COVID-19 has hugely disrupted economies and societies across the globe. In addition, the threat of climate change, conflict and fragility, demographic shifts and rapid technological innovation make effective social protection, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable people, crucially important—now more than ever.

**Universal social protection (USP),** which ensures access to social protection for all whenever and however they need it, is critical for effectively reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity.

How countries make progress towards USP varies according to political and economic factors specific to each country, but in all cases, building fiscal space and institutional capacity are essential prerequisites.

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**Charting a Course Towards Universal Social Protection**

**- What it means -**

- **Diverse needs**
  - Through the life cycle
  - Across the income spectrum
  - Taking into account specific needs of women and girls, people with disabilities, and others

- **Tailored instruments**
  - Direct transfers and insurance instruments
  - Labor market, economic inclusion, care and other services
  - Tax financed and privately financed

**- How to deliver -**

- **Country specific trajectories**
  - Will evolve differently in each country based on the social contract, political economy and institutional context

- **Progressive realization**
  - Needs appropriate institutional capacity and strong delivery systems
  - Needs fiscal space
  - Prioritize those most in need and the largest uncovered risks

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**3 Goals of Social Protection**

- **Resilience**
  - Providing insurance against, and building the capacity to manage shocks

- **Opportunity**
  - Promoting investments in human capital and helping men and women access productive work

- **Equity**
  - Reducing poverty and inequality, promoting equality of opportunity, and addressing exclusion
Achieving USP requires an integrated effort

Universal Social Protection can only be achieved with a suite of programs working as an integrated system.

Financing is a challenge

There is pressure in almost all countries to raise social protection spending over the medium to long term, amidst significant fiscal constraints.

Achieving USP will require a substantial increase in national spending to achieve the necessary expansion of coverage of social protection programs.

Reducing inefficient spending is critical for increasing fiscal space for effective social protection.

The ability to finance universal social protection depends to a great extent on countries being able to mobilize more domestic revenues, but international support will also continue to be vital.

Areas of focus

There are 5 areas of focus for the World Bank’s work to support countries in achieving USP, with women’s and girls’ empowerment and climate change as cross-cutting areas:

1. Build strong foundational Social Protection Systems
2. Address the Coverage Gap
   - Increase coverage and promote greater inclusion
3. Address the Flexibility Gap
   - Build more resilient, adaptive, and dynamic programming
4. Address the Opportunity Gap
   - Scale-up more effective economic inclusion and labor systems
5. Address the Fiscal Gap
   - Create more fiscal space for Universal Social Protection

Social insurance
- Pensions
- Unemployment insurance
- Disability insurance

Social assistance
- Cash and in-kind transfers
- Care services
- Fee waivers

Labor and economic inclusion programs
- Training
- Public employment services
- Integrated economic inclusion programs

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