

## Ep. 43 | World Social Protection Report 2024-26

Note that guests' interventions are not altered, so grammatical errors and verbal fillers may appear in the transcript.

**Jo Sharpe:** Hello, and welcome to the Social Protection Podcast. I'm your host, Jo Sharpe.

Last month, the ILO launched the latest edition of the [World Social Protection Report](#). Published every two years, it gives a global overview of progress towards extending social protection since 2015.

The good news? For the first time, more than half of the world's population are now covered by at least one social protection benefit, and that's something to celebrate. But progress has stalled in low-income countries and in those most vulnerable to climate change. And the report dives deep on the role of social protection for climate action and to achieve a just transition.

Today we'll unpack the headlines with our guests from the ILO, the Gambia and Brazil, talking global trends and country efforts to expand coverage and pivot programs to meet the climate challenge.

My guests today are Christina Behrendt, Head of the Social Policy Unit for the ILO Universal Social Protection Department, Débora Freire, Deputy Secretary for Fiscal Policy at the Ministry of Finance in the Government of Brazil, and Momodou Dibba, National Coordinator at the National Social Protection Secretariat in the office of the Vice President in the Gambia. Welcome all.

**Christina Behrendt:** Thanks a lot for having me. It's a pleasure to be on this podcast.

**Débora Freire:** Thank you guys for having me. It's a really pleasure to be here.

**Momodou K. Dibba:** Thank you. It's a pleasure to join the podcast.

**Jo Sharpe:** Christina, let's get to the headlines first. The World Social Protection Report finds that for the first time in history more than half of the world's population are covered by at least one social protection benefit.

Can you tell us a little bit about that headline finding and what accounts for that increase?

**Christina Behrendt:** Thank you so much for the question, Joanne. In fact, more than half of the global population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, and this represents quite a major achievement.

And in fact, since 2015, coverage has increased by more than nine percentage points. So up from 42.8% to 52.4%. And this is really a remarkable increase in only eight years. But yet, progress has not been fast enough to ensure that everyone is covered adequately. So, it means that almost half of the global population, 3.8 billion people, predominantly in the Global South, are still without any social protection. And this means that they're ill equipped not only to face their everyday life cycle risks, but also the increasingly common climate related risks.

Let's maybe look at the factors that contributed to that significant increase in coverage. And in fact, we see quite a deeply divided world. Many middle-income countries have actually made significant strides to expand their social protection systems. In upper-middle-income countries, coverage has increased by 14.7 to 71.2%. And in lower-middle-income countries, by 11.5 to 32%.

But at the same time, low-income countries were not in a position to follow the same positive path. Their coverage rates have largely stalled, with a very small increase of two percentage points to 9.7%. And this is certainly cause for concern.

And so if we ask what contributed to that increase, we have seen that many countries have reinforced their social protection systems with two main mechanisms. So, many countries have introduced or expanded non-contributory benefits financed from general taxation or other sources, including social pensions, for example, universal or quasi universal child benefits or social assistance programs.

But at the same time, also many countries have extended social insurance coverage to categories of the population that were not previously covered. And this includes, for example, workers in small and micro enterprises, self-employed workers, domestic workers, or workers in agriculture. And I think both of this provides a very powerful message. So, policies matter, and they do have an impact, and we see that impact, but we need more.

**Jo Sharpe:** Débora, Brazil of course is an upper-middle-income country, and Christina has just told us about the sort of general growth in social protection in some of those countries. How is Brazil working towards the goal of universal social protection?

**Débora Freire:** We can say that today Brazil already has a high level of social protection coverage among the poorest. Our criterion and measure of poor family is a per capita household income of half the minimum wage, which means just over US\$120 per month. The Unified Registry, which is our Unified Large Registry of Poor People, includes all families with up to this income level.

So, we have more than 94 million people and around 28 million families registered. We are talking about around 44% of the estimated population this year. When we consider the population benefiting from the main cash transfer program we have, the Bolsa Familia, we are talking about almost 21 million families. So, we have more than 73% of poor Brazilian families who are registered, more than 25% of the Brazilian population.

Brazil also has social protection through a non-contributory social security system. We pay a minimum wage to poor elderly people and people with disabilities registered in the unified registry.

The average benefit of the Bolsa Familia program is currently around US\$123 per month for each family. And the amount of the benefit has grown significantly in recent years. Few years ago, the Bolsa Familia program had an average benefit of US\$38 per family. So, this is a huge increase.

