Advancing Social Security and Formalisation of Labour Markets

Technical paper prepared on Priority 1 for the 2nd meeting of the Employment Working Group under India's presidency

Priority 1

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Contents

Executive summary

This technical paper reviews the progress made by BRICS member States in advancing social security, which contributes to the formalization of labour markets. It provides a summary of recent reforms and good practices in BRICS member States in extending social protection coverage, demonstrates the effects in quantitative terms on progress towards achieving SDG 1.3, and discusses concrete ways of further accelerating progress towards universal social protection through an annual coverage extension commitment. The paper also zooms in on ensuring social security coverage and portability of rights and benefits for migrant as one of the categories of workers who often face challenges in accessing social security. The paper concludes with a set of policy options that can contribute to advancing social security and formalization of employment in BRICS countries.

1. Introduction

Both advancing social security and the formalization of labour markets is a strong priority of BRICS member States, and significant progress has been achieved in both areas. The selection of this topic as priority 1 for 2026 provides a welcome opportunity to review progress, to highlight the important interconnections between the advancement of social security and the formalization of labour markets, and to identify opportunities for further action.

Building on the background papers and deliberations under previous BRICS presidencies (see Annex 1), this technical note focuses on practical ways of extending social security coverage to those currently not yet adequately covered, thereby contributing to formalizing labour markets. This is essential for building universal social protection systems that ensure adequate, comprehensive and sustainable social protection for all in line with the conclusions of the International Labour Conference in 2021, and looking ahead to the next recurrent discussion on social protection (social security) at the International Labour Conference in June 2027.[1]

Chapter 2 will therefore place particular emphasis on the link between the extension of social security and the formalization of the economy (section 2.1), a review of recent good practices in BRICS member States (section 2.2) and a summary of recent trends in the extension of coverage, and concrete ways of further accelerating progress towards universal social protection, including the annual coverage extension target agreed in 2025 (section 2.3). Chapter 3 will focus on ensuring social security coverage and portability of rights and benefits for migrant as one of the categories of workers who often face challenges in accessing social security.

The paper concludes with a set of policy options that can contribute to advancing social security and formalization of employment in BRICS countries.

2. Extending social security coverage and ensuring adequate protection for all workers

The extension of social security coverage and the provision of adequate protection for all workers have become increasingly urgent priorities in the context of rapidly changing labour markets. Demographic shifts, technological change, the climate crisis, and other factors reshape employment patterns and generate both new opportunities and new risks. While these dynamics can support economic growth, they also contribute to rising economic insecurity for many workers. In this context, strengthening universal social protection systems is essential to ensure that all workers can effectively navigate work and life transitions, while maintaining income security and access to healthcare, as highlighted by a recent ILO publication.[2]

Experience shows that social protection systems play a critical role not only in reducing poverty, but also in preventing it and enhancing resilience. By providing protection across the life cycle, they support productive risk-taking, facilitate transitions between jobs and sectors, and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable labour market outcomes. However, persistent gaps in coverage, adequacy and financing continue to leave

[1] ILO (2021) Resolution and Conclusions Concerning the Second Recurrent Discussion on Social Protection (Social Security), 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.

[2] ILO. Universal Social Protection in Changing Labour Markets: Protecting Workers in All Types of Employment. 2026.

many workers unprotected, particularly those in the "missing middle" who are neither covered by contributory nor non-contributory schemes.

Building inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems – combining contributory and tax-financed mechanisms – is therefore central to advancing formalisation, promoting decent work and supporting a just transition for all workers.

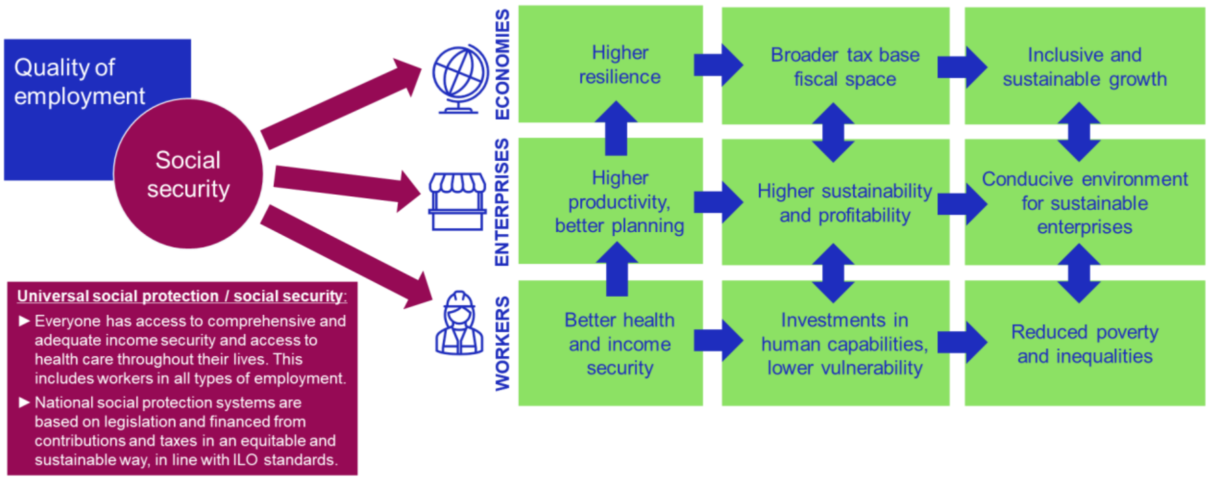
2.1 The link between the extension of social security coverage and the formalization of employment

The extension of social security coverage generates positive and mutually reinforcing outcomes across three levels: workers, enterprises, and the broader economy, which together contribute to the formalization of enterprises and employment. The ILO's normative framework, including in particular the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 2015) underpin these linkages and provide relevant guidance.

