



Task Force 6
Accelerating SDGs: Exploring New
Pathways to the 2030 Agenda



LEVERAGING KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

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Abstract




In 2011, the G20 Development Working Group recommended the establishment of an effective knowledge sharing platform dedicated to social protection. In response to this request, socialprotection.org was created in 2015, with a view to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However,

the engagement of countries in multi-stakeholder learning and discussions remains low. Thus, it is recommended that the G20 encourage the participation of countries in these spaces as part of its agenda to foster the exchange of best practices in the area, while strengthening capacities and partnerships (SDG 17).^a

a This Policy Brief is based on Mariana Balboni et al., “The Role of Socialprotection.org in Fostering Knowledge Exchange and Capacity-Building in Social Protection Through a Knowledge Brokering Perspective,” October 3, 2022.



The Challenge



1



Social protection is an effective instrument in the fight against poverty and vulnerability. In addition, it has the potential to contribute to long-term sustainable development. Nonetheless, the adoption and expansion of social protection has faced barriers not only in the fiscal space, but also in the capacity of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to design and implement effective programmes.¹

Recognising the importance of knowledge sharing in overcoming these barriers, in 2011, the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) recommended the establishment of a knowledge sharing platform devoted to social protection.² In response to this request, the socialprotection.org platform was launched in September 2015.

Given the fact that countries with somewhat similar levels of development have achieved different levels of social protection coverage, adequacy and comprehensiveness, sharing experiences and good practices could be an effective way to help those lagging behind. Knowledge sharing could help developing nations accelerate towards more effective and comprehensive social protection systems in the interest

of achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.3 (“implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”). However, despite the growing demand for the platform’s services by several stakeholders, the engagement of policymakers remains low. Supporting country-level engagement is a key step to making knowledge sharing an accelerator for the achievement of SDG 1.3.

The socialprotection.org platform

The socialprotection.org platform is one of the most successful examples of a global knowledge sharing hub. When the G20 DWG recommended its creation, the primary goal was to generate knowledge and facilitate its exchange in the area, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).³

The idea was for the platform to be used as a common space to foster learning, identify knowledge gaps, and share easily accessible information in the field of social protection. Its goal was to leverage knowledge for value



creation by bringing together different actors such as national governments, global organisations, non-governmental organisations, and think tanks. In 2014, a prototype was endorsed by the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) and an official agreement was signed between the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the former International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), which was itself a partnership between the Government of Brazil and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The agreement aimed at further developing socialprotection.org, which was officially launched in September 2015. By December 2015, it started receiving additional funding from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).⁴

The socialprotection.org platform is a robust social protection community, currently hosted by UNDP Brazil, which has a memorandum of understanding with the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA), a think tank linked to the Ministry of Planning and Budget of Brazil, for collaboration within the platform. It brings together over 12,900 members⁵ from various sectors, such as international organisations and


government institutions. Over the past few years, there has been a growing demand from the international social protection community for a collaborative and interdependent platform that offers relevant content and capacity-building guidance. As a result, socialprotection.org has come up with new and extensive services and strengthened its activities aimed at promoting exchange and collaboration between different actors. This has led to a universal perception and recognition of the platform as a knowledge broker.

According to Michaels,⁶ knowledge brokering enables decision-makers to acquire, value, and consider expertise that they would not otherwise obtain or incorporate into their decision-making process. Knowledge brokers are particularly useful where decision-makers lack the time or capacity to keep themselves informed of the evidence in the field.⁷

Acting as an intermediary, socialprotection.org maps and highlights research-based and practice-informed knowledge. It encourages exchanges through initiatives such as webinars and events, facilitating interactions between knowledge producers, policymakers, and practitioners working in the field.

The G20's Role

2



Although the participation of policymakers in the various activities promoted by the platform is low—despite its initiatives being directed towards this group—socialprotection.org has the potential to engage those who directly, indirectly, or tangentially contribute to decision-making through different brokering strategies. According to Michaels⁸ and Jones et al.,^{9,10} knowledge brokers act through six different strategies: informing, linking, matchmaking, engaging, collaborating, and building adaptive capacity. In the following sections, these strategies are described and related to the socialprotection.org platform’s activities, along with the potential benefits of greater engagement by G20 countries.

