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**THE RISE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:  
THE ROLE OF FOREIGN AID**

Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, Ana Horigoshi, Alma Santillán Hernández, Ernesto Tiburcio



# The Rise of Social Protection in the Global South: The Role of Foreign Aid

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# Foreword by EBA

Social protection systems have expanded markedly in low- and middle-income countries in the last two decades. At the same time over half the world's population is estimated to lack access to social protection. These systems are especially important in financial and other crises, something that became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently in connection with the global food crisis that followed on Russia's attack on Ukraine.

This report investigates if, and indeed finds that, international foreign aid has contributed positively to the recent development of social protection systems in low- and middle-income countries, mainly driven by support from multilaterals. Building the fiscal capacity of countries is, according to the authors, probably the most effective way to secure the long-term sustainability of these systems.

Regarding Swedish aid to social protection the report concludes that “in terms of absolute volumes, it has oscillated considerably over the longer term, first peaking at around 1 per cent of total aid in the mid-1990s, then falling in the early 2000s to about 0.6 per cent before increasing again from 2015 – a trajectory reflected in the pronounced ups and downs ... with no obvious trends.”

I hope this report will find its audience at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swedish Embassies, Sida as well as among the public. The study has been conducted with support from a reference group chaired by Joakim Molander, former member of the Expert Group. The authors are solely responsible for the content of the report.

The four annexes that underpin the study are published on-line and may be found at <https://eba.se/en/reports/>.

Stockholm, March 2023



Torbjörn Becker

# Sammanfattning

Trots en snabb utbyggnad av sociala trygghetssystem i det globala syd under de senaste decennierna bedömer Internationella arbetsorganisationen ILO att mer än halva jordens befolkning idag saknar tillgång till socialt skydd mot det utanförskap och den marginalisering som fattigdom innebär.

Covid-19-pandemin har genom de ekonomiska och sociala konsekvenserna av nedstängningar och smittskyddsåtgärder blottlagt grundläggande brister i det sociala skyddet i den fattiga delen av världen. I många fall har nationella regeringars svar på pandemin visat på ett akut behov av bättre sociala skyddsnät för att skydda befolkningar och för att bättre hantera framtida kriser.

Denna studie analyserar vilka faktorer som legat till grund för de senaste årens expansion av sociala trygghetssystem med fokus på det internationella biståndets roll i processen.

Till de sociala trygghetssystemen i det globala syd räknas bland annat socialförsäkringar, kontantstödsprogram och arbetsmarknadsrelaterade skyddssystem. Denna studie fokuserar på avgiftsfria stödformer då dessa utgjort de viktigaste förändringarna i sociala trygghetssystem i låg- och medelinkomstländer under de senaste två decennierna.

Bistånd för att öka sociala trygghet har historiskt endast utgjort ett par procent av det totala globala biståndet, även om det i absoluta tal ökade med cirka 60 procent mellan 1995 och 2019. FN:s förklaring om de mänskliga rättigheterna och omfördelning till förmån för fattiga har varit framträdande skäl för givares satsningar på socialt skydd. Men, som beskrivs vidare i rapporten, finns också andra anledningar bakom de sociala trygghetssystemens expansion.

Studien ställer följande frågor: Har det internationella biståndet bidragit till utvecklingen av sociala trygghetssystem och i så fall hur? Vilka aktörer har varit drivande? Vilka andra faktorer har bidragit till eller hindrat den senaste utvecklingen och expansionen av sociala trygghetssystem?

Analysen anlägger ett jämförande perspektiv för att fånga de heterogena, politiska, ekonomiska och demografiska faktorer som kan ha format den senaste utvecklingen i Afrika avseende sociala trygghetssystem, också i kontrast till andra regioner i världen.

Analysen bygger på (1) en statistisk analys av internationellt och, i mer begränsad utsträckning, svenskt bistånd till socialt skydd, (2) en ny systematisk forskningsöversikt och (3) en internationell jämförande analys för perioden 2000–2019 med ekonometriska metoder.

## **Rapportens huvudsakliga slutsatser**

Även om de globala bistandsflödena till socialt skydd ökat i absoluta tal så har ökningen varit större i andra sektorer som hälsa och utbildning. Sammantaget har det inneburit en minskning av den andel bistånd som anslås för sociala trygghetssystem. Pandemin kan ha förändrat bilden, även om mer analys behövs för att bekräfta detta när data blir tillgängliga.

På global nivå har stödet till social trygghet uppvisat ett cykliskt mönster genom att ha ökat som svar på finansiella kriser och prischocker. Huvuddelen av biståndet till socialt skydd som utbetalades i kölvattnet av finanskrisen 2008–2009, särskilt från multilaterala organisationer, gick till medelinkomstländer som redan innan hade sociala trygghetssystem på plats. Många låginkomstländer kunde inte absorbera biståndet då de inte hade rikstäckande sociala skyddsprogram och system. Detta understryker betydelsen av att bygga sociala trygghetssystem som kan användas kontracykliskt i kristid.

Analysen visar också att biståndet har gett ett positivt och statistiskt signifikant bidrag till utbyggnaden av sociala trygghetssystem i låg- och medelinkomstländer: en ökning av biståndet med en procentenhet leder till en ökning av den andel av ländernas befolkning som omfattas av social trygghet med cirka 0,25 procent, vilket inte är försumbart. Resultaten för Afrika söder om Sahara visar en marginellt större effekt medan resultaten för Latinamerika och Karibien är något lägre, men statistiskt signifikanta. Detta ger ytterligare belägg för en positiv effekt av bistånd på sociala skyddssystem i det globala syd. De positiva effekterna gäller både för en bred och en snäv definition av sociala trygghetssystem, även om resultaten är tydligare under den snäva definitionen.

Globala givarorganisationer och multilateral organisationer, särskilt Världsbanken, påverkar tydligt resultaten för grad av täckning för sociala trygghetssystem i Afrika. Det är också ett resultat som ligger i linje med den begränsade litteratur som undersökt biståndets påverkan på sociala trygghetssystem. Studien hittar inga belägg för någon negativ påverkan av det internationella biståndet på utvecklingen av sociala trygghetssystem även om biståndet fördelas ojämnt.

## Några övriga slutsatser

- Sammansättningen av stöd och finansiering verkar ha en stor betydelse liksom vilka kanaler som används för biståndet. Det faktum att över två tredjedelar av biståndet till sociala trygghetssystem i Afrika är i form av lån från multilaterala organisationer pekar på ett ökat engagemang från nationella regeringar för utvecklingen av sociala trygghetssystem.
- Att parallellt med bistånd till sociala trygghetssystem stärka länders kapacitet att ta in skatt är sannolikt det mest effektiva sättet att säkra en långsiktig hållbarhet för sociala trygghetssystem i Afrika söder om Sahara.

- Även givarnas övriga inflytande och policypåverkan, vid sidan av biståndet, verkar ha en positiv inverkan på utvecklingen av sociala trygghetssystem i Latinamerika, Karibien, Asien samt Stilla-havsområdet. Denna koppling är dock svagare i Afrika söder om Sahara.
- Den ekonomiska dynamiken i partnerländerna, förmågan till progressiv beskattning, utrikeshandelns bytesförhållanden och inkomstjämlighet samvarierar positivt med senare års expansion av sociala trygghetssystem i det globala syd.
- Faktorer som antingen hindrar eller har försumbar effekt på expansionen av sociala trygghetssystem är stora naturresurser, materiell fattigdom och grad av arbetslöshet.
- Finansiella och andra övergripande kriser har delvis drivit på utbyggnaden av sociala trygghetssystem i Latinamerika men inte i Afrika söder om Sahara.
- Ett ökat fokus på låginkomstländer och sviktande stater, särskilt i Afrika, gör biståndsarbetet på området särskilt komplicerat och utmanande.

Den viktiga frågan är hur man kan hjälpa låg- och medelinkomstländer att använda sociala trygghetssystem för att mildra effekterna av finansiella och andra kriser. Det förutsätter inte bara en utvidgning av stödssystemen med finansiell hjälp utifrån, utan även en stärkt förmåga att ta in skatt, och en generellt förbättrad kapacitet i ländernas system för tillhandahållande av välfärdstjänster.

## Summary

Despite the rapid expansion of social protection across the Global South in recent decades, the ILO (2021: 19) estimates that more than half of the global population still have no access to any form of protection against poverty vulnerability and social exclusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating economic and social consequences brought about by lockdown and containment measures have further exposed significant gaps in access to social protection systems within and across countries in the Global South. In many cases, unprecedented policy responses introduced by national governments to mitigate the effects of the pandemic have underscored the urgent need to expand coverage of social protection systems to better protect vulnerable populations and adequately respond to future crises.

Social protection measures include distinctive policy strategies within social insurance, social assistance, and labour market regulations. Our focus is on interventions within non-contributory social assistance, as they represent the most important changes to social protection systems in low- and middle-income countries over the past two decades.

Aid targeted at supporting social protection has historically captured a very small fraction (about 2 per cent) of total global aid budgets, although in absolute terms they increased by approximately 60 per cent between 1995–99 and 2015–19. While human rights principles and pro-poor redistribution have been valid reasons put forward by donors for the adoption of social protection, there are other factors that may underpin its expansion.

This study conducts an analysis of key determinants underpinning the recent expansion of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions in the Global South, paying particular attention to the role of foreign aid in these dynamics. The analysis takes a comparative perspective to unpack distinct patterns and



heterogeneous political, economic, and demographic conditions that may have shaped the recent evolution of social protection systems in SSA relative to other world regions.

The study asks: Has foreign aid contributed to the development of social protection systems? If so, how? Under what modalities and financial approaches? Which actors have driven these processes? What other underlying factors have contributed to (or hindered) the recent evolution and expansion of social protection systems?

The study draws on (1) a statistical analysis of international and Swedish aid to social protection, (2) a new systematic review of the existing literature, and (3) an international comparative analysis based on advanced econometric methods covering the period 2000–19.

In a nutshell, the study finds the following:

- While aid flows to social protection have followed an overall positive trend in absolute volumes, this growth has been outpaced by the more active dynamism of development assistance going to other sectors, such as health and education, leading to an overall decrease in the share of aid budgets being allocated to support social protection systems. The recent COVID-19 crisis may have changed this trend, although further analysis is needed when data become available to corroborate these dynamics.
- At the global scale, social protection aid has exhibited a cyclical pattern, spiking in response to financial crises and price shocks. The bulk of aid distributed in the aftermath of the 2008–09 financial crisis, particularly from multilaterals, was distributed to middle-income countries that already had social protection programmes in place. Many low-income countries were unable to absorb social protection aid because they did not have nationwide social protection programmes and systems in place. This underscores the importance of building social protection systems to utilize these structures as countercyclical instruments in times of crisis.

- Econometric analysis shows that aid has made a positive and statistically significant contribution to the expansion of social protection systems among low- and middle-income countries in the Global South: an increase in social protection aid by one percentage point leads to an increase in the share of countries' population covered by social protection by approximately 0.25 per cent, which is not negligible.
- In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, results indicate a positive and statistically significant contribution of aid to the development of social protection systems, with a marginally larger effect, approximately 0.26 per cent.
- Results from Latin America and the Caribbean (0.12 per cent,  $p < 0.1$ ) and Asia-Pacific (0.24 per cent,  $p < 0.1$ ) provide further evidence of a positive effect of aid on the scale of social protection systems in the Global South.
- The positive effects hold across both a broader and a narrower definition of social protection aid, although they are clearer under the narrower definition.
- Global donors and multilaterals, in particular the World Bank, drive effects on the scale of coverage of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa. The results are broadly consistent with the scant literature that has investigated the impact of aid on social protection systems.
- We do not find any evidence of a detrimental effect of aid on the development of social protection systems, although there is a marked unequal distribution of aid budgets, irrespective of the prevalence of aggregate vulnerabilities and the low levels of social protection spending and coverage in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

- The composition of aid type and finance type seems to matter as well as the preferred channels for aid disbursements. The fact that over two-thirds of social protection aid in sub-Saharan Africa has been channelled via multilaterals and executed in significant proportions through debt instruments and reimbursement grants signals a greater engagement of national governments in the development of social protection systems.
- Building in parallel the fiscal capacity of countries is desirable, and possibly the most effective way to secure the long-term sustainability of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa
- While donors' influence and policy diffusion seem to have, above and beyond aid and the associated conditionalities, a positive effect on the development of social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific, this association is weaker in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, and the prevailing terms of trade and level of income inequality are all positively associated with the recent expansion of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa and other world regions.
- The abundance of natural resource rents, the incidence of material deprivation and the scale of unemployment either hinder or have negligible effects on the expansion of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa and other world regions.
- Aggregate shocks, in particular previous financial crises, have triggered the expansion of social protection programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, but not in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The increasing focus on low-income countries and fragile states, particularly in SSA, makes aid work in this area particularly complex and challenging.

The important question is how to assist low- and middle-income countries to utilize social protection systems to better respond to, and mitigate the effects of, aggregate shocks. This will require not only the expansion of the scale and scope of these systems with financial assistance, but also the building of tax collection and welfare delivery systems that enable governments to effectively respond to crises.

The study concludes by making the case for continuing to provide support for building social protection systems, preferably in parallel with aid interventions that enhance resource mobilization efforts, which are critical to achieving the long-term sustainability of social protection in SSA and beyond.

# 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating economic and social consequences brought about by lockdown and containment measures have exposed significant gaps in access to social protection systems within and across countries in the Global South.

The ILO (2021:19) estimates that more than half of the global population remain with no access to any form of social protection, although coverage rates vary markedly across world regions, from above 95 per cent in Western Europe to around 15 per cent in SSA.

In many contexts, the pandemic has exacerbated the structural inequalities in access to social protection and disproportionately impacted informal workers, the poor, and other marginalized groups that are not covered by contributory social insurance or non-contributory social assistance programmes (Henson et al., 2020).

At the same time, the multiple and in many cases unprecedented policy responses introduced by national governments to mitigate the effects of the pandemic have underscored the urgent need to expand the coverage of social protection systems to better protect vulnerable populations and adequately respond to future crises.

In this report, we follow the ILO (2021: 29) and adopt a definition of social protection systems that reflects a set of public measures that are ‘designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle. Social protection includes nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection, old-age benefits, disability benefits, and survivors’ benefits.’

These ‘public measures’ include distinctive policy strategies within social insurance, social assistance, and labour market regulation.

Our focus is on interventions within non-contributory social assistance, as they represent the most important changes to social protection systems in LICs and MICs over the past two decades.

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's Progresa-Oportunidades-Prospera; social pensions such as Lesotho's Old-Age Pension; unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) such as South Africa's Child Support Grant; and public works such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program are prominent examples of this wave of social protection in the Global South.

These programmes have emerged in contexts where contributory social insurance schemes remain truncated, partly due to the persistence of informality and the dominance of subsistence agriculture. Nonetheless, the pace at which social protection systems have expanded, as well as the type of programmes that have been adopted, varies substantially across countries and world regions. Unsurprisingly, the poorest countries and fragile states observe the largest gaps in coverage (see Table 2) and the most limited fiscal and administrative capacity to implement social protection systems to scale (Andrews et al., 2012; Niño-Zarazúa, 2019; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012).

In an address to the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly in 2021, the UN Secretary-General called for additional domestic resource mobilization efforts and international solidarity to assist LICs and MICs in closing the gap in access to social protection systems (United Nations, 2021). There are strong normative and economic arguments that support this proposition.

From a social justice perspective, efforts to address current deficits in social protection coverage, particularly among poor countries and vulnerable populations, are welfare-enhancing (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1970). From a human rights perspective, the realization and fulfilment of social protection coverage and an adequate standard of living is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, particularly in Articles 22 and 25 (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

From an economic angle, at the macro level, countries with well developed social protection systems are in a better position to utilize these policy structures as countercyclical measures in times of crisis

(Stiglitz, 2013). At the micro level, a growing literature shows overall positive socio-economic impacts of these policies on households' well-being (Baird et al., 2013; Barrientos & Niño-Zarazúa, 2010; Bastagli et al., 2019; Hillier-Brown et al., 2019; Kabeer & Waddington, 2015; Lagarde et al., 2007; Malerba & Niño-Zarazúa, forthcoming; Owusu-Addo & Cross, 2014).

Prior to the recent expansion of social protection, many LICs and MICs witnessed a series of important political and political economy developments that reshaped both state–society relations and interactions with domestic and external actors, institutions, and donors. In the context of SSA, these developments include processes of urbanization, demographic transitions, economic transformation, and more competitive political systems, often involving a (re)assertion of clientelistic and sometimes authoritarian forms of governance. And while the number of electoral democracies in the SSA region has quadrupled since the 1990s, the region remains dominated by electoral autocracies controlled by privileged elites (Carter, 2016; Kroeger, 2020).

In the area of development assistance, aid targeted at supporting social protection has historically captured a very small fraction of global aid budgets (about 2 per cent of total official development assistance), although in absolute terms it increased by approximately 60 per cent between 1995–99 and 2015–19. While human rights principles and pro-poor redistribution have been valid reasons put forward by donors for the adoption of social protection (UNDP, 2016), there are other factors that have underpinned its expansion. The socio-economic conditions that prevail in aid-recipient countries and the structure of their economies and political institutions, as well as external factors such as policy diffusion effects from donors and international organizations can all play an important role in shaping the level of adoption and institutionalization of social protection systems.

This study conducts an international comparative analysis of the recent evolution of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions, paying particular attention to the role of foreign aid in these dynamics. It asks: Has foreign aid contributed to the development of social protection systems? If so, how? Under what conditions does it work? What other underlying factors have contributed to (or hindered) the recent evolution and expansion of social protection systems? What does the existing evidence indicate in this regard?

Taking a relational comparative perspective is key to understanding the heterogeneous historical, political, economic, and demographic conditions and dynamics that are shaping the recent evolution of social protection systems in the Global South.

