

Side event organized by the International Labour Office and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa

## Financing social protection and accelerating coverage in times of crisis and beyond: options for a human-centred recovery

### Background

The low coverage of social protection in Africa (17.4 per cent, compared with a global average of 46.9 per cent) is associated with low spending on social protection (3.8 per cent of gross domestic product, compared with a global average of 12.9 per cent). According to analysis by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that factors in the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), for low-income countries to close the financing gaps and achieve targets 1.3 and 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, they would need to invest an additional 15.9 per cent of their gross domestic product every year (8.3 per cent for sub-Saharan African countries).

Social protection was at the centre of the crisis response. Across Africa, more than 230 new social protection interventions were introduced to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. A key message from the *World Social Protection Report 2020/22*<sup>1</sup> was that many countries needed to choose between the high road, which would entail adopting a comprehensive range of social protection benefits, investing in adequate benefit levels, and striving towards sustainably financed systems, and the low road, which would entail austerity, fiscal consolidation and underinvestment in social protection. The high road approach is key for

resilience, decent work, social justice and a human-centred recovery.

Given the pressing need to extend social protection in Africa, the ILO Regional Office for Africa launched the Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy 2021–2025,<sup>2</sup> which represents the continent's high road and aims to extend social protection coverage from the current 17 per cent to 40 per cent by 2025, with a strong focus on the informal and rural economy, formalization efforts, and sustainable financing and fiscal space for social protection.

### Objective

The main objective of this side event is to allow participants to deliberate on concrete domestic and international financing options for Africa, given the current fiscal constraints and the unequal response to the crisis. The discussions will be centred around the Abidjan Declaration of 2019, on advancing social justice to shape the future of work in Africa;<sup>3</sup> the Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy; the Secretary-General's proposed global accelerator for jobs and social protection for a just transition;<sup>4</sup> and his *Our Common Agenda* report,<sup>5</sup> which calls for a renewed social contract.

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2020-22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future*, (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization, *Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy, 2021–2025: Towards 40% – a Social Protection Coverage Acceleration Framework to achieve the SDGs*, (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization, document AFRM.14/D.4(Rev.).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "UN Secretary-General calls for accelerated action on jobs and social protection to avoid an uneven global recovery and prevent future crises", 28 September 2018.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General*, (New York, 2021).

## Expected outcomes

Participants will:

- Conduct a thorough assessment of recent trends in social protection systems in Africa and the current financing arrangements and gaps
- Deliberate on ways to finance crisis response interventions and transform them into sustainable social protection measures
- Discuss concrete options for extending fiscal space, including through investment multipliers, the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area to create jobs, and social-protection linkages

## Target audience

- Officials from government finance, planning, economic development, and social-protection institutions

- Regional, subregional and national policymakers and planners
- International financial institutions and development partners
- Representatives of workers' and employers' associations
- The private sector, civil society, academia and researchers

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