THE RIGHT TO SOCIAL SECURITY

a precondition for equity,
 gender equality and empowerment



ABOUT ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN:

Act Church of Sweden is the Church of Sweden's international aid and development organisation. Together with other churches, organisations and volunteers, we work to alleviate poverty, fight against oppression and injustice and respond quickly in the event of disasters. Thanks to our extensive network and close collaboration with local organisations, we are efficient and powerful. Together in faith and with knowledge, we must fight for everyone's right to a dignified life!

Act Church of Sweden is a member of the ACT Alliance, a worldwide network of churches and grassroots movements. This means we can act quickly in the event of a disaster and that we have a powerful common voice.

CONTROL OF OUR FUNDRAISING AND WORK

Act Church of Sweden is controlled by the Swedish Fundraising Control (Svensk insamlingskontroll) and a member of Donate Sweden (Giva Sverige), that works with quality assurance and competence development and promotes transparency, ethics and professionalism.

All of Act Church of Sweden's work, including humanitarian aid, development aid, global advocacy and inter-church relations, is certified against the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), certificate number ACTCOS-CHS-16-01. This independent, external verification demonstrates the high quality of Act Church of Sweden' work and our focus on accountability to rights holders.

As a member of the ACT Alliance we have signed up to ACT Alliance's Code of Good Practice for organisations which details membership obligations, including having a staff Code of Conduct. In addition, we are a member of the CHS Alliance.











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SUMMARY OF OUR POSITION

Act Church of Sweden undertakes, in collaboration with both faith-based and secular actors at national, regional and global level, to work for all people's access to social security, as both a human right to help ensure a dignified life and as a means to promote sustainable development.

- 1. Act Church of Sweden emphasises all countries' responsibility to provide social security as a human right and at the same time calls on the international community to strengthen support for countries' efforts to introduce national social protection.
- 2. Act Church of Sweden emphasises that social protection systems can contribute to increased gender equality, provided that the systems are designed in a gender sensitive manner.
- 3. Act Church of Sweden advocates for rights-based and inclusive social protection systems that are aimed at the entire or large parts of the population.
- 4. Act Church of Sweden emphasises that well-designed social protection systems reduce people's vulnerability and increase their ability to handle various forms of shocks and crises.
- 5. Act Church of Sweden's position is that civil society organisations, including faith-based actors, play an important role in helping to realise everyone's right to social security.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social security¹ is a human right and a precondition for increasing equality (including gender equality) and empowerment. It is also a crucial means of combating poverty and ensuring people can maintain a decent standard of living.

A social protection system supports people during the phases and circumstances of their life when they face particular risks or may be particularly vulnerable. The systems consist of (1) different types of contributory social insurance or non-contributory transfers, such as child allowances, parental benefits, unemployment insurance, and pensions, and (2) social services that work in conjunction with transfers, such as child and elderly care, and health care including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.² Depending on the definition of social protection, education and labour protection can also be included.

The expansion of social protection in large parts of the world have contributed to poverty reduction in recent decades, and social protection is today a central issue in the international efforts for development and human rights.

Many low- and middle-income countries are building and expanding their social protection systems to cover a larger part of their population. Despite this, the systems in most low- and middle-income countries are still inadequate. More than half of the world's po-

pulation, most of whom are girls and women, have no access at all to social protection systems. Only 29 per cent, mainly in high-income countries, are covered by comprehensive social protection systems.³

ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Act Church of Sweden works for all people's right to social security, based on the church's prophetic mission to point out injustices and be a voice for people living in vulnerable situations, as well as from the special role that the churches have long played in providing health services and social care. The commitment to social protection is thus in line with the diaconal mission – service and care for fellow human beings.⁴

This position paper aims to clarify Act Church of Sweden's understanding of what the right to social security means and what role social protection plays in the work for sustainable development and a dignified life for all people. The position expresses commitments and strategic positions, in relation to the work on social protection as an actor on its own, in networks as well as together with various partner churches and organisations.

