

## Social Protection

### IN THIS ISSUE

**2** Current challenges and debates on social protection in the global South

**4** Universal Health Coverage, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure: Women's Human Rights as the Catalyst

**6** The Review on Social Protection and Access to Healthcare by Sex Workers in Cambodia

**9** Is social protection working for women in Southern Africa?

**10** Argentina in the new neoliberal cycle since december 2015: social security is going backwards

**14** Social Protection and Ending Poverty in Pacific Island States: a new fad or a real solution?

**18** A crisis of social protection is at the heart of current migration trends

**21** Setbacks 4.0: The Challenges of Social Protection for Platform Workers



This issue of DAWN Informs presents a discussion on the state of social protection in the Global South and the new (and not so new) challenges to overcoming its gender gaps. Recognizing that in the countries of the Global South, the development of social protection systems has presented features of segmentation, insufficiency, exclusion and inequality, the articles gathered here review the situation in the various regions ( Asia, Pacific, Africa and Latin America), taking into consideration their nuances and differences.

The authors discuss central problematic nodes such as the social protection situation of migrant populations, female rural workers and those engaged in platform jobs. They also review experiences of resistance against the increase in precariousness in various work spaces.

We hope this edition of DAWN Informs contributes to a debate necessary to think about alternatives that strengthen rights for all people.



## Current challenges and debates on social protection in the global South

by Corina Rodríguez Enríquez

Social protection systems are key to addressing social risks. Their development has been very different across countries and within regions. These differences arise from their design, the capacity of the States leading them and the context in which they operated (including economic dynamics, characteristics of labour markets and social structures, including gender regimes).

In most parts of the global South, developments were incomplete, insufficient, segmented and uncoordinated. ILO (2017) states that by 2015, barely 45.2% of the world population had access to at least one social protection benefit. However, while this percentage rises to 84.1% in the case of Europe and Central Asia, it falls to 12.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa .

Historically, there have been gender gaps in social protection, even in schemes that developed stronger institutions and broader coverage. Social protection systems built around the individuals' position in the labour market reproduced, quite directly, gender gaps in employment. On one hand, women have historically faced more obstacles to qualify for social protection benefits and/or qualify for less benefits due to their lower and poorer labour participation, their increased relative participation

in informal work and their lower average wages. On the other hand, the huge amount of women's time dedicated to unpaid domestic and care work is still a sphere that lacks any kind of social protection. Likewise, rural and migrant women as well as sex workers and domestic workers face structural barriers to social protection.

Against this backdrop, several proposals have been developed based on the idea of guaranteeing basic social protection floors for all. In fact, in 2012, the ILO approved Resolution 202 (Social Protection Floors Recommendation) that sets forth a kind of guiding framework for achieving universal social protection.

"Reaffirming the human right to social security, the recommendation calls for the establishment as a priority of social protection floors, comprised of basic income security and essential health-care guarantees for all in need, throughout the life cycle, as a fundamental element of comprehensive national social security systems". (ILO, 2019: iv).

Two elements have been spreading across the world in this logic of guaranteeing minimum social protection floors, particularly in terms of guaranteeing monetary income. One of them refers to the programs of conditional cash transfers (CCT) These programs, mainly conceived as tools to face the issue of income poverty, have simultaneously sought the following, according to their own definition: to address, in the short-term, the lack of income, put an end to the intergenerational reproduction of poverty in the long run, and

to promote women's economic empowerment. The latter, due to the fact that although these programs target children and adolescents, in practice, the benefits are received by mothers.

The impact of these programs on women has been ambiguous. On the one hand: i) these programs have resulted in a transfer of broad monetary resources to poor women which ultimately improved, in most cases, their living conditions and their households; ii) considering the fact that it's a regular income, and in most cases, bank-based, it has been used as a backing for other financial mechanisms such as bank credits; iii) in some circumstances these programs have strengthened women's position in the negotiation processes of economic resources inside households; and iv) in other circumstances, they have also provided women with better tools to face recurring gender-based violence. But, at the same time: i) although these programs are highly feminised, specific gender considerations have been left out of the design, implementation and monitoring; ii) they consolidate the maternal side of social policy that addresses women in their role as mothers, rather than on account of being women; iii) conditionalities linked to children's education and health reinforce women's role as caretakers; and iv) in certain circumstances, they can discourage women's participation in the labour market.

Another mechanism whereby the extension of basic protection floors has been promoted in terms of income, are the reforms on pension systems, which, in some regions,



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have specifically focused on women. For example, in Latin America, some countries have moved forward in terms of: i) guaranteeing universal basic pensions that have particularly benefitted women who have historically faced more difficulties to qualify for pension benefits within the framework of tax systems; ii) guaranteeing basic income thresholds which also benefits women in particular, who usually receive lower pensions due to their weak contributory records; and iii) recognition of unpaid work.

These partial advancements towards the universalisation of social protection benefits combine with the historical aforementioned obstacles and with new trends heading in the opposite direction. In this sense, three current challenges are worth mentioning.

Firstly, the trend to privatise social protection (mainly, but not solely, in the education and health areas, including the promotion of public-

private partnerships to build basic social infrastructure and even for service provision).

Secondly, the austerity paradigm in fiscal policies that undermines funding for social protection. Many countries in the global South are facing the following fateful combination of situations: tax structures that collect very few funds and in a regressive way, mainly because rich people, huge national companies and transnational corporations use several tax dodging and tax abuse mechanisms; consequently, recurring fiscal deficits are met with austerity measures and indebtedness; the need to privatise social service provision and/or collect funds from the private sector to meet the demands deriving from social risks, in austerity contexts.

Thirdly, the challenges imposed by the "future of work" forms of employment that are increasingly moving away from the usual formal

paid "registered" work which has been the basis of tax-based social protection systems. Conversely, the forms of employment available through the new technologies, with an increasing decentralisation of production, remote work and platform jobs start to distort the labour relations and lead workers to increasingly more situations of lack of social protection.

This issue of the DAWN Informs deals with both the historical and new challenges faced to move towards guaranteeing the right of social protection to all.

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# Universal Health Coverage, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure: Women's Human Rights as the Catalyst

by Gita Sen

The interconnections between policies to move toward universal health coverage/care (UHC) as a key element of social protection, and those to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights, have seen advances in recent years, especially since 2010. These advances have occurred against the backdrop of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) despite difficult economic circumstances, rising inequality, constrained political space, and continuing and new forms of political backlash and resistance (Sen, forthcoming; Tessier et al., 2013; World Bank, 2018). Social mobilizing and advocacy have opened policy space for global agreements such as ILO Recommendation No. 202 in 2012, and target 1.3 of the SDGs, which recognize the potential of national social protection floors (SPFs) as tools against poverty and vulnerability.

Recognition of UHC as central to social protection has been relatively recent. It was consolidated with the passing of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202) in 2012 by the International Labour Conference (ILO, 2012).

This recommendation guides ILO member-states on how to build comprehensive social security systems, starting with national social protection floors (SPFs).

The Recommendation calls for applying the principle of “non-discrimination, gender equality and responsiveness to special needs”.

Building on Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ILO Recommendation No. 202 includes UHC as one of four minimum elements for an SPF: “... access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality...” (Tessier et al., 2013, p2).

But recognition of UHC as one of the elements of an SPF needs to be matched both by adequate financing, and by ensuring access to all women and girls as well as groups who are vulnerable to exclusion, marginalization and discrimination on grounds, inter alia, of poverty, ethnicity, race, caste, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, indigeneity, migrant and refugee status, and location.