The study draws on (1) a statistical analysis of international and Swedish aid to social protection, (2) a new systematic review of the existing literature, and (3) an international comparative analysis based on advanced econometric methods covering the period 2000–19, to address the following specific research questions:

## **Research questions**

1. What are the trends in international and Swedish aid to social protection systems? What actors have driven these processes? What modalities and financial instruments have been used to support social protection systems? Are there distinct features of aid delivery by types of donor? Which countries and world regions have been the main recipients of assistance over time?
2. What are the key factors highlighted by the academic literature as underpinning the rise of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions? What does the literature indicate in relation to the role of aid in the expansion of social protection systems?
3. Has aid indeed positively contributed to the expansion of social protection systems? If so, which are the likely channels? What other factors have played a key role in this recent evolution?



The main message from the study is a positive contribution of aid to the development of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions. We do not find any evidence of a detrimental aid relationship.

The analysis underscores other important factors underpinning the recent expansion of social protection systems, namely the economic dynamism of recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, their insertion in the global economy, and their level of income inequality.

Donors' influence and policy diffusion, the political ideology of incumbent regimes, and previous aggregate shocks also appear to have contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in some regions, particularly LAC and APAC, but not in SSA. The report provides a discussion of the possible reasons for these findings.

## **A roadmap**

The next section of this report presents an analysis of the scale and recent evolution of social protection systems in LICs and MICs, based on several sources, while underscoring the informational limitations of these sources. The report then presents an analysis of the composition of and trends in aid flows to social protection. It identifies two definitions of social protection aid that capture distinct sets of policy strategies within social insurance, social assistance, and labour market regulation. This analysis draws principally on the OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database, although we also use, for the case of Swedish aid, Sida's administrative data.

Next, the report takes new stock of the literature. It presents a systematic review of published work on the determinants of the adoption and expansion of social protection systems, which, to the best of our knowledge, is the first such systematic review in this area.

The review considers not only studies that explicitly focus on the role of external forces via aid, donor influence, and policy diffusion, but also studies on other key determinants of social protection expansion.

The report then presents a quantitative analysis of the contribution of aid to the expansion of social protection systems in SSA and around the developing world. We resort to advanced econometric methods to mitigate the endogeneity problem that arises from the relationship between aid and the scale and evolution of social protection systems. The analysis also tests key propositions advanced by the literature. The report concludes with reflections on the policy implications of the findings.

## 2 The scale and evolution of social protection systems

Measuring the scale and evolution of social protection systems in an international comparative perspective remains challenging due to data limitations and differences in the conceptualization and definition of social protection across the organizations that track progress and collect information on the scope and coverage of social protection programmes.

Social protection systems are defined in this study as nationwide policy portfolios aimed at protecting populations against life-course and employment-related hazards that threaten acceptable levels of well-being; supporting their productive capacity; and facilitating their full participation in society (Gough et al., 2004; ILO, 2021; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012). These ‘policy portfolios’ are underpinned and supported by institutional, legal, and administrative capabilities and the fiscal space that countries have in which to build integrated management information systems, beneficiary registries, monitoring and evaluation systems, and delivery mechanisms that will facilitate the coordination and management of multiple programmes and welfare entitlements in a harmonized and cost-effective manner. Countries with well-developed systems and financial resources are in a better position to support large-scale social protection programmes with nationwide coverage. Thus, in this study, we focus on the nationwide coverage of social protection programmes as a proxy for the development and scale of social protection systems.

While nationwide coverage, measured as the total of all beneficiaries of all functioning social protection programmes in country  $i$  in period  $t$ , is an imperfect proxy for the scale of adoption of welfare institutions, we argue that in the absence of accurate data, it is ultimately the best indicator of the capabilities that countries have for institutional and financial arrangements - and their management and implementation – to distribute entitlements and provide protection to eligible populations.

For the purpose of the international comparative analysis presented below, we rely on key data sources and indicators to examine the scale of adoption and recent expansion of social protection systems in LICs and MICs, including those in SSA. These data sources are: (1) The ILO's World Social Protection (WSP) database; (2) the World Bank's ASPIRE database; and (3) UNU-WIDER's Social Assistance, Politics, and Institutions (SAPI) database.

The first two databases provide relevant information on the current scale of social protection systems at a cross-sectional level, but without the key longitudinal information that is needed to measure the evolution of these systems. The third database provides useful information on the evolution and current take-up of social protection systems, in particular social assistance programmes, over the past two decades and allows us to take advantage of the time and spatial variation in social protection expansion to conduct an international comparative analysis. We discuss these data sources in online Appendix I.

## **The ILO's World Social Protection database**

In Table 1 we present a summary of the scale of effective social protection coverage by vulnerable groups based on the ILO's World Social Protection database, across world regions. The colour scale captures the distribution of coverage, from dark green indicating the highest values to dark red measuring the lowest coverage in the corresponding distribution. As can be seen, SSA remains the region with the lowest effective coverage across vulnerable populations, with only 15 per cent of the regional population covered by at least one area of social protection, followed by Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia.

People in old age is the population subgroup best (but still marginally) protected by social protection systems in SSA, with a rate of effective coverage of approximately 29 per cent, followed by children and persons with disabilities, both with a rate of effective

coverage of 13 per cent. Just over 8 per cent of vulnerable groups (which include those living in extreme poverty, people living with HIV, orphans and vulnerable children, households headed by older persons, and food-insecure households) are covered by social protection systems in SSA, while just 5.4 per cent of mothers and new-borns and 4.3 per cent of the unemployed are covered by formal forms of social protection.

While the ILO's WSP database provides useful information to track the current distribution of coverage of social protection systems across vulnerable populations, it remains limited as a measure of the evolution of these systems over time.<sup>1</sup>

## **The World Bank's ASPIRE database**

In Table 2 we present a summary of the coverage of social assistance programmes and social insurance schemes across world regions by income quintiles based on the World Bank's ASPIRE database. SSA, and LICs in general, show the lowest rate of coverage throughout the income distribution.

In the case of SSA, only about one-third of the poorest 20 per cent of populations receive any form of social assistance (the lowest rate across world regions), and that proportion goes down to around just 5 per cent when we consider social insurance benefits. When we consider LICs, we observe, as expected, the lowest rate of coverage among the World Bank's country income classifications, with a rate of coverage of only around 14 per cent among the poorest 20 per cent.

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<sup>1</sup> We conducted an econometric analysis of the spatial variation in social protection take-up observed in the WPS database in an attempt to assess the impact of aid on social protection systems; but, unfortunately, due to data limitations in the temporal dimension of this database, we were unable to obtain robust estimates in the international comparative analysis presented below.

We also observe a significant variation in the rate of coverage in SSA by type of programme, which remains nonetheless very limited throughout the income distribution. Focusing on the poorest 20 per cent, social pensions report the largest rate of coverage, with a regional average of 8.8 per cent, followed by school feeding programmes and in-kind transfers (both with a coverage of approximately 7.5 per cent) and unconditional cash transfers (5.7 per cent) (see Table A1 and Table A2 in I).

**Table 1: Effective social protection coverage by vulnerable populations**

Region	Population covered (in at least one area)	Children	Mothers and newborns	Persons with severe disabilities	Unemployed	Older persons	Vulnerable groups <sup>1</sup>
Arab States	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6.46	9.80	24.15	n.a.
Central and Western Asia	44.38	29.64	40.93	66.43	11.57	52.98	24.38
Eastern Asia	69.12	51.10	57.56	53.82	27.33	90.10	31.11
Eastern Europe	89.41	91.44	96.13	100.00	27.65	95.83	53.70
Latin America and the Caribbean	58.45	50.23	47.94	28.56	21.54	53.99	33.30
Northern Africa	36.88	n.a.	55.60	4.37	n.a.	37.10	n.a.
Northern America	87.97	39.73	100.00	83.62	33.95	100.00	65.00
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	95.34	98.38	99.84	95.43	50.50	89.41	82.17
Oceania	74.32	100.00	n.a.	90.14	42.00	36.75	31.37
South-Eastern Asia	42.50	21.09	18.07	11.82	44.10	41.49	8.87
Southern Asia	25.93	29.44	30.96	14.93	n.a.	31.94	7.58
Sub-Saharan Africa	15.01	13.03	5.39	13.03	4.33	28.55	8.19

Note: the colour scale captures the distribution of coverage, from dark green capturing the highest values to dark red capturing the lowest values.

1. Vulnerable groups include those living in extreme poverty, people living with HIV, orphans and vulnerable children, households headed by older persons, and food-insecure households.

Source: authors' calculations, based on the ILO's WSP database (ILO, 2021).

**Table 2: Coverage and transfer size of social assistance and social insurance by quintiles**

Coverage <sup>1</sup>	Social assistance					Social insurance				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.08	26.97	24.16	19.76	14.26	5.41	4.54	4.88	5.47	6.36
East Asia & Pacific	43.62	36.47	31.53	25.17	18.31	14.68	13.59	13.9	14.39	14.75
Europe & Central Asia	48.63	35.87	30.41	26.08	19.51	61.34	52.16	43.77	38.04	30.37
Latin America & Caribbean	63.72	53.33	44.35	34.92	20.67	11.05	13.7	15.48	17.19	19.03
Middle East & North Africa	44.9	35.81	31.73	27.92	18.25	21.39	17.65	18.38	20.06	22.61
South Asia	47.11	39.73	34.5	29.79	23.92	6.53	5.67	6.04	5.95	6.85
High income	68.41	60.57	53.27	46.54	33.61	55.08	47.06	40.63	35.9	27.45
Upper-middle income	56.35	44.24	36.45	28.25	17.82	26.9	26.55	25	24.34	23.66
Lower-middle income	41.84	34.23	30.1	25.67	18.84	12.76	10.42	10.41	10.71	11.41
Low income	14.32	12.32	11.91	9.94	7.66	6.34	3.81	3.73	4.15	4.88
World	45.2	36.91	31.76	26.16	18.16	21.28	19.04	17.79	17.23	16.48
<b>Transfer size<sup>2</sup></b>										
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.98	0.32	0.36	0.42	0.6	2.51	1.14	1.11	1.62	2.75
East Asia & Pacific	0.45	0.46	0.54	0.34	1.25	5.35	3.57	2.95	3.98	5.6
Europe & Central Asia	2.23	1.22	1.12	1.24	1.21	6.38	5.86	5.82	6	7.24
Latin America & Caribbean	0.53	0.43	0.46	0.52	0.92	2.82	3.22	4.42	5.84	13.36
Middle East & North Africa	0.34	0.19	0.22	0.35	0.42	3.3	1.84	2.17	2.5	4.51
South Asia	0.32	0.35	0.38	0.46	0.84	2.33	1.29	1.41	1.62	2.45



Transfer Size <sup>2</sup>	Social assistance					Social insurance				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
High income	2.04	1.35	1.49	1.19	2.3	7.92	7.7	7.7	8.67	13.18
Upper-middle income	0.46	0.11	0.14	0.2	0.32	4.8	4.04	4.5	5.61	9.55
Lower-middle income	0.61	0.29	0.26	0.32	0.44	2.63	1.75	1.61	2.06	3.27
Low income	1.36	0.8	0.81	0.93	1.2	2.31	0.6	0.64	0.78	1.55
World	1.02	0.57	0.58	0.62	0.91	3.92	3.01	3.14	3.8	6.26

Note: the colour scale captures the distribution of coverage, from dark green capturing the highest values to dark red capturing the lowest values.

Note: sample restricted to the last observation of each country.

1. Coverage measures the percentage of the population participating, directly or indirectly, in social assistance and social insurance programmes.

2. Transfer size measures the average transfer amount of social assistance programmes among beneficiaries in daily per capita US\$ adjusted by purchasing power parity (PPP). The colour scale captures the distribution of coverage and transfer size, from dark green capturing the highest values to dark red capturing the lowest values.

Source: authors' calculations, based on the ASPIRE database.

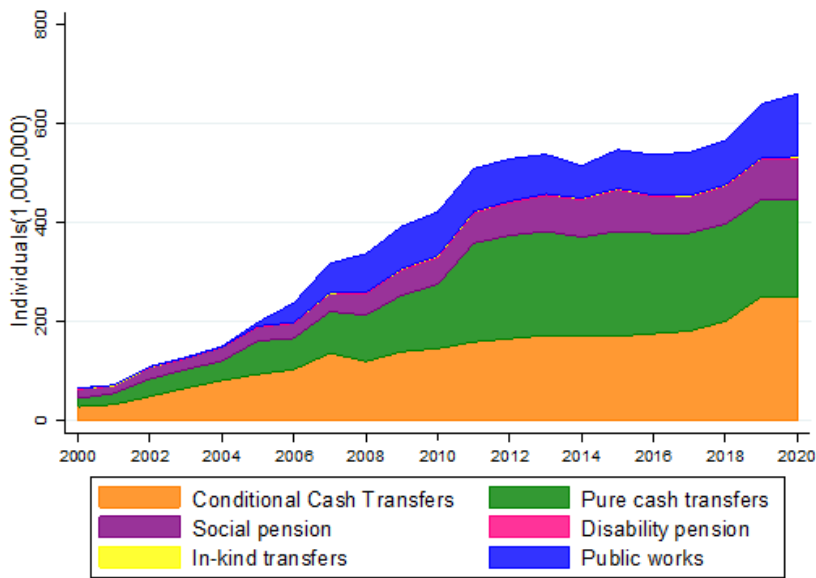
## **UNU-WIDER's Social Assistance, Politics, and Institutions (SAPI) database**

Figure 1 shows the recent evolution of social assistance by type of programme based on UNU-WIDER's SAPI database, with CCTs and UCTs showing the largest increases in terms of absolute coverage. Figure A1 and Figure A2 in Online Appendix I show the evolution of the absolute scale of social assistance by world regions and the World Bank's country income classification. The largest expansion of social protection systems in SSA is observed among UCTs, followed by social pensions and public works. In LAC, in contrast, CCTs have dominated the extensive expansion of social protection, followed by social pensions, while in APAC there is a more equal distribution of social protection take-up - public works, CCTs, and UCTs being the favoured policies for providing support to vulnerable populations.

Data from the SAPI also reveal a markedly unequal distribution in the scale of social protection systems in SSA, with just a handful of countries, including Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia, having programmes in place that reach over a million beneficiaries (see Table A3, Table A4, and Table A5 in Online Appendix II for a list of the largest social protection programmes in the SSA, LAC, and APAC regions, respectively).

Data also show a significant jump in the scale of coverage in the mid-2000s and then a gradual expansion of social protection systems to the end of 2020. We exploit this temporal variation in the SAPI database, as well as the spatial differences in the scale of coverage, to estimate the contribution of aid to the expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions. The international comparative analysis is presented in sections below. In the next section, we present a statistical analysis of the composition of and trends in aid in support of social protection systems. We also discuss aid measures and the data sources used for analysis.

**Figure 1: Number of beneficiaries (in millions) by type of programme**



Source: authors' calculations, based on the SAPI database (UNU-WIDER, 2021).

For the purposes of this study, we focus on two indicators: the first indicator measures the total coverage of direct and indirect beneficiaries by type of programme in millions of beneficiaries and captures the *absolute* scale of social protection systems and their evolution over the past two decades. The second indicator normalizes absolute coverage by national populations to provide a measure of the expansion of *relative* coverage of social protection across countries.

### 3 Aid to social protection

In this study, we focus on aid allocations to support social protection systems in the developing world. Aid is broadly defined as the ‘transfer of concessional resources from one government to another government, nongovernmental organization, or international organization to promote long-term beneficial change’ (Lancaster, 2009: 799).

Aid is commonly channelled through distinct modalities and financial instruments. In the OECD-DAC CRS terminology, ‘type of aid’ refers to the modalities used to distribute aid, including budget support (general or at sector level); core contributions and pooled programmes and funds; project-type interventions; and experts and other technical assistance. In contrast, the term ‘type of finance’ is used to distinguish the financial instruments used in the delivery of aid, e.g., grants, debt instruments, equity, guarantees, mezzanine finance, and debt relief (see Box 1).

#### Box 1: Modalities and types of finance of social protection aid

##### Modalities

**Budget support** is a method of financing a recipient country’s budget through a transfer of resources from a donor agency to the recipient government’s national treasury. **General budget support** is unearmarked contributions to the government budget, including funding to support the implementation of macro-economic reforms such as structural adjustment programmes and poverty-reduction strategies. In **sector budget support**, donors and the governments of aid-recipient countries focus on sector-specific concerns rather than on overall policy and budget priorities. Under **core contributions and pooled programmes or funds**, the donor relinquishes the exclusive control of its funds by sharing responsibility with other stakeholders. Core contributions include support to multilateral institutions, NGOs, public–private partnerships (PPPs), and research institutes,

whereas pooled programmes and funds are contributions with a specific earmarking, managed by implementing partners or, in the case of funds, jointly with other donors and/or the recipient country. Under **project-type interventions**, donors contribute funds to an autonomous account managed by an implementing agency, with specific purposes, modes of disbursement, and accountability mechanisms, and a limited time frame. **Aid to experts and technical assistance** covers the provision of know-how in the form of personnel, training, and research.

### Types of finance

**Grants** are transfers in cash and/or in kind where no legal debt is incurred by aid-recipient countries. **Debt instruments** are transfers in cash and/or in kind where legal debts are incurred by the recipient country via loans, bonds, securities, and in certain instances reimbursable grants. **Equity** takes the form of shares in the ownership of public companies or a collective investment scheme. **Guarantees** are risk-sharing agreements under which the donor country agrees to pay in part or in full a loan, equity, or other instrument to lenders or investors in the event of non-payment by the aid-recipient country. **Mezzanine finance** consists of more complex, hybrid financial instruments that combine subordinated loans and preferred equity, whereas **debt relief** may take the form of a reduction in the present value of debt service obligations and/or a deferral of outstanding loan payments, thus providing reduced near-term debt service obligations.

Source: OECD (2018).