It would obviously be desirable for every family registered in the single registry. However, it's challenging to finance a social protection scheme of this magnitude. The Ministry of Finance has taken a series of actions to correct tax deviations and loopholes in taxation, seeking to ensure fairer

taxation in Brazil to fund this greater social protection that we inaugurated after the pandemic. So, we need fiscal space if we want to universalize social protection among the poor.

**Jo Sharpe:** Interesting to hear about increases to the value of benefits in Brazil, as the World Social Protection Report also addresses the need to make sure benefits are adequate to achieve the desired outcomes of social protection. Of course, coverage alone only gets us so far.

Mr. Dibba, the Gambia, I understand, still has relatively low social protection coverage. I think the data in the report shows around 6% of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit. What are the Gambia's priorities in terms of building out that system and who it needs to cover?

**Momodou K. Dibba:** As far as the Gambia is concerned, I would say we made it very clear that social protection will be taken very seriously in the coming years.

So, first you have people who are extremely poor. We don't start with the cause of why they are poor, but they are poor. But you then have another list of what the policy called priority groups. And these priority groups constitute orphans, people living with disabilities, older persons, widows or you can call them female headed households. This group of people have been identified by the policy as priority groups.

In fact, this year, the government of the Gambia, as part of the mainstreaming social protection into the national budget, piloted a universal support on this categorical group of individuals identified by the policy and for the first time the government rolled out monthly cash transfers to these vulnerable groups.

Then, the other category of support comes from risk arriving from transitory shocks, which are likely to be climate, either floods or windstorms that we have in the Gambia. So, these are the groups that the climate finance leaders need to come up with products to build their resilience to be able to quickly adapt to the impacts of climate change.

**Jo Sharpe:** I was interested in the fact that the National Secretariat, which you lead, sits within the Vice President's office in the Gambia. How are you looking to drive the development of the social protection system from that vantage point?

**Momodou K. Dibba:** One of the challenges in terms of even attracting funding from government and also from partners is that everyone wants to support, whether it's government or NGOs or partners, they want to support vulnerable groups, they want to support marginalized groups. One of the main challenges, of course, in this part of the world is data to target the right individuals.

Now, with the coming of the Social Protection Secretariat, with support from the World Bank, they embark the development of the Gambia Social Registry, which is a census-based approach covering the whole country. So, by the end of December, we should have a full coverage using the census approach of social registry data collection.

Now, with the power of the social registry in getting to specific groups when and where needed, we have seen increased levels of requests to us from different programs by development partners like WFP. So, we believe that with the way we are building the social protection system, especially the investments in data to target individuals, either categorical targeting or poverty targeting, any kind of program requirements, we always try to make people understand that the social registry is not only for poverty targeting. So many other programs don't use poverty targeting as a criteria, so we have a universal set.

We have also embarked on an exercise to go through the government of the Gambia budget line by line using the policy as a guide and international benchmark, to classify every social protection expenditure in the different ministries and why they qualify to be social protection or not. We just pull this report out from the government budget and send it to anyone who is interested. So, it creates clarity and government also will be able to see whether they are spending enough on social protection or not.

So, we believe creating clarity on what constitutes social protection expenditure will be part of the big efforts to the momentum we are building, and I think also we are encouraging government to move towards universal social protection, and that is why they started the categorical

targeting. Hopefully, government scale it up every year. Of course, on the background of fiscal challenges. But we are continuing to advocate that government increase social protection expenditures.

**Jo Sharpe:** We will come back to some more of the findings from the global data in a moment, including to talk a little bit more about where some of these major gaps remain. But, first, as Christina has already foreshadowed, the theme for this edition of the world social protection report is universal social protection for climate action and a just transition.

We've spoken a lot about the role of social protection in promoting adaptation and mitigation on this show in the past year. Of course, the first way we tend to think about this is through shock responsive or adaptive social protection.

So, Débora, coming back to you, countries all over the globe, including Brazil, are seeing more frequent and severe weather events due to climate change. In April and May this year, heavy rains resulted in severe flooding in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, affecting 2 million people. Can you tell me a bit about how Brazil's social protection programs adapted and were deployed to help people through that period?

**Débora Freire:** Yes. The flooding in the state of Rio Grande do Sul was a major environmental disaster and we all felt its effects deeply and very sadly. But we can say that the federal government responded very quickly and all the social protection infrastructure we have was very useful. For example, the capacity of the Unified Registry, which is the basis of social protection in Brazil, to be rapidly expanded by a task force to include affected families was essential.