Informing

Disseminating accessible and digestible information among decision-makers and other stakeholders.

Since launch, the platform has been consistently mapping and adding relevant content to its database. It currently features over 18,000 resources on social protection across various formats, such as publications,

news, events, jobs, programme profiles, country profiles, legal and policy frameworks,¹¹ blog posts, and multimedia,¹² in addition to offering access to various external databases.¹³

The promotion of webinars is one of socialprotection.org’s flagship activities. They tackle a wide range of issues and often collaborate with external partners, helping policymakers and practitioners catch up with cutting-edge research and discussions in the field. Since 2015, the platform has coordinated a total of 273 webinars with more than 114 partner organisations.

Another example of the platform’s role in disseminating digestible and curated knowledge is its Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 Task Force.¹⁴ In collaboration with DFAT, GIZ, and the former IPC-IG, between March and October 2020, the initiative conducted 32 webinars, involving 26 social protection stakeholders, attracting over 6,000 live attendees, and collecting over 20,781 YouTube views (by 10 May 2023).¹⁵ It also mapped and distributed over 3,800 pieces of content in different formats through a weekly newsletter and engagement with its online community. Once the task force was finalised, the platform developed a

dedicated COVID-19 page,¹⁶ putting in place further resources and a curated list of key readings on the topic.

G20 countries could directly benefit from the socialprotection.org database, which could be used for consultation and research purposes, supporting policymakers in making more informed decisions. Through the webinars hosted by the platform, G20 countries could also strengthen their institutional capacities and use the space to share best practices and national experiences on important social protection topics that are relevant to the G20 agenda, such as employment, adaptive social protection, digitalisation, and financing. This also represents an important opportunity to learn from the experience of others in a collaborative environment.

Linking and matchmaking


Linking: Linking expertise related to a specific policy area or a particular discipline so that policymakers can access knowledge and subject area experts with ease.

Matchmaking: Creating communication opportunities between policymakers and experts by matching those in

possession of expertise with those in need of relevant knowledge, helping policymakers understand and address the issue holistically.

One of socialprotection.org's significant aims is to enable collaboration between experts/specialists and decision-makers so that knowledge and expertise can be linked to policy needs. In this effort, it been working as a matchmaker, enabling the dissemination of knowledge among practitioners across different fields.

On 16 and 17 March 2022, the platform linked over 1,000 experts during the e-conference “Disability—Social Protection—Inclusion: Dialogue for Change”. This event was a culmination of the three-year joint activities of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). Organised by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and other stakeholders, with support from socialprotection.org, the conference showcased new research and ways of thinking about the key issues related to disability-inclusive social protection. The conference enabled a discussion around next steps to ensuring that comprehensive social protection benefits are extended



to all people with disabilities. These discussions were translated into Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian in real time, while also interpreting ongoing conversations into sign language.

In November 2021, the platform facilitated the Arab Ministerial Forum 2021, titled “The Future of Social Protection in the Arab Region: Building a Vision for a Post-COVID-19 Reality.”¹⁷ Representatives from all 20 countries in the region, including 10 ministers, participated in the event to reflect on and formulate a social protection vision. The forum also declared principles for a speedy post-COVID recovery in the Arab region and identified priority areas for UN support (at regional and country levels). Discussions at the event led to the formulation of a meeting declaration in which participating countries committed to working on the following four axes of reform for the future of social protection in the Arab region: 1) enhanced coverage, 2) shock-responsiveness, 3) improved financing, and 4) better governance and coordination. The forum was made possible by the joint efforts of the Regional UN Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection, UNICEF and the ILO, in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for

Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), the former IPC-IG and socialprotection.org.

The global e-conference “Turning the COVID-19 Crisis into an opportunity: What’s Next for Social Protection?”¹⁸ is another great example of the platform’s matchmaking work. Marking the end of the Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 Task Force, it took place from 5 to 8 October 2020, delivering 72 sessions across three different time zones thanks to the efforts of 55 partner organisations that helped organise it. The event brought together 183 speakers and 28 moderators and garnered 2,150 registered participants (including almost 200 government attendees) from 112 countries.