In order to measure aid to social protection, we take two alternative definitions of social protection aid that are consistent with the conceptual definition of social protection systems adopted in this study. The first, ‘narrow’ definition encapsulates donor support to activities that fall under OECD-DAC CRS purpose code 16010 (Social Protection), which include those listed in the left column of

Table 3. The second, ‘broad’ definition covers the activities included in the ‘narrow’ definition plus support to the activities (under various other codes) listed in the right column of Table 3.

While the narrow definition can be more closely associated with aid activities that aim to develop and strengthen systems that distribute welfare benefits in cash or in kind, the broader definition also considers activities that assist both active and passive labour market policies, as well as economic assistance for people living with HIV, which is a population subgroup that is particularly large and vulnerable in SSA.

**Table 3: Social protection aid by definition**

Activities under the ‘narrow’ definition (CRS code 16010)	Activities under the ‘broad’ definition
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social protection or social security strategies</li> <li>2. Legislation and administration</li> <li>3. Institution capacity building and advice</li> <li>4. Social security and other social schemes</li> <li>5. Support programmes</li> <li>6. Cash benefits, pensions, and special programmes for older persons, orphans, persons with disabilities, children, mothers with new-borns, those living in poverty, those without jobs, and other vulnerable groups</li> <li>7. Social dimensions of structural adjustment</li> </ol>	<p>Activities 1–7 plus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Employment creation (CRS code 16020)</li> <li>9. Special programmes to mitigate the effect of HIV/AIDS (CRS code 16064)</li> <li>10. Labour rights (CRS code 16070)</li> <li>11. Social dialogue (CRS code 16080)</li> </ol>

Source: authors’ compilation based on the OECD-DAC CRS code classification.

In order to measure these two definitions of aid to social protection, we resort to two data sources: the OECD-DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) dataset and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)'s administrative data.<sup>2</sup>

The OECD-DAC CRS dataset runs from 1973 and is available until 2019, although the quality of the data is reliable only since the 1990s. We use this data source for the international comparative analysis presented below. Sida's administrative data begin in 2000, although with very limited information and the presence of substantial coding errors; the scope of the information substantially improves from 2016. Thus, given these data constraints and the fact that the accounting methodology used in Sida's administrative data is not strictly compatible with the one used by the OECD-DAC CRS dataset, we focus the overall analysis on the OECD-DAC CRS dataset and use Sida's administrative data purely for descriptive purposes of the most recent trends in Swedish aid to social protection.

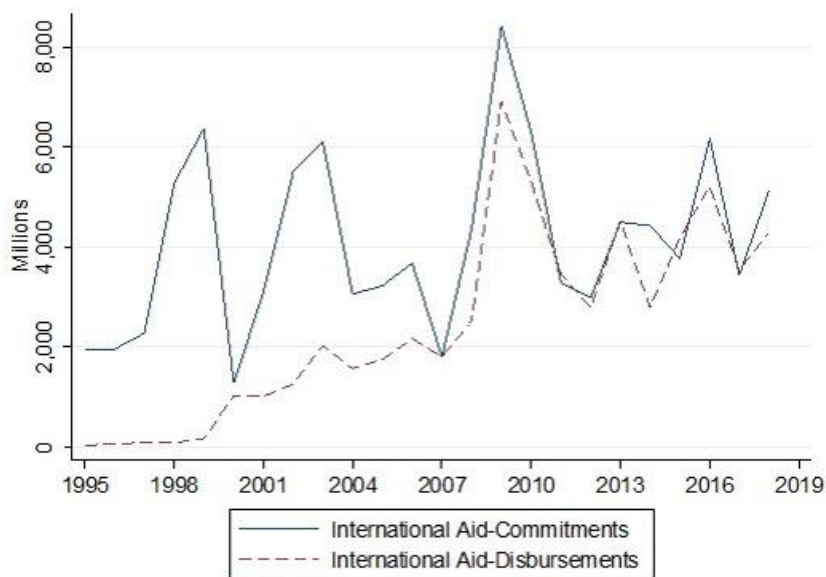
In the next section we present an analysis of aid trends to social protection in recent decades. We focus on aid commitments in constant prices for total ODA grants, ODA loans, and other official flows (non-export credit), as the series in constant prices are the most appropriate for longitudinal analysis.<sup>3</sup> We rely on commitments data, since their annual coverage is more complete and because disbursements data cannot be regarded as a reliable source before the mid-2000s due to misreporting issues. Nonetheless, the correlation between commitment and disbursement data is high, especially since the mid-2000s, when aid budgets became systematically reported in the CRS data system (see Figure 2).

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Ulrika Lång and Pontus Korngren from Sida for giving us access to Sida's latest administrative records.

<sup>3</sup> Series in constant prices adjust aid values for changes in inflation in donor countries as well as for changes in exchange rates between the local currencies of donor countries and the US dollar over the same period. The OECD-DAC CRS system then applies the total DAC deflator to recipient countries and multilateral donors to calculate their receipts or flows in constant prices. For further details, see: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DACDEFL>

**Figure 2: Global aid to social protection by aid definition: commitments vs. disbursements**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

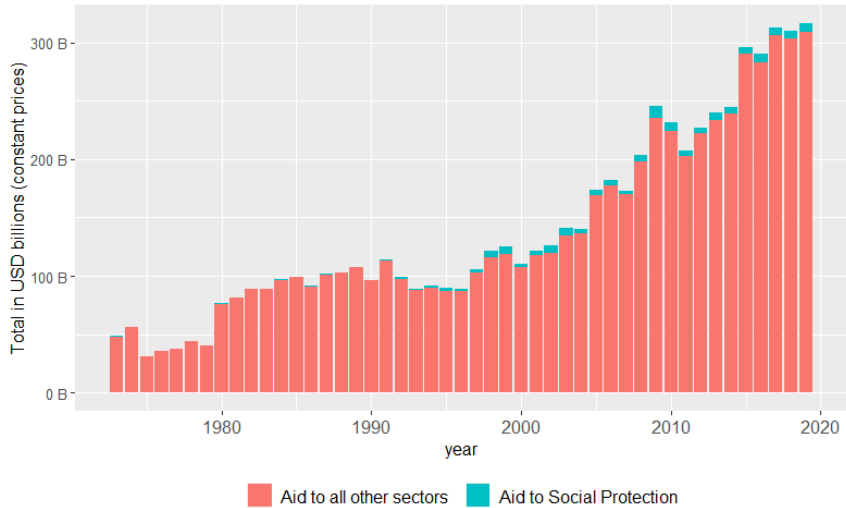
## **Composition of and trends in aid to social protection in the Global South**

In this section we present an analysis of the composition of and trends in aid to social protection based on the OECD-DAC CRS dataset, which allows us to undertake an international comparative analysis. As observed in Figure 3, aid to social protection, measured as a percentage of total global aid to all sectors of activity, has historically captured only a very small fraction of global aid budgets, although in absolute terms aid to social protection increased by approximately 60 per cent between 1995–99 and 2015–19 (see Table 4). Taking the broad definition of social protection aid as a benchmark, and focusing on the period 1995–99, we observe that global donors allocated approximately US\$4 billion annually to



support social protection systems worldwide, which represented approximately 3.8 per cent of total developmental aid budgets.<sup>4</sup> By the period 2015–19, global aid to social protection had increased to US\$6.6 billion, although these funds remained marginal, representing just above 2 per cent of total overseas development assistance (see Table 4).

**Figure 3: Contribution of global aid to social protection relative to all sectors (broad definition)** (commitments at constant prices in millions of US\$)



Source: authors’ calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

<sup>4</sup> We refer to total developmental aid as the sum of overseas development assistance (ODA) allocated with the purpose of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Total developmental aid includes all activities listed in the CRS purpose codes from 110 to 998; it excludes military aid, peacekeeping expenditures, and aid for nuclear energy and certain cultural activities. For more details on the coverage of total ODA, see <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm>

**Table 4: Aid to social protection by type of donor and aid definition (in US\$ million at constant prices)**

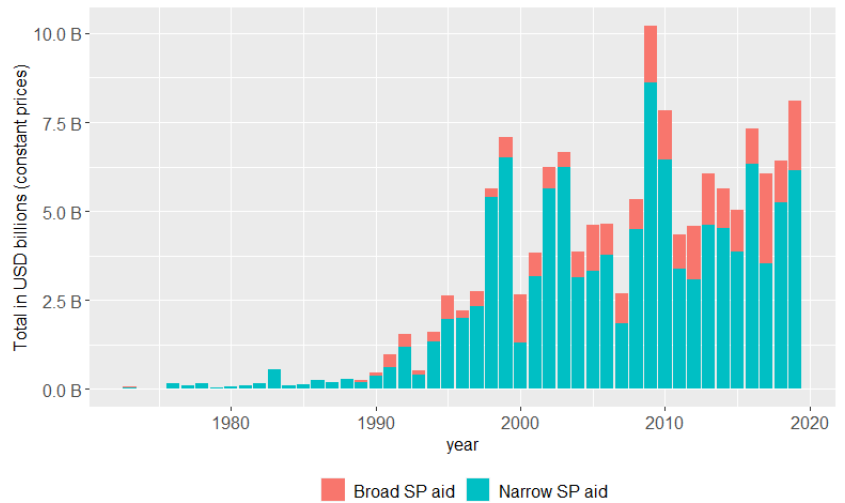
Source of aid	Aid definition	1995–99	2000–04	2005–09	2010–14	2015–19
Global aid	Total developmental aid	106,482	127,722	195,470	230,048	304,889
	Broad (%)	3.81	3.64	2.82	2.47	2.16
	Narrow (%)	3.42	3.05	2.26	1.92	1.65
Swedish aid	Total developmental aid	1,209	1,721	2,625	2,844	3,491
	Broad (%)	1.14	0.64	1.26	0.83	1.43
	Narrow (%)	0.30	0.42	0.26	0.08	0.64
Top five donors	Total developmental aid	35,988	47,764	74,382	69,790	89,605
	Broad (%)	0.85	0.79	1.48	1.53	0.94
	Narrow (%)	0.50	0.36	1.16	1.27	0.61
Multilateral aid	Total developmental aid	47,547	44,319	63,835	93,804	133,173
	Broad (%)	7.14	8.54	5.66	3.95	3.60
	Narrow (%)	6.82	7.66	4.83	3.13	2.95
Bilateral aid	Total developmental aid	58,934	83,402	131,635	136,244	171,686
	Broad (%)	1.12	1.04	1.44	1.45	1.05
	Narrow (%)	0.69	0.60	1.01	1.08	0.64
OECD-DAC countries aid	Total developmental aid	52,803	71,643	111,703	112,533	138,959
	Broad (%)	1.09	1.00	1.37	1.29	0.86
	Narrow (%)	0.72	0.60	0.97	0.97	0.53

Note: global aid is measured as the sum of total aid from OECD-DAC countries, multilateral donors, and non-DAC countries. Multilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, ILO, and FAO. Bilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from DAC and non-DAC members, whereas DAC countries aid measures exclusively aid flow from DAC countries. The top five donor countries for the entire period are the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Netherlands, and Germany. From 2000, the Netherlands reduced its contribution to social protection systems significantly, and France and Germany became more actively involved in supporting social protection systems. Thus, the top five donors from 2000 onwards are, in decreasing order, the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and France. For the full list of agencies listed under each category, see the OECD-DAC and CRS code lists available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/dacandcrscodelists.htm>.

Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

Notably, the vast majority of aid to social protection has been allocated to activities that fall under our narrow definition of social protection aid, as shown in Figure 4 and Table 4. Indeed, financial assistance to support employment creation via active and passive labour market policies, as well as policies designed to support vulnerable populations living with HIV, which fall under our broader definition of social protection aid, has remained small throughout the period of analysis and has never surpassed US\$2 billion globally in a calendar year, although we observe marginal absolute increases in recent years.

**Figure 4: Global aid to social protection: narrow and broad definitions (commitments in millions of US\$ at constant prices)**

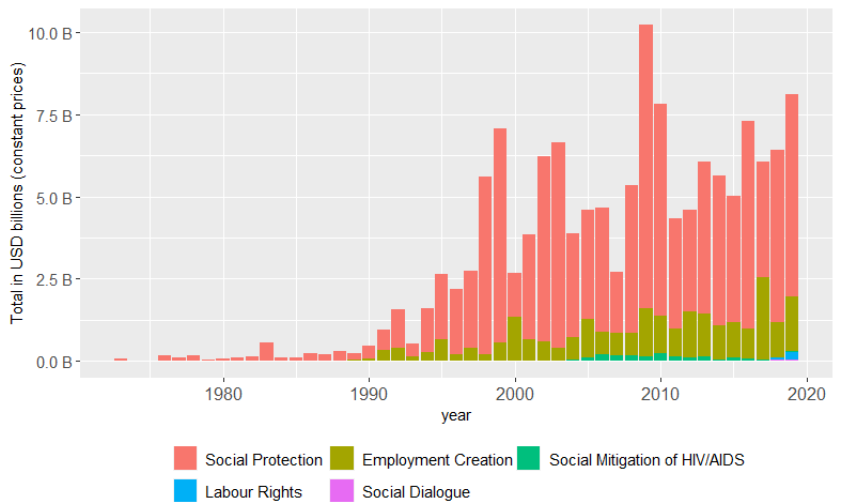


Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

If we disaggregate those activities that are grouped under the broad definition of social protection aid, in addition to our narrow definition, we observe that, since the early 2000s, employment creation policies, which are clustered under CRS code 16020, have received the second-largest amount of social protection aid at a global scale (see Figure 5). Nevertheless, those activities that are included in the narrow definition of social protection aid have

absorbed the largest share of financial support provided by global donors, as well as by specific types of donors such as bilaterals and multilaterals (see Table 4).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 5: Global aid to social protection by sector of activity**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

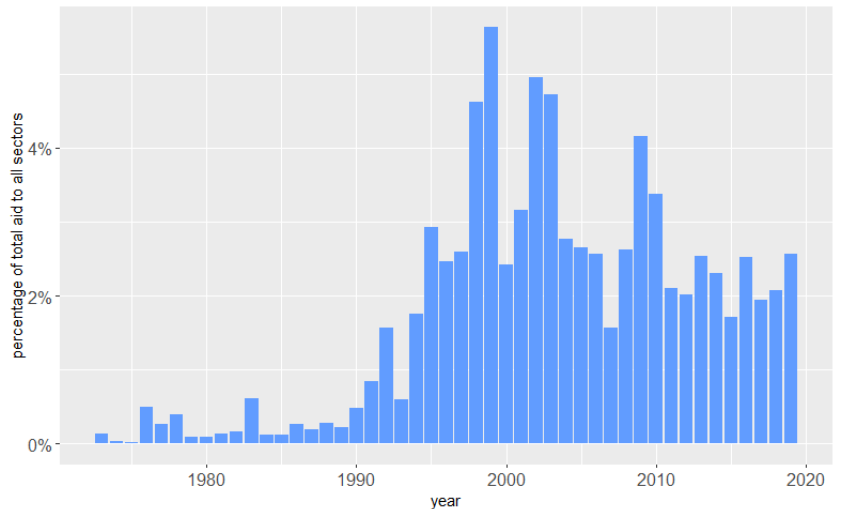
At the global scale, and measured in absolute terms, social protection aid based on either the narrow or the broad definition followed an upward trend from the 1990s until 2008, when it reached a maximum historical level, and then it remained flat at around US\$4.4 and

<sup>5</sup> In DAC statistical nomenclature, bilateral aid is provided directly by a donor country (e.g. Sweden) to an aid-recipient country (e.g. Mozambique). In contrast, multilateral aid is allocated via 'international institutions with governmental membership which conduct all or a significant part of their activities in favour of development and aid recipient countries'. Multilateral organizations include international development banks (e.g. the World Bank and regional development banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank or the African Development Bank), United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, FAO, and ILO, and regional groupings (e.g. the European Union and Arab agencies such as the Islamic Development Bank). A contribution by a DAC country to such agencies is deemed to be multilateral if it is pooled with other contributions and disbursed at the discretion of the agency. For more details see: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-glossary.htm#>

US\$5.5 billion during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008–09, respectively. In recent years, aid volumes to social protection have gradually recovered to US\$6.5 and US\$8.1 billion in 2019 based on the narrow and broad definitions, respectively.

However, when we measure aid flows to social protection as a percentage of total aid allocation, we observe a different pattern (see Table 4 and Figure 6). While we find an increase in the relative share of social protection aid to global developmental assistance during the late 1990s and early 2000s, these shares begin to show a downward trend from the mid-2000s, which continues after the financial crisis. More specifically, we find that social protection aid peaked at approximately 3.8 and 3.4 per cent of total aid flows in the period 1995–99 and since then has shown a gradual downward trend to 2.2 and 1.7 per cent in the period 2015–19, based on the broad and narrow definitions, respectively.

**Figure 6: Global aid to social protection as a percentage of total aid (narrow definition)**



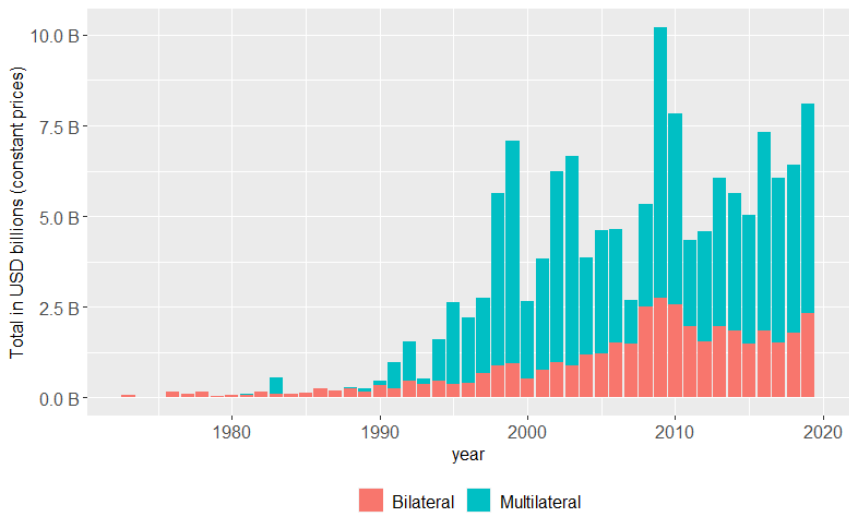
Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

Thus, absolute and relative aid measures together indicate that while aid flows to social protection have followed an overall positive trend in absolute volumes, these trends have been outpaced by the more active dynamism of development assistance going to other sectors such as health and education (Addison et al., 2015; Niño-Zarazúa, 2016), leading to an overall decrease in the share of aid budgets being allocated to support social protection systems. This may also be indicative of a declining weight accorded to social protection as a development policy within the global development agenda.