Synergies matter. In the case of UHC, its recognition as a key element of social protection will have stronger impact when combined with access for all to needed public services, and to infrastructure that supports such access and is sustainable through adequate budgets and spending.

Gender equality matters. It can be the catalyst for the realization of synergies by ensuring access and

sustainability.

Women's and girls' human rights matter. A grounding in the human rights of girls and women, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, not only puts the spotlight on their needs and rights, it identifies duty bearers in states and governance systems. It foregrounds their own voices and agency. It makes real the slogan of social mobilizing, “Nothing about us without us”.

Much of the debate around social protection, including UHC, has focused on the relative merits of program instruments such as targeting and conditionalities, where human rights concerns do not have pride of place. They tend instead to be excluded and are evaluated (if at all) on par with efficiency, effectiveness and other criteria. A recent, useful UNDP Primer argues that social protection “...ensures access to basic social services to all, especially for groups that are traditionally vulnerable or excluded; stimulates productive inclusion through the development of capabilities, skills, rights and opportunities for the poor and excluded; builds resilience and protects people against the risks of livelihood shocks throughout their lifecycle; and helps remove structural barriers, including barriers within the household, that prevent people from achieving well-being...” (UNDP: 2016, p15-16: emphasis added).

## SUPPLY SIDE BARRIERS

From the perspective of UHC, a simple demand-side versus supply-side distinction can help to clarify the nature of the synergies that

are possible. On the supply side, the provision of infrastructure – available, accessible and affordable primary health centres, emergency transportation, reliable referral systems, as well as basics such as clean water, toilets, waste disposal etc – are well known. These have to be matched by other key elements on the supply side such as adequate staffing and equipment, and quality services.

But these supply side elements may elude women and girls unless they are provided with an eye to tackling the risk of exclusion and discrimination. Infrastructure may be unfriendly to disabled people; services may stigmatize poor women, pregnant adolescents, ethnic, caste minorities, LGBTI groups and others. Disrespect and abuse in service provision, especially but not only in obstetric care, can violate women's dignity and humanity, driving them away from public services, as has been widely documented in many countries. Women and babies held captive until they pay fees or bribes has been noted in multiple contexts.

While abortion is actually legal in most countries of the world, stigma and harassment of abortion-seekers violate their human rights and drive them into unsafe services, despite abortion being one of the simplest and safest of procedures when properly conducted. HIV positive girls, LGBTI people, and sex workers face fear, discrimination, violence, and even death when seeking health services.

## DEMAND SIDE BOTTLENECKS

On the demand-side too, many bottlenecks stand between women

and access to health services. Poverty and inequality are not only economically driven, but also by exclusion or marginalization due to other sources of deprivation. Such deprivation involves the interpenetrating workings of multiple relations of power, disadvantage and oppression. It is this conjoint working of different social forces that is often the most challenging barrier to policy interventions.

Deep poverty is intersectional. Its “victims” suffer multiple and reinforcing forms of oppression, some of which, like caste or gender or ethnicity, or sexual orientation may be long-standing and deeply embedded in social systems and structures of belief and practice. What is more, because such intersecting and enmeshed power relations and oppression can be difficult to tackle, program implementers may tend to direct their attention to groups higher up the ladder just because they may have fewer barriers to transcend.

An intersectional approach can help us understand why, even if the programs in themselves are delivered well, sustained programmatic attention to the health of those suffering from economic poverty may not yield the desired outcomes without more nuanced and multidimensional approaches that are sensitive to the intersections of deep poverty.

For instance, a conditional cash transfer requiring poor women to bring their children for immunization may be ineffective for women suffering from deep poverty, whose caste, ethnic or indigenous background may mean that they

fear disrespect or mistreatment in the health centre, or who live in hamlets that are ill-served by public transport, or do not have help to care for other children, older or sick or disabled people at home. The result is weak program outcomes because such intersections have not been adequately addressed.

Intersecting discrimination against women and girls is reinforced by their weak access to and control over financial resources, weak social networks, and lack of knowledge and information about health and other services. Their time poverty is exacerbated by their highly unequal work burdens and responsibilities for unpaid care of children, the old and the infirm. Intimate Partner Violence and fear of domestic and public violence keep them away from public spaces including schools and health centres, and this may be increasingly so in the growing atmosphere of religion, race, migration, caste and other forms of publicly sanctioned hatred. To conclude: Synergies between the financing and provision of health services and infrastructure on the one side, and access that transcends both supply- and demand-side barriers, are possible. But they will only be realised if the human rights including the voice and agency of girls and women are recognised and realised.

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## The Review on Social Protection and Access to Healthcare by Sex Workers in Cambodia

by Roth Chansophearet

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Looking at its history, Cambodia, like other less developed countries, receives overseas development aid and financial assistance from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in order to restore and build its economy and to enhance development. This financial assistance comes with conditions which require Cambodia to reform many areas, including economic policy and public administration. Privatization was introduced and adopted under a Structural Adjustment Program and other policy frameworks and strategy plans including the Medium-Term Economic and Financial Policy Framework Paper 1999–2002 and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Thus, privatization becomes one of the main strategies for economic development in Cambodia.

Privatization of essential services including education, water, electricity, housing and public healthcare has become a major concern for Cambodian people especially the poor: 71% of the total population (who have an income less than USD 3 per day); and women, since privatization prevents these groups from accessing essential services. The promotion of the private sector's role in providing services and the introduction of user-fees at public

health facilities have become critical barriers for people to access free and quality healthcare. The spending on healthcare per capita in Cambodia is high. For instance, in 2014, out-of-pocket per capita expenditure on health per year accounted for 63% of total expenditure on health, whilst government expenditure accounted for only 18.5%.

### SOCIAL PROTECTION IN CAMBODIA AND ITS COVERAGE

Privatization, a key policy imposed by IMF, World Bank and other

**“Social protection includes benefits for children and families, maternity, unemployment, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability and disaster survivors, as well as health protection.”**

financial institutions via aid and concessional loans and made through free trade agreements, has posed a serious threat and impoverished people in Cambodia, as it has elsewhere in the world. Social Protection/Social Security, coined and introduced by various actors including the World Bank and implemented through key international laws, has emerged as a critical social policy to alleviate poverty and as a shield to protect people from disaster caused by such impoverishing neo-liberalized economic policy.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), “all members of a society have the right to social security, and

everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself/his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control”. Through the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, “States recognize the right of everyone to social security including social insurance”

Similarly, as articulated by the International Labor Organization (ILO), Social Protection or Social Security is a “human right and is defined as the set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle. Social protection includes benefits for children and families, maternity, unemployment, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability and disaster survivors, as well as health protection. Social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory (tax-based financing) including social assistance”.

In Cambodia, the term and concept

of “Social Protection” has become popular since the promulgation of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2011-2015. This strategy defines social protection and determines the scope of policy and implementation activities. In March 2017, the National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025 was made with the goal to develop a strategic plan for the Royal Government of Cambodia to guarantee income security and reduce economic and financial vulnerability of its citizens by focusing on two main pillars, namely Social Assistance (non-contributory) and Social Security (contributory).

