment in people, in their present and in their future. It is also a proven way to fight poverty. Addressing the issues of inequality and poverty reduction in a comprehensive manner requires linking human rights with social protection of individuals, families and communities. There is strong evidence on the ground in many countries that universal access to basic social protection is beneficial not only for vulnerable social groups but also for society as a whole. Social protection of course is not a panacea and cannot solve all problems of the world at once, but it is a very important, truly vital element of progressive social policy attuned to the needs of people today and projected to the future. Universal social protection is an

important enabling factor conducive to protecting human rights, developing human potential and reducing income inequalities. Highlighting importance of essential material conditions required for living with dignity, social protection facilitates upholding human dignity as a value and a legal principle, firmly linking it with social and economic rights. Moreover, it is an essential material prerequisite for the effective empowerment of people, as individuals and families.

4. The vital role of social protection in society is well recognized by the international community—that is why the reference to social protection systems, including floors, is made in the Agenda 2030; if social protection systems and schemes are realized, the achievement of several key goals of the new agenda 2030 comes within reach. Given its importance for society at large social protection has much significance for families and households. In this sense strengthening social protection systems is not only one of the best ways to reduce insecurity and deprivation in the world, but also an effective means to reinvigorate the development agenda and come up with new solutions to a range of old and new social ills.
5. Recommendation 202 on national floors of social protection adopted by ILO in 2012 is a very important normative document, a vital international tool to promote social protection. In accordance with this document the countries are encouraged to establish, as quickly as possible and in accordance with national circumstances, to maintain their social protection floors consisting of basic social security guarantees. These would comprise a) effective access to a nationally defined set of essential goods and services that would include essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality; b) basic income security for children, assuring access to nutrition, education and care; c) basic income security for persons in the economically active age, with particular attention to sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability benefits; and d) basic income security for older persons.
6. It is obvious that given its significance and wide coverage national floors of social protection may be seen as an important element in promoting family-sensitive policies. Linking social protection to family policy has many layers given defensive, transformative

and enabling functions of social protection. These functions are realised through the life-course.

7. Despite different definitions of social protection and differing approaches to social protection in society, both ILO and the World Bank share some important points relevant for family-sensitive policies. Both organizations underscore that supporting universal social protection “promotes human development: cash transfers facilitate access to nutrition and education, thus resulting in better health outcomes, higher school enrolment rates, reduced school drop-out rates, and a decline in child labor; it increases productivity and employability by enhancing human capital and productive assets; it protects individuals and families against the losses due to shocks, whether they be pandemics, natural disasters, or economic downturns; it is a human right that everyone, as a member of society, should enjoy, including children, mothers, persons with disabilities, workers, older persons, migrants, indigenous peoples and minorities”. (http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/social-security/WCMS_378991/lang--en/index.htm)
8. National governments are recognized as being most important institutions for reducing poverty and implementing effective anti-poverty measures. Governments can provide basic social security/ social protection guarantees. People who live in poverty are deprived of the opportunity to improve their position—through education, through secure employment. Deprivation affects the security of poor people who live in perpetual insecurity. Social protection schemes are essential for overcoming this insecurity and for building resilience of households and families. Social protection floors are basic security guarantees. They are only part of a comprehensive social protection system that might be in place, but a very important, even crucial part.
9. There are at least three crucial dimensions that should be taken into account when family-sensitive social protection is conceptualised.
 - a) *Gender dimension and centrality of a gender “lens”.*

Gendered risks and vulnerabilities across the lifecycle should be recognized—from early childhood to school age to working age to old age. Gender-related vulnerabilities are multidimensional. Social transfers associated with social protection schemes have

multiple benefits for women and their families, from reduced poverty to improved nutrition and better health care, including for pregnant and lactating mothers. These transfers also improve education possibilities for a girl child; quite often such transfers allow to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Not only cash transfers but also public work programs and social assistance schemes (including pensions) could be also used to strengthen empowerment of women within families. At the same time, despite these positive examples, there is a need for a note of caution—much depends on the situation on the ground, and as social protection recipients women may not necessarily be able to control how income is distributed within a household. In this sense some complimentary interventions such as awareness raising and other measures might be required to address deeply-seated gender inequality.

b) Child sensitive social protection

Given that about half of the world's poor living in extreme poverty are children, child – sensitive social protection strategies play a vital role in addressing chronic poverty and social exclusion that undermine children's lifetime capacities. Such schemes can maximize opportunities and development outcomes for children taking into account various dimensions of their well-being—different under different circumstances. Supporting families and care-givers, child-sensitive social protection among other things may improve access to basic social services, prevent discrimination and child abuse in and outside the home, reduce child labour and prepare adolescents for their own livelihoods. (https://www.unicef.org/aids/files/CSSP_joint_statement_10.16.09.pdf). Social protection programs implemented in different forms (e.g. cash-based regular payments) or in-kind social transfers (e.g. school feeding or take- home rations), provided either universally or on explicitly- targeted basis, have demonstrated capacity to improve children's nutritional status. Helping families to cope with chronic poverty, stresses and shocks, such schemes promote and advance the rights and wellbeing of children, enabling families to invest in children's welfare on a continuing basis. These policy measures could be seen as explicitly pro-family measures.

c) Adjusting to an ageing world and intergenerational solidarity.

Solidarity between generations represents a key element in all social protection schemes, either formal or informal. However, the diversity of family structures, including substantial variations in family size, creates much uncertainty regarding sustaining such solidarity. While traditionally families have supported their members over their lifespan everywhere, nuclear families nowadays are more dependent on extended family members and communities where they live for the provision of care to both young and old. Ageing of the population presents a truly global challenge in developed and developing countries that need to cope with its numerous consequences. The growing number of older persons need to have adequate income support as they age; they need opportunities to engage in decent employment should they wish to remain economically active, and access to appropriate health care services, including long-term care. Intergenerational interaction remains a crucial characteristic given that almost everywhere income security for older persons is decreasing. The age dimension is very important in the context of family-sensitive policies as well as in the context of social protection. Family ties, with a stronger sense of responsibility linked to them, can contribute to improved longevity, and in many ways represent a boon for human well-being.

Among older persons in many countries older women represent a particular vulnerable segment of the population, taking into consideration their longer life expectancy compared to men. They bear the brunt of double discrimination—as women and as older persons. Violence against older women in some countries is rampant, being particularly strong at the community level where older women are often accused of various misdeeds such as witchcraft, with horrible implications for their lives. The recognition of their particular vulnerability should become a priority in conceptualizing social protection schemes.