## **Aid flows by type of donor**

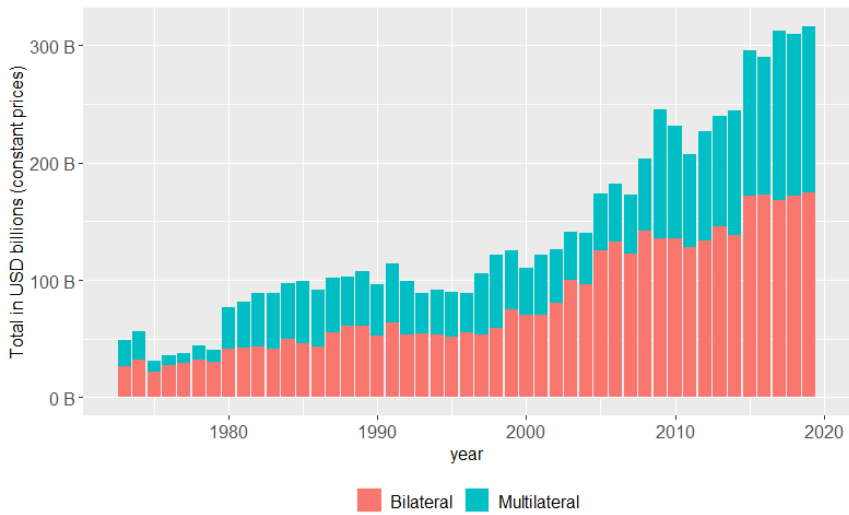
In order to better understand the recent dynamics of social protection aid, we break down the analysis by type of donor. Interestingly, we find that multilateral organizations have been the largest contributors of aid to social protection since the early 1990s, contributing over two-thirds of development finance to the sector. The dominant influence of multilaterals is in clear contrast to what we observe in development aid to all sectors of activity, in which bilateral aid has featured prominently, providing more than half of financial resources (see Figure 7a and Figure 7b).

**Figure 7a: Global aid to social protection by type of donor—bilateral or multilateral**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

**Figure 7b: Global aid to all sectors by type of donor—bilateral or multilateral**

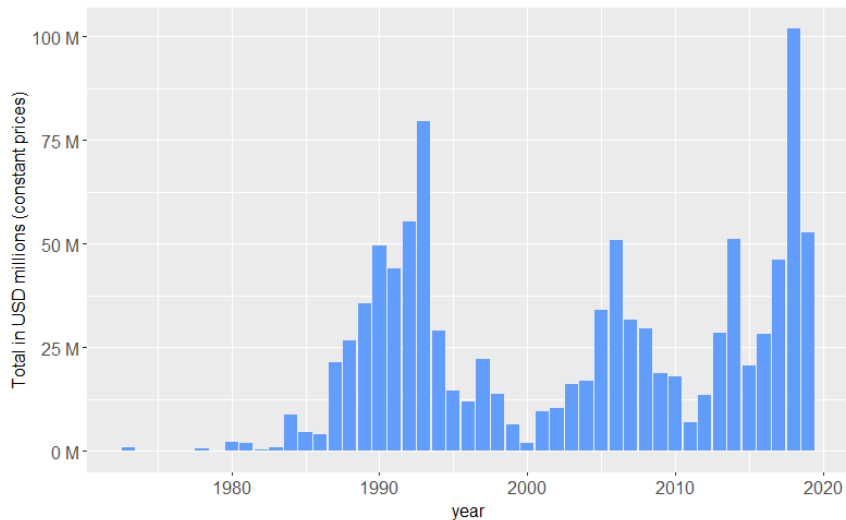


Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.



In the case of Swedish aid to social protection, the OECD-DAC CRS dataset show that in terms of absolute volumes, it has oscillated considerably over the longer term, first peaking at around 1 per cent of total aid (broad definition) in the mid-1990s, then falling in the early 2000s to about 0.6 per cent before increasing again from 2015 – a trajectory reflected in the pronounced ups and downs in Figure 8, with no obvious trends. Qualitative evidence collected via in-depth interviews indicates that this variation can be linked to a myriad of factors, including changes in foreign policy priorities in development sectors and countries over time, demand-driven responses to crises and shocks in recipient countries, corrupt practices and antidemocratic behaviour of recipient governments that lead to the rescission of cooperation agreements, and wide-ranging objectives in bilateral strategies for development cooperation (e.g. allocating resources to social protection to jointly improve access to education or health care utilization).

**Figure 8: Swedish aid to social protection: broad definition**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

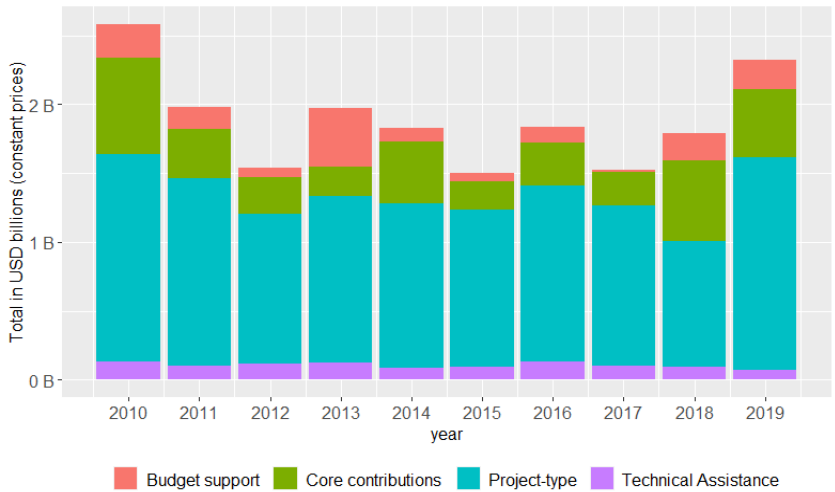
Anecdotal evidence also suggests that aid budgets to social protection may be influenced by political business cycles and the political ideology of ruling parties in Sweden in the long run, going up when left-wing parties (in particular, social democrats) are in power and going down when right-wing parties become incumbents. While these accounts need to be verified by further research, they seem to be supported by the econometric analysis presented below, which shows that the political orientation of governments in donor countries (not only in Sweden) is a strong predictor of aid allocations to social protection at the global level.

Nevertheless, despite the observed fluctuations observed in Swedish aid allocations to social protection over the past decades (see Figure 8), the country allocated on average around 1 per cent of total Swedish aid to the sector over the period 1995–2019, which is close to the mean volumes observed among bilaterals, the top five donors, and DAC countries (see Table 4).

## **Aid modalities**

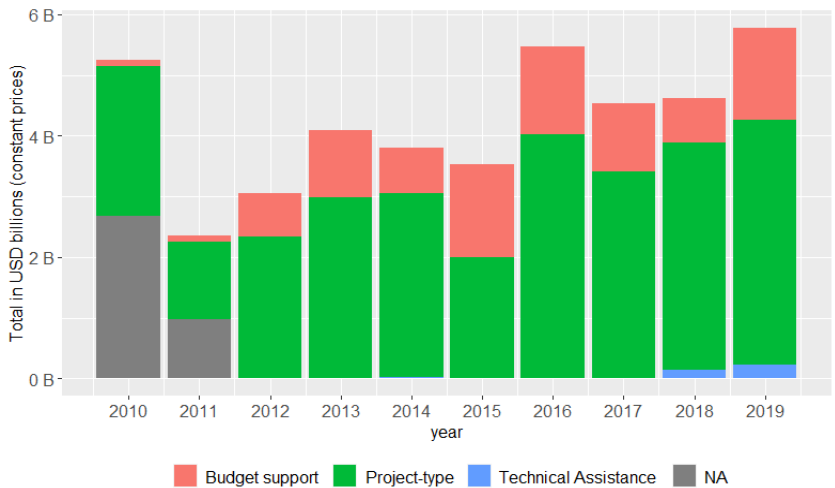
Regarding aid modalities (or aid types), the data in the OECD-DAC CRS dataset are unreliable prior to 2010, which makes our analysis truncated and restricted to the past decade. Despite these constraints, the available data provide interesting insights. We observe that both bilateral and multilateral aid are concentrated in project-type interventions, usually devoting more than half of total contributions to social protection (based on the broad definition) through this aid modality. Multilaterals also rely on budget support and, to a much lesser extent, on technical assistance to support social protection systems, while bilaterals channel a significant proportion of their operations via core contributions, pooled programmes, and funds (see Figure 9 and Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Global bilateral aid to social protection by aid modality (broad definition)**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

**Figure 10: Global multilateral aid to social protection by aid modality (broad definition)**



Note: 'NA' refers to aid that is considered 'bilateral, unspecified', which, according to the OECD-DAC CRS classification, includes non-country programmable aid such as administrative and research costs, aid to refugees in the donor country, and aid allocated to regional bodies.  
Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

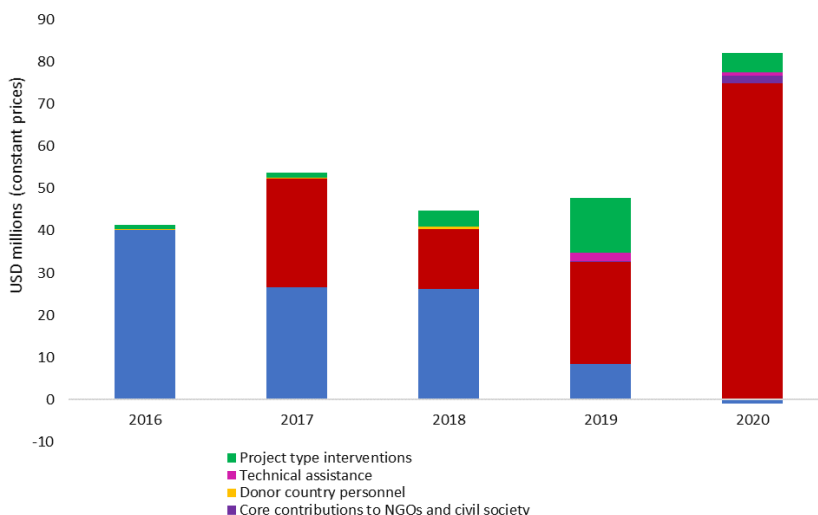
The preference for project aid over other modalities such as budget support is symptomatic of broader considerations that relate to governance issues, state capacity, and foreign policy, all of which underpin the relationship between donors and recipient countries. Indeed, qualitative evidence collected through in-depth interviews suggests that donors limit budget support operations because of concerns about corruption, rent-seeking behaviour, and the overall absence of programmatic politics in aid-recipient countries. Furthermore, with the increasing focus on LICs and fragile states, governments in donor countries are reluctant to be seen as supporting regimes that abuse human rights and govern in an undemocratic manner.

Unfortunately, Sida's administrative data are too limited in scope and duration for us to arrive at robust conclusions about patterns and trends in Swedish aid to social protection. While the most recent data, covering the period 2016–20, may suggest a shift in aid modalities from a dominance of basket funds or pooled funding (see Box 1) to a high concentration of Swedish aid going to specific-purpose programmes and funds,<sup>6</sup> in fact this apparent trend simply captures specific decisions made in a small number of cases (e.g. the large-scale support to Sudan in 2020), which have had a large effect on these statistics (see Figure 11).

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<sup>6</sup> A subcategory of core contributions and pooled programmes and funds, in which international organizations, NGOs, public–private partnerships and networks, in donor countries as well as in the recipient country, set up programmes and funds with a specific sectoral, thematic, or geographical focus.

**Figure 11: Swedish aid to social protection by aid modality (narrow definition)**



Source: authors' calculations based on Sida administrative data.

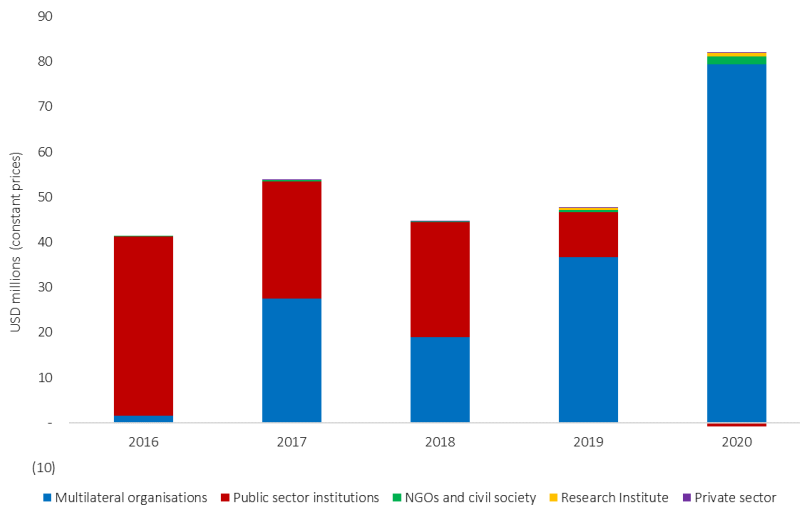
## Aid distribution

Sida's administrative data also show a general trend from collaboration with public sector institutions in recipient countries to working proactively with multilateral organizations as the implementing institution (see Figure 12). In 2020, 60 per cent of Swedish aid to social protection was distributed via the World Bank Group, 36 per cent through UN agencies - in particular UNICEF (21 per cent), the World Food Programme (12.5 per cent), and the United Nations Development Programme (3 per cent) – and 4.2 per cent via the European Commission.

Qualitative evidence suggests that this trend is in part the result of two factors. First, from an operational point of view, it reflects Sida's efforts to coordinate and harmonize aid operations with donor agencies (both bilaterals and multilaterals), with the aim of moving away from assisting specific programmes and projects towards

supporting integrated systems, including structures, functions, and policies. Indeed, until the mid-2000s, the focus of multilaterals and bilaterals was on supporting specific projects rather than on supporting the building blocks of social protection systems (World Bank, 2012). However, since the early 2010s, there have been growing efforts among DAC countries and multilaterals to coordinate strategies to address the existing fragmentation and structural and functional inefficiencies of policies with the aim of increasing coverage and building harmonized social protection systems (McBride et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2020).

**Figure 12: Swedish aid to social protection by implementing organization (narrow definition)**



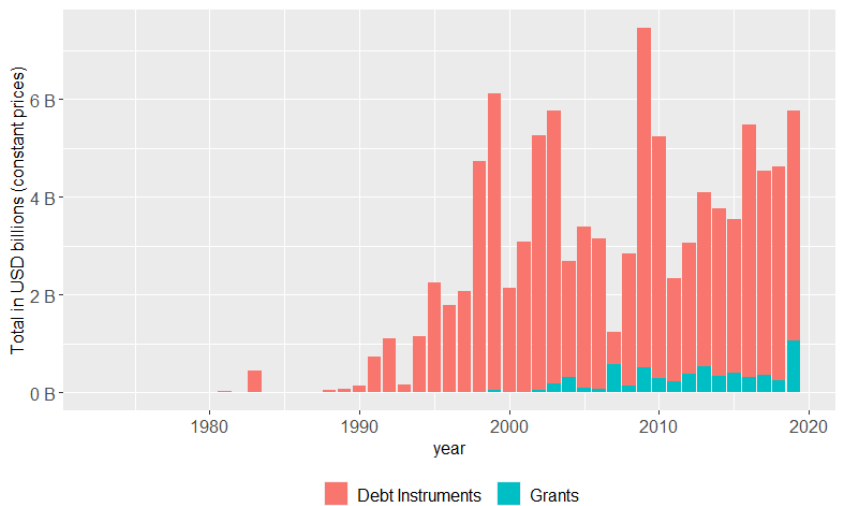
Source: authors' calculations based on Sida administrative data.

Second, from a political economy point of view, incumbent governments in Sweden have strong incentives to distribute aid indirectly, via multilateral agencies and third parties, to limit the public perception that the government cooperates with autocratic regimes, which are often characterized by widespread corruption, poor

democratic governance, and human rights abuses. Nevertheless, Sida has continued to engage in certain cases in direct state-to-state agreements to influence policy.<sup>7</sup>

Data also show that grants, which are transfers in cash, goods, or services for which no repayment is required, are the main financial instrument used by Swedish bilateral aid donors to contribute to social protection systems. The preference for this financial instrument reflects the fact that most of Sweden’s priority countries in the area of social protection are LICs and MICs, especially in SSA. This pattern is symptomatic among bilateral donors (perhaps with the exception of Germany), which also distribute aid primarily through grants, vis-à-vis multilaterals (especially the World Bank), which rely more on debt instruments (see Figure 13 and Figure 14), especially among LMICs and UMICs (see Figure 15).