Social Assistance is mainly financed by the Cambodian government's budget with the aim to ensure decent living standards for poor and vulnerable citizens, including individuals living close to or under the poverty line, pregnant women, infants, children, elders, people with disabilities and families with no food security. Currently, the Cambodian government has been implementing some programs including the Health Equity Fund (HEF) for holders of poor identification cards (IDpoor) and families who cannot afford to pay for health care, food reserves for disasters, scholarship programs for poor primary school students, vocational trainings and other benefits.

Social Security, being a contributory system, encourages citizens to seek protection in the face of unforeseen social and economic crisis which can negatively affect their income security and increase their vulnerability to illness, maternity, employment injuries, unemployment, disability, old age

or death. As stated in the Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025, this program is composed of five components including pensions, health insurance, work injury insurance, unemployment insurance, and disability insurance. However, to date, the government has only implemented two components, namely health and work injury insurance for formal sector workers who are covered under social insurance, a pre-paid system that depends largely on the contributions which are compulsory payments made by employers.

### SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE AND FREELANCE SEX WORKERS

As informal sector workers, freelance sex workers are not yet covered by the social security scheme though the government has plans to expand Social Protection for all. With irregular in-comes ranging anywhere between 3.75-7.50 USD per day, freelance sex workers live precariously and are unable to save, often unable to cope with income insecurity, health and occupational hazards and accidents.

**“...only 17.6% out of 131 sex workers interviewed (...) have a Health Equity Card. Mobile freelance sex workers can't fulfil the criteria (...) in order to get an IDpoor card...”**

Under the Health Equity Fund (HEF) scheme of the Social Assistance System, sex workers who hold IDpoor cards can access treatment at public health facilities. However, not every sex worker has an IDpoor card. According to a



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research report conducted by the Women's Network for Unity on “Health and Life, Experiences of Sex Workers and Entertainment Workers”, only 17.6% out of 131 sex workers interviewed in the study have a Health Equity Card.

Mobile freelance sex workers can't fulfil the criteria to be assessed by the Ministry of Planning in order to get an IDpoor card. Some freelance sex workers are mobile and don't have specific shelter. Recently, with advocacy efforts of sex workers





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facilitated by the Women's Network for Unity<sup>1</sup>, the Ministry of Planning expressed a commitment to support mobile sex workers to access IDpoor cards. However, accessing healthcare through the IDpoor cards does not fully respond to the needs of the poor including sex workers, and is not sustainable. The Health Equity Fund scheme still largely depends on financial support from development partners, though the government is increasing its budget. More concerning is that Cambodia is on the way to becoming an upper-middle income country, and as a result, the financial support from external development partners will gradually reduce and Cambodia will face a budget shortfall for covering healthcare. As stated in the 2016-2020 Health Strategic Plan, there is an expectation of a budget deficit of USD 1,104 million for healthcare which urgently needs the

<sup>1</sup> Women's Network for Unity (WNU), a sex worker's association based in Cambodia, was founded at the end of 2002, having mission to strengthen sex workers network to advocate for the greater participation in program, policy and law development related to sex work that will give them greater access to social services, and freedom from violence and discrimination.

political will of and commitment from the government in order to increase the national budget for the health sector. Aside from these concerns, some freelance sex workers (38.2% of 131 interviewed women) experience discrimination and poor service from health staff when they are seeking health treatment by using IDpoor card. Questions raised regarding these concerns include: What is next for freelance sex workers? Will they be covered under social insurance, and if so, will the state pay for them? What of other informal sector workers, the poor, elderly, people with disabilities, children, women and those who have irregular income? How will effective healthcare be delivered to them?

### SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE GAP

The adoption and implementation of Social Protection can only address some of the people's needs. However, there are a number of concerns regarding the current system. Firstly, it still lacks a comprehensive and clear measure and procedure to

ensure that groups of people such as informal sector workers (including sex workers and farmers), people with irregular income, youth, elders, and all the poor access to free and/or affordable basic social services, as well as social security such as pensions, and other necessary support/subsidies. Informal sector and irregular income groups are still excluded from the scheme, though some have access to social assistance. Secondly, the contributory social security system, though currently compulsory and paid for by employers (for work injury and health insurance) through social insurance schemes, will add more burden to citizens in addition to tax duties. Finally, the current social protection framework excludes the provision for free and/or affordable access to other essential services such as housing, water, electricity and transportation etc. These essential services are crucial for ensuring that the basic needs of people are met, especially for poor migrant workers and women workers, and must be included in Social Protection programs.

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## Is social protection working for women in Southern Africa?

by Mercia Andrews

The 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 63) held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York 11-22 March 2019 focused on 'Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.'

As the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) in Southern Africa prepared for CSW 63, we started from the premise that women, especially poor rural women, urgently require an extensive system of social protection that is responsive to the impoverished and marginalised conditions in which they live. For rural women, every day is a struggle for survival because they are subjected to economic, ecological and social deprivations, risks and extreme vulnerability.

For a decade now, the RWA has been struggling for the possibility for women to live independent lives free from want with dignity. For the RWA, living with dignity is a fundamental human right. The RWA women from Southern Africa (South Africa, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Namibia, Mozambique and Mauritius) all confirmed that in their respective countries some form of social protection exists. Often, the social protection systems take the form of cash transfers such as social old age pensions, child support and disability grants.



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Young women report that there is often an unfair distribution of cash transfers due to corruption and administrative malfeasance in some of the countries. They also reported limited access to basic services such as primary health care, primary school education, water, sanitation and other support such as feeding schemes in public schools.

In many cases good public education is no longer free and public health provision is breaking down and requires additional resources. There is a dire need for facilities for aging populations as well as child-care services, particularly in rural areas. The country reports presented at CSW 63 revealed that access, availability and distribution of social protection in Southern Africa is uneven and often extremely precarious. Evidence elsewhere shows that as public provision of social protection services such as health, education and social welfare are downgraded

and fall prey to austerity measures, private providers of these services are on the increase in the region. Increasing private provision of health, education and social welfare services fuels inequalities. Women who are in the rural and agrarian sectors who live precarious lives remain on the fringe and experience greater inequities.

Notwithstanding this, women at CSW 63 also agreed that social protection programmes were essential given the extent of poverty, especially rural poverty, inequality and unemployment that prevailed in the region. In most countries, unemployment amongst young people, especially young women was extremely high. Hit by environmental and epidemiological crises such as HIV/AIDS, women in rural areas suffer the worst impacts of droughts, floods, famines and lack of access to health and education services. The lack of transport and related social infrastructure also



reinforces their spatial, social and economic dislocation.

Despite the fact that many African states signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to end “global poverty by 2030”, the RWA view this as a pipe dream. Women argue that it requires a greater commitment from the global north to make some fundamental changes which could contribute to overcoming the huge gaps between the social protection systems in the global North and the global South.

The RWA sees the need for much greater social protection, a system that particularly empowers and opens spaces for rural women with special focus on young women.

For this to take place, it requires a strong organised voice of women that can articulate and organise around key demands such as the provision of good childcare services and support.

Whilst access to decent public health care and affordable public transport

can certainly assist, it is not enough. There is an urgent need for African governments to rethink and widen the scope of what is required. In South Africa, for example, the Child Support Grant has gone a long way to supporting poor unemployed women, but women would much rather have access to decent work and a living wage.

In the rural areas of Southern Africa, access to land for production with security of tenure over the land by the women themselves is central to their empowerment. It not only gives rural women control of production but it makes them independent from both the “husband”, the family and the state and it can undermine patriarchal power relations. Women saw this as giving them the opportunity to be actively involved in the economy and to generate the resources that allow them to make decisions about their lives. Public transport was also viewed as an important pillar of social support, by providing mobility and conditions to seek access to work, training and education.