The document replaces an earlier position paper on social protection (2012). It is based on our own publications (see section 3 for references) and is in line with the Church of Sweden's document: "The role and task of the Church of Sweden in the Swedish welfare system – a platform" (2013).

2. SOCIAL PROTECTION

A HUMAN RIGHT, A COMMON GOAL AS WELL AS AN EFFECTIVE MEANS

The right to social security is enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.⁵

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Recommendation 202 on National Floors of Social Protection covers a minimum level of necessary health care, including maternity care, and basic income security for children and the elderly, as well as people of working age, who are unable to support themselves for various reasons. The recommendation is a global directive that forms the basis for the monitoring of the targets and goals related to social protection in Agenda 2030: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1. No Poverty, 3. Good Health and Well-being, 5. Gender Equality, 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth and 10. Reduced Inequality.

The expansion of social protection systems is thus clearly justified from a human rights perspective. At the same time, social protection is an effective way of realising other human rights, such as the right to food and the right to health, including SRHR. Social protection can also be justified on purely economic grounds – thriving and healthy citizens can play a more active role in contributing to a country's economic development. According to the UN, social protection contributes to the implementation of 14 of the 17 SDGs.⁸

A large number of scientific evaluations show that social transfers such as pensions, child benefits and other types of social transfers generally give good results – they can reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, especially among children; they help ensure more children go to school; and can lead to improved health outcomes. Social transfers have also been linked to delayed sexual debut⁹ for girls and young women, and a reduction in the spread of HIV.¹⁰

Experience also shows that access to social protection schemes do not make people passive, but gives vulnerable people greater opportunities to reduce negative coping mechanisms, to take risks and to improve their own livelihoods. Social protection systems thus become a societal investment that help create better conditions in which people can contribute to and benefit from economic and technological development.

There is also much to suggest that social protection systems are an important tool for creating social trust

and building democratic social institutions, including tax systems, provided that the systems are not perceived as arbitrary.¹²

Social protection systems are also an important part of a country's adaptation to climate change, as they reduce the vulnerability of poor and unprotected people to extreme weather events and other climate-related risks.¹³

The design of social protection systems plays a major role in how effective they are in combating poverty and inequality as well as promoting gender equality.

DESIGN ISSUE: GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER JUSTICE

Social protection systems have a particularly large impact - potentially both positive and negative - on gender equality. Women are generally more vulnerable to poverty than men during the various phases of life. They more often are informally employed and are, to a greater extent than men, absent from school and work due to unpaid housework and care work. The domestic and care work sectors are also dominated by women and are characterised by informal employment, low wages and lack of access to social protection systems. The lack of access to publicly funded child and elderly care is therefore one of the biggest social challenges for women to be able to educate themselves and enter working life. Women's access to social protection can also be hampered by discriminatory family law legislation, law legislation, regulating, for example ownership rights, inheritance rights and civil status.

If social protection systems, and relevant legislation, are designed in a gender sensitive way, they can help to change and even out unequal relations between women and men. Universal old-age pensions can, for example, increase older women's empowerment in a decisive way. If, however, existing norms and values regarding gender equality are not taken into account in the design of the system, they risk instead increasing the workload of women or reinforcing unequal gender roles, for example, the notion that women have primary parental responsibility.¹⁴

DESIGN ISSUE: TARGETED AND UNIVERSAL SYSTEMS

Social protection systems can be targeted or universal.¹⁵ The latter means that they include all people in a certain population category, for example, all children

or all people over a certain age. Targeted transfers aim to identify a narrower set of beneficiaries and are often based on means-testing. These can either be conditional on fulfilling certain requirements or unconditional.¹⁶