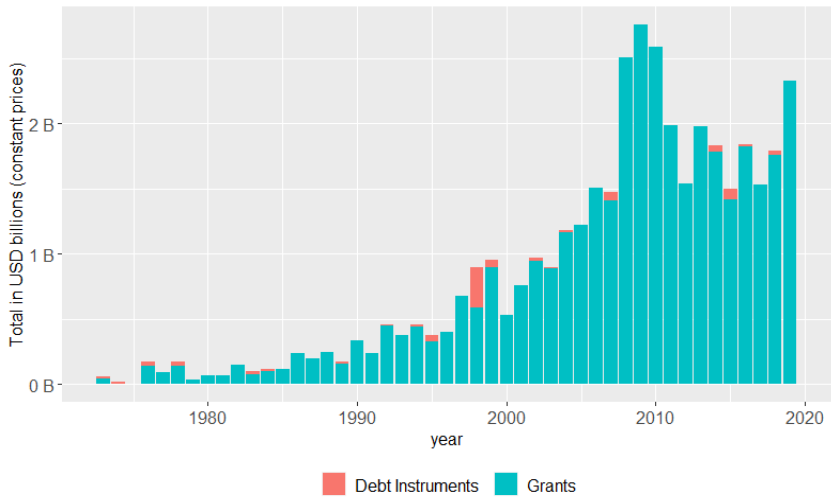
**Figure 13: Multilateral aid to social protection by type of finance (broad definition)**



Source: authors’ calculations based on OECD-DAC-CRS.

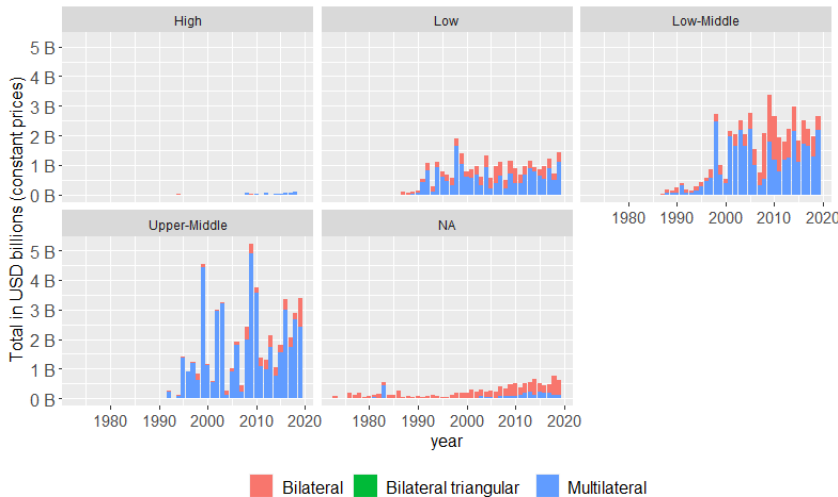
<sup>7</sup> For example, in 2021, Sida signed a large-scale agreement with the Government of Tanzania, with significant disbursements in subsequent years.

**Figure 14: Bilateral aid to social protection by type of finance (broad definition)**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

**Figure 15: Global bilateral and multilateral aid to social protection (broad definition) by country income groups**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.



Indeed, looking at how aid flows are distributed across countries by their per capita national income, we observe significant differences between bilateral and multilateral agencies. Multilateral aid to social protection has been distributed among both UMICs and LMICs, while bilateral aid has been distributed largely among LMICs, and also to support non-country programmable aid and regional bodies, which are classified under the ‘non-applicable’ (NA) category in Figure 15.

Data also show that aid to social protection has been cyclical, spiking in response to aggregate shocks including financial crises (e.g. the East Asian Financial crisis of 1998–99 and the 2008–09 global financial crisis) and price shocks (e.g. the world food crisis of 2007–09). Indeed, as shown in Figure 15, between 2009 and 2011, aid to social protection witnessed the largest increase over the period under analysis, particularly among UMICs and LMICs, reflecting countries’ increasing demand for resources to scale up and reform social protection systems in response to the global financial crisis (World Bank, 2012; Deacon, 2013). The increasing demand for social protection aid also coincided with the emergency situations arising from the world food crisis of 2007–09 (Chiripanhura & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016; Devereux, 2016; Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2010).

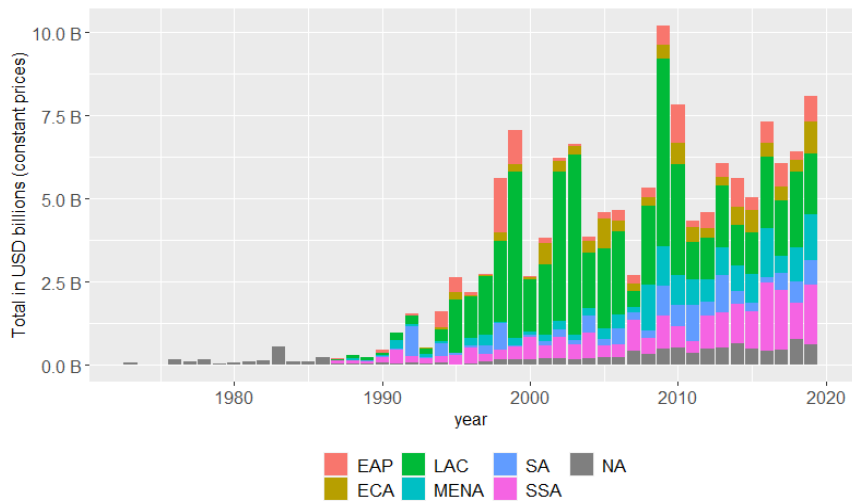
However, the bulk of multilateral aid distributed in the aftermath of the financial crisis, in particular from the World Bank, was channelled, via the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), to MICs that already had social protection programmes in place. Many LICs were unable to absorb social protection aid because they had not yet introduced social protection programmes to scale. This underscores the importance of building social protection systems in order to be in a position to utilize these policy structures as countercyclical instruments in times of crisis.

This finding is corroborated when we break down aid flows by world regions. LAC countries have been the largest recipients of financial support throughout the entire period under analysis, absorbing

about 60 per cent of global aid to social protection in the 1990s and as much as 65 per cent in the period 2000–05, before gradually declining to about 30 per cent by the 2010s.

Countries in SSA and the MENA region have been the second and third largest recipients of global social protection aid over the past decade, both regions observing an increasing share, from just 8 per cent and 4 per cent in the 1990s, to 24 per cent and 16 per cent since the last half of the 2010s, respectively (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Distribution of global aid to social protection (broad definition) by world region**

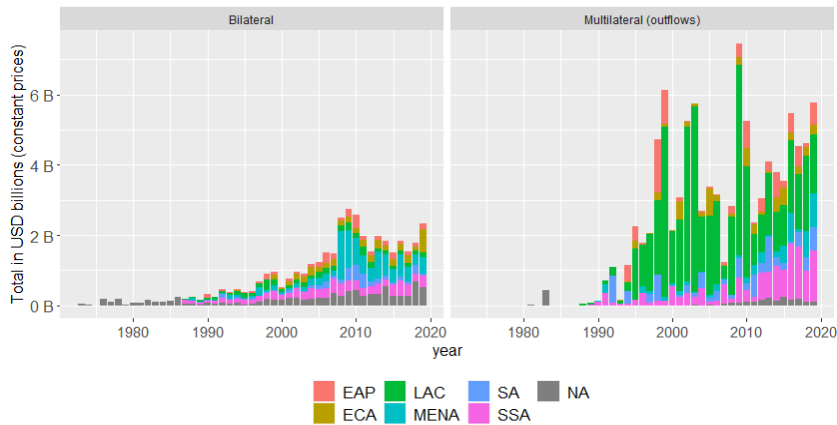


Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

The large concentration of social protection aid in LAC, as well as the growing trend in aid budgets going to SSA, is largely driven by multilateral agencies, which have played a key role in supporting the expansion of social protection systems in those regions (see Figure 17). In the case of LAC, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization have been the driving forces in the financing and strengthening of social protection systems; whereas in the case of

SSA, the World Bank has been by far the largest direct contributor of financial resources to the expansion of social protection over the past decade, although with financial support from donor countries.

**Figure 17: Global aid to social protection (broad definition) by type of donor across world regions**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

Bilateral aid has been somewhat more evenly distributed, the largest share being allocated to the MENA region and to regional institutions and non-country programmable aid activities. More recently, over the second half of the 2010s, larger (although still small) proportions of bilateral aid have been allocated to countries in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and SSA (see Figure 17).

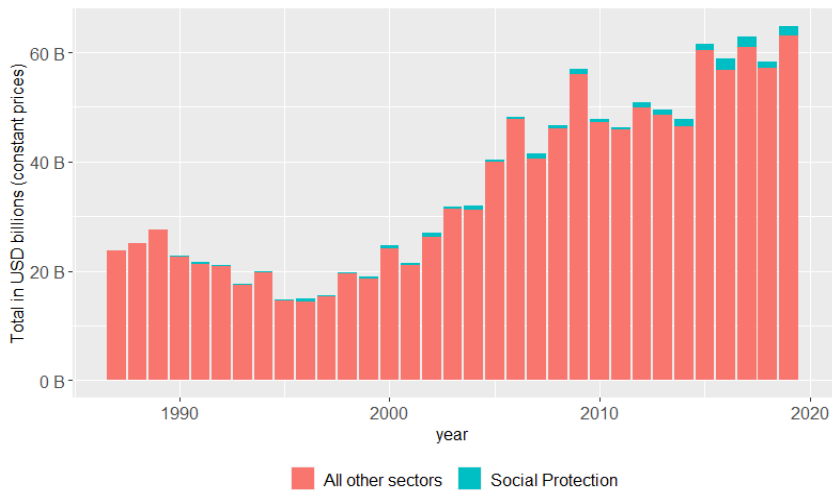
The increasing focus by DAC countries and multilaterals on LICs and fragile states, particularly in SSA, makes aid work in this area more complex and challenging. These challenges are symptomatic of the precarious conditions at various levels, including administration (e.g. limited population registries and an unprofessionalized bureaucracy), programmes (e.g. dysfunctional and ineffective delivery systems), and policies (limited resource mobilization capacity and fiscal capacity to sustain programmes and systems to scale) (Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012; World Bank, 2012), and in part

explains the stronger coordination and harmonization between bilaterals and multilaterals in the process of assisting social protection systems in the past decade.

## Social protection aid to sub-Saharan Africa

Given the growing strategic importance of SSA within the global efforts to expand and strengthen social protection systems among LICs and MICs, we limit the analysis to that region. Figure 18 shows the historical composition of global aid to SSA, in which the share of development assistance to social protection systems has remained small, although showing a growing proportion since the 2010s, largely driven by financial flows going to support activities that fall under the narrow definition of social protection aid, which since 2015 averaged US\$1.3 billion at constant 2018 prices.

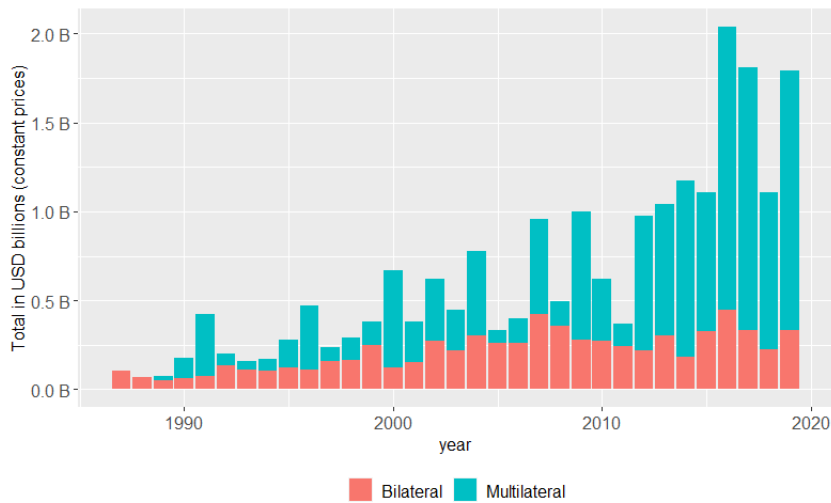
**Figure 18: Global social protection aid in SSA (broad definition) relative to all sectors of activity**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

The growing financial flows to social protection aid in SSA have been driven, as mentioned earlier, by multilateral organizations, especially the World Bank, which have contributed to more than two-thirds of aid budgets since 2010, amounting to an average of US\$1.3 billion per year over the same period (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Global aid to social protection in SSA (broad definition) by type of donor**



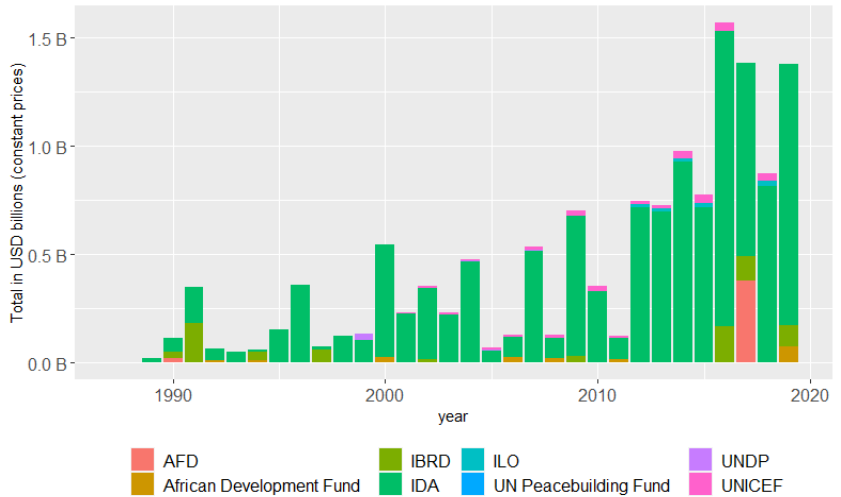
Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that the International Development Association (IDA), which is an arm of the World Bank Group that distributes concessional lending to LICs and fragile states, has been the dominant channel for the provision of financial resources to strengthen social protection systems in SSA. IDA's operations are financially supported by contributions from both DAC and non-DAC countries,<sup>8</sup> and provide assistance to social protection systems based on countries' risk of debt distress, the level of GNI per capita, and whether they are eligible to receive loans from the IBRD.

<sup>8</sup> In 2019, at the end line of our analysis, Sweden contributed approximately 3 per cent of total contributions to IDA operations. For more details, see <https://ida.worldbank.org/en/about/contributor-countries>

Recipient countries with a high risk of debt distress are eligible to receive financial assistance in the form of grants, while countries with a medium risk of debt distress receive a blend portfolio of assistance with 50 per cent in grants and the rest in the form of concessional loans (see Figure 20). Other countries receive IDA loans with maturities of between 30 and 38 years, depending on their economic conditions (World Bank, 2012). At the end line of our analysis, Sweden contributed US\$974 million at current prices, which represents approximately 3 per cent of total contributions to IDA operations.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 20: Top multilateral donors of social protection aid in SSA (broad definition)**

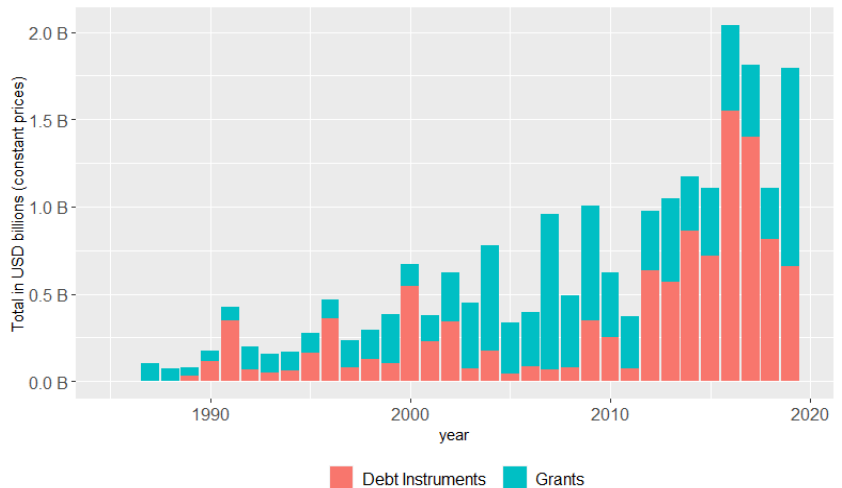


Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

<sup>9</sup> The terms of concessional lending have varied over time, but the most recent conditions consist of loans with a 50-year final maturity, a 10-year grace period, and a service charge of 0.75 per cent of outstanding disbursed loans. For more details, see <https://ida.worldbank.org/en/financing>

The aid volumes distributed via the IDA are followed at a considerable distance by lending from the IBRD, the African Development Fund (ADF), UNICEF, the ILO, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) (see Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Global aid to social protection in SSA by type of finance**



Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

In the case of bilateral aid, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, France, and Germany have, in terms of absolute volumes, played a dominant role in the provision of social protection aid in SSA, especially since 2000, when there was a substantial increase in financial support to the sector. Bilateral aid flows to the sector have been demand driven, as in the case of multilateral aid, and peaked during crises, such as the global food price shock of 2007–09 (Devereux, 2009; Gentilini & Omamo, 2011).

The strong influence of multilateral institutions, in particular the World Bank, has meant that debt instruments such as standard loans and reimbursement grants have played a key role in financing the recent expansion of social protection systems in SSA (see Figure 20). Part of the financing to LICs in SSA has been distributed through

the IDA's Rapid Social Response Programme, which is funded by Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation,<sup>10</sup> and also as development policy financing, which replaced structural adjustment lending and has conditions attached to its delivery (Kilby, 2006; Montinola, 2010).

The provision of IDA financial support through either loans or grants represents a good opportunity for multilateral agencies to exercise a degree of influence in the design, implementation, and reform of development policies via conditionalities (Clark & Dolan, 2021; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014).

For example, in the context of a Disaster Risk Management Development Policy Financing agreement with the IDA, the Malawi government (through its National Social Support Steering Committee) agreed in 2019 to adopt the Malawi National Social Support Programme II (2018–23) and Implementation Plan, which prioritized the development of a shock-sensitive social protection system. The same year, the government of Mali agreed to establish (via a prime ministerial decree) a Centre for the Coordination of Safety Nets responsible for the establishment and promotion of a national monitoring system of social protection programmes, as well as a Social Registry. In Ghana, the Ministry of Finance, as recipient of an IDA loan in 2017, agreed to make sufficient appropriations in the national budget to cover the LEAP expansion programme, whereby the number of households targeted by the National Households Registry was increased from 150,000 to 250,000 (World Bank, 2022).