Lastly, for the RWA it is important

to defend and strengthen current access to basic services, especially water, electricity and sanitation, public education, health care and social grants. Social protection services offered by the public service should also be accessible and provided based on criteria that is transparent, in order to monitor corrupt practices and hold public officials to account. It is important to also ensure that the recipients of public services are treated with respect and their human rights are protected.

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## Argentina in the new neoliberal cycle since December 2015: social security is going backwards

by Nuria Ape, Bruno Bagnarelli, Diego Oliveira and Flora Partenio

From the time that Mauricio Macri took office as President of Argentina in 2015, there has been a sustained decline in social security (understood as a comprehensive system of so-cial protection) with decreased levels of protection for the

population in general. The period of Macri administration between December 2015 until now, has been named by experts as a period of “social insecurity” referring to the absent role of the State in guaranteeing the right to social security of every citizen<sup>1</sup>.

This sharp decline is even more pressing in social sectors or collectives with a higher level of social vulnerability<sup>2</sup>, such as: retired people and pensioners with minimum benefits; beneficiaries of non-contributory benefits; persons with disabilities; children entitled to the Universal Allocation per Child

(AUH, by its Spanish acronym) for Social Protection, granted to households where its members work in the informal sector or are unemployed; pregnant women who are beneficiaries of the Maternity Benefit for Social Protection (AEPP, by its Spanish acronym): and transgender people and transvestites who have no access to minimum benefits in terms of health, at present, nor in the future to pensions, retirement benefits and “historical reparation” of pensions<sup>3</sup>.

This is the expected outcome of a neoliberal program marked by the unrestrained promotion of



Photo courtesy of Flora Partenio

financial businesses over income-generating activities (except those that are strictly primary and/or extractive), thus leading to growing indebtedness, reinforced (in terms of public debt and conditionalities on sovereign policies) by the agreement signed with the IMF in 2018 for the largest loan in the history of this financial institution.

In this context, there is a sharp increase of the cost of living, loss of purchasing power of income and growing two-digit levels of unemployment, being higher for women, with dramatic consequences for the younger generation. This is reflected in the dimension of income<sup>4</sup> poverty that reached 35.4% of the population in the first quarter of 2019 (INDEC, 2019).

The Argentine case hereby presented is an example of the impact of neoliberal policies on social protection systems and how IMF conditionalities operate in these processes.

#### MODIFICATION OF THE RETIREMENT MOBILITY FORMULA AT THE REQUEST OF THE IMF

The formula for retirement mobility (that determines the periodic increase of the monetary value of retirement income) was replaced by a new one approved by the national Congress in December 2017, while rallies against the pension reform were being re-pressed. This led to a decline in the purchasing power of pensions of around 19.1% in 2018 in relation to the official inflationary measurement. This decline has been reflected in the Subsystem of Family Allowances that provides cash transfers per child and covers formal workers, individual tax payers<sup>5</sup>, workers from specific areas such as farming, private households, seasonal workers, workers from the informal sector and pension beneficiaries, because in all cases the equation of mobility benefits is the same.

At the same time, there was a reduction in tax revenues that

finance the social security system, together with a subtle but sustained and permanent policy affecting the assets of the Sustainability Guarantee Fund (FGS, by its Spanish acronym)<sup>6</sup> through asset sales, investments with uncertain return or loans to the Treasury and other government entities. This seriously threatens the financial sustainability, in the long- and medium-term, of the only social security system that provides national coverage and, consequently, the future of retired persons and pensioners as well as the other benefits and/or programs related to the FGS.

Additionally, the stagnant real value of the minimum wage (equivalent to less than 50% of the average food basket) entails the depreciation of the economic coverage provided by the Subsystem of Unemployment Compensation for people who have lost their job.

By mid-2018 there was an attempt to reduce the number of benefits related to comprehensive protection





Photo courtesy of Flora Partenio

for families, which is specifically protected by the constitutional system in force that supports the endorsed international human rights instruments. The intention was to eliminate the tiers favouring certain areas or regions of the country because of their recognised disadvantages in terms of income-generation and/or climate conditions. This measure, taken through administrative acts, was withdrawn after court decisions that overruled it and bills that legally disallowed it.

Apart from the attempt to cut family allowances by differential zones, the Macri administration continued to push in that direction and moved to suspend benefits for vulnerable sectors, particularly persons with disabilities who have been constantly in the spot-light since mid-2016<sup>7</sup>. Between 2017 and 2018 the government reduced more than 170,000 disability pensions and published a resolution that established a series of additional eligibility requirements for disability pensions, which go against

basic human rights principles<sup>8</sup>. Fortunately, judicial decisions passed through the courts have stopped the attempts to stem the benefits of already granted disability pensions and these are currently still in force.

#### IMPOVERISHED AND INDEBTED

The above list of socially regressive measures started in 2016 with the restriction and reduction of the percentage of older adults' medicine cost covered by healthcare plans from the National Institute of Social Services for Retired Persons and Pensioners (PAMI, by its Spanish acronym). At the same time, the deregulation of the price of these supplies led to an increase of around 25% over the inflation rate after three and a half years of Macri administration. In this context of accelerated inflation, the cost of essential medicines for older people also increased more than 300%.

Another form of intervention, since July 2017, was the government's extension of micro-credit programs for basic expenses to those receiving

non-contributory benefits. Those sectors currently receiving reduced income were able to access microcredit loans to be able to cover basic expenses such as food, health and the increase in utility tariffs. In the list of indebted people through this programme, you will find that most of them are women from sectors well known to need support.

#### WOMEN AS A POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENT VARIABLE

During the previous administration (2003-2015), a pension inclusion plan was promoted through which people who had not made enough contributions to their retirement plans were able to join the social security system. The program allowed them to receive a pension and to pay taxes through a "moratorium" system. Although this benefit was equally available for men and women, it was mostly women who joined it (86% of the total number).

This was the direct consequence of an overrepresentation of women in informal employment as well as in unpaid domestic and care work, which means that few contributions had been made to their retirement plans (CELS et al., 2018). Although the measure was presented as a general one, it was popularly known as the "retirement plan for homemakers" acknowledging that the women's collective has historically suffered labour market inequalities and a smaller participation in the formal sector of the economy.

Causing even more setbacks in social security, in 2016 the government promoted the inaccurately named "National Program of Historical Reparation for Retired People and Pensioners" which threatens the

social security system. Through that program the above-mentioned pension moratorium was extended for three years, but only for women, incorporating at the same time new requirements in terms of asset verification and gradually restricting coverage. For those left out (men and women who did not meet the new requirements), a Universal Pension for Older Adults (PUAM, by its Spanish acronym) was implemented. This is a benefit that represents 80% of the minimum retirement income and requires the verification of social vulnerability, plus beneficiaries cannot be on a pay-roll and must also reside in the country. Amongst other limitations, it is not transferable in case of death. Additionally, for women, PUAM brought another harmful requirement: the age to be eligible for the benefit was increased by five years, from 60 to 65 which was inconsistent to the age required by the moratorium.

Consistent with these measures, by July 2019 the government announced the elimination of the "homemakers' retirement." However, as a result of the broad mobilisation of social sectors, particularly the feminist movement, the Macri administration was forced to extend the benefit until 2022.