In specific regional sessions, countries were invited to share their social protection responses to COVID-19. These sessions represented an important opportunity for countries to exchange best practices, highlighting the need to reflect collectively on each other’s experiences and think together about innovative approaches that could improve the capacities of existing social protection systems. In one of the most popular session formats, socialprotection.org put experts in touch with practitioners and

policymakers in ‘clinics’,^b where they received tailored peer-to-peer advice on specific practical questions related to the design and implementation of social protection responses to COVID-19.

As demonstrated, the socialprotection.org platform can be used to address social protection policy issues in an inclusive manner since it inherently has the potential to attract a large and diverse audience. Leveraging the platform’s expertise, the G20 could partner with socialprotection.org to organise virtual closed meetings and public events. This could be helpful in framing a common understanding on social protection among member countries and strengthen cooperation and decision-making processes around important G20 themes such as climate change, food security, and gender equality. All this could be done by involving different stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalised groups. Such opportunities for interaction allow for direct dialogue between actors with different areas of expertise, fostering knowledge sharing, networking, and multi-partner collaboration.


b Clinic sessions were open and collaborative Zoom meetings were held on specific topics and staffed and moderated by designated ‘resource people’. Registrants were able to send practical and technical questions related to the session’s topic in advance.

Engaging

Framing issues inclusively to facilitate a common understanding of social protection in the decision-making process; engaging people or organisations to provide knowledge on an as-needed basis; opening up the decision-making process to encourage genuine participation and ownership.

To foster dialogue and engagement between different actors, socialprotection.org offers various tools on its platform, such as Online Communities (OCs), and promotes collaborative initiatives between stakeholders, such as the development of joint articles and blog posts. The platform currently hosts over 60 OCs, administered by 43 different stakeholders.

The Social Protection in Crisis Contexts OC¹⁹ is a successful example of virtual engagement, mutual learning, and cooperation between multiple actors. Bringing together over 390 members, it is a valuable space for practitioners and researchers working in the humanitarian



and social protection fields to access accumulated knowledge and numerous initiatives towards mutual understanding and cooperation. Activities promoted by this OC include ‘Hangouts’, which are informal meetings offering an opportunity for practitioners to share ideas and experiences.

In addition to enabling direct engagement, the platform also fosters collaborative knowledge production. After a large event or a series of webinars, the various stakeholders involved are invited to work on articles or blog posts to disseminate key points that emerged from those discussions. In general, multiple organisations are involved in the arrangement of events/webinars, which translates into increased opportunities for active and genuine engagement and understanding among different stakeholders.

Given its networking and knowledge production expertise, socialprotection.org can be a valuable tool facilitating coordination between different actors and disseminating important G20 knowledge products. The platform can be a unique asset that allows the G20 to use common understandings or commitments on a particular issue

related to social protection to affect real change.

Collaborating

Lengthening and deepening collaborative processes, strengthening relationships, and formalising the process of ensuring that all sides jointly negotiate the questions to be asked around an issue.

As a neutral space, the platform has become a relevant hub in support of global initiatives and interagency mechanisms, strengthening collaborative actions and fostering synergies.

For example, the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030) has been supported by the platform since its launch in 2015. In July 2019, the platform released the USP2030 webinar series,²⁰ in close collaboration with key partners, garnering 298 attendees and over 3,751 YouTube views as of 10 May 2023. Its outcomes were published in an issue of the Policy in Focus magazine under the title “Universal Social Protection: A Target for All.”²¹ It was also widely promoted through the platform’s communication initiatives, including a short video. In addition,

universal social protection featured as the main topic in 15 webinars²² hosted by socialprotection.org.

The platform also supports the work of the SPIAC-B Digital Social Protection Working Group,²³ which was formed in 2019 to enhance global coordination and advocacy on digital social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions. In 2020, it became the Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI), supported by USP2030, with the goal of building global consensus around standards and guidelines for social protection information systems. Since March 2022, the platform has hosted the Talking Interoperability²⁴ dialogue series, organised by the DCI to facilitate in-depth technical conversations around designing for interoperability in the social protection sector.


The G20 could directly partner with the socialprotection.org platform to enhance the reach of global initiatives supported by its member countries and reinforce their work, contributing to country-level coordination and fostering collaboration and synergies between the various actors involved.

Building adaptive capacity

Stewarding long-term relationships, fostering organisational learning, and co-producing knowledge through, for example, co-management.