While the conditionalities of debt instruments vary significantly across countries, they are influenced by donor priorities and agendas that can in turn impact the design features of programmes, and ultimately influence the evolution and configuration of social protection systems (Dodlova, 2020; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012; Simpson, 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> For more details about the Rapid Social Response Programme, see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/rapidsocialresponseprogram>



The literature highlights that other multilaterals, such as UNICEF and the ILO, and top bilateral donors have also influenced the expansion of social protection systems through the provision of technical assistance, policy design, and advice on programme implementation, monitoring, and impact evaluation, as well as policy diffusion and policy dialogue (Borges Sugiyama, 2011; Brooks, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2015). Findings from the econometric analysis presented below also support these propositions.

Qualitative evidence from in-depth interviews indicates that while bilateral and multilateral donor agencies engage in dialogue and the exchange of ideas, policy agendas are more actively advanced by multilaterals, which have distinct corporate objectives and, as funding agencies, a more active engagement with national governments and other key local stakeholders. Qualitative evidence also suggests that bilateral agencies such as Sida and Dfid – now the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) - have operated in a decentralized manner, giving country officers ample room for independence in their engagement with counterparts in aid-recipient countries.

## **Swedish aid to social protection in SSA**

The financial composition of Swedish aid to social protection, as well as the preferred modalities for its distribution (see Figure 11 above) indicates that since the mid-2010s, contributions to specific-purpose programmes and funds have increasingly been the preferred channel for the distribution of Swedish aid, absorbing about 92 per cent of aid budgets in 2020, followed by project-type interventions with just 5.5 per cent and core support to NGOs with a mere 2 per cent. These modalities have been distributed entirely in the form of grants.

It is important to note that, due to limited administrative data availability, it is not possible to identify a clear pattern in the distribution of Swedish aid to social protection across SSA, although

over the last half of the 2010s there appears to have been less concentration of aid budgets. In 2016, a single country, Tanzania, received 85.6 per cent of Swedish aid to social protection.

Kenya, Mozambique, and Zambia are the only three countries that have received support throughout the period, with ups and downs, while other countries, such as Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, have seen an increasing participation in Swedish aid budgets in recent years. In Mozambique, for example, Swedish aid provided support to the World Bank Trust Fund Cash Transfers, the UN Joint Programme on Social Protection 2017–20, and the Transfer Project Phase 2, the last two of which are managed by UNICEF.

In Sudan, Swedish aid supported the World Bank's Sudan Family Support Programme 2020–22 and the World Food Programme's Resilience Sudan programme, although funds were frozen soon after inception due to the military coup of October 2021.

In Zambia, Swedish aid supported the World Bank's Social Protection programme through the Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Project (GEWEL) project 2020–22, which distributes the Keep Girls in School (KGS) bursary, as well as UNICEF's Capacity Building Social Protection 2019–22 and Transfer Project Phase 2 2018–20, but Sweden also withdrew US\$832,000 in support of the Zambia Social Protection Expansion Programme, which is implemented by the central government, due to mismanagement of funds.

In Uganda, Swedish aid supported the WFP–UNICEF Joint Programme on Social Protection in Uganda 2019–23, while in Somalia, Swedish aid provided financial assistance to the Inclusive Local and Economic Development (ILED) Social Safety Nets programme implemented by the European Commission and the Multi-Partner Fund Somalia 2018–21, which is implemented by the World Bank.

While Sweden has increased its contribution to global efforts to support social protection systems, it has channelled most of its resources through the World Bank and UN agencies. This is in part due to operational and political economy considerations.

At the operational level, this policy is a response to international efforts to better coordinate and harmonize aid allocations with the aim of avoiding a proliferation of initiatives and making aid flows more impactful by helping aid-recipient countries to develop integrated social protection systems. Having a collective approach also makes operations more cost-effective, given the limited capacity that Sweden has to administer resources in recipient countries.

At the political economy level, adopting a collective approach makes sense, especially since Swedish aid has increased its focus on LICs and fragile states, which makes Sida's direct relationship with autocratic and conflict-affected states politically problematic.

Although social protection has not featured prominently in Swedish international development efforts, the increase in budgets, as well as the number of beneficiary countries, may appear to signal a policy change in this area. However, whether Swedish aid will be able to play a more influential role in expanding and shaping the scale of social protection systems in SSA will depend on a myriad of factors that go beyond financing considerations and the specificities of aid disbursements, and which may include the influence of external and domestic actors, the prevailing economic and social conditions of recipient countries, the quality of their institutions, and the ideology of incumbent governments, as well as exogenous forces. What does the related literature find in this regard? We conduct a rigorous systematic review to answer this question.

## 4 What do we know about the determinants of social protection expansion in the Global South?

We take stock of the empirical literature to date that has quantitatively and qualitatively examined the determinants of social protection expansion in the Global South, in particular the role of foreign aid and external actors. To do so, we follow a systematic review methodology. Systematic reviews involve using a clear, transparent, and reproducible method to first identify and then synthesize relevant research.

We follow the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews and Interventions (Higgins & Green, 2008) and the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).<sup>11</sup> Adherence to a systematic review methodology yields a review of the literature that is not only reproducible but also less prone to selection and publication biases than other types of literature review such as critical reviews and scoping studies (Cooper, 1988; Grant & Booth, 2009; Paré et al., 2015). This methodological approach also facilitates a more precise cross-study comparative analysis, which strengthens the findings from the review.

The search protocol included both the white and grey literature. Unpublished work was included in order to mitigate the potential ‘file drawer problem’, i.e. the bias that can be introduced into evidence review when only published studies are considered due to the tendency of published work to reflect statistically significant results (either positive or negative), while excluding statistically

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<sup>11</sup> The Cochrane methodology of systematic reviews is considered the gold standard for syntheses of evidence and has been adopted, for instance, by the Campbell Collaboration and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), which focus on generating evidence on international development interventions.

insignificant findings. In the end, we included 80 studies in the review, of which 32 were based on quantitative methodologies, while 66 studies relied on qualitative research methods.

To our knowledge, this is the first systematic review that examines the factors that are highlighted by the literature as underpinning the adoption and expansion of social protection systems in the Global South in general, and in SSA in particular.

In Online Appendix II, we present a detailed synthesis of the evidence and a full account of the systematic review methodology, including the search protocol, the inclusion criteria, and a description of the studies in terms of analytical methods, data sources, and coverage. In the next section, we summarize the main findings of the systematic review.

## **Findings of the systematic review**

The systematic review focuses on the adoption and expansion of social protection in LICs and MICs. We differentiate methodological traditions, either quantitative or qualitative, used in the literature to test key propositions about the expansion of social protection systems. Overall, we identify six broad categories of explanatory factors that the literature highlights as underpinning the development of social protection systems:

One group of studies highlight historical legacies and path dependence in the evolution of social protection systems. A second group emphasizes the role of external actors, which through foreign aid, donor influence, and the diffusion of successful policies have promoted the expansion of social protection in developing countries. A third group places institutions at the centre of social protection expansion. (Because these studies underscore diverse institutional factors, we divide this strand of the literature into three sub-categories: the first focuses on the role of democracy and democratic institutions, the second on political settlements, and the

third the role of the judiciary system.) A fourth group of studies centres on the role of economic and demographic factors, while a fifth argues that ideas, both international and domestic, are behind the adoption of social protection programmes. Finally, the sixth group of studies focus on covariate shocks as strong determinants of the emergence of social protection systems. In Online Appendix II, we discuss these literature strands in more detail, while Table A1 and Table A2 in the same Online Appendix present a summary of the studies included in the systematic review.

From the findings of the systematic review, we conclude that there is no robust evidence of a conclusive indication about the underlying factors that explain the emergence and expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions. This is particularly true when we examine the scant literature that focuses on the role of aid and external actors.

From a quantitative perspective, these studies mainly investigate cross-sectional variation at country level, making meaningful comparisons challenging. Isolating the contribution of specific factors, by exploiting time variation, is also complex, as multiple variables move together in periods of reform. However, even if econometric methods can avoid these informational obstacles, the most challenging aspect of such studies remains the task of correctly identifying the causal aid–social protection relationship, i.e. piecing this together in a persuasive theoretical way. Therefore, it is not surprising that, even if some sophisticated studies offer hints of causal links, the quantitative literature has not in our view offered credible causal evidence of the impact of aid on social protection expansion.

The qualitative studies, which comprise around 75 per cent of the literature covered in the review, tend to acknowledge their limitations, too. For the most part, they are explicit about the trade-offs between in-depth process tracing and the number of cases studied. No qualitative study thoroughly dissects the evolution of social protection in more than two dozen cases. Nonetheless,

beyond the obvious fact that no single variable can account for the emergence and expansion of social protection in developing countries, this literature is very valuable and enlightening for a number of reasons.

First, multilateral and bilateral organizations seem to have an important role in promoting social protection. Among others, this literature identifies the influential role of the World Bank, Dfid, UNICEF, ILO, European Union, World Food Programme, Sida, and USAID, especially in SSA (Abdulai, 2021; Cherrier, 2016; Ouma, 2019; Simpson, 2018; Ulriksen, 2016), but also in Southeast Asia (Dadap-Cantal et al., 2021) and around the world (Dodlova, 2020). There are studies focusing on the role of the World Bank in expanding social protection systems in Latin America (Béland et al., 2018; Saguin & Howlett, 2019), as well as the influence of the Asian Development Bank, WFP, and GIZ in Southeast Asia et al., 2015). Their hypothesized contributions are either direct, through funding and conditionalities, or indirect, through persuasion, encouragement of further resource mobilization, and capacity building (Cherrier, 2016; Ouma & Adésinà, 2019).

Different donors seem to have distinct preferences for specific types and designs of programmes that recipient countries are expected to adopt, e.g. the World Bank's inclination for CCTs and conditionalities in general (Dodlova, 2020; Simpson, 2018). Likewise, international agencies tend to resort to successful models from other latitudes when promoting social protection policies (Béland et al., 2018; Saguin & Howlett, 2019). While the literature does contrast the preferences of donors, it does not explicitly study the consequences that potentially conflicting preferences among donors have brought about when they attempt to influence domestic policies.

Donors also appear to be particularly persuasive when they can frame their preferred programmes according to the interests of national elites (Abdulai, 2021; Ulriksen, 2016; Wanyama & McCord, 2017). Social protection is particularly likely to emerge when international organizations meet public-minded bureaucracies (Kwon et al., 2015;

Lavers & Hickey, 2016). Importantly, however, this literature does recognize the potential disadvantages of excessively politicizing social protection (Hickey & Bukenya, 2020).

Although foreign aid is described as overwhelmingly positive in the literature, the role of donors is not always positive. Donor policies may not be optimal due to, for example, orthodox views on how social security and social assistance programmes should be integrated into a system (Dadap-Cantal et al., 2021).

Second, democracy seems to facilitate the expansion of social protection. The literature identifies correlations between democracy and different arms of social protection, particularly with those that due to their programmatic characteristics are less susceptible to political manipulation (De La O, 2015; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Dodlova et al., 2017; Niño-Zarazúa & Santillán Hernández, 2021; Schmitt, 2020). This seems to be because democracies empower the voices of civil society and generate electoral incentives for opportunistic political parties and incumbent governments (Altman & Castiglioni, 2020; Garay, 2016; Huber & Stephens, 2012). Furthermore, democratic transitions often lead to a general understanding and reframing of poverty as lack of human capital (Barrientos et al., 2013; Velázquez Leyer, 2020).

Third, the nature of political institutions seems to matter. Having strong, organized, national political parties increases the chances of adopting and expanding social protection (Iversen, 2005; Rasmussen & Knutsen, 2021), especially if left-wing parties are part of the ruling coalition (Pellissery & Barrientos, 2013; Pribble, 2013). Likewise, in line with the classic political economy models (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita, 2003), there seems to be a positive association between balanced power relations between elites and non-elites and more inclusive social policy (Mares & Carnes, 2009). The presence of multiple veto players and institutions, such as federalism or vested interests created by previous reforms, makes it harder to expand social protection (Ehmke, 2019; Martínez Franzoni & Sanchez-Ancochea, 2016; Tillin & Pereira, 2017).



Judicial courts seem to be another vehicle through which social policy can be enlarged, as long as legal institutions and courts pass general rulings in favour of broader social protection (Brinks & Gauri, 2014; Friedman & Maiorano, 2017; Gauri & Brinks, 2008; Lamprea, 2017).

Fourth, there is suggestive evidence of the role of neighbouring countries in promoting social protection (Borges Sugiyama, 2011; Brooks, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2015). Governments tend to adopt policies whose outcomes they see as successful (Weyland, 2005, 2006). Furthermore, countries seem to strategically respond to the policy decisions of their trade competitors to remain competitive, as highlighted by López-Cariboni and Cao (2015). These types of diffusion effect most likely vary depending on other factors, such as internal opposition and the type of programme at hand (Vacaflares & LeSage, 2020). Relatedly, trade openness also appears to be negatively associated with social protection because there are pressures to compete and keep social expenditures low (Huang, 2014; Segura-Ubiergo, 2007). Nonetheless, the role of organized labour can mitigate such pressures via mobilization and contestation (Niedzwiecki, 2014, 2015).

Fifth, ideology and personal efforts are identified as important in the literature (Manor & Duckett, 2017). The presence of left-wing governments in itself appears to be correlated with larger expenditures in social protection (Jensen, 2011; Sirén, 2021). Nonetheless, right and centre parties can legitimize reforms among inimical sectors, as suggested by Borges (2018) and Dorlach (2021). This is crucial, as reform can be particularly challenging in environments of adverse public opinion (Bossuroy & Coudouel, 2018).

Sixth, covariate shocks might present challenges but also opportunities to adopt and expand social protection systems. Crises, in the same way as democratization, can offer political space to reframe poverty and rethink the role of the State. In some instances, economic shocks and political crises can even create lasting programmes rather than ad hoc temporary solutions, as in the case

of Progresa in Mexico, which was introduced in the aftermath of the Peso crisis of 1994–95 (Levy, 2006; Niño-Zarazúa, 2020). Furthermore, as the experience of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa has shown, specific forms of social protection may emerge as policy responses to new forms of vulnerabilities and health crises that a pandemic can generate in several countries, thus facilitating their expansion and even diffusion across countries. (Ellis et al., 2009; Mokomane, 2013).

Finally, historical factors and path dependence seem to have conditioned the evolution of social protection systems in some contexts. Specific combinations of institutional legacies from the colonial era may continue to influence how countries expand benefits and create welfare systems (Huber & Stephens, 2012; Segura-Ubiergo, 2007). Moreover, rather than fostering future reforms, specific concessions that elites make can act as a sticky slope, preventing further reforms by co-opting increasingly powerful groups that could demand more benefits in the future (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008).

Whether or not the propositions put forward by the various strands of the literature hold is hard to know a priori without conducting an empirical analysis, especially since the reviewed works exhibit considerable variation in their internal and external validity. In the sections that follow, we investigate empirically the central questions of this study: Has aid contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions in the Global South? And if so, through which channels and mechanisms? We take advantage of advanced econometric methods and the available (yet limited) information to test empirically whether some of the underlying factors that are highlighted by the literature are indeed important determinants of the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South.

## 5 Has aid contributed to the expansion of social protection systems? An international comparative analysis

Critical questions in this study are whether aid has contributed to the expansion of social protection systems and, if so, in which contexts, and under what conditions. To address these questions, we conduct a comparative analysis that takes into consideration key factors that are highlighted by the literature.

We implement the analysis in relation to the two indicators of social protection aid discussed in previous sections. The first indicator measures aid activities that fall under the ‘narrow’ definition of social protection aid, which captures, as discussed earlier, donor strategies focused on supporting programmes that aim at protecting vulnerable populations through contributory social insurance and non-contributory social assistance policies. The second indicator measures the ‘broad’ definition of social protection aid, which adds to the narrow definition aid flows that are distributed with the aim of supporting employment generation activities and labour market strategies.

We conduct the empirical analysis using econometric methods, models, and approaches that capture the complex configuration of the relationship between aid and the expansion of social protection systems in SSA and the Global South in general, while accounting for key determinants of social protection expansion as highlighted by the literature (see methodology section in Online Appendix III). We note that the focus is on social assistance programmes, as they capture the most important changes to social protection systems in the Global South over the past two decades.

As discussed above, we rely on social protection coverage at country level to proxy the scale of social protection systems. Since data on social protection coverage allow us to measure both the scale and the evolution of social protection systems, in absolute numbers of beneficiaries as well as in relative terms, normalized by countries' populations, we implement two empirical strategies.

The first strategy adopts a series of Tobit models with endogenous regressors (IV-Tobit) to take advantage of the gradual evolution of social protection systems over the past two decades, looking at the absolute coverage that these systems provide to vulnerable populations, based on the SAPI database.

The second empirical strategy adopts a fractional response model with an endogenous regressor (FRM) to measure the scale of social protection coverage relative to the size of the populations in the corresponding countries. We adopt several versions of the IV-Tobit and FRM models to capture dimensions that are expected to influence the scale of social protection systems as highlighted by the literature review section.