Gender inequalities across the world of work and social security are reinforced by the absence of the State's role in guaranteeing access to rights. The end of the pension moratorium would have prevented women's access to pension benefits. However, the new extension of the moratorium system is taking place and at the same time its access is more constricted because of how the measure is designed in general, while at the same time also because of the

inclusion of the new requirements in terms of the economic situation of those who request it.

This change in the quality of rights creates more segmentation between those included in the formal labour market and those who, like women, had career breaks. This represents a setback for women who had access to the moratorium between 2003 and 2016, when 1,796,439 women retired. The restriction of moratorium benefits is nothing but the patriarchal oppression suffered by women workers who dedicated most of their lives to housework and unpaid care work<sup>9</sup>. This further deepens social and gender inequalities, and makes Argentina non-compliant with the ILO Social Security Convention N° 102, disregarding the recommendations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, by the impact of these economic policies on ESCRs in Argentina<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, there is no doubt that we are witnessing a period of regression of the Argentine government in terms of social inclusion and protection policies, reflected in the depreciation of benefits in general, a decrease in funding and a retreat from the social security universalization trend, among other effects. This situation blatantly violates the standards reached through the commitment that the State undertook with the incorporation of international instruments to protect human rights and the constitutional rule as a mechanism for the reallocation of income.

#### NOTES

1 See: Miguel Fernández Pastor, Page 12, October 31, 2018.

2 For example, and, as further explained in the

following section, in December 2017, the formula to update the monetary value of the transfers received by this population was modified, entailing a loss of value in real terms. In 2018, while transfers increased 28.5%, the general price index increased 47.6%. Sources: ANSES; UNDAV (<http://bit.ly/2um06Jy>).

3 "Historical reparation" under the terms understood by the community of transgender people. The most recent precedent of that kind of measure can be seen in Argentina, at subnational level, in the province of Neuquén through a program that acknowledges that "there has been and there is a systematic violation of transgender people's rights, and tries to compensate state neglect through a monthly financial contribution and access to healthcare." See: <http://bit.ly/30HzZKX>.

4 As already mentioned, according to INDEC, headline inflation in 2018 was 47.6%.

5 The Simplified Tax Regime for Small Contributors is a system that unifies and simplifies taxes for low-income independent workers. Tax and social security obligations are met through the payment of a single monthly installment: <http://bit.ly/2TMJkj3>.

6 FGS is formed by a financial asset portfolio, shareholding in different companies and other assets, with the purpose of providing financial sustainability to the social security system in the long and medium-term, and the implementation of social security programs (housing loans, financial aid for students to support education completion, computer supplies for the education sector, support for income-generating projects from the private sector, support for energy and infrastructure projects from the public sector, etc.); it has lost an amount of around \$31,041 million dollars between December 2015 and October 2018: <http://bit.ly/38GwY0j>.

7 See: <http://bit.ly/36m7y6d>.

8 Data from the IDA presentation at the 64th. session of the UN ESCR Committee, in Geneva, 2018.

9 CEPA (2019) "De Pobreza Cero a pobreza cien mil, análisis de la Pensión Universal de Adultos Mayores como reemplazo de la moratoria previsional para el acceso a la jubilación" (From Zero Poverty to Hundred Thousand Poverty, Analysis of the Universal Pension for Older Adults as a Replacement of the Pension Moratorium to Provide Access to Retirement Benefits.) March.

10 In this sense, see the report presented by CELS, DAWN and other civil society organizations at the UN in 2018: <http://bit.ly/3avCXGJ>.



## Social Protection and Ending Poverty in Pacific Island States: a new fad or a real solution?

by Claire Slatter

The adoption of the language and policies of 'social protection' has only recently begun to be reflected in the development thinking and practice of Pacific Island states, following their promotion by international and regional financial institutions and donor agencies as a poverty alleviation policy instrument and, since 2016, as a means of achieving both SDGs 1 (End Poverty) and 8 (Inclusive economic growth).

According to Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Pacific region's largest donor, social protection is 'a relatively new space for the Australian aid program, but one which is growing in importance for the Indo-Pacific region.'

DFAT is now pushing social protection - whether in the form of 'cash and food transfers, an income generating asset (such as livestock), cash for work or other transfers' (which may be conditional upon school attendance or accessing child health services) - as 'one of the key responses to reducing poverty and supporting inclusive economic growth'. Australia's aid program will focus strongly on 'supporting initiatives that provide regular and predictable cash or in-kind transfers to individuals, households and communities in our partner countries.'

The promotion of social protection with the joint aims of alleviating

poverty and achieving inclusive economic growth, is premised on the notion that it will 'unlock... the economic potential of the poorest', and assist the poor "to purchase enough food to be able to work hard, obtain transport to access work opportunities and purchase assets to invest in income generating activities".

It's an IFI take on the International Labour Organisation's longstanding advocacy for strengthened social protection floors in all countries in the context of globalisation's impacts in eroding wages and working conditions and increasing income disparities. While a global push by development banks and donor agencies for social protection for citizens in low and middle income countries throughout their different phases of life (life cycle approach) is a welcome development in global policy thinking, it can be criticised for failing to

**"...like Fiji, however, where urban migration has resulted in generations born and raised outside of their ancestral villages, the possibility of living off the land is more imaginary than real."**

confront the structural causes of the extreme levels of poverty and inequality we are seeing today, which lie in inequitable and impoverishing macro-economic policies. Such policies, which have been applied in Pacific Island states over the last 25 to 30 years, have resulted in substantial formal sector job losses, declining real wages and living standards, a growing dependence on informal

sector livelihoods, and widening income inequality.

The idea of poverty existing in Pacific Island countries was rejected for a long time - it was argued that communal land ownership systems in Pacific Islands countries and the subsistence livelihoods that they enabled for rural dwellers meant everyone had the option of living off the land. For a growing majority in countries like Fiji, however, where urban migration has resulted in generations born and raised outside of their ancestral villages, the possibility of living off the land is more imaginary than real. It is now generally acknowledged that there is a problem of poverty, that it exists as much in rural as in urban areas, and can no longer be ignored or euphemised as 'hardship'.

Within this context, an inventory on non-contributory social protection

programmes in the Asia and Pacific was recently jointly published by the International Centre for Inclusive Growth and UNICEF, with support from the Australian Government and [socialprotection.org](http://socialprotection.org).

The picture presented in the regional inventory is very diverse. Pacific Island countries which continue to be in association with a developed country (former



coloniser/administrator/trustee) may enjoy a wider range and more generous social protection benefits, approximating the kinds of social support provided in the metropolitan countries to which they remain linked. The social protection regimes within other states covered in the inventory may reflect national economic capacities and/or political imperatives or political will<sup>1</sup>.

For example, and just to give an idea of large inequalities in social provision between PICs, Cook Islands, a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand, with an estimated population of 17,700 in 2019 has eight social protection programmes, costing more than NZD 35.8 million a year in total. Niue, a similarly self-governing state in free association with New Zealand, with a much lower resident population (only 1500) has six social protection programmes. As with Cook Islands, Niue as one

<sup>1</sup> The inventory takes a narrow approach to 'reading' or identifying 'social protection' in all the countries covered.

of the three 'realm' countries is substantially aided by New Zealand and its generous social protection programmes are similar to those provided to New Zealanders.