Figure 1 highlights in a schematic way how social security can improve the **quality of employment** by ensuring that everyone has access to income security and healthcare throughout their lives. This includes workers in all types of employment, including self-employment. This foundation leads first to **direct benefits for workers**, such as better health and income security. This contributes to investments in workers' skills and capabilities, reducing vulnerability and increasing their resilience. These improvements translate into **enterprise-level gains**. Healthier and more secure workers are more productive and better able to plan for the future. This enhances the sustainability and profitability of enterprises, while also contributing to a more conducive environment for sustainable business development. At the **macroeconomic level**, these effects accumulate into broader societal benefits. Increased productivity and formalization expand the tax base and fiscal space, enabling further social and economic investment. This supports higher resilience at the national level and promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Ultimately, the figure highlights a virtuous cycle: social protection not only reduces poverty and inequalities but also strengthens economic performance and social cohesion, benefiting individuals, businesses, and societies alike, which eventually also contributes to a broader tax base and enlarged fiscal space.

▶ **Figure 1: The link between the extension of social security coverage and the formalization of employment**



The extension of social security coverage is a key driver of the formalization of employment. Access to social protection – particularly through contributory social insurance – is both a defining characteristic and a key incentive of formal employment, encouraging registration, compliance and participation in regulated labour markets, strengthening the link between enterprises, workers and public institutions.

Well-designed extension strategies therefore contribute to the virtuous cycle highlighted above: by bringing workers and enterprises into formal arrangements, they expand the contributory base and fiscal space for social protection, while improving productivity, income security and working conditions.[3] At the same time, complementary tax-financed schemes play an important role in facilitating transitions by providing basic income security and access to healthcare for those not yet covered, thereby reducing vulnerability and enabling current and future workers to engage in formal employment opportunities. In this way, the progressive extension of social protection not only protects workers, but also supports the structural transformation of labour markets towards greater productivity, resilience, and inclusiveness.

2.2 Advancing social security in BRICS: recent developments

Recent reforms across BRICS countries reflect a continued commitment to extending, modernizing and reinforcing social security systems. Further efforts in moving toward stronger, more inclusive and more adapting social protection systems are essential in view of ongoing labour market transformations, demographic shifts, and increasing exposure to climate-related and other risks.

Extending social security to those not yet covered, and ensuring that workers in all types of employment enjoy adequate social security coverage requires a comprehensive approach [4], as highlighted in a recent ILO publication.[5] Addressing the legal, financial, administrative and awareness barriers that enterprises and workers may face is essential in this respect.[6]

Recent policy reforms in BRICS countries have addressed these aspects:

- **Extending legal coverage to so far unprotected categories of workers.** A key priority across BRICS countries has been the progressive extension of legal coverage to workers historically excluded from social protection systems. For example, Brazil, China, Indonesia and South Africa have extended social insurance coverage to additional categories of workers (domestic workers, agricultural workers, self-employed workers) over the past decade; and India's Social Security Code (2020). These efforts reflect a broader shift towards inclusive systems that cover workers in all types of employment and reduce segmentation in labour markets.
- **Aligning benefits with people's needs across the life cycle**: Ensuring comprehensive and adequate protection requires continuous adaptation of benefit design to evolving risks. This includes introducing new branches of protection, improving adequacy and adjusting eligibility conditions. For instance, Indonesia introduced an unemployment insurance scheme in 2021, marking an important step in strengthening income security for workers. China has expanded its long-term care insurance pilot schemes since the mid-2010s, responding to population ageing, Ethiopia is strengthening its social health insurance, and Brazil's long-standing rural pension scheme (expanded notably since the 1990s and 2000s) continues to play a major role in reducing rural poverty. These examples illustrate how BRICS countries are strengthening protection across the life cycle.
- **Adapting protection mechanisms to the specific situation of workers**: Aiming at tailoring financing and administrative arrangements to the specific situation of workers, BRICS countries have adapted contribution rules, simplifying registration and introducing flexible payment

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[3] ILO (2026) Universal Social Protection in Changing Labour Markets: Protecting Workers in All Types of Employment. See also ILO (2021) Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience, as well as the related Policy Resource Platform.

[4] The ISSA report on Global Social security developments and trends 2025 includes a chapter highlighting comprehensive country measures to improve social security coverage. A set of practical recommendations for implementing this type of measures is presented in the the ISSA Guidelines on Administrative Solutions for Coverage Extension.