- The first model, which we refer to as Model 1, considers indicators that measure the potential effects of countries' economic conditions and external factors beyond foreign aid. Specifically, we include the following proxy indicators:
  - the log income per capita lagged one period to capture the stock of physical capital and the rate of economic convergence in aid-recipient countries;
  - the annual rate of economic growth in order to measure the dynamism of the economies;
  - the share of total government revenues in GDP (excluding grants and social contributions) to capture the redistributive fiscal capacity of countries to scale up social protection coverage;

- total natural resources rents (the sum of rents from oil, natural gas, coal, minerals, and forests), measured as a percentage of GDP, which are expected to support economic diversification but also potentially undermine social protection expansion via state capture (Caselli & Cunningham, 2009; Caselli & Michaels, 2009; Currie & Gahvari, 2008);
  - the unemployment rate, which measures the conditions in the labour market and the potential demand for protection among the working-age population;
  - trade openness, measured as the sum of imports and exports normalized by GDP, which captures the extent to which a country is engaged with the global economy and may face the need to improve competitiveness at the potential cost of decreased social security expenditure;
  - the number of donors involved in the expansion of social protection systems in a given country, to capture the density as well as potentially competing agendas by external actors;
  - the average number of social protection programmes in neighbouring countries, which measures the potential policy diffusion effects in the expansion of social protection systems.
- A second model, which we refer to as Model 2, adds to Model 1 factors that are associated with socio-demographics, including:
    - the age dependency ratio as the proportion of the working-age population that is likely to influence the type of social transfer programmes adopted by political regimes;
    - the fertility rate, which is expected to affect aggregate demand and future requirements for social services and welfare benefits;

- the under-five child mortality rate, which we proxy for material deprivations that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems.<sup>12</sup> We employ child mortality rates due to the significant informational gaps in our sample regarding poverty headcount rates, and because of the high correlations between child mortality and income poverty (Haile & Niño-Zarazúa, 2018);<sup>13</sup>
  - the share of the urban population, which is expected to influence the type of social protection benefits that are adopted by governments;
  - population density, measured as the number of people per square kilometre of land area. Higher population density is expected to reduce the unit costs of delivering welfare benefits, thus increasing the probability of their expansion;
  - the Gini index, which measures the level of income inequality in a country and how economic disparities may influence preferences for redistribution, as highlighted by the literature (Acemoglu et al., 2015; Alesina & Giuliano, 2011; Benabou, 2000; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2021).
- A third model (Model 3) adds to Model 1 indicators that capture the influence of history and path dependence in the expansion of social protection systems, including the following:
    - the number of years since independence, to capture the maturity of national institutions;

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<sup>12</sup> Child mortality rates are estimated by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, constituted by UNICEF, the WHO, the World Bank, and the UN DESA Population Division, and were extracted from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> The Pearson correlation ( $r$ ) coefficient, which measures a linear dependence between under-five child mortality rates and the poverty headcount ratio at US\$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) in the period 2009–15, was in the order of 0.99 for East Asia and the Pacific, 0.92 for Latin America, 0.96 for South Asia, and 0.96 for SSA.

- dummy variables to measure whether a country was a colony of any of the three dominant former colonial powers, namely Britain, France, and Spain.
- A fourth model (Model 4) adds to Model 1 dimensions that capture the effect of institutions on the expansion of social protection systems, including:
  - the state of democracy measured by the Electoral Democracy Index from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), which is expected to facilitate the expansion of social protection via political pressure and demands for social policy reform;
  - the quality of government, which we proxy by the bureaucratic quality index from the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), which measures the soundness of institutions and the quality of the civil service;
  - the level of party institutionalization, which reflects the capacity of incumbent governments to implement social protection policies and make credible commitments to voters;
  - a measure of compliance with the judiciary, which captures the extent to which judicial courts serve as vehicles to expand social policy;
  - military spending, measured as a share of GDP, which captures the financial resources dedicated to defence and security and can have positive or negative effects depending on the level of state fragility and conflict and the type of regime in control of public finances (Brauner, 2015; Rota, 2016).

- A fifth model (Model 5) adds to Model 1 dimensions in the domain of political ideology that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems, including:
  - dummies that measure whether a ruling government in time  $t$  has a centrist, leftist, or rightist political orientation.
- Finally, a sixth model (Model 6) adds to Model 1 controls that capture the effects of aggregate shocks on the expansion of social protection systems, including:
  - the number of years a country was immersed in a financial crisis in period  $t-1$ ;
  - a dummy variable measuring whether a country experienced a weather shock in period  $t$ .

We present a summary of all the indicators used in Models 1–6 and their sources in Table A1 in Online Appendix IV.

When implementing the above models, we consider several functional forms. For the case of the IV-Tobit models, the first functional form adopts a linear–linear specification, in which coverage is measured in millions of beneficiaries, and social protection aid – which is based on either the broad or the narrow definition – is entered in levels, in millions of US dollars at constant prices. The second functional form adopts a linear–log specification, in which coverage is linear and aid is entered in logarithm, whereas the third functional form adopts a log–log specification.

The linear–linear specification measures how much coverage increases in terms of number of beneficiaries for every dollar increase in social protection aid. The linear–log specification provides a more meaningful interpretation, as it shows the absolute change in the level of coverage associated with a percentage change in social protection aid allocations. The log–log specification has the advantage of smoothing the data and allowing coefficients to be interpreted as elasticities.



For the case of the FRM models, since coverage is measured as a percentage of countries' populations, we enter social protection aid in three different forms: the first specification measures aid in levels, the second specification measures aid in per capita terms to account for the size of countries' populations and their budgetary requirements for redistribution, while the third specification enters aid in logarithmic form.

The first specification provides information about how much coverage increases for every additional dollar in social protection aid. The second specification provides information about how much coverage increases for every *per capita* dollar of social protection aid that is allocated to the corresponding country. Finally, the third specification provides the most straightforward interpretation of the models, as it shows the change in coverage as the result of a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid. We estimate all models and specifications for several groups of donors and world regions. We present the main results in the next section.

## **Overall findings of the international comparative analysis**

We focus the discussion on the preferred FRM models, which account for the size of countries' populations and better capture the simultaneous correlation between social protection aid and countries' budgetary requirements for redistribution. Our discussion of the results is based on the linear-log functional form equations due to its straightforward interpretation, although we present summaries of the results based on the IV-Tobit models and other functional forms in Online Appendix III. A full description of the results is presented in Tables A2 to A97 in Online Appendix IV.

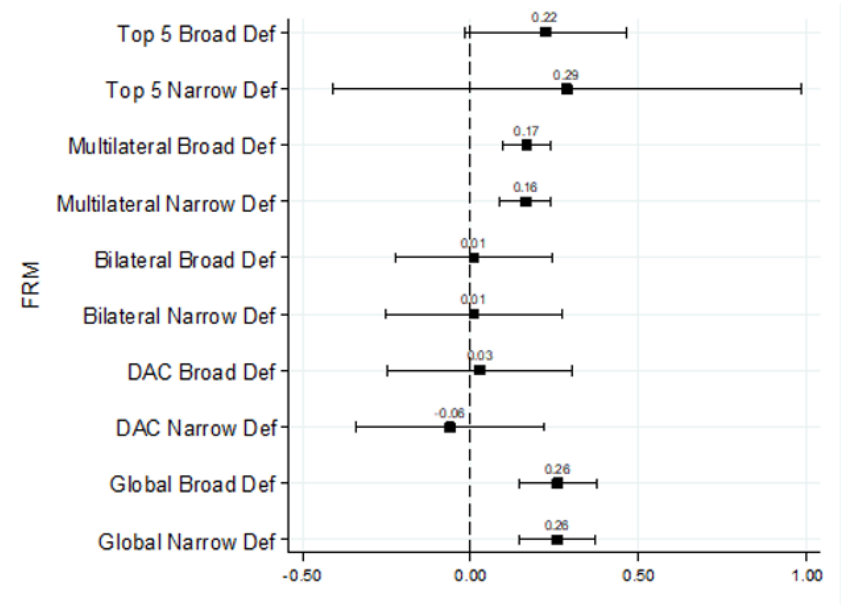
Before turning to the results, we point out that, on the basis of the Wald tests of exogeneity for both the FRM and IV-Tobit models, which are presented at the bottom of Tables A2 to A97 in

Online Appendix IV, we can reject the null hypothesis of no endogeneity. Thus, the test results support our choice of implementing an IV-Tobit and FRM with endogenous regressors, which account for the endogeneity of social protection aid.

## **Effects of aid on the expansion of social protection systems**

Overall, results indicate that aid has made a positive and statistically significant contribution to the expansion of social protection systems in low- and middle-income countries. Taking as the benchmark the global sample of donors, which includes DAC countries, non-DAC countries, and multilateral donors, and focusing on Model 1, which is estimated using the FRM method as our baseline, we find that a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid based on our narrow definition leads to an increase in the share of countries' population covered by social protection of approximately 0.25 per cent. The size of the coefficient estimate remains similar when we estimate Models 2 to 6, which include different sets of controls, as shown in Figure A2 in Online Appendix IV, although the point estimates vary across groups of donors (see Figure 22).

**Figure 22: Effects of social protection aid on social protection coverage at global level by type of donor**



Note: estimates based on FRM Model 1 with log functional form. The log of social protection aid is lagged one period. Full results are presented in Online Appendix IV. The variables included in each model are presented in Table A2 in Online Appendix IV. The ropeladder plot shows markers for point estimates, and spikes for confidence intervals at 90% levels. Spikes crossing the reference line at zero show coefficients that are significantly different from zero. Global aid is measured as the sum of total aid from DAC countries, multilateral donors, and non-DAC countries. Multilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, ILO, and FAO. Bilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from DAC and non-DAC members, whereas DAC countries aid measures exclusively aid flow from DAC countries. The top five donor countries are, in decreasing order: the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and France.

Source: authors' estimates.

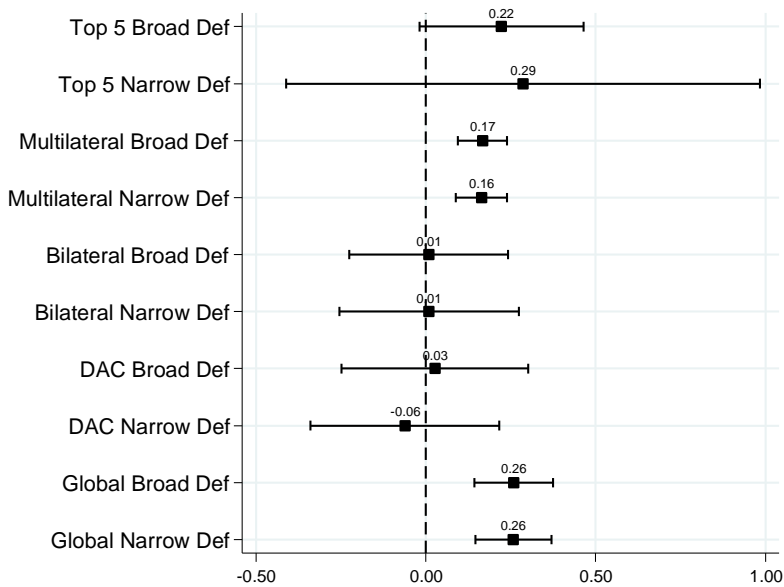
Indeed, social protection aid from DAC countries appears to yield the largest impact on social protection systems at the global scale, with point estimates in the order of 0.29 per cent for every percentage point increase in social protection aid. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, as well as the top five donors (the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and France), all report positive and significant effects.

As expected, social protection aid based on our narrow definition yields slightly larger effects than aid measures that are based on the broad definition, in part due to two factors: first, aid activities under the narrow definition *directly* support institutional capacity, administration, legislation, and related strategies to distribute and scale up cash or in-kind benefits to vulnerable populations; and second, our indicator of coverage, which proxies the scale of social protection systems, does not accurately capture active and passive labour market policies that are included in the broad definition of social protection aid, leading to lower-bound impact estimates. Therefore, in the sections that follow, we focus on estimates that are based on the narrow definition of social protection aid.

## **Aid effects in SSA**

When we focus on the results for SSA (Figure 23), we find considerable variation in the statistical significance of aid by type of donor. In particular, the effect of aid in the region is only significantly different from zero for the case of global donors, which seems to be driven, at least partly, by multilaterals. This is not surprising, given the sphere of influence that these agencies have in SSA, not only in terms of financing, as seen from Figure 17, and the related conditionalities – a channel highlighted by Abdulai (2021), Cherrier (2016), Ouma (2019), Ouma & Adésinà (2019), Simpson (2018), and Ulriksen (2016) in their country case studies – but also in terms of policy diffusion and knowledge transfer (Brooks, 2015; Hickey et al., 2020; Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012; Schmitt et al., 2015).

**Figure 23: Effects of social protection aid on social protection coverage in SSA by type of donor**



Note: estimates based on FRM Model 1 with log functional form. The log of social protection aid is lagged one period. Full results are presented in Online Appendix IV. The variables included in each model are presented in Table A2 in Online Appendix IV. The ropeladder plot shows markers for point estimates and spikes for confidence intervals at 90% levels. Spikes crossing the reference line at zero show coefficients that are significantly different from zero. Source: authors' estimates.

The insignificant effect of bilateral aid in the case of SSA could be associated with several underlying factors, including: (i) a more limited allocation of resources channelled directly by bilaterals relative to multilateral agencies (see Figure 9 and Figure 10); (ii) the heavy reliance of bilaterals on project aid and grants (see Figure 14), which carry the risk of reducing domestic resource mobilization and crowding out public spending on social protection, as pointed out by Benedek et al. (2014) and Cordella & Dell'Ariccia (2007); and (iii) the likely lagged effects arising from the more recent, and therefore shorter, bilateral engagement with social protection systems in SSA, relative to the longer history observed in other world regions such as LAC and APAC, as seen in Figure 16 and Figure 17 above.

Overall, results for SSA indicate that a 1 percentage point increase in global aid leads to an increase in social protection coverage by approximately 0.26 per cent, which is a similar order of magnitude to the point estimates obtained from the global sample of countries. Results for LAC (0.12 per cent,  $p < 0.1$ ) and APAC (0.24 per cent,  $p < 0.1$ ), presented in Figure A4 and Figure A5 in Online Appendix III, also evidence a positive effect of aid on the scale of social protection systems.

In order to provide an economic interpretation of our findings, we present in Table 5 the effect of a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from the global sample of donors on the scale of social protection coverage among the top five recipient countries of social protection aid in SSA over the period 2015–19. We include the top five recipients in LAC and APAC for comparative purposes.

In Ethiopia, for example, a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from an annual average of US\$253 million would lead to an increase in coverage of approximately 260,000 beneficiaries from a baseline of 8.4 million people currently receiving a cash transfer programme in that country, amounting to a daily cost of US\$2.6 per beneficiary. In Kenya and Uganda, a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from levels of approximately US\$65 and US\$64 million, respectively, would lead to an increase in coverage of approximately 123,000 and 99,000 beneficiaries from a baseline level of coverage of 1.3 and 0.67 million people, amounting to a daily cost of US\$1.4 and US\$1.8 per beneficiary, respectively. The results reveal a degree of variation in the impact of aid, which *ceteris paribus* is likely to be contingent upon the unit cost and design features of transfer programmes in each country, as well as the economies of scale that are achieved with more developed systems.

**Table 5: Effects of social protection aid on coverage, 2015–19**

Top five recipients of social protection aid	Average aid (constant US\$ millions)	Average coverage (millions)	Coverage as % of population	Grants as % of total aid	Public social protection expenditure (% of GDP)	Contribution of aid to social protection expenditure (%)	Public social protection expenditure (constant US\$ millions)	Effect of 1% increase in aid on social protection coverage
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>								
Ethiopia	253.04	8.40	7.88	16.8	3.17	16.71	1,260	260,155
Nigeria	190.18	0.11	0.01	4.2	0.71	5.78	3,154	467,335
Malawi	82.72	0.91	5.11	71.2	0.99	37.82	63	43,203
Kenya	64.88	1.28	2.60	13.7	2.29	4.63	1,210	123,526
Uganda	64.13	0.67	1.61	68.1	2.19	2.89	707	98,622
<b>Latin America and Caribbean</b>								
Argentina	537.52	5.50	12.49	0.3	17.50	0.85	63,043	53,484
Colombia	192.84	7.48	15.36	10.7	14.07	0.42	41,282	58,926
Mexico	185.99	43.68	34.88	1.1	11.95	0.13	140,059	151,104
Panama	129.58	0.48	11.74	1.3	9.79	2.42	5,296	4,921
Ecuador	101.77	1.66	6.06	4.0	7.77	1.27	7,713	20,103

Top five recipients of social protection aid	Average aid (constant US\$ millions)	Average coverage (millions)	Coverage as % of population	Grants as % of total aid	Public social protection expenditure (% of GDP)	Contribution of aid to social protection expenditure (%)	Public social protection expenditure (constant US\$ millions)	Effect of 1% increase in aid on social protection coverage
<b>Asia and Pacific</b>								
Bangladesh	190.23	22.31	13.91	24	1.65	4.49	3,219	370,327
Pakistan	135.25	35.36	16.88	5.6	0.17	27.94	457	472,642
Philippines	122.89	31.60	29.86	3.7	2.20	1.76	6,744	242,008
China	95.80	56.00	4.05	7.7	6.28	0.01	695,030	3,249,791
Mongolia	75.94	1.01	32.45	3.1	14.39	4.35	1,691	7,106

Note: estimates based on the FRM with an endogenous regressor (Model 1) with log functional form. The log of aid is lagged one period. Model 1 includes number of years since the introduction of ILO conventions, log of income per capita, average number of programmes in neighbouring countries, trade openness, rate of economic growth, government revenues excluding grants and social contributions, and natural resources rents. Full results are presented in Online Appendix IV.

Source: authors' calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD-CRS.



Table 5 also reveals not only considerable variation in the scale of social protection systems, but also a markedly unequal distribution of aid budgets, even among the top aid-recipient countries in SSA, ranging from US\$253 million in Ethiopia (approximately US\$2.5 in per capita terms) to US\$64 million in Uganda (approximately US\$1.7 per capita), irrespective of the relatively low level of public spending on social protection and the high dependency on aid to finance government spending in this area. In Malawi, for instance, 38 per cent of public spending on social protection is funded with aid money, this despite the small rate of coverage and the limited public resources that are allocated to support social protection systems in that country, and in SSA in general.