On the other end of the spectrum, Kiribati, the Pacific's largest ocean state with an EEZ that covers more than 3 million square kilometres - is one of the region's three independent atoll states most at risk from climate change induced sea level rise. With a population of 109,693 in 2015, Kiribati has three modest non-contributory social protection programmes in place: a copra fund subsidy for copra farmers introduced in the mid 1990s, provided through a minimum purchase price for copra and costing AUD4.54 million in 2009; a monthly paid cash allowance for citizens above 65 years of age (more than 50% of whom are women) under an Elderly Fund Scheme introduced in 2004 and costing AUD2.9 million in 2016; and free education (from 2016), previously known as School Fees Subsidy, costing approximately

AUD 2.3 million a year.

Fiji, with a population of close to 900,000 (World Bank 2019), is the only Pacific Island country with a longstanding state-funded welfare scheme set up initially to support destitute citizens, who originally were elderly, former indentured labourers from India, without family to support them. Fiji is also the only Pacific Island state that has a longstanding contributory National Provident Fund (based on combined contributions from employers and employees) which includes a pension option for members upon reaching the age of 55.

The scheme was controversially 'reformed' in 2011, with a halving of pension payments, to ensure sustainability.

The inventory identifies five non-contributory social protection programmes in Fiji, costing a total of FJD83.2 million a year. They include: a conditional and means-tested 'Care and Protection' cash transfer and food subsidy for





dependent children, who must be in school and not deprived of their rights to education, health and other basic needs (introduced in 2008); a bus fare subsidy (since 2011); a Poverty Benefit Scheme (comprising a conditional cash transfer plus food subsidy and skill-training programme for which just over FJD38 million was allocated in the 2018-2019 budget), which has replaced a longstanding Family Assistance Programme run by the Welfare Department and from which women (comprising 55% of beneficiaries) primarily benefited in 2017; a social pension scheme for elderly people who have no source of income and are not recipients of any government support or of a pension (since 2013); and a food voucher for rural pregnant women who regularly visit rural facilities, to improve maternal health (since 2014).

A Fact Sheet on Social Protection in Fiji produced by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) in February 2019, identifies a much broader slate of social protection schemes in Fiji, numbering 48 in total, illustrating that definitions of social protection vary considerably.

**“...Can poverty and inequality be ended without changing their structural causes?”**

Following UNESCAP's broader, life cycle approach to social protection, FWRM's inventory counts among Fiji's non-contributory social protection programmes the various scholarships and tertiary education loan schemes; HPV vaccination, school health checks, cancer screening, dialysis subsidisation, and overseas referrals for treatment

programmes; as well as young entrepreneurship and micro and small business grants schemes; social housing assistance, legal aid services and family law fee waiver. This broader framing of social protection reflects very positively on Fiji. What can we

expect from the implementation of new social protection approaches in Pacific Island states? Are cash transfers just the most recent 'fad' in poverty alleviation (and indeed humanitarian aid) approaches, or does it hold the key to ending poverty? Can poverty and inequality be ended without changing their structural causes? The multiplier

effects of conditional cash transfers are known, from the case of Brazil (under Lula's government) to have contributed to improving family wellbeing of the most vulnerable. But we seem unwilling to abandon dominant economic policies that have caused extreme and worsening inequality and focus on re-orienting national economies towards creating jobs, improving wages and working conditions, returning to progressive taxation and re-embracing 'the social wage' (free education, free health care, subsidised housing, etc) of yesteryear, to achieve a more equitable sharing of national (and global) wealth. For all of Fiji's many social protection schemes, the minimum hourly wage of FJD2.68 provides Fiji workers with a derisory FJD107.20 for a 40-hour week, which is well below the basic needs poverty line.

The widely-varying social protection

programmes in Pacific Island states that have been detailed in the regional inventory have emerged in different political and historical contexts. None of them were linked in any way to an economic growth agenda. Their gender impacts have never been assessed.

New social protection programmes involving cash transfers will almost certainly be monitored and evaluated for their social (and gender equality) as well as economic impacts. It will be interesting to see whether, without the burden of debt and the intra-community tensions that typically accompany micro-credit schemes, the beneficiaries of cash transfers and other associated supports will be motivated and empowered to self-start their own income-generating activities and climb out of poverty. It is unlikely, however, that such new social protection approaches alone will

achieve the SDG Goal of ending poverty.

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*A further 62,000 Cook Islanders live in New Zealand* <http://bit.ly/2Rit6g8>

#### NOTES

<http://bit.ly/2vfD4pV>

<http://bit.ly/2TNA2mN>

Ibid.





## A crisis of social protection is at the heart of current migration trends

by Masaya Llavaneras Blanco

It is widely known that migrants are often at the margins of national social protection systems in their countries of residence. They are also likely to be at the margins of the systems in their home countries, either by practice (not using them because they do not reside there) or by law. It is also common to find that migrant women from the global south provide paid and unpaid care and reproductive labour (as nurses, nannies, domestic and elderly support workers, etc) that is central to the social protection systems in the countries of residence, especially but not limited to, the global north. Migrant labour has been fundamental for the creation and sustenance of social protection systems in several destination countries, i.e. the British and Dutch health systems, which

relied on Indian, Caribbean, and South African health workers. An aspect that has barely been discussed is how the decay of formal and informal systems of public services, infrastructure and social protection is a driver of women's transnational mobility. Moreover, the deterioration or absence of reliable social policies increases their risk of embarking into dubious labour migration arrangements that in some cases are linked to human trafficking and other risky and exploitative journeys.

### POOR SOCIAL PROTECTION DRIVES PRECARIOUS MIGRATION JOURNEYS

The deterioration of social protection and social security systems are key incentives for human mobility. People often embark on transnational journeys looking for strategies to cover the costs of care for their dependants in their countries of origin. For example, recent qualitative research about the drivers behind the migration of millions of Venezuelans into Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, 56.3

percent affirmed to have embarked on their migration journeys due to the lack of access to medical treatment and 63.9 percent due to hunger (UNHCR-IOM 2019, Bermúdez, Mazuera-Arias, Albornoz-Arias, & Morffe Perez, 2018).

The weakening or absence of social protection systems is a key enabler of human trafficking. Even when women may identify risky transnational job offers, the pressure to cover for the care needs of their dependents is a strong incentive for them to enter into what may entail risky journeys and exploitative labour schemes. This is notable in impoverished communities in post-socialist Ukraine (Hankivsky, 2011) as well as in neoliberalised economies of the 1990s and early 2000s such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Llavaneras Blanco, forthcoming).

The privatization of health and education services increases the pressure on women to accept harsher labour conditions in exchange for income that would enable them to cover for school fees, health treatments, funeral services, etc. In an interview conducted in a Haitian border town, a Haitian migrant domestic worker explained why she worked on the Dominican side of the border despite her undocumented status and poor labour conditions: "I work in [migrant] domestic work because the situation gets difficult when one has children and need to pay for schooling" (Llavaneras Blanco, forthcoming). For her, as for many migrants, the absence or weakening of accessible social services was a significant push into precarious migration and labour

journeys.

### A TRANSNATIONAL CRISIS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Labour migration schemes are increasingly tailored in ways that reduce the paths to citizenship in receiving countries and equate the mobility of people (migration) with the mobility of goods (trade). This has multiple implications in terms of accessing social security and social protection. For example, it is often the case that migrant workers contribute financially to social security systems that do not protect them or their families. Seasonal agricultural workers in Canada, often from the Caribbean and Central America, are often contributing to a social security system that does not protect the majority of them from workplace injuries (Marchitelli, 2016). This form of exclusion also occurs in the global south. Elderly Haitian workers who devoted their lives' labour to sugar production in the Dominican Republic often die without access to pensions to which they contributed throughout their working lives (Leclerc, 2015). This affects retired elderly male workers and commonly their widows, who in most cases are migrants themselves, and are left in conditions of extreme precariousness since their own labour was historically unaccounted and scarcely paid (Francisco, 2015).