Between May and July, we had around 126,000 families in the state included in the Unified Registry so that they could access eligible benefits. In terms of social protection, we implemented an income support called Reconstruction Aid, which consisted of a one-off payment of almost US\$1,000 to families left homeless or displaced by the climate tragedy. We also advanced payments to insured individuals who receive welfare and social security benefits. Basic food baskets were also delivered both to solidarity kitchens, which prepare meals for families affected by the floods, and for humanitarian aid. We also have the emergency financial support

programs for workers, in which the federal government paid two salary instalments to workers in exchange for companies maintaining jobs.

I think that the intelligence in social protection that Brazil has built, mainly in registration, mapping, active search, and support for vulnerable people was essential for this rapid response. Of course, there is still a long way to go before we have the adaptive social protection framework needed to deal with broader climate challenges.

**Jo Sharpe:** Christina, what are some of the other ways we need to be thinking about social protection in terms of supporting mitigation, that is reducing carbon emissions, and the social and economic transitions that will need to come along with all of that? So, thinking beyond that kind of shock responsive piece to the kind of broader ecosystem of interventions and how social protection can contribute to those.

**Christina Behrendt:** I would just like to reinforce two important point that Débora has made. The first one is that both social insurance and tax finance benefits can contribute to this important objective. And I think this is absolutely essential. And secondly, which is as essential, is having robust systems in place before a crisis is very, very critical for really having a fast response.

Now, if we think about how social protection can play an important enabling role in supporting the mitigation of climate change, including with regard to alleviating the unintended negative impact of climate policies. And I think there's several channels for which this works and where social protection can play an important role. And I would just quickly mention three examples.

The first one is looking at supporting and facilitating the just transition when it comes to the employment impacts of policies to reduce carbon emissions. And there we have, for example, countries like Spain or Germany: when they closed down coal mines, they were really using quite a lot of social protection policies as part of the support packages that were put in place and which were negotiated actually between governments, employers, and workers. So, in this support package, early retirement schemes was part of it, unemployment protection, but also re skilling and job placement support, and I think these experiences hold quite important

lessons for other countries that are undergoing energy transitions, like China, Indonesia, India or South Africa.

And then, as a second example, going beyond the employment impacts, social protection does also play a very important role to buffer price impacts of policies designed to reduce emissions. So, for example, the removal of energy subsidies, or the implementation of a carbon tax to incentivize the development and use of renewable energy sources. And this might temporarily, at least, increase the prices for energy, transport, and food, which might harm especially low-income households who suffer most from higher prices.

And I think this is a key point because, sometimes the public support constitutes an important precondition to implementing more ambitious policies to reduce carbon emissions. People fear that some policies designed to protect the environment and climate will make them worse off. Already in some countries, we see a backlash against climate policies, but we know at the same time that such policies are necessary to save the planet and protect those people. From a recent IMF publication on the public acceptability of climate policies across 28 countries, there were two factors that were key to increase acceptability: policies that compensate people who are worse off because of the result of the reforms, but also making sure that the co benefits from climate change mitigation, like the creation of new decent jobs in the renewable energy sector, or better health outcomes because of reduced pollution, can really be realized. And I think social protection has a key role to play in enabling both of these factors.

And finally, a third point, which is a bit more general. Both social protection and climate change adaptation share a very common core objective, and this is to reduce vulnerability. So, even before such a shock, social protection systems really play a key role in reducing vulnerability and increasing the resilience of people.

**Jo Sharpe:** I do think that the way as a sector we're thinking about the potential role for social protection is evolving quite rapidly, and as you say, social protection systems are such significant economic tools in all sorts of ways. I was really interested in a reference the report makes to the divestment of carbon intensive industry and pension funds, for example, is just another way that social protection can be implicated in these big shifts.



Débora, how is Brazil thinking about supporting mitigation and transition through your social protection system?

**Débora Freire:** In Brazil, we have right now an energy sustainable transition plan called Ecological Transformation, led by the Minister of Finance, that is planning a series of actions for decarbonization and to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

All actions in the plan consider social issues, since one of the guidelines is to achieve a just transition. And, of course, for a just transition, we need to consider adaptive social protection. That's a work in progress in Brazil, but I would say that we have a very nice example of policy, the Bolsa Verde program.