The fact that our results point to a significant positive correlation between government revenues (excluding grants and social contributions) and the scale of social protection systems (see Table 5) underscores not only the vital role that aid plays in supporting, and in many cases sustaining, social protection systems in SSA in the short to medium term, but also the role that aid can play in strengthening the capacity of governments to mobilize resources that are essential to finance social protection spending in the longer term.

## **Testing theoretical predictions highlighted by the literature**

Our empirical strategy also allows us to test key theoretical predictions with regard to the factors that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems, as highlighted by the literature, and which we group into six broad areas, namely: external forces, economic and demographic conditions, historical legacies and path dependence, institutions, the role of ideas and ideology, and external shocks.

In Table 6 (at the end of this section) we present a summary of the empirical findings based on the fractional response model with endogenous regressors and the linear-log functional form. A summary of results for the IV-Tobit models and other world regions is presented in Tables A2–A5 in Online Appendix III. Full details of the results are presented in Tables A2 to A97 in Online Appendix IV.

The qualitative literature in particular highlights the role of donor influence, which through negotiation, persuasion, and pressure has contributed to the emergence and expansion of social protection systems (Abdulai, 2021; Hickey & Bukenya, 2020; Ouma, 2019; Ouma and Adésinà, 2019; Ulriksen, 2016; Wanyama & McCord, 2017). From our analysis, we believe that large portions of donors' influence effects are captured in the models by the aid measures, given that aid volumes and aid modalities are often accompanied by conditionalities that seek to influence certain behaviours of aid-recipient governments. Nevertheless, we include a second proxy for donor influence, which measures the number of years since a country adopted any of the ILO Social Security Conventions (which consider minimum standards in the areas of medical care, sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, old age benefits, employment injury benefits, and family benefits).

The adoption of Social Security Conventions signals states' willingness to adopt international standards and norms, through legal and regulatory frameworks that are expected to facilitate the adoption and institutionalization of social protection systems. A longer commitment to these international norms would signal a stronger donor influence on the adoption of social protection systems. However, the negative coefficient reported in Table 6 reflects the fact many countries in SSA either have not adopted any

of the ILO conventions<sup>14</sup> or have done so more recently than countries in other world regions, which helps to explain the positive coefficient estimates reported for LAC and APAC countries (see tables in Online Appendix IV).

Another strand of the literature emphasizes the role of policy diffusion and policy transfer in the expansion of social protection systems, which are assumed to materialize, in part at least, via cross-border spillover effects (Borges Sugiyama, 2011; Brooks, 2015; Devereux, 2013; López-Cariboni & Cao, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2015; Vacaflares & LeSage, 2020). We test this proposition by the inclusion of an indicator that measures the number of existing transfer programmes in neighbouring countries. Interestingly, we find that while our measure of policy diffusion is a strong positive predictor of the scale of social protection systems at the global scale, the parameter estimate turns negative when we focus on SSA. This is likely to be the result of (1) low levels of absolute and relative coverage, measured by the total number of direct and indirect beneficiaries across SSA and the share of vulnerable populations covered by social protection programmes, respectively (see Table A1, Table A2, and Figure A1 in Online Appendix I), and (2) the high levels of between-country inequality in access to social protection benefits observed across SSA, which in turn leads a negative correlation arising from countries with above regional-average coverage being neighboured by countries with below-average coverage. Thus, the evidence does not, at least in the SSA context, support the proposition that policy diffusion is a strong predictor of the adoption and expansion of social protection systems, as previous qualitative studies seem to suggest.

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<sup>14</sup> The following countries have not adopted any of the ILO Social Security Conventions: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The literature also underscores the catalytic role of economic conditions and socio-demographic characteristics in the adoption and expansion of social protection systems in developing countries (Abu Sharkh & Gough, 2010; Carnes & Mares, 2015; Huang, 2014; Segura-Ubiergo, 2007).

Our analysis does indeed provide evidence of a strong correlation between the scale of social protection systems and the level of economic development and the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, which are proxied by the log of income per capita lagged one period and the annual rate of economic growth, respectively. Results also show a strong positive correlation with government revenues and level of trade openness, which underscores the importance of supporting African nations in strengthening their redistributive fiscal capacity and improving the conditions that facilitate their competitiveness in the global economy.

The abundance of natural resource rents shows a strong negative correlation with the expansion of social protection systems, which—although at first hand it may appear counterintuitive—is not surprising given the fact that non-tax revenues often face less scrutiny and demands for accountability from taxpayers than tax revenues, which can lead to rent-seeking behaviour and patronage (Collier, 2010; McGuirk, 2013). Furthermore, resource rents generate incentives for the incumbent to remain in power and utilize these resources not programmatically, for vote buying and clientelistic purposes (Addison et al., forthcoming; Caselli & Cunningham, 2009). The fact that many countries in SSA are electoral autocracies exacerbates these dynamics and helps to explain the negative correlation that is observed from the parameter estimate that measures the level of democracy in SSA, as well as the positive association that we find with the measure of quality of government.

The rate of unemployment does not seem to strongly influence the expansion of social protection, presumably due to the large scale of the informal economy and subsistence agriculture in SSA, which probably mitigate the political pressure by the working-age

population for social protection redistribution. However, results also show that the level of income inequality, measured by the Gini index, is a strong determinant of the scale of social protection systems, which suggests that high levels of inequality, as are observed in SSA, may put pressure on incumbents to implement a limited redistribution, as highlighted by Acemoglu et al. (2015); Alesina & Giuliano (2011), Benabou (2000), and Niño-Zarazúa et al. (2021).

In terms of socio-demographic conditions, we note that models that include under-five child mortality rates, which capture the extent of material deprivation in aid-recipient counties, show the expected negative and significant sign and yield smaller aid effects, which indicates the greater challenges aid activities face in contexts of widespread poverty. Empirical results also give support to previous studies that show how the prevalence of HIV and its catastrophic consequences in terms of mortality and morbidity have acted as an incentive for incumbent regimes to introduce and scale up certain types of transfer programme, especially in southern countries of SSA (Ellis et al., 2009; Gauri & Brinks, 2008; Lamprea, 2017; Mokomane, 2013).

The long-standing hypothesis that the political ideology of incumbent governments, in particular left-wing governments, influences preferences for redistribution (Barrientos et al. 2013; Jensen, 2011; Sirén 2021) does not appear to hold when we run the models at the global level, or in the context of SSA. In SSA, the parameter estimates are insignificant, which could be attributed to the limited variation in political ideology that we observe across African countries over the period under analysis. However, at the global level, we find that left-wing, centre, and even right-wing regimes appear to have contributed to the expansion of social protection systems at different points in time.

Indeed, experiences from Latin America show that whether a left-wing or a right-wing government has introduced social protection programmes, these policies are often continued, and even expanded, when parties on the opposite side of the political spectrum

subsequently take office (Niño-Zarazúa, 2020; Pribble, 2013). Thus, the evidence suggests that it is perhaps not the political ideology of parties but the prospects of enjoying an incumbency advantage that drives political support for social protection systems (Filipovich et al., 2018).

Finally, a strand of the literature finds that social protection systems are more likely to emerge and/or expand in the aftermath of aggregate shocks (Bossuroy & Coudouel, 2018; Desai & Rudra, 2019; Manor & Duckett, 2017). International agencies can play an important role here, given the challenges and adverse conditions that developing countries face in times of crisis (Barrientos & Niño-Zarazúa, 2011). While we find evidence of a positive correlation between past financial crises and the expansion of social protection systems in LAC, this correlation turns negative and significant in SSA, indicating the limited capacity of African countries to utilize existing social protection systems as effective countercyclical policy instruments. This weakness is in part due to the small scale of these systems but also to the reduced fiscal space and subsequent cuts in government spending that usually accompany the slowdown of economic activities as a result of the heavy reliance of African countries on commodity exports and their growing interconnectedness with international capital markets (Calderón & Nguyen, 2016; Konuki & Villafuerte, 2016; Ouedraogo & Sourouema, 2018).

While weather shocks may have led to the emergence and expansion of social protection programmes in specific cases (see, e.g., Béné et al., 2012; Berhane et al., 2014; Devereux, 2009; Gao & Mills, 2018, for the case of Ethiopia), we do not find evidence that weather shocks have systematically triggered policy responses leading to the expansion of social protection systems in SSA as a whole. Further analysis will be needed to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions, once data are available.

**Table 6: Determinants of the expansion of social protection systems**

			Global		SSA	
Dimensions		Proxy indicators	Narrow	Broad	Narrow	Broad
External forces	Foreign aid	Total aid to social protection <i>t-1</i>	+	+	+	+
	Donor influence	Number of years since introduction of ILO conventions	NS	NS	-	-
	Policy diffusion	Average number of programmes in neighbouring countries	+	+	-	-
Economic and demographic conditions		Log GDP per capita in constant US\$ (PPP)	+	+	+	+
		GDP growth (annual %)	+	+	+	+
		Total natural resources rent (%GDP)	-	-	-	-
		Trade openness	-	-	+	+
		Revenue excluding grants and social contributions	NS	NS	+	+
		Unemployment rate	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population)	-	-	-	-
		Fertility rate	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Prevalence of HIV (% of population aged 15–49)	+	+	+	+
		Child mortality rate	-	-	-	-
		Urban population	NS	NS	NS	NS

			Global		SSA	
Dimensions		Proxy indicators	Narrow	Broad	Narrow	Broad
		Population density	+	+	NS	NS
		Gini index	+	+	+	+
Historical legacies and path dependence		Years since independence	NS	NS	+	+
		Former colony power: UK	+	+	NS	NS
		Former colony power: France	-	-	-	-
		Former colony power: Spain	+	+	-	-
Institutions	Democracy	Electoral democracy index	NS	NS	-	-
	Political settlements	Quality of government	-	-	+	+
		Party institutionalization index	+	NS	NS	NS
		Military expenditure (% of GDP)	+	+	-	-
	Judicial system	Compliance with judiciary	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ideas / Ideology		Right political orientation	+	+	NS	NS
		Centre political orientation	+	+	NS	NS
		Left political orientation	+	+	NS	NS
Aggregate shocks		Years in financial crisis $t-1$	NS	NS	-	-
		Rain shocks	-	-	NS	NS

Note: NS stands for ‘not significant effect’. + stands for a positive and statistically significant effect. – stands for a negative and statistically significant effect. Estimates are based on the fractional response model with endogenous regressors and a linear–log functional form. Aid enters lagged one period. Summary of results for the IV-Tobit models and other world regions are presented in Tables A2–A5 in Online Appendix III. Full results are presented in Online Appendix IV.

Source: authors’ calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD-DAC CRS.



## 6 Conclusions

In this study, we have taken a comparative perspective to investigate key determinants of the recent evolution of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and other world regions in the Global South, paying particular attention to the contribution of foreign aid to these dynamics.

The study includes a statistical analysis of international and Swedish aid to social protection, a new systematic review of the existing literature, and an international comparative analysis based on advanced econometric methods.

Overall, findings from the systematic review and the international comparative analysis point to a positive contribution of international aid to the adoption and subsequent expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other regions in the Global South. Econometric findings from the international comparative analysis indicate that a 1 percentage point increase in aid to support social protection systems in SSA leads to an increase in social protection coverage by approximately 0.26 per cent, which is not negligible.

The positive effect holds across both our ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ definitions of social protection aid, although it is clearer under the narrow definition, as well as for global donors and multilaterals, in the case of SSA. The results are broadly consistent with those of our priors and with the scant literature that has investigated the impact of aid on social protection systems, as summarized in the systematic review presented above.

Importantly, we do not find any evidence of a detrimental effect of aid on the development of social protection systems, although there is a marked unequal distribution of aid budgets, irrespective of the prevalence of aggregate vulnerabilities and the generalized low levels of social protection spending across SSA nations. This is an issue that requires careful consideration when adopting coordinated efforts between bilateral and multilateral agencies to support social protection systems.

At the global scale, social protection aid has exhibited a cyclical pattern, spiking in response to aggregate shocks including financial crises (e.g. the East Asian Financial crisis of 1998–99 and the 2008–09 global financial crisis) and price shocks (e.g. the world food crisis of 2007–09). The bulk of aid distributed in the aftermath of the 2008–09 financial crisis, particularly from multilaterals, was distributed to middle-income countries that already had social protection programmes in place. Many low-income countries were unable to absorb social protection aid because they did not have social protection programmes to scale. This underscores the importance of building social protection systems that will enable countries to utilize these structures as countercyclical instruments in times of crisis.

Statistical analysis also shows that while aid flows to social protection have followed an overall positive trend in absolute volumes, this trend has been outpaced by the more active dynamism of development assistance going to other sectors such as health and education, leading to an overall decrease in the share of aid budgets being allocated to support social protection systems. This may be indicative of a declining weight given to social protection as a development policy within the global development agenda, although the recent COVID-19 crisis may have altered this trend. Further analysis will be needed to corroborate these dynamics once data become available in the near future.

The composition of aid type and finance type seem to matter as well as the preferred channels for aid disbursement. The fact that over two-thirds social protection aid in SSA – in both the broad and narrow definitions – has been channelled via multilaterals and executed in significant proportions through debt instruments and reimbursement grants (especially since the early 2010s), and in the form of budget support, technical assistance, and project aid signals a greater engagement of national governments in the development of social protection systems.

The fact that bilaterals rely extensively on project aid (or specific-purpose programmes and funds in the case of Sida) to allocate aid largely in the form of grants reveals complex logistical, technical, and foreign policy considerations that underpin the relationship between donor and recipient countries. While these strategies can indeed mitigate the risk of regime capture of aid budgets, especially in contexts of autocratic governance, they can also undermine domestic resource mobilization efforts that support social protection spending in the longer term.

Indeed, assisting low- and middle-income countries, especially those with a high dependency on commodity exports, to utilize social protection systems as countercyclical policy instruments in times of crisis will require not only the expansion in the scale and scope of these systems through financial assistance but also the building of tax collection and welfare delivery systems that will enable governments to effectively respond to crises.

However, the increasing focus on low-income countries and fragile states, particularly in SSA, makes aid work in this area more complex and challenging. These challenges are symptomatic of the precarious conditions in these countries at various levels, including administration, programmes, and policies, and in part explain the stronger coordination and harmonization between bilaterals and multilaterals in the process of assisting social protection systems in the past decade.

We remain cautious about arguing in favour of certain modalities or types of finance over others (because of lack of sufficient data to conduct a rigorous analysis), although building in parallel the fiscal capacity of countries (on both the revenue and expenditure sides) is clearly desirable, and possibly the most effective way to secure the long-term sustainability of social protection systems in SSA.

A major challenge in the multi-country, multi-year analysis of aid and social protection expansion is the ‘endogeneity’ problem – in particular how to disentangle the impact of aid on the development of social protection systems from the influence of these systems on aid allocations.

With reference to one country, this problem could be addressed via experimental or quasi-experimental research, ideally complemented by careful qualitative process tracing. However, in international comparative analyses such as ours, the endogeneity problem can easily become intractable, so the best choice is to rely on advanced econometric techniques to mitigate this problem. We acknowledge that, due to data limitations, we are not in a strong position to prove causality, despite the validity of our instrumental variables and all the tests that we have conducted to support our findings. Thus, our results should be treated with caution and as approximations to an actual causal relationship. Nevertheless, the multiple models, methods, and tests used in the analysis, as well as the extensive examination of the available data and the systematic analysis of the existing literature, give strong indications that targeted aid has contributed to building social protection systems in SSA and elsewhere in the Global South.

Our empirical analysis has allowed us to address relevant political economy questions posed by the literature, in particular with regard to the influence of external forces, economic conditions, socio-demographics, historical legacies, the quality of institutions, the role of ideology, and external shocks, which are informative for the process of decision making.

Results from the international comparative analysis indicate that while donors’ influence and policy diffusion effects that are likely to materialize in conjunction with aid and conditionalities may have had a positive influence on the development of social protection systems in some contexts (e.g. LAC and APAC), these external factors are weaker in SSA as a whole.

Analysis also provides suggestive evidence that the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, their prevailing terms of trade, and their level of income inequality are all positively associated with the recent expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions. In contrast, structural factors such as the abundance of natural resource rents, the incidence of material deprivation, and the scale of unemployment seem to either hinder or have an ambiguous influence on the expansion of social protection systems. We have discussed possible factors underpinning these effects.

While the political ideology of incumbent regimes seems to play a role in influencing preferences for redistribution, which in turn has contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South as a whole, this influence appears to be weaker in SSA, in part due to the limited variation in the political spectrum (and ideologies) in the region.

Results also show that, whereas aggregate shocks, particularly financial crises, have triggered the expansion of social protection systems in other regions, especially in LAC, this association has turned negative in SSA, in part due to the region's limited capacity to use social protection systems as countercyclical instruments, and also because of the reliance of African economies on commodity exports.

We conclude by making the case for, and emphasizing the importance of, continuing to provide and even increase support for the building of social protection systems, preferably in parallel with aid interventions that assist the development of tax collection systems, which are critical to achieving the long-term sustainability of social protection in SSA and other regions in the Global South.

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# Online Appendix I–IV

I. Scale and Evolution of Social Protection Systems

II. Systematic Review

III. International comparative analysis

IV. Tables

The four appendices that underpin the study are published on-line and may be found at <https://eba.se/en/reports/>

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Mer än halva jordens befolkning saknar idag tillgång till sociala trygghetssystem eller socialförsäkring. Vad gör biståndet för att åtgärda detta? Den här studien visar att det internationella biståndet bidragit till utbyggnaden av sociala trygghetssystem i fattiga länder. Samtidigt har andelen bistånd till sociala skyddsnät minskat globalt över tid och det har inte alltid gått till de länder där behoven är som störst.

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More than half of the world's population has no access to social safety nets or social insurance. What is international development aid doing to address this? This study demonstrates that, while international aid has contributed to the expansion of social safety net programmes in poor countries, the share of aid that is targeted towards social protection has decreased globally. Furthermore, it has not always been allocated to countries with the greatest needs.