Migrant domestic workers are amongst the least protected of migrant labour. The most serious occur in Saudi Arabia, where Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers have faced death penalties (Agencies, 2018, 2019) without effective protection from their countries of origin. In most cases, migrant seasonal and domestic

workers tend to live significant parts of their lives in countries where they do not hold the right to nationality and therefore have scarce means to be represented and politically accounted for. In tandem, migrant domestic labour is a significant part of the national development plans of their countries of origin, as a sizeable source of foreign income.

Because of their reliance on migrant labour, origin countries may compromise their ability to defend the rights of their workers abroad. For example, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have implemented measures to protect their foreign female workers abroad,

**"In tandem, migrant domestic labour is a significant part of the national development plans of their countries of origin, as a sizeable source of foreign income."**

such as pre-departure training, improved consular services and moratoria in cases of extreme violence against their nationals.

However, the effectiveness of these measures depends significantly on their position in the international market and their ability to keep their 'customers' satisfied by not upsetting them too much (Ireland, 2018). In those cases, the presence of civil society and gender justice advocates can make a difference in the creation of effective channels of participation for diverse stakeholders (including migrant workers themselves) and transnational mechanisms of social protection for the workers and their families.

The conclusions of the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women held March 2019, make some relevant remarks regarding the situation of migrants in the context of social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure. These three main themes are linked by their centrality for social reproduction and the sustenance of life and play a central role in terms of human transnational human mobility.

CSW 63 called upon governments to "adopt national gender-responsible migration policies and legislations and protect the human rights of all migrant women and girls" (CSW,

2019, p. 13/22). It made significant calls for cooperation among diverse stakeholders, including countries of origin, transit and destination, in terms of granting access to rights, documentation and social protection to all migrants, including also the creation of comprehensive anti-trafficking strategies from a human rights and sustainable development perspective. These calls cause significant governance challenges that require close attention and participation of civil society groups, and to grant space to people on the move, no matter their legal status. It is critical to pay close attention to the participation of those whose access to documentation is undermined by the very states that







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are expected to protect them. Those with precarious legal status and scarce access to documentation are the most exploitable.

Social protection is a central aspect of human mobility, especially for women whose socially determined responsibility to provide care to their dependents pushes them to endure labour and spatial journeys that often can be dangerous and exclusionary. In this context, it should be a priority to access social protection in home countries, defending the right to development and to stay in conditions of safety, and well-being. In tandem, it is fundamental to protect the rights of freedom of movement, to seek asylum, and have a nationality, all of which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The latter three are increasingly compromised by the securitization of migration, and the increasing precariousness of migrant and labour rights. The right to social protection, social security and work, no matter the legal status

are key elements in the struggle for the human rights of migrants, and particularly of women migrant workers who find themselves constantly on the move due to their personal circumstances.

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## Setbacks 4.0: The Challenges of Social Protection for Platform Workers

by **Florencia Partenio**

Platform workers occupy the headquarters of a delivery company because the company wanted to change their status to contractors. After a strike, the deputy secretary of a new union of digital platform workers is blocked from headquarters. Banking unions claim that online sale digital platform workers are nor part of the collective agreement. A young migrant "rider" is run over on the street on his way to deliver an order from Glovo. Freelance designers charge bitcoins for their projects. A woman was the breadwinner for her family from the income she received by renting her house through Airbnb, but for the past few months she has been competing with the corporate hosts within the same city. Amazon workers go on strike on Prime Day under the motto "We are workers, not robots!"

These real situations can be seen in remote cities such as Bogotá, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Mumbai, Minnesota, Santiago de Chile, Padua, New Delhi, London and/or Manila. However, North-South inequalities show the disparities between the supply and demand of labour in platforms.

Even among countries of the global South, there are astounding differences in labour costs, making, for example, freelance services in Asia much more affordable than those in Argentina.

When we explore in detail the peculiarities acquired by the "platformisation of work," we find different dimensions that have to be considered and located geographically when we evaluate the opportunities introduced by this economy. Narratives that praise "revolution 4.0," the "collaborative economy," the "internationalization of individual work" and e-business, face serious difficulties to guarantee labour and fiscal regulations as well as social protection for workers who find an income opportunity in that type of work. This article intends to summarize these challenges through a feminist lens of the global South, considering the stances of academics, activists, unions, international agencies and global networks that try to join efforts in the face of the irreversible and unmanageable advancement of technology.

### REVEALING A LACK OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

When we talk about "platform economy" we connect with the concepts of gig-economy, on-demand economy,

crowdsourcing, microworkers, collaborative economy, "uberization of employment" and access economy.

However, the diversity of tasks and exchanges carried out through these platforms has created different types of work, work qualifications, building user-consumer and user-provider profiles, wages, time availability, evaluations of performance, etc. Thus, the first step is to focus on platform profiling and typologies.

According to the elements considered, this kind of job can be classified by the intensity of the productive element involved, either intensive capital or intensive work; they can also be classified by the type of service rendered, either virtual or face-to-face, and the type of qualifications workers must have (Madariaga et al., 2019.) A recent ILO study (2019) introduces a specification regarding the number of people involved, making the difference between, on the one hand, web-based platforms where long-term tasks are assigned to freelancers or a group of

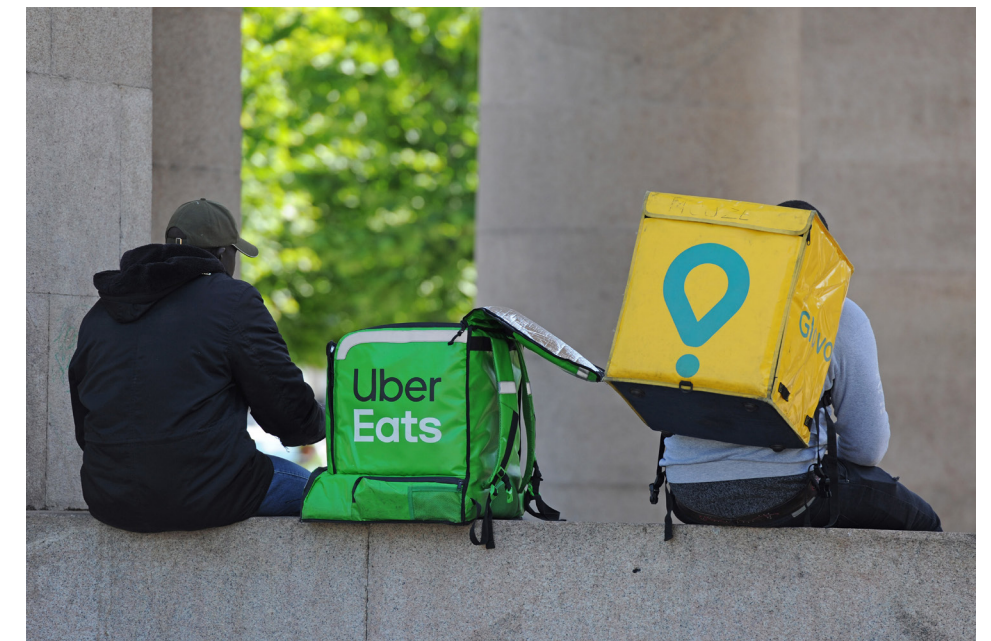


Photo credit: Shutterstock



people is assigned microtasks or creative tasks based on tendering. On the other hand, platforms based on location and applications that operate through geolocalisation where most of the tasks are distributed among specific individuals, through the applications, such as transport (UBER), accommodation (Airbnb), delivery (Glovo, Deliveroo, etc.) and home services (Taskrabbit, Zolbers) and those assigned to a group of people tend to be less common, such as carrying out microtasks at local level.