This program is a payment for environmental services. In its new version, Bolsa Verde will make quarterly payments of US\$100 to poor families registered in the Unified Registry who live in conservation units and in territories occupied by traditional peoples and communities, such as riverside communities, extractivists, indigenous peoples, and quilombolas. The beneficiaries of the policy must commit to taking care of the region where they live, using natural resources in a sustainable way and preserving the forest, in addition to helping with the work of monitoring and protecting these areas. In addition to payments, they will have access to technical assistance, social environmental rural extension, environmental conservation, and social productive inclusion.

**Jo Sharpe:** It is really interesting to think about how some of these payments could over time be viewed as valuing kind of that natural environment. We have also featured the Seguro Defeso scheme on the podcast before, which is essentially compensating fisher people for not fishing in the season in order to allow fish stocks to regenerate and some of those things. So, again, a structural approach to making sure that people aren't disadvantaged. Obviously, the challenge of addressing land degradation and deforestation goes beyond individual communities, but nevertheless an important piece of that puzzle.

Mr. Dibba, the Gambia has a nationally determined contribution, an NDC, to reduce national emissions and a National Adaptation Plan to adapt to the socioeconomic impacts of climate change. From where you sit, how do you see the potential for social protection to contribute to climate adaptation?

And how does social protection feature in the NDC or the National Adaptation Plan or the national conversation about how to address climate change?

**Momodou K. Dibba:** I'll just start this response with an engagement I had with a few colleagues last time we were attending the COP28 in Dubai. And the guy was curious to say, he said, but what is social protection doing at COP? So, I made a joke. I said, when you have a flood or a windstorm, who do you see in the frontline providing assistance, the climate people or the social protection people? We are not discussing anymore whether climate change has impacts. We are living through the impacts of climate change. And you need the social protection programs to be there in such a way that they are easily scaled up to build people's resilience when the climate impacts hit, because data already has proven that some of the impacts of the climate change are not preventable anymore. They've been triggered and then they will happen.

So, from the point of view of the Gambia, together, of course, with support from the World Bank, we are building an adaptive social protection structure so that we are able to scale up activities to respond to the impacts of climate change.

When we worked on the brief on social protection for NDCs, because the NDCs are coming next year, they said this brief is for ministries of Social Protect to understand they have a role. Then I said, in our case, is the reverse. We need the climate people to really understand that we have a role to play in climate change discussions. So, it's one of the reasons why we are continuously being engaged with the Ministry of Finance, the Climate Finance Unit, the Ministry of Environment to actively participate in the activities.

Of course, the Minister of Climate Change already said that the Social Protection will be part of the adaptation working group, as we work on the next NAP. And, of course, the Social Protection Agency will also play a crucial role to ensure that in terms of adaptive strategies, social protection measures are an integral part of the system.

Our strategy is constantly engaging the climate change to ensure, when they are discussing the issues of climate change, either it's the NAP or it's

the NDC, we are actually on the table because if you are not on the table, sometimes you may be forgotten. That's our approach.

**Jo Sharpe:** Christina, coming back to the report in the broad, and the data that you're presenting in the paper, as you've already outlined earlier, we've made really significant progress in expanding coverage and access to social protection. At the current rate, the report estimates we're still 49 years away from achieving that goal of universal social protection that we are working towards. And you've already outlined a bit that, while social protection coverage is expanding in many places, expansion has stalled particularly in low-income countries, and also in the countries most vulnerable to climate change. And obviously there's quite a lot of overlap between those two categories.

Can you talk us through those findings and their implications?

**Christina Behrendt:** Yeah, thank you. I think that's a very important question. I mean, especially as we're just five years away from 2030. And if we want to make good on the objective of universal social protection, we can definitely not wait another 49 years, but we need to really accelerate progress in that regard.

And indeed, we've talked earlier about the 3.8 billion people, predominantly in the Global South, who lack any form of social protection, which really leaves them very unprepared for both the life cycle and the environmental challenges that lie ahead of them.

And you've touched upon the situation of people in low-income countries, where we have seen much too timid progress, and the situation of those countries that couldn't really follow the same level of dynamism that we have seen in middle-income countries, which have really embraced social protection as a key part of their strategies of both social but also economic development. But for low-income countries, the coverage rates, it is 9.7 percent on average, remain really stubbornly low.