[5] ILO (2026) Universal Social Protection in Changing Labour Markets: Protecting Workers in All Types of Employment.

[6] The ILO Policy Resource Package on Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy and Protecting Workers in all Types of Employment includes summaries and links to further resources for different aspects of extension policies (including the formulation and implementation of policies, legal frameworks, financing, governance and trust, awareness-raising), as well as for specific categories of workers (including workers in micro- and small enterprises, self-employed workers, agricultural workers, domestic workers, construction workers, digital platform workers). See also ILO (2021) Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience.

modalities. For example, Brazil, China, India and Indonesia have taken steps in recent years to extend social protection to digital platform workers, including adapted contribution mechanisms, financing arrangements and administrative procedures facilitated by digital technologies.[7]

- **Ensuring continuity of coverage and facilitating portability:** Maintaining continuous protection when workers move between jobs, sectors or employment statuses is critical. Reducing fragmentation and enhancing coordination across schemes helps preserve entitlements. India's eShram portal (launched in 2021) supports the registration of informal workers and aims to improve portability and access to benefits. Brazil's Cadastro Único (developed and expanded since the 2000s) serves as an integrated social registry facilitating access to multiple programmes. Such integrated mechanisms are particularly important in labour markets characterized by high mobility and informality.
- **Streamlining administrative procedures and improving access:** Simplifying administrative processes and leveraging digitalization are key to expanding effective coverage. Brazil's SIMPLES programme, India's eShram platform and China's ongoing digitalization of its social security administration (accelerated in recent years) demonstrate how digital tools can facilitate large-scale inclusion, reduce transaction costs and improve service delivery.[8] Strengthening administrative efficiency is essential for translating legal coverage into effective protection.
- **Raising awareness, sharing information and building trust:** Expanding coverage also requires increasing awareness among workers and employers about their respective rights and obligations. Outreach campaigns, engagement with social partners and simplified communication strategies have been used in several BRICS countries, including India, Indonesia and South Africa, to encourage registration of workers and improve take-up of benefits. Building trust in public institutions is a critical enabler of participation in social protection systems.
- **Enhancing enforcement and strengthening compliance mechanisms:** Effective enforcement is essential to ensure that legal provisions translate into real protection. Strengthening labour inspection systems, improving monitoring and creating incentives for compliance are key measures. In South Africa, for example, the use of public procurement policies in recent years has helped incentivize compliance with labour and social security obligations. Such approaches contribute to formalization and ensure fair competition among enterprises.
- **Guaranteeing a social protection floor and supporting transitions to higher levels of protection:** Establishing nationally defined social protection floors, in line with ILO Recommendation No. 202 (2012), remains a central objective. Extending social insurance coverage and strengthening non-contributory (usually tax-financed) benefits both contribute to this objective. Several BRICS countries have strengthened their non-contributory benefit schemes in recent years; for example Ethiopia reinforced its Productive Safety Net programme, Egypt expanded its Takaful and Karama programmes, and South Africa introducing the Social Relief of Distress Grant. At the same time, facilitating transitions from social assistance to social insurance is critical for building comprehensive systems. Brazil's integrated approach, including Cadastro Único as a "one-stop shop", illustrates how contributory and non-contributory schemes can be coordinated to improve coverage and adequacy. Combining these mechanisms is essential for reducing poverty, supporting formalization and ensuring sustainable and equitable financing of social protection systems.

2.3 Trends in the extension of social security coverage in BRICS countries

The efforts undertaken by BRICS countries in reinforcing their social protection systems, through both contributory and non-contributory schemes, are reflected in a marked increase in social protection coverage

[7] The ISSA portal on the "Protection of platform workers" includes legal and implementation measures developed by several countries.

[8] ILO and ISSA (2026) *Leveraging Digital Technologies to Protect All Workers, Including Gig and Platform Workers , Paper Prepared for the 2nd Meeting of the BRICS Employment Working Group (Priority 4).*

over recent years. Figure 2 shows that in the majority of BRICS countries, the share of the population protected by at least one social protection benefit (including both recipients of contributory and non-contributory cash benefits, as well as active contributors to social insurance) (SDG indicator 1.3.1) increased significantly since 2015.[9] For example, Brazil increased social protection coverage from 59.8 to 71.2 per cent of the population between 2015 and 2022, China from 63.0 to 75.6 per cent from between 2015 and 2021, India from 19.0 to 64.3 per cent between 2015 and 2025, and Indonesia from 27.8 to 54.3 per cent between 2019 and 2021, the Russian Federation from 90.4 to 95.4 per cent between 2015 and 2022, and South Africa from 48.0 to 63.4 per cent between 2015 and 2022.

As highlighted above, the increase in coverage was achieved through both contributory and non-contributory schemes. This included the extension of social insurance coverage to previously uncovered categories of the population with easier access to registration and benefits (such as the extension of legal coverage and the facilitation of access through digital means in China and India), the introduction of new social insurance branches (such as the introduction of unemployment insurance in Indonesia), the introduction or expansion of non-contributory categorical schemes (such as the introduction of the Social Relief of Distress Grant in South Africa) or social assistance (such as Bolsa Familia in Brazil). To some extent, the expansion of benefits in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and enhanced data collection through the ILO Social Security Inquiry in collaboration with national authorities also accounted for this significant increase.

