



Strengthening Social Protection Systems

Welcome delegates to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (GA3) of SharkMUN 2026.

In this committee, delegates will examine the importance of strengthening social protection systems as a means of promoting human dignity, reducing poverty, and ensuring social and economic resilience. Social protection systems play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations, reducing inequality, and helping societies recover from crises such as pandemics, economic recessions, armed conflicts, and natural disasters.

Despite significant global progress in recent decades, billions of people still lack access to adequate social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed major weaknesses in welfare systems worldwide and highlighted the urgent need for more inclusive, accessible, and resilient social protection policies.

Delegates must evaluate how governments and international organizations can strengthen social protection systems while balancing economic sustainability, social inclusion, and long-term development goals.

GA3 provides a platform for discussing humanitarian and social issues affecting communities worldwide. Delegates are encouraged to develop innovative and realistic solutions that address both immediate social needs and long-term human development.

Introduction

Social protection refers to policies and programs designed to protect individuals and households from poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion. These measures include unemployment benefits, pensions, healthcare coverage, disability assistance, child support programs, food assistance, and social safety nets.



Strong social protection systems contribute to economic stability, social cohesion, and improved living standards. They help individuals manage risks associated with unemployment, illness, disability, old age, economic downturns, and emergencies. In many countries, social protection has played a critical role in reducing poverty and improving access to education and healthcare.

However, access to social protection remains highly unequal. According to international organizations, nearly half of the world's population lacks adequate social protection coverage. Low-income countries often face financial and administrative challenges that limit the effectiveness of welfare programs, while vulnerable groups such as migrants, informal workers, women, persons with disabilities, and refugees frequently remain excluded.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the importance and the limitations of existing social protection systems. Governments worldwide implemented emergency measures to support workers and vulnerable populations, yet many individuals received little or no assistance due to insufficient infrastructure or funding.

Climate change, demographic shifts, technological transformation, and global economic uncertainty continue to place additional pressure on social protection systems. As societies face increasingly complex challenges, strengthening social protection has become a key objective for sustainable development and human security.

The international community must therefore explore how social protection systems can become more inclusive, resilient, and capable of responding to future crises.



Timeline of Key Events

Year	Event
1919	The ILO was established following the recognition of social justice as essential for peace.
1944	The ILO Declaration of Philadelphia affirms that labour is not a commodity; social protection as basic right.
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right to social security (Article 22)
1952	ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102) adopted
1990s	Conditional cash transfer programs expand in Latin America (Bolsa Família, Progres/Oportunidades)
2000	Millennium Development Goals include poverty reduction targets.
2012	ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202) adopted
2015	Sustainable Development Goals include social protection targets (1.3, 3.8, 10.4)
2020	COVID-19 pandemic exposes global social protection gaps; 4 billion people without coverage
2021	UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection launched
2023	ILO reports that only 47% of the global population has effective social protection coverage
2024	Climate-related disasters drive increased demand for adaptive social protection systems.
2025	Digital social protection systems expand but raise privacy and exclusion concerns.



Key Terms

Social Protection

Policies and programs designed to reduce poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion while improving individual and community well-being.

Social Safety Net

Government programs that provide financial or material assistance to vulnerable populations during times of need.

Universal Social Protection

A system in which all individuals have access to essential social protection benefits throughout their lives.

Informal Economy

Economic activities and employment that operate outside formal government regulation often lack social protection coverage.



Vulnerable Populations

Groups at greater risk of poverty, discrimination, exclusion, or economic hardship, including children, elderly individuals, migrants, and people with disabilities.

Current Situation

Social protection systems vary significantly between countries. High-income nations generally maintain extensive welfare programs that provide healthcare, unemployment assistance, pensions, and family benefits. In contrast, many developing countries struggle to provide comprehensive social protection due to limited financial resources and institutional capacity.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of social protection in reducing economic hardship. Governments implemented emergency cash transfers, wage subsidies, unemployment assistance, and food support programs to help affected populations. However, many workers in the informal economy remained excluded from these benefits.