But you've also put your finger on the countries which are at the front line of the climate crisis. And in fact, if we look at the 20 countries which are most at risk, even a lower percentage of the population, only 8.7 percent of the population, has some kind of social protection coverage. So that leaves

more than 90 percent of the population, or 364 million individuals in those 20 countries, without social protection.

And even if we expand to the 50 countries which are most exposed to climate risk, the coverage is only one quarter of the population covered at least by one social protection benefit, but we have a much larger group of people living in those countries. We're talking about 2.1 billion people. It's by far not enough to have just one in four persons covered. We really need to achieve universal social protection coverage.

And in fact, these large coverage gaps are linked to important policy and financing gaps. There is no question that if climate action and a just transition are to succeed and are to be politically acceptable also in the long run, that social protection must be adequately reflected, not only in national and international social protection strategies, but also in national and international climate financing strategies.

**Jo Sharpe:** Thank you. Christina, what about some of the other significant gaps that the report highlights? I noticed, for example, there's some discussion about the ongoing continued gender gap, the kind of peaks and troughs of coverage across the life cycle.

What else stands out to you and how are those trends changing or not changing over time?

**Christina Behrendt:** Indeed, we see still some quite significant gender gaps. For example, when we talk about the overall coverage by at least one social protection benefit, we see that coverage is just above 50% for women, compared to 54.6% for men. I think there is a very important need for social protection systems to become more gender responsive, but we also know that this requires a larger set of policies to address inequalities in labour markets and employment and society at large, because these are the inequalities which are in a way mirrored by social protection systems, and social protection systems can do a lot, actually, to address those, but they're not just a panacea.

And maybe one of the areas that we need to look into is the question of care and the way care is organized, how care is financed, who's responsible for care. But there has actually been an interesting discussion at the International Labor Conference earlier this year on decent work in the care

economy, and I think that's also highlighted some additional aspects, which go beyond how care is organized in families, but also to look at how there can be a decent employment in the care sector, which helps to address several challenges.

**Jo Sharpe:** Whenever we talk about this goal of universal social protection, we have to talk about financing. Governments do have to make choices about what they invest in. We do see some countries, in fact, resorting to austerity and reduced social protection and social services in the face of rising debt or reduced revenue.

Débora, I'd be interested to understand a bit more how Brazil looks at this challenge. What are the fiscal pressures on social protection budgets in Brazil? How do you balance that social protection expenditure against other priorities?

**Débora Freire:** I think, after a long way, social protection is currently considered to be an investment rather than a cost, mainly by President Lula, who always defended this point. But we have to say that Brazil has important fiscal pressures in its budget.

We have a rapidly aging population and we can say that the demographic bonus is running out in Brazil. At the same time, we have a broad social security system and a very rigid budget. Social security expenditures, which are mandatory expenditures in Brazil, currently represent more than 40% of total budgetary expenditures in the country. When we talk about mandatory expenditures as a whole, that is, those that are in the constitution, we are talking about more than 90 percent of the entire budget. So, there is very little left for discretionary policies.

The Bolsa Familia program, for example, is not yet a mandatory expenditure. Its flow can be controlled according to the defined budget. Thus, we can say that the space for new social protection policies is quite limited, and that expenditures, especially on social security, tend to compress the space for these policies if nothing else is done.

However, social protection is a priority for the government, for President Lula. And what we are doing to seek budgetary balance and maintain fiscally sustainable social protection is to establish a spending review process, which is underway, with the goal of reviewing and reprioritizing

expenses. The focus is on making spending more efficient and progressive. And we are also seeking to raise revenue through progressive tax changes.

**Jo Sharpe:** Christina, as we've been talking about financing and the need particularly for likely investment from wealthier countries to those most affected by climate change, the low-income countries.

Various climate financing instruments have been established internationally. The loss and damage fund has been the most recent. These mechanisms are tasked with a lot of different kinds of things, clean energy transition, helping to decarbonize economies, a whole range of things.

There is the potential for social protection, as I understand it, to draw on some of these funds, and yet there aren't that many examples of it so far. So, I guess I'm just interested in how you see the potential of these kinds of instruments to close that financing gap. And if they're not the right instruments for this purpose, do we need to be looking at something else?

**Christina Behrendt:** I think this is a very important question and I don't think I have a very clear answer on that, because this is very much a moving target. I think there is a potential in leveraging international climate finance for social protection, especially for social protection to play this enabling role, when it comes both to adaptation and mitigation and obviously also you mentioned the discussion on loss and damage.