Despite this important progress over recent years, none of the BRICS countries has already achieved universal social protection coverage, as reflected in SDG target 1.3. A concrete BRICS commitment to increase social protection coverage by at least 2 percentage points could help coordinate policy efforts, supported by focused sharing of experiences and strengthen political momentum towards 2030 and visibility within and beyond the BRICS.[10] Aiming to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG target 1.3, as measured by SDG indicator 1.3.1, such commitment could build on agreed language reflected in the outcome document of the Second World Summit for Sustainable Development[11] and the Fourth Financing for Development Conference[12]. In the context of broader discussions on public finance at the international level, recognizing social protection as a core pillar of sustainable development, and the payment of social security contributions as essential to expanding coverage and ensuring adequate benefits. The ongoing negotiations on the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation may provide an opportunity for such a recognition.[13, 14]

In case BRICS countries were to commit to increasing their social protection coverage by a minimum of 2 percentage points per year until 2030, this could achieve important results. Depending on the starting points, countries could increase their social protection coverage by at least 8 percentage points over the period 2026-30. The dotted lines in Figure 2 show a possible scenario, assuming that coverage would increase by 2 percentage points since the last observed datapoint. In this scenario, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, the Russian Federation and South Africa could achieve coverage rates of more than 70 per cent

[9] ILO (2024) World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition.

[10] ILO and USP2030 (2024). A Global Call to Action to Accelerate the Achievement of Universal Social Protection (SDG Target 1.3) to Reduce Poverty and Inequality.

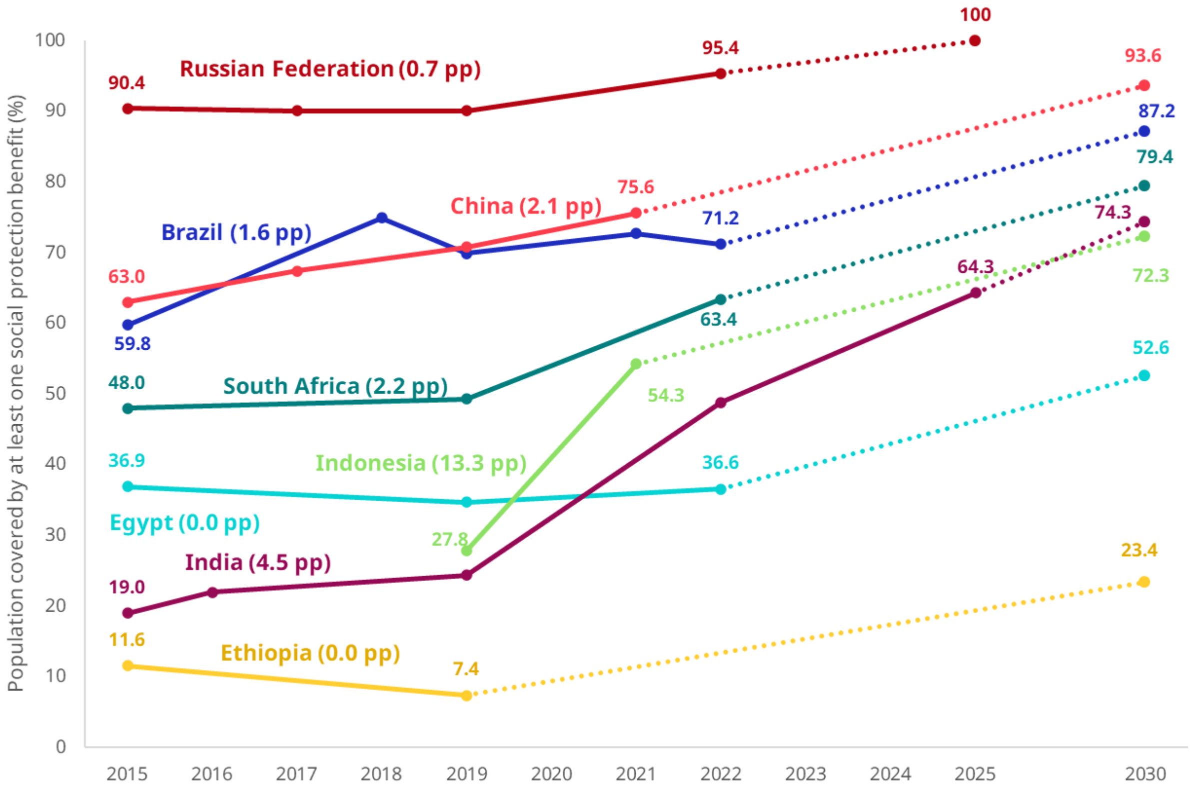
[11] UN (2025) Doha Political Declaration, para. 29(g): Strengthening social protection systems and reinforcing investment in measures, including social protection floors, and integrating financing of social protection systems and policies, including floors and policies in line with International Labour Organization recommendations and intergovernmental agreed standards, into country-led plans and strategies while providing support to developing countries that aim to increase social protection coverage, including those that aim to do so by at least two percentage points per year.