Systems that are strictly poverty targeted turn out, paradoxically, to exclude a large proportion of the very poorest.¹⁷ In countries with widespread poverty, it is in practice impossible to correctly determine who belongs to the very lowest income category. This is partly due to the misconception that poverty is a static concept, whereas in reality people's incomes and assets can vary greatly during the course of life. In countries with large informal sectors, there is also no targeting method that is sophisticated enough to flawlessly estimate people's assets. Categorical transfers, which go to entire population categories, such as the elderly¹⁸, children¹⁹ or people with disabilities,²⁰ on the other hand, exclude very few in the intended target groups and are thus more effective in combating poverty and inequality. At the same time, universal categorical benefits must be supplemented with targeted programmes to support groups with special needs. While more and more international development actors support the goal of universal access to social protection, the majority of international assistance in this area is still given to targeted programmes.21

If narrowly targeted and means-tested social assistance constitutes one end of the scale of different ways of delimiting the target group, then universal basic income constitutes the other. There are very few examples of universal basic income being put into practice, but in many countries the proposal is advocated by a growing group of actors with very different political starting points. This has been brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 crisis. There are reasons to introduce universal basic income in special situations, for example, as a step towards comprehensive life-cycle based social protection systems, as a way to quickly close extensive gaps in safety nets or as a way to distribute national income from natural resource extraction.

DESIGN ISSUE: HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES

Core principles from the international human rights framework must always be followed when designing social protection programmes.²⁵ For example, they must not further stigmatise vulnerable and poor people, or be implemented in such a way that they risk impairing people's ability to support themselves. Social protection programmes must also never be desig-

ned in a discriminatory manner. The systems should also be enshrined in legislation. An important rule of thumb is that the programmes should be designed simply enough in such a way that people themselves can determine whether or not they are eligible for support (and know how to access it).

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN CRISES AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATIONS

In parallel with the fact that support for social protection systems have received more attention in international development cooperation, cash transfers, instead of food and other support in kind, has increased sharply in humanitarian aid. ²⁶ Cash transfers are often faster, more efficient and less exposed to corruption than traditional aid. At the same time, cash transfers empower recipients with the autonomy to prioritise their own needs, thus increasing people's sense of self-worth, dignity and control over their lives.

Several social protection programmes that are supported by development cooperation have been developed from recurring need for humanitarian aid.²⁷ At the same time, social protection plays an important role in crises and disasters by reducing human vulnerability and thereby preventing humanitarian crises and the need for humanitarian support. The COVID-19 crisis in 2020 made this very clear – access to public health care, health insurance and unemployment benefits greatly affects how severely people are affected in different countries.

The possibility of linking social protection systems and cash transfers in humanitarian situations is receiving increasing attention as a way of dealing with the relationship between humanitarian and long-term development cooperation.²⁸ So-called adaptive or shock-responsive social protection is seen as a way to strengthen people's resilience and to scale up protection systems during large scale shocks and in crisis situations.²⁹ Potentially, there are a number of benefits to linking humanitarian support and social protection, but also significant obstacles. While impartiality and independence are crucial in humanitarian aid, national ownership and close cooperation with the state are absolutely crucial in long-term development cooperation.³⁰ The differences in the starting points and time perspectives of the different sectors also influence the identification of target groups. Humanitarian aid is temporary and the needs assessment is a crucial principle in the work. Long-term development cooperation is instead aiming at sustainable fulfilment of all people's right to, among other things, food, health and education.

FINANCING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Social transfers that cover large sections of the population can appear costly, but are far from impossible to provide. For example, Mozambique, the Philippines and El Salvador have about the same GDP per capita as Sweden had a hundred years ago, when a universal welfare system began to be developed here. Universal child benefits for children aged 0–5 in lower middle- and low-income countries are estimated to cost an average of 1.4 per cent of the countries' GDP, and universal pensions for everyone over the age of 65 are estimated at an average of 1.6 per cent of GDP.³¹ By comparison, countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas spend an average of 1.4 – 1.7 per cent of GDP on military spending.³²