But one of the key questions is really where are the funds in that way? So, I think looking at different sources of financing and looking on how they can be combined is important. But we also know that the overall context, in terms of development assistance, is very complicated and this doesn't seem to get any better, especially given that the overall budgets for ODA are not increasing. So, if we talk just about shifting money from one part to the other, that doesn't really help. We really need to see a very important increase also in the support which is available to the poorest countries to meet both the climate and the social protection objectives.

Domestic resource mobilization must really remain the cornerstone of national social protection systems. And I think there's a lot to be gained looking in more depth both into the social insurance contributions, but also general taxation, making sure that these are progressive and that they create the sufficient fiscal space for social protection.

But when we talk about low-income countries and the countries really at the frontline of the climate crisis, we also know that international support is very likely to be necessary to make sure that those countries can address their immediate financing needs, but also build their social protection systems over time.

**Jo Sharpe:** Mr. Dibba, the World Social Protection report shows quite clearly that many of the most climate vulnerable countries are the least able to afford comprehensive social protection systems.

Do you see opportunities to draw on some of those instruments to help build social protection systems in places like the Gambia? Have you had any experience or success in trying to utilize climate financing for that purpose?

**Momodou K. Dibba:** Okay, so I may not be able to be very comprehensive on this, because it's a recent phenomenon for me in terms of specific climate financing instruments. What I do know that, with the support of the African Development Bank, they have some instruments on climate related shocks where they provide support.

But specifically on trying to draw in climate related financing to social protection, I will make mention of the national social protection act, 2024, established a national Social Protection Fund.

Now, the regulations to the national Social Protection Fund detail out how we should strive to have this climate finance shock window to be able to finance climate related risks and shock responses. So, we have actually detailed out the guidelines and in order to be able to draw in financing from the international structures or instruments, we have created a situation where, in the social protection fund, even though it's domestically managed, the shock window could allow for earmarking of funds from these instruments to the social protection fund, and they could specifically be only to scale up activities in response to climate risk.

So, basically, in the Social Protection Fund that we just established, the regulation created a shock window for these kind of financing of social protection activities. They could either be support in terms of setting up the organisational structures of the shock window. They could also be earmarked funds for specifically financing climate related risk.

**Jo Sharpe:** Christina Behrendt, Débora Freire and Momodou Dibba. Thank you so much for joining me on the social protection podcast today.

**Christina Behrendt:** Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure.

**Débora Freire:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Momodou K. Dibba:** Joanne, thank you so much also for having me. It was a pleasure to be on the podcast.

**Jo Sharpe:** Before we go, we like to end each episode with some quick wins. We ask our guests to bring in some recommendations for research, news or events that have sparked their interest and that we think you should know more about.

Joining us for Quick Wins today, I'm very excited to welcome Professor Naila Kabeer, who is Professor of Gender and Development at the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics.

Welcome, Naila. It's a real pleasure to have you with us.

**Naila Kabeer:** Thank you, Jo. I'm very pleased to be here.

**Jo Sharpe:** We're talking in this segment about the upcoming edition of the [World Survey on the Role of Women in Development](#), due out later in this month, October. I understand you played a role as part of an expert advisory group on this report and peer reviewed it as well.

This is a really significant piece of work prepared every five years and presented at the UN General Assembly. Previous editions of the World Survey have focused on sustainable development and time and income poverty. The forthcoming 2024 edition is about harnessing social protection for gender equality, resilience and transformation.

Why do you think it was important to highlight social protection for this edition of a product that's very focused on gender?

**Naila Kabeer:** We are in an era of... people call it a poli crisis, where one after another, we are being hit from all sides. It's climate change, it's



financial crisis, it's the pandemic, and then there's the everyday crisis that people have to deal with in their daily lives.

So, we've become aware in a way that we have never been aware before, first of all, that this is going to be the state of the world. This is not an exception. This is the norm. And secondly, all the inequalities, and of course gender inequality is one of the most pervasive, is going to mean that those who are vulnerable, those who have lost out in the past, are going to be hit even harder.

And the issue of gender and gender equality is interesting from two perspectives. One is that it means that women and girls are hit very hard. But two is that fixing it has enormous synergies and multipliers for the wellbeing the world, of society and so on. So, there is the cost aspect, but also the gains aspect.