[12] UN (2025) Sevilla Commitment. Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, Sevilla, Spain 30 June - 3 July 2025: "We encourage countries to integrate financing of social protection systems and policies, including floors and policies in line with International Labour Organization recommendations and intergovernmentally agreed standards, into their country-led plans and strategies. We will provide support to developing countries that aim to increase social protection coverage, including those that aim to do so by at least two percentage points per year" (para. 27(i)).

[13] ILO & ISSA input to the to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.

of the population by 2030; Egypt could cover more than half of its population, and Ethiopia could achieve close to a quarter of the population.

▶ Figure 2: Trends in the extension of social security coverage, 2015-latest year (continued lines), and estimated increase in coverage by 2030 that could be achieved by a coverage target of at least 2 percentage points by year (dotted lines)



Source: ILO, 2026. See also World Social Protection Report 2024-26

Note: ILO estimates based on national data. Coverage estimates include only social protection schemes anchored in national legislation. The reference population (denominator) corresponds to the total resident population of the country and includes non-nationals.

▶ 3. Ensuring access to social security and portability for migrant workers

3.1 Social security for migrant workers: fundamental principles and recent trends

Migrant workers play a vital role in the economies of BRICS countries, contributing significantly to key sectors such as construction, agriculture, care, and services, yet many of them face precarious employment conditions and remain excluded from adequate social protection, which limits their access to income security, healthcare and social services, and leaves them and their families vulnerable across borders.

Around the world, migrant workers continue to face systemic barriers in accessing social protection and maintaining or transferring their entitlements across countries, due to discriminatory legal exclusions, weak and fragmented systems and limited bilateral or multilateral coordination. This results in serious protection gaps, particularly in pensions, healthcare, maternity, work injury, and unemployment benefits.

As major emerging economies and influential actors in global governance, BRICS countries are uniquely positioned to champion the extension of social protection to migrant workers and their families, not only to address inequality and uphold labour rights, but also to promote fair labour mobility and reduce informality.[15] At a time when social protection is widely recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable development and a fundamental human right, closing these gaps is both an economic and moral imperative. Strengthening inclusive social protection systems and portability of benefits would enhance economic resilience and foster social cohesion. In doing so, BRICS can set an important precedent globally, demonstrating that equitable growth and human dignity can go hand in hand, while also responding to demographic shifts, labour market demands, and the increasing interconnectedness of economies.

Building on these challenges and opportunities, there is a clear need for coherent and practical policy pathways to extend social protection to migrant workers and their families. The ILO provides a well-established normative and policy framework to guide such efforts. Key international standards, including the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118), and the Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157), together with Recommendation No. 167, offer a solid legal foundation to ensure equal treatment and the portability of social security rights across countries. Building on this framework, the ILO Strategy on the Extension of Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees and their Families promotes a progressive and integrated approach that addresses both legal and practical barriers.[16] It recognizes the diversity of migration contexts and emphasizes the importance of tailoring solutions to factors such as labour mobility patterns, the scope and maturity of social protection systems in countries of origin and destination, and the heterogeneity and specificities of migrant workers and their family members, including migration and employment status, duration of stay, income level, sector of activity, as well as gender considerations.

Within this framework, countries have a range of mutually reinforcing policy measures at their disposal, guided by the overarching principle of equality of treatment. These include:

- Progressively building national social protection systems that are inclusive of migrant workers and refugees based on the principle of equality of treatment;
- Supporting the ratification of relevant ILO standards and new revised social security laws and their concrete implementation, including Conventions No. 118 and 157 and relevant Recommendations;
- Concluding social security agreements (bi/multilateral) between countries to ensure the portability of benefits across countries.
- Including social protection provisions in Bilateral Labour Agreements and MoUs[17];
- Setting complementary measures addressing the administrative and practical obstacles faced by migrant workers and refugees;
- Adopting other unilateral measures, or mechanisms that allow for flexibility in the design of the scheme and assistance with regards to qualifying conditions and minimum requirements.

No single policy measure can fully address the complex effects of labour mobility on workers' access to social protection across the life course and migration cycle. Moreover, no single country can ensure comprehensive social protection for migrants and their families. Strengthened dialogue and collaboration among origin and destination countries, including within the BRICS, can play a pivotal role in advancing and promoting inclusive social protection systems and the portability of benefits for migrant workers and their families. The BRICS Virtual Liaison Office can serve as a platform for knowledge sharing and exchange on

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[15] ILO, ISSA and ITCILO (2021) Extending Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees, and their Families: Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners; ILO (2021) Extending social security to workers in the informal economy: Lessons from international experience; ILO (2023) Intervention Model: For extending social protection to migrant workers in the informal economy.

[16] ILO (2024) ILO Strategy on Extending Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees and Their Families.