An important basic principle is that social protection systems should be financed through public investment and domestic tax systems and implemented by the government. In countries with weak domestic resource mobilisation, it is therefore necessary to develop the systems gradually and at the same time build a functioning tax system so that sustainable financing becomes possible. As a rule, there is also some room for re-prioritising existing public expenditure items. In many countries, for example, there are subsides for fuels and food that benefit poor people to a much lower extent than would direct social transfers.³³ Some countries have also reduced their military spending in favour of investing in social protection.³⁴

The development of social protection in low- and middle-income countries has been driven mainly by national political processes and to a much lesser extent by international development cooperation. Since the beginning of the millennium, however, interest in social protection has increased within a number of international organisations. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs manifest a consensus that social protection is a global issue. International development cooperation can play an important role by building capacity and strengthening the competence of national authorities, as well as financing the initial construction of the institutional infrastructure.

Stakeholders within both the UN and the international civil society have long advocated the establishment of a Global Fund to support countries' introduction of social protection floors in accordance with ILO Recommendation 202. Among other things, the fund is proposed to provide technical and financial support for establishing systems for social protection and the financing of them. According to an international call in 2020 from a large number of civil society organisations, such a fund should also provide an opportunity for both official and private donors to provide financial support for the establishment of social protection floors, especially in low-income countries with insufficient financial resources.³⁵

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

It is the duty of the governments to guarantee the right to social security. Churches and other faith-based actors also have a long history of offering comprehensive social services and support to people living in poverty and vulnerability, and do so even today, not least where the government does not live up to its commitments.

More broadly, civil society can, depending on the local, national or international context in which it operates, contribute in various ways:³⁶

- Advocate and mobilise public opinion for the development of social protection.
- Strengthen people's capacity to claim their right to social security, for example, by informing about which social benefits and services they are entitled to, or helping them to obtain identity documents.
- Monitor the implementation of social protection, draw the public's attention to mistakes, rights violations and corruption.
- Supplement the governmental protection programmes when they are non-existent or poorly developed. However, this should be combined with advocacy and holding the government accountable. When civil society performs social services, it never replaces the state's responsibility for providing social protection.

3. ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN'S ROLE

Act Church of Sweden, as a faith-based development actor, has extensive experience of collaborating with organisations that offer social services, advocate for social protection and strengthen people's opportunities to claim their right to social security, for example, by helping them access identity documents. Through the diaconia, conducted by the congregations of the Church of Sweden, Act Church of Sweden has a direct relationship with Swedish welfare at the grassroots level – today as well as historically.³⁷

As a Swedish development actor, the Church of Sweden has a role in conveying the experiences of Sweden's and the Nordic countries' largely universal social protection systems. These are in good agreement with rights-based perspectives, but constitute exceptions in international contexts that are dominated by means-tested and targeted systems with roots in charity rather than human rights perspectives.

Since 2010, Act Church of Sweden has developed an active work around social protection through, among other things, publications³⁸ and conferences, advocacy in relation to decision-makers, ecumenical dialogue, initiatives in the Lutheran World Federation and the ACT Alliance, capacity building for partner organisations, and collaboration with civil society organisations in Sweden and internationally.

4. ACT CHURCH OF SWEDEN'S POSITION

OVERALL POSITION:

Act Church of Sweden undertakes, in collaboration with both faith-based and secular actors at national, regional and global level, to work for all people's access to social security as both a human right to help ensure a dignified life and as a means to promote sustainable development.

Social security is a human right. It is also a key tool in reducing poverty and contributing to the commitment not to leave anyone behind, as well as several of the Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030. Human rights-based and well-designed social protection systems promote social cohesion, gender justice and gender equality, economic development and equalities, climate adaptation as well as preparedness for pandemics and other crises.³⁹

STRATEGIC POSITIONS:

1. Act Church of Sweden emphasises all countries' responsibility to provide social security as a human right and at the same time calls on the international community to strengthen support for countries' efforts to introduce national social protection floors. The starting point is that the social protection systems shall be financed nationally, through income from transparent and fair tax systems and from contributary social insurance. Social protection systems must be designed on the basis of each country's unique poli-

tical and economic conditions, without compromising the right of all people to social security. At the same time, international development cooperation can play an important role, above all by supporting exchanges of experience and contributing to the initial development of social protection systems in low-income countries. Act Church of Sweden advocates for the proposal to establish a Global Fund for Social Protection and thereby accelerate the introduction of social protection floors in countries that currently lack sufficient finance.