The risks and challenges of the current “delabourisation” work trends in digital platforms have been warned of by different sectors. The ILO (2019) has even indicated the challenges of guaranteeing decent work while digital platform companies insist that they are “new” forms of work, as opposed to traditional work, precisely to avoid labour regulations. Considering this contrast, we will present a series of challenges to labour rights, social security and social protection of those who consider the platform economy as an opportunity to generate income or to obtain additional income, work from home or combine schedules in a “flexible workday”:

### THE IMPACT ON WORK RELATIONSHIPS

The role of the platform company is distorted and only appears as an intermediary in the exchange of goods and services, not as an employer. In these platforms, the terms participants, members, independent contractors, or autonomous or self-employed workers are mentioned. However, the main argument of workers to

claim payment of tax contributions is insisting on the fact that there is a sustained work relationship and they report a false “autonomy.” In countries of the North, we have seen the growing judicialisation of cases, work inspections and ongoing regularisation processes through tax collection. However, the situation in countries of the South is extremely different, due to the regulatory capacity of the State and a context of growing unemployment, precariousness, unregistered work and informal work. Researches from the South (Del Bono, 2018) indicate that the creation of an ad-hoc status (in-between an employee and a contractor) can lead to the legalisation of delabourisation, such as the labour reform proposal that the Argentinian government tried to promote. In any case, these situations refer to the discrepancies between a global regulatory framework and the power of transnational digital companies.

### THE PORTABLE SCORECARD<sup>1</sup> AS A WORK TRACK-RECORD

Workers’ protection also lies on the capacity to prove records throughout their work history. With the purpose of promoting digital transparency, the ownership and portability of workers’ data should be guaranteed, enabling the availability of information about their work performance (CETyD et al., 2019, Scaserra, 2019.)

### CHALLENGES IN UNION ASSOCIATION, COLLECTIVE NEGOTIATION AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE WHEN THE “THE

<sup>1</sup> Through a portable scorecard it would be possible to collect all the information that the company needs about the work performance of each worker (CETyD et al., 2019; Scaserra, 2019).

### ALGORITHM IS THE BOSS<sup>2</sup>

In the case of platform workers who provide face-to-face and geolocation services, the exercise of freedom of association has been threatened when they gather to make claims about daily work issues (e.g. demanding work breaks or accident insurance) or to demand their tax and retirement deductions. For those carrying out microtasks or selling products through platforms, in many cases there is no personal contact or supervisor in the company to talk with. In other cases, unionisation itself is hindered by work styles such as home office and remote work, which is even worse if we refer to demands for the right to disconnect (Scaserra, 2019.) This point is key, considering that this kind of labour force is available 24/7, 365 days a year. If schedule flexibility used to be one of the positive variables, currently those platforms are the ones that penalise if orders are rejected or if online inquiries are not replied to.

### COMBINATION OF PAID WORK WITH DOMESTIC WORK AND UNPAID CARE WORK

ILO (2019) states that the two most recurrent reasons to join platforms are “to complement the wages received through other jobs” and “preference for working from home.” But in the case of women, it states that they can only work from home considering the global burden of unpaid care work. The so-called “labour and digital inclusion” worsens the conditions in which women work, with endless workdays where they combine paid and unpaid work, the latter deepened by the erosion of State obligations (Gurumurthy et al.

2018); with no sick leave, maternity leave, or paid vacations and with no certainty in terms of their retirement future. Unlike those coming from the informal market who obtain access to “microwork”, we must consider the promotion of new professional “freelance” women whose work track records show that they interrupt their professional careers to “engage” in remote work from home and to take care of their children.

### RURILITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The arrival of transnational digital platforms such as Amazon in the food retail sector entails some new risks for the sector. Real gender gap problems are reinforced in terms of techno-social skills and socioeconomic challenges that family farming, small businesses and cooperatives led by women face, particularly in the rural sector of the global South (Gurumurthy et al. 2018).

### MIGRATION AND RIGHTS

The social protection mechanisms to be designed should consider the migrant population working in platforms, most of them with no legal residence, no access to basic services and without the possibility of receiving pension and retirement benefits in the future.

### REINFORCING THE INTERNATIONAL SEXUAL-RACIAL DIVISION OF WORK

Gendering has also shaped the labour force of platforms, with strongly masculinised sectors such as transport and delivery, and others designed to provide services and

care work for dependent people, which are highly feminised<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the sexual-racial division of work is reinforced for women who join platforms of domestic work, pet care, or passenger transportation. At the same time, in countries of the South, it is highly possible to find workers who depend exclusively on the income generated through digital platforms and are not protected at all (no health insurance, retirement or pension plans.) Only a very small percentage of workers from countries of the South had retirement deductions or pensions, 21% in Africa and 32% in Asia and Pacific (ILO, 2019).

### THE NEED TO INCORPORATE MECHANISMS TO FACILITATE COVERAGE OF WORKERS WITH MULTIPLE EMPLOYERS

Considering the international sexual-racial division of work and the disparities in the ability to “compete” in the market (Gurumurthy et al. 2018), another challenge is to guarantee social protection to workers with employers across different countries.

Revisiting challenges, a lingering question gears towards the path of resistance. In the face of setbacks in terms of social protection and labour rights, the tools for collective organization and fight might become obsolete. Along this path, calls for strikes and APP “blackouts” have been organized at global level; legal disputes are taken to labour courts; delivery cooperatives and new unions have emerged, and coordination has started to develop

<sup>2</sup> The works cited collect data on a binary basis. There are no studies from government agencies or organizations that collect data showing the presence of LGBT+ people. The same happens with people with disabilities.

with outsourced workers and subcontractors.

Digital platform businesses, in the same way as land-grabbing, environmental degradation, intellectual property and finance, are part of the model of extractivist capitalism (Sassen, 2017.) Thus, the strategies to organize and fight must contemplate how these businesses operate in the junction of local, regional and global levels and who are the potential policy-makers in contexts where there is corporate capture of States.

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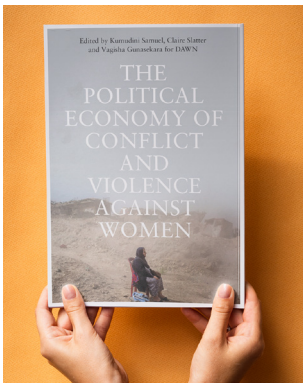
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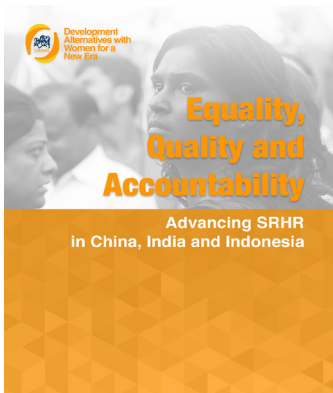
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