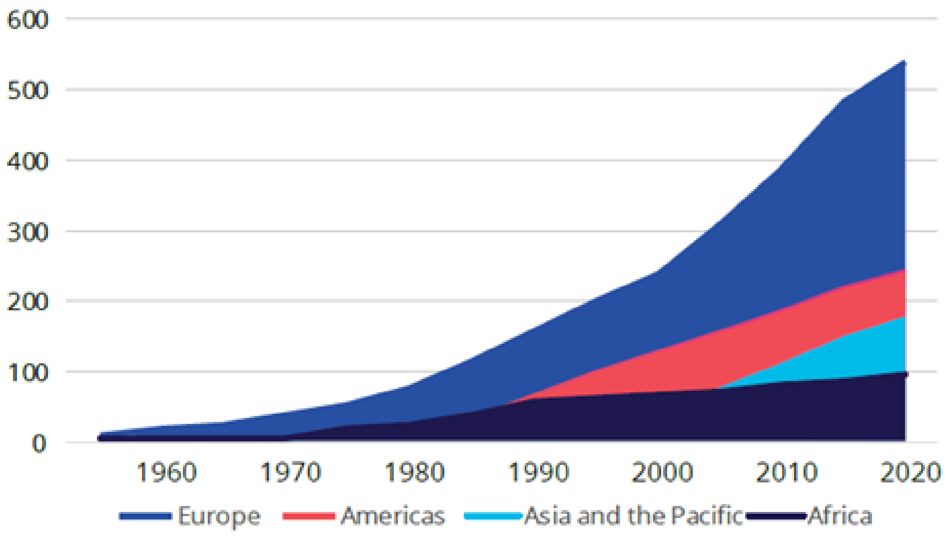
[17] See UN Global guidance on bilateral labour migration agreements.

this and other matters, following the example of a BRICS interactive webinar on social security agreements in 2021. [18]

3.2 Promoting portability of social security rights and benefits

Promoting the portability of social security rights and benefits is a critical priority for BRICS countries, given the growing scale and complexity of labour mobility globally. Bilateral and multilateral social security agreements are essential tools to ensure the portability of benefits across countries. According to a mapping conducted by the International Social Security Association (ISSA), approximately 660 social security agreements are currently in place worldwide reflecting a gradual increase over time (see figure 3).

▶ **Figure 3: Increase in the number of bilateral social security agreements for each region, 1960-2020**



However, their overall number remains limited relative to the scale and diversity of migration corridors that need to be covered, including among BRICS countries (see table 1). This may be due the diversity of country situations and the different levels of economic development between countries which may lead to an unequal power balance during negotiations. In addition, a lack of, or insufficiently developed social security schemes, may also hinder the development of reciprocal agreements.

Furthermore, most existing agreements focus primarily on long-term benefits (especially pensions) and often exclude sectors and occupations where migrant workers are highly concentrated, as well as those engaged in the informal economy or in irregular situation.

The implementation of social security agreements can also be complex due to differences in social security schemes, for example, regarding the design and level of benefits (such as social insurance vs. provident funds), which can pose a challenge for coordination between them. The lack of institutional and administrative capacities to support the implementation of these agreements can also be an issue. ILO Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118) and ILO Maintenance of Social Security Rights Recommendation, 1983 (No. 167) provide useful guidance on the coordination principles and modalities to be considered in such agreements.

In this context, BRICS countries have a unique opportunity to take concrete action and lead by example. This includes strengthening legal and effective social protection coverage for migrant workers within national systems, while reinforcing cooperation and coordination among BRICS members and with key partner countries to improve access to and portability of benefits. Advancing portability will also require integrating

[18] The BRICS Virtual Liaison Office Executive Interactive Webinar: "Conducting Negotiations on Social Security Agreements between Nations: Initiation Approaches and Procedures" was held on 29-30 April 2021.

social protection provisions into broader migration governance frameworks, improving data collection, such as through social security institution, ILO Social Security Inquiry migration modules, to better inform policy design, and exploring innovative interoperability mechanisms or digital platforms that can facilitate the transfer of entitlements across borders.[19] By championing these efforts at global and regional levels, BRICS can play a pivotal role in advancing more inclusive and portable social protection systems for migrant workers and their families.

▶ Table 1: Bilateral and multilateral social security agreements of BRICS countries

<table>
<tr><th>Country</th><th>Bilateral Social Security Agreements</th><th>Multilateral Social Security Agreements</th></tr>
<tr><td>Brazil</td><td>Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mozambique, Portugal, Quebec (Canada), South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, United States of America</td><td>MERCOSUR Agreement (Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay), Ibero-American agreement (Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay)</td></tr>
<tr><td>China</td><td>Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Egypt</td><td>Cyprus, Greece, Morocco, Netherlands, Tunisia</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>India</td><td>Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Quebec (Canada), South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Iran (Islamic Republic of)</td><td>South Korea, Turkey</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Russian Federation</td><td>Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan (about Baikonour) Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Tajikistan</td><td>EAEU Agreement (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Saudi Arabia</td><td></td><td rowspan="2">Unified Law on Insurance Protection Extension for Citizens of GCC (with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar)</td></tr>
<tr><td>United Arab Emirates</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Source: ILO-ISSA database

Note: to our knowledge, Ethiopia and South Africa have not concluded bilateral or multilateral social security agreements.

https://www.ilo.org/publications/intervention-model-eight-step-process-negotiating-social-security-agreement

[19] Other relevant tools and events that aim to support policy design and operations : ILO-ISSA Intervention Model on social security agreements including best practices; ISSA Database of Social Security Agreements (2026); ILO Mapping and estimates of legal social protection coverage of migrant workers and refugees (2027) : ISSA Working group on International Social Security Agreements and Data Exchange ; ISSA Guidelines including the new Guidelines on Administration of Social Security Agreements (2028).