**Jo Sharpe:** This report is quite monumental and comprehensive. It looks in depth at the inequities and compounding risks that women and girls face, how they are covered or otherwise in social protection systems. There are chapters on design, coordination, delivery, financing. There's far too much to unpack, unfortunately, in this short segment.

But, from your perspective, what are some of the key insights in this report?

**Naila Kabeer:** Away from the report, I think one thing I should say is that this is social protection growing up, it's gone from being piecemeal safety nets to a full-blown systemic intervention. This should be a part of the way societies are run. I think this report touches on that in a number of different ways. It's holistic in terms of linking up vulnerabilities across the life course.

I did a report for a program on adolescents, and I began by looking at poverty amongst the elderly and it is poor women who are much worse off. And you have to look at the elderly because it helps you to understand where those disadvantages began and they begin in adolescence and in childhood.

The second is it's a whole systems approach. It's not just looking at an implementation or financing. It's saying that we have to have intentionality and commitment to gender equality at every stage of programs. And it's a

whole society approach. It tells you that social protection has enormous benefits for overcoming structural deficits, crisis, and so on, but it cannot do it on its own. Social protection needs to be coordinated and linked with macroeconomic policies, concerns about the environment, concerns with care, and so on.

**Jo Sharpe:** Thank you. I wanted to highlight myself the report's gender analysis along the social protection delivery chain. The report starts off by saying these are more than just a series of technical steps made up of people and relationships. They shape women's experiences of agency and dignity. This is such an important perspective on something that we often view as in a very technical way. And it is made possible by applying gender and human rights lenses.

**Naila Kabeer:** What I think this whole report does is by reminding us that there are people involved in these delivery systems. We have to imbue the whole system with an awareness that you are dealing with people, and many of them are amongst the most marginalized, whose everyday lives depend on how well they can cope with the crisis, how well they can prosper and look after their children.

But I think the report makes one other additional point, and that is the way that social protection is delivered, the terms of respect, the obvious effort and inclusiveness are very important in shaping relationships between States and their citizens. The field worker on the ground is the government in person. This is who a poor marginalized woman or an informal sector worker... this is their experience of the government. It should not just be being inspected or taxed, etc. It should also be being recognized as entitled to sharing in the prosperity of a nation, sharing in the possibility for improvement and so on.

**Jo Sharpe:** In the first part of this episode, we talked about the ILO's recently released world social protection report, which of course tracks global coverage, and other indicators. And this year looks very closely at the role of social protection in addressing climate change.

Of course, a huge challenge for achieving universal social protection is financing or perhaps the way governments make decisions about financing. This report, the world survey, calls for a new generation of fiscal pacts to scale up financing for social protection and gender equality. What do you

think it would take to mobilize that crucial financing to achieve universal social protection?

**Naila Kabeer:** I see the idea of fiscal pacts as an element in social contracts. Social contracts consist of duties, obligations, rights, claims, and so on. And at the centre of it are what we owe each other in terms of resources. And I think the report says “universal social protection stands and falls by whether we have the resources”.

I think where there's a political will, we will find the resources. Right now, many poorer countries have been forced to tax citizens through indirect taxes, through sales taxes, consumption taxes. They have been prevented from direct progressive income tax or wealth tax. So there, if we could get rid of those restrictions, then even within a poor country there is scope for re mobilizing revenue.

I think another point that the report makes is you've got to start giving benefits before you start extracting costs. So, I think governments have got to be seen to be caring of all their citizens, the poor and the rich, and you need that social solidarity.

At the moment, I think the international financial institutions are not on this side. They are far too busy kind of restricting fiscal space in different countries. Far too busy kind of allowing corporations to avoid wealth tax. But I think one of the things that climate change has done is it's a call to action. When people talk about extinction, that is what we are facing. And so, I hope that that urgency does wake international organizations up and the wealthy of the world up to take collective action. Because poor people cannot do it on their own.

**Jo Sharpe:** Thank you so much. As I say, this is a really comprehensive work, pulling together all of the different ways that we can be thinking about social protection and gender, so I really do recommend it to listeners.

Professor Naila Kabeer, thank you so much for joining me on the social protection podcast today.

**Naila Kabeer:** Thank you, Joanne.



**Jo Sharpe:** And thank you for listening to the Social Protection Podcast, brought to you by [socialprotection.org](https://socialprotection.org). You can find all of our episodes on the [socialprotection.org](https://socialprotection.org) website, and on your favourite podcast platforms. Be sure to like, subscribe and leave a review. Back next month. See you then!