The demand for online learning activities has steadily been increasing over the past few decades, and the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns pushed this demand further up in a short span of time. e-TRANSFORM²⁵ is socialprotection.org's flagship e-Learning partnership. The platform has been working with ILO, UNICEF, UNDP and other partners since 2017 to adapt and offer the comprehensive TRANSFORM training package to a broad audience. This innovative virtual training initiative has been offered seven times, to 357 professionals from 46 different countries. Furthermore, as part of the platform's pandemic response, in February 2021, it delivered a pilot e-TRANSFORM training on shock-responsive social protection. Featuring synchronous and asynchronous activities, it trained 18 people from Malawi and Zambia.

In April 2020, socialprotection.org launched its first micro-course series



featuring original content. Over the past two years, the GIZ-sponsored “Social Protection Fundamentals and Topics” series has produced five free micro-courses on various topics. As of April 2023, a total of 1,268 people had been certified. In the first semester of 2022, these courses were translated into Arabic through a collaboration with UNICEF MENA and UN-ESCWA.


Recognising the importance of providing constant updates and developing capacities, producing and promoting different types of learning initiatives are

some of the platform’s core activities. G20 countries could benefit from its virtual learning courses, which could be used to enhance their internal capacities in the area, standardising the understanding of core social protection concepts among members. In addition, they could present demands for specific courses in the field of social protection. A potential partnership with the platform could be assessed to develop these training initiatives, which could also be used to complement technical assistance programmes.



Recommendations to the G20

3




Considering the unique set of challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent and current shocks, such as rising food and energy prices and increasing climate risk, the role of social protection has become even more prominent in cushioning negative impacts.

It is undeniable that these long-term structural trends have direct impacts on countries' socio-economic outcomes. Most G20 economies are still recovering from the COVID-19 crisis and this process is not uniform, as there are disparities across countries, regions, and demographic groups. In this scenario, it is becoming clear that facilitating joint actions to strengthen countries' capacities, promoting learning and cooperation, and sharing knowledge and experiences are crucial to establishing more effective and cohesive social protection systems and achieving the SDGs.

Social protection knowledge-sharing hubs, and more specifically the socialprotection.org platform, could be used to accelerate the G20's efforts to advance social protection systems (SDG 3.1). However, as mentioned in the introduction, despite the growing

demand for the platform's services by several stakeholders, the engagement of policymakers continues to be relatively low, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The future G20 presidencies of Brazil and South Africa, two countries with substantial investment, comprehensive social protection systems, and a strong record of South-South cooperation, represent an ideal time to galvanise the engagement of low- and lower-middle-income countries with the platform, in effect making knowledge sharing an accelerator for the achievement of SDG 1.3. Thus, it is recommended that the G20 use various channels, including South-South and triangular cooperation to:

- Encourage the G20 working groups, particularly those on Development, Disaster Risk Reduction, Employment, Education, Health, and Climate, to actively participate in knowledge-sharing initiatives such as podcasts, webinars, and online communities, fostering learning and collaboration around common challenges.
- Provide content for social protection training courses to



enhance national capacities, standardise the understanding of core concepts, and promote a broader awareness of its importance. Such content can be used as an instrument for G20's own South-South cooperation initiatives (SDG 17).

- Engage member countries and the G20 engagement groups, such as Think 20 (T20), Labour 20 (L20), Civil Society 20 (C20), and Women 20 (W20) in inclusive virtual meetings and events addressing topics of common interest. These engagement groups could promote and participate in discussions and exchange knowledge for the development of innovative policy frameworks for universal social security coverage, strengthening

multi-stakeholder dialogue and contributing to policymaking.

- Advise members to make use of available databases to make informed decisions related to social protection. The G20 can further push its member countries to share public national legal and policy documents, making them available for open consultation and contributing to learning and knowledge-sharing endeavours.

Through these actions, it is expected that LMICs can participate more actively in existing multi-stakeholder hubs and cooperate to identify common challenges and opportunities towards building capacities, accelerating action towards meeting the SDGs, and facilitating decision-making processes related to social protection.

Attribution: Mariana Balboni et al., "Leveraging Knowledge Sharing for Social Protection," *T20 Policy Brief*, August 2023.

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