2. Act Church of Sweden emphasises that social protection systems can contribute to increased gender equality, provided that the systems are designed in a gender sensitive manner.

Women are particularly affected by access to social protection, as they live in poverty and can suffer deprivations to a greater extent than men, more often support themselves in the informal sector or in the care sector, and more often have the main responsibility for unpaid care work in the home. Social protection systems can therefore make a major contribution to the efforts to increase gender equality and gender justice. However, if the systems are not designed in a gender sensitive manner, they risk instead to increase women's workload or lock women into traditional and unequal gender roles.

- 3. Act Church of Sweden advocates for rightsbased and inclusive social protection systems that are aimed at the entire or large parts of the population. Broad and universal systems reach people living in poverty in a more efficient way than narrow poverty targeted social assistance. Furthermore, they contribute to increased social cohesion, reduce the risk of stigma, arbitrariness and corruption, and are associated with simpler administration. They also tend to be popular among the public and are thus more likely to be sustainably financed at an adequate level through national taxation. If lack of resources makes universal systems impossible, targeted programmes should be planned for gradual expansion. Universal basic income can play a role in special situations but never replace the state's responsibility for social services, such as providing general health care and education.⁴⁰
- 4. Act Church of Sweden emphasises that well-designed social protection systems reduce people's vulnerability and increase their ability to handle various forms of shocks and crises.

To build resilience and alleviate crises, including humanitarian disasters, social protection systems need to be broad and inclusive. Furthermore, they need to be designed so that they can be quickly scaled up in the event of large shocks.⁴¹

Act Church of Sweden's position is that civil society organisations, including faith-based actors, play an important role in helping to realise everyone's right to social security. Civil society organisations, including faith-based actors, promote the right to social security by, among other things, conducting advocacy work, informing about human rights, and monitoring and holding governments accountable for public social protection systems. It is important to pay attention to conflicts of goals and loyalty that may arise between the different roles that civil society can play, for example, between the roles as advocate and provider of social services. Faith-based actors are often providers of social services, and in some cases also legislators in family law matters that have a direct impact on social protection. As moral and sometimes legal duty bearers, faith-based actors thus need to be held

accountable in the same way as other responsible

decision-makers.

5. VALIDITY

This position paper is valid until further notice, in accordance with a decision by the Church Board's International Council 2020-09-16 (§31).

