

Social protection coverage toolkit

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The implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems for all has emerged as one of the key targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1, “End poverty in all its forms and everywhere”, which calls for all countries to report on the coverage of social protection programmes. However, just as there are multiple definitions of social protection, the definition of coverage also differs. The concept of coverage by the World Bank (and also used in its ASPIRE database) reflects a ‘population concept’ of coverage: the share of a population or subpopulation that receives or contributes (as in the case of social insurance) to social protection. Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization differentiates between legal and effective coverage: the first refers to who, by law, is entitled to social protection, and the latter indicates who in fact contributes or receives.

Despite their differences, both take a ‘participation’ approach to social protection, meaning who participates (either directly or indirectly) in a social protection programme. However, they do not tell much about the extent to which people’s specific life-cycle risks are covered.

An alternative approach to measuring coverage

In partnership with the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the IPC-IG has developed a toolkit (Bacil et al. 2020) which proposes a complementary approach to measuring social protection coverage. The new approach includes a coverage function to measure the extent to which the different risks are covered, ranging from unprotected to protected, and taking into account the particular vulnerabilities of each population group. The steps to be taken can be summarised as follows:

Step 1. Setting the national definition of social protection: The importance of nationally adopted definitions is also reflected in SDG target 1.3. The objective of social protection and the types of programmes and their target groups largely depend on the socio-economic characteristics of the country.

Step 2. Risk mapping: After having defined social protection, the next step requires mapping the set of risks that affect the population.

- As outlined above, risks and vulnerabilities vary across different groups and are context-specific. Therefore, it is first necessary to identify the different social groups of a society that are subject to particular risks. For example, farmers are vulnerable to the risk of droughts, while working-age individuals are exposed to the risk of unemployment. The person’s characteristics define their individual sum of risks (SR), which is equal to the totality of risks to which they are vulnerable.
- Each of these risks has an assigned weight (w_r). It might reflect the level of vulnerability of that person to such risk or how much the society values addressing it.

For example, if child marriage has higher incidence in rural areas, the weight for this risk could be higher for rural children, while a government that prioritises eradicating hunger would assign it higher weight.

- Importantly, the sum of the weights of all risks that affect a person must be equal to 1.

Step 3. Programme mapping: Once the groups and their specific risks are identified, the existing social protection programmes need to be mapped to determine to what extent they address the mapped risks.

Step 4. Defining the coverage function and programme benchmarking:

To analyse the extent to which the programmes respond to the risks, a coverage function must be defined for each of them.

- The coverage function reflects how much the risk is mitigated by the different programmes. It aims to indicate, for example, how much a food transfer scheme can protect against the risk of food insecurity. Thus, for every risk r a specific coverage function applies criteria to evaluate whether it is covered, returning a proportion between 1 (fully covered) and 0 (completely uncovered):

$$c = f(\text{criteria})$$

- The individual social protection coverage rate SPC_i can be expressed as:

$$SPC_i = \sum_{r=1}^{R_i} c_r w_r$$

- The total social protection coverage rate (SPC) of a population composed of N people is the average of the individual rate, and the coverage gap is $1 - SPC$.

Conclusion

This new approach is based on the premise that social protection coverage should be measured by the extent to which programmes provide protection against the multiple risks to which people are exposed during each phase of the life cycle. Therefore, it focuses on risks and the particularities of each social group. By doing so, this approach highlights the specific needs of different groups and the existing protection gaps, enabling the implementation of evidence-based policies to strengthen the national social protection system.

Reference:

For all references, see the full report: Bacil, F., C. Bilo, and W. Silva. 2020. *Social protection coverage toolkit*. Brasília and Cairo: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.