4. Looking ahead: Advancing social security and the formalization of labour markets

Looking ahead, advancing social security and the formalization of labour markets requires a coherent and forward-looking policy agenda that responds to both persistent structural challenges and emerging transformations.

Building on earlier commitments expressed by BRICS countries and the guidance provided by international social security standards, this section outlines key policy options to extend coverage, ensure adequate protection, support transitions to formality and reinforce the contribution of social protection to decent work, social justice and resilient economies.

- **Continuing and intensifying efforts to extend social security to workers in all types of employment,** building on the significant extension of social security coverage achieved in BRICS countries over recent years, and the lessons learnt from this experience. Extending coverage and ensuring adequate social security for workers in all types of employment, including in temporary, part-time and self-employment, contributes to:
    - ensuring continuous and adequate protection for workers and their families throughout the life course, including during periods of transition and vulnerability;
    - supporting the formalization of employment and economic activities, and, over time, contributing to a broader and more sustainable tax and contribution base;
    - strengthening the equitable and sustainable financing of social security systems, including through enhanced risk pooling and solidarity mechanisms; and
    - promoting decent work, social inclusion and social justice, in line with international social security standards.
- **Accelerating progress towards universal social protection through measurable targets:** BRICS countries could consider adopting a shared commitment to increase effective social protection coverage by **at least 2 percentage points per year until 2030**, building on the progress achieved between 2015 and 2023 towards SDG target 1.3. Such a target would provide a clear benchmark for policy action to extend coverage of national social protection systems, including both contributory and non-contributory schemes, to guide sustained investments in comprehensive and adequate social protection systems, with particular attention to workers in temporary, part-time and self-employment, and those in sectors and occupations with low coverage. BRICS countries will benefit from sharing of experiences and lessons learnt with respect to enhancing policy and legal frameworks, strengthening administrative capacities, improving delivery systems and ensuring sustainable and equitable financing mechanisms.
- **Ensuring equitable and sustainable financing of social protection systems**: To strengthen their social protection systems, governments need to ensure equitable and sustainable financing solutions adapted to their contexts, combining progressive taxation and social security contributions, complemented , where relevant, by the reallocation of savings from the gradual phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies or other sources. In this context, it is important to recognize social protection as a core pillar of sustainable development, and the payment of social security contributions as essential to promote the formalization of economies and expand social protection coverage at the international level, including in the context of ongoing negotiations on the United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation.
- **Strengthening social security coordination to support labour mobility and protect migrant workers:** The promotion of **bilateral and multilateral social security agreements among BRICS countries** could significantly enhance access to and continuity of social protection for migrant workers. Such agreements can ensure the **portability of acquired rights and entitlements**, avoid double contributions and fill coverage gaps for workers moving across borders. Strengthening coordination mechanisms would be particularly important in the context of increasing labour

mobility and evolving labour markets. Policy efforts could focus on expanding the network of agreements, harmonizing key provisions where feasible, improving administrative cooperation and leveraging digital solutions to facilitate benefit portability. Ensuring effective protection for migrant workers would contribute not only to social justice, but also to more efficient and well-functioning labour markets across BRICS economies.

- **Deepening policy dialogue and knowledge sharing through the BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework** and the **Virtual Liaison Office** supported by the ILO and the ISSA, offers important opportunities to advance policy innovation and system strengthening. Better harnessing these existing mechanisms can support peer learning on key challenges, such as extending coverage, improving benefit adequacy, strengthening financing and governance, and adapting systems to digitalization and demographic change. Expanding technical cooperation, joint research and capacity-building activities can further support evidence-based policymaking in line with international social security standards and global good practices, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness and sustainability of national social protection systems.

Annex 1: BRICS deliberations and commitments on social protection

The BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers have attached great importance to the topic of social protection, and have discussed progress in moving forward towards a universal and sustainable social security systems in each of their meetings since 2015.

Progress towards universal social protection has been at the centre of this agenda, as highlighted in several Declarations adopted by Ministers of Labour and Employment:

- The *Declaration on Quality Jobs and Inclusive Employment Policies* (Ufa, Russian Federation, January 2016) highlighted the BRICS commitment to extending adequate social protection to all workers, formalizing labour markets, strengthening social protection of vulnerable groups and enhancing the protection of the unemployed looking for job to prevent social exclusion or marginalization from decent work opportunities.
- The *Declaration on Employment Generation, Social Protection for All and Transition from Informality to Formality* (New Delhi, India, September 2016) recognized social protection as one of the means through which governments can positively influence labour market outcomes and reduce exclusion and poverty and commits to comprehensive social security systems that are effective, equitable, economically sustainable and address the needs of the society.
- The *BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers' Declaration* (Chongqing,China, July 2017) recognized the important role of universal and sustainable social security systems, including social protection floors, for inclusive growth, decent and productive employment, gender equality and social inclusion. It focuses specifically on ensuring adequate social security coverage for workers across different contractual arrangements including non-standard forms of employment, supporting the mobility of workers, complementing effective and efficient contributory social insurance schemes with non-contributory schemes, rationally set and adjust the benefit levels while maintaining adequacy of benefits, preserving and further reinforcing the financial basis of the social security systems, including social security funds, and adapting administrative procedures to facilitate compliance. This Declaration also established the *BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework*[20] to deepen collaboration among BRICS countries and with other countries, supported by ILO and ISSA.
- The *Declaration of the BRICS Labour And Employment Ministers' Meeting* (Durban, South Africa, August 2018) reaffirmed the commitment to universal and sustainable social security systems, including social protection floors, as an integral part of our policies to promote inclusive growth, decent and productive employment, gender equality and social cohesion. They have also reviewed the progress

[20] This framework "is designed to implement the requirements posed by the Declarations of previous BRICS Summits and the commitments of the Declarations of Labour and Employment Ministerial Meetings, which provides guidance for the BRICS countries to deepen coordination and cooperation in the field of social security." This cooperation framework rests on the principles of "equality, openness, efficiency, mutual trust and benefit as well as consensus built upon consultation", and is "pragmatic, open-ended and progressive" (BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework, II.1). The specific objectives of the cooperation framework are the following: "(1) Through bilateral and multilateral exchanges and cooperation, promote the reform and improvement of social security systems in the BRICS countries, expand social security coverage and enhance the sustainability of social security so as to adapt to the ever evolving national and international 2 environment; (2) promote discussion on the signing of bilateral social security agreements between the BRICS countries; and (3) encourage the BRICS countries to establish a liaison mechanism among the social security administrative agencies to carry out case-based assistance and share information and experiences, so as to promote the improvement of the management and service capacity of administrative agencies and realize good governance and effectively achieve policy objectives (BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework, III.1-III.3)

made under the Social Security Cooperation Framework, as well as strategies to move towards a universal and sustainable social security system in BRICS countries.[21]

- The *Declaration of the BRICS Labor and Employment Ministers' Meeting* (Brasilia, Brazil, September 2019) committed to an inclusive future of work and highlighted the role of the promotion of formal employment for guaranteeing the financial, fiscal and economic sustainability of the system with due respect for social justice and equity for the present and future generations.[22]
- The *Declaration of the BRICS Labor and Employment Ministers' Meeting* (Moscow, Russian Federation, October 2020) highlighted the role of social protection for poverty alleviation through social and economic transformations and for combating all forms of poverty and removing barriers to accessing decent jobs, including those provided by SMEs. It also expressed the commitment to providing a wide range of social protection benefits through universal schemes, social insurance and social assistance to those in need and to further increase the efficiency of social protection systems by improving the links between the provision of cash transfers and access to employment, healthcare, education and other services.[23]
- The *Declaration of the BRICS Labor and Employment Ministers' Meeting* (New Delhi, India, July 2021) committed to deepening social security cooperation among BRICS countries to better protect the rights of migrant workers through bilateral and multilateral social security agreements, and highlighted the potential of technological innovations to facilitate access to social security and the formalization of enterprises and employment.
- The *Declaration of the Eighth BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting* (Beijing, July 2022) committed to extend social protection to workers in new forms of employment improve social security systems to provide access to social security for all workers as part of the BRICS Guidance on Protecting the Rights of Workers in New Forms of Employment.[24]
- The *Declaration of the Ninth BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers* (Durban, September 2023) committed to prioritizing universal access to social protection and ensuring a minimum basic income and the transitions from the informal to the formal economy.[25]
- The *Declaration of the Tenth BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers* (Sochi, September 2024) committed to integrate digital platform workers into national social security systems and highlighted the importance of social security, and broader social support systems, in meeting the needs of the population.
- The *Declaration of the Eleventh BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting* (Brasilia, April 2025) reaffirmed the commitment to ensuring adequate social security for all workers, including women, young people, older workers, migrant workers and vulnerable groups, and highlighted the role of social protection in enabling workers to adapt, acquire new skills, and retain or regain access to decent employment opportunities.

Several of these Declarations have highlighted the important guidance provided by international social security standards, particularly the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation. 2012 (No. 202), as well as the professional standards for the governance and administration including the ISSA guidelines for social security administration.

[21] ILO and ISSA (2018) Moving towards a Universal and Sustainable Social Security System in the BRICS.

[22] ILO (2019) Promoting Decent Employment for a Sustainable Social Security System, Short Paper Prepared for the 1st EWG under the 2019 Brazilian Presidency of the BRICS.

[23] ILO (2020) Poverty Alleviation through Social and Economic Transformation, Paper Prepared for the Employment Working Group under the 2020 Russian Presidency of the BRICS.

[24] ILO and ISSA (2022) Protecting Workers in New Forms of Employment.

[25] ILO and ISSA (2023) Universal Access to Social Protection and Ensuring Basic Income Security, Paper Prepared for the 2nd Meeting of the BRICS Employment Working Group.