6. REFERENCE LIST AND ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Social security" is here used in the broad sense that is used in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. "Social protection" is in many contexts used as a synonym including in this document. The Swedish term is "social trygghet".
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- ⁴ Diakonia in the Time of Inequality. Sigtuna Statement on Theology, Tax and Social Protection, (2017), https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/Diakonia%20in%20a%20time%20 of%20inequality.pdf
- ⁵ UDHR art 22, art 25. ICESCR art 9-11.
- ⁶ ILO (2012), Social Protection Floors Recommendation, (No. 202) https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R202
- ⁷ Targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 5.6, 8.5, 8.8 and 10.4.
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- ¹² B. Rothstein (2010), Corruption, happiness, social trust and the welfare state: a causal mechanisms approach, Institutionen för statsvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet; Babajanian, Babken (2012), Social Protection and its Contribution to Social Cohesion and State-Building.
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- ¹³ M. Davies, J. Leavy, T. Mitchell, and T. Tanner (2008), *Social Protection and Climate Change Adaptation*, Policy brief prepared by Institute for Development Studies for the Commission on Climate Change and Development; Tenzing, Janna D. (2020), Integrating social protection and climate change adaptation: A review. *WIREs Climate Change*, Volume 11, Issue 2. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.626
- ¹⁴ See for example Buller AM, Peterman A, Ranganathan M, Bleile A, Hidrobo M and Heise L. (2018), A mixed-method review of cash transfers and intimate partner violence in low- and middle-income countries. The World Bank Research Observer, 33(2). https://academic.oup.com/ wbro/article/33/2/218/5091868; Holmes, R. Scott, L (2016), Extending social insurance to informal workers – A gender analysis. Overseas Development Institute ODI. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10620.pdf; Molyneux, M & Thomson, M. (2011), Cash transfers, gender equity and women's empowerment in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. Gender & Development. Volume 19, 2011 - Issue 2: Social protection. https:// www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.201 1.592631 Barker, Gary et al. (2019), Applying a Masculinities Lens to the Gendered Impacts of Social Safety Nets EBA 2019:07.
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- 16 Given on the condition that the recipients perform certain actions, such as having their children vaccinated, or that the children qo to school.
- ¹⁷ Kidd, S. Athias, D. (2020), Hit and Miss: *An assessment* of targeting effectiveness in social protection, with additional analysis. Development Pathways och Act Church of Sweden. https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/act/nyheter/riktat-stod-missar-malet
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- ¹⁹ ODI/UNICEF (2020), *Universal child benefits: policy issues and options*. London: Overseas Development Institute and New York: UNICEF.

- ²⁰ Stephen Kidd, Lorraine Wapling, Rasmus Schjoedt, Bjorn Gelders, Diloá Bailey-Athias, Anh Tran and Heiner Salomon (2019), *Leaving No-one Behind: Building Inclusive Social Protection Systems for Persons with Disabilities* Working Paper: February 2019
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- ²³ Gentilini, Ugo; Grosh, Margaret; Rigolini, Jamele; Yemtsov, Ruslan (2020). *Exploring Universal Basic Income: A Guide to Navigating Concepts, Evidence, and Practices*. World Bank..; Anh Tran (2020), Webinar reflections: Universal Basic Income in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. Blog 20-04-03. https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/news/webi-nar-reflections-universal-basic-income-in-the-time-of-covid-19-and-beyond/ In July 2020, the UN Development Agency (UNDP) proposed the introduction of a temporary basic income for 2.7 billion people in developing countries. However, the proposal does not include the entire populations of countries, but only those people living in poverty or vulnerability. George Gray Molina, Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez (2020), *Temporary Basic Income, Protecting Poor and Vulnerable People in Developing Countries*. UNDP.
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- ²⁵ UN Economic and Social Council (2008), Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 191 The right to social security (art. 9) E/C.12/GC/19. https://www.refworld.org/docid/47b17b5b39c.html
- ²⁶ Cash transfers in humanitarian aid doubled between 2016 and 2019 and today accounts for almost 18% of global humanitarian aid expenditure. CaLP (2020), *The State of The World's Cash 2020*. Cash Learning Partnership.

- ²⁷ For example, Ethiopia's major flagship programme PSNP, the Productive Safety Net Programme, was introduced to prevent recurring hunger crises and the need for humanitarian aid.
- ²⁸ In many contexts, the issue is called nexus, or triple nexus, when conflict prevention is included.
- ²⁹ World Food Programme, (2020), 10 Things You Wish You'd Always Known about Shock-Responsive Social Protection. https://www.wfp.org/publications/10-things-you-wish-youd-always-known-about-shock-responsive-social-protection
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- ³³ ILO (2019), Fiscal Space for Social Protection: A Handbook for Assessing Financing Options https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_727261.pdf
- ³⁴ For example, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Costa Rica och Mauritius, see ILO (2017), World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals s. 150.
- ³⁵ Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (2020), A Global Financing Mechanism for Social Protection: A proposal for the decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals 2020–2030; Civil Society Call for a Global Fund for Social Protection to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and to build a better future http://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/wp-content/uplo-ads/2020/07/2020-07CivilSocietyCallGlobalFundSocial-Protection_EN.pdf
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