Demographic changes present additional challenges. Aging populations in many regions increase demand for pensions, healthcare, and long-term care services. At the same time, younger populations in developing countries require investments in education, employment opportunities, and family support systems. Climate-related disasters increasingly threaten livelihoods and economic stability, particularly in vulnerable regions. Social protection systems are becoming essential tools for helping communities recover from droughts, floods, hurricanes, and other environmental crises.

Technological changes and automation also create uncertainty in labour markets, raising questions regarding how social protection systems should adapt to future employment patterns.

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Despite international commitments to reduce poverty and inequality, significant gaps remain in coverage, accessibility, and funding. Expanding social protection while maintaining fiscal sustainability remains one of the most important challenges facing governments today.

Main Countries and Regions Involved

Brazil

Brazil has implemented major social assistance programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, serving as an example for social protection initiatives in developing countries.



Germany

Germany maintains one of the world's most comprehensive social protection systems, including healthcare, unemployment benefits, and pension programs.



India

India has expanded social welfare programs significantly, but continues to face challenges regarding coverage, population size, and access for informal workers.





South Africa

South Africa operates extensive social grant programs and continues to address poverty, unemployment, and inequality through social protection measures.



Bangladesh

Bangladesh faces challenges related to climate vulnerability and social protection coverage while expanding programs to support vulnerable populations.



Additional Stakeholder Positions

Entity	Position on Social Protection
International Labour Organization (ILO)	Leads standard setting through Convention 102 and Recommendation 202; advocates for national social protection floors.
World Bank	Provides financing and technical assistance; emphasizes fiscal sustainability and target efficiency.
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Supports integration of social protection with broader sustainable development goals
UNICEF	Focus on child-sensitive social protection, including child benefits and family support.

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Entity	Position on Social Protection
World Health Organization (WHO)	Advocates for universal health coverage as a component of social protection
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Provides fiscal advice; concerns about debt sustainability and program affordability.
European Union	Maintains high coverage levels; supports social protection in development cooperation
African Union	Promotes social protection through Agenda 2063; supports member states in establishing floors
OECD	Provides comparative data and policy analysis for developed and emerging economies
HelpAge International	Advocates for universal pensions and older people's access to social protection
Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)	Represents informal workers; advocates for portable, flexible benefits
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)	Supports universal, contributory social protection systems

Previous Attempts to Address the Problem

The United Nations has consistently promoted social protection through the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).



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The International Labor Organization introduced the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202), encouraging countries to establish basic social protection guarantees for all citizens.

Organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, and United Nations Children's Fund support social protection initiatives through funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance.

Many governments have also expanded cash transfer programs, healthcare systems, pension schemes, and emergency assistance programs in response to economic crises and public health emergencies.

Despite these efforts, coverage gaps and inequalities remain significant in many regions.

Possible Solutions

Expanding Universal Social Protection

Encouraging governments to establish minimum social protection guarantees accessible to all citizens.

Improving Coverage for Informal Workers

Developing flexible programs that include workers outside the formal economy.

Strengthening Crisis Response Mechanisms

Creating emergency assistance systems capable of responding rapidly during pandemics, conflicts, and natural disasters.



Increasing International Financial Support

Providing technical and financial assistance to low-income countries seeking to expand social protection programs.

Leveraging Digital Technology

Using digital identification systems, mobile banking, and online platforms to improve accessibility and efficiency.

Promoting Inclusive Policies

Ensuring that women, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities are fully included in social protection systems.

Enhancing Long-Term Sustainability

Developing financing mechanisms that maintain social protection programs without creating excessive fiscal burdens.

Questions a Resolution Should Answer

1. How can social protection systems be expanded in low-income countries?
2. How should governments balance social spending with economic sustainability?
3. What measures can improve protection for informal workers?
4. How can social protection systems better respond to future crises?
5. What role should international organizations play in supporting national welfare programs?
6. How can vulnerable populations be better included in social protection systems?
7. How can technology improve access to social protection benefits?



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