

Social protection floor gaps and pandemic relief measures: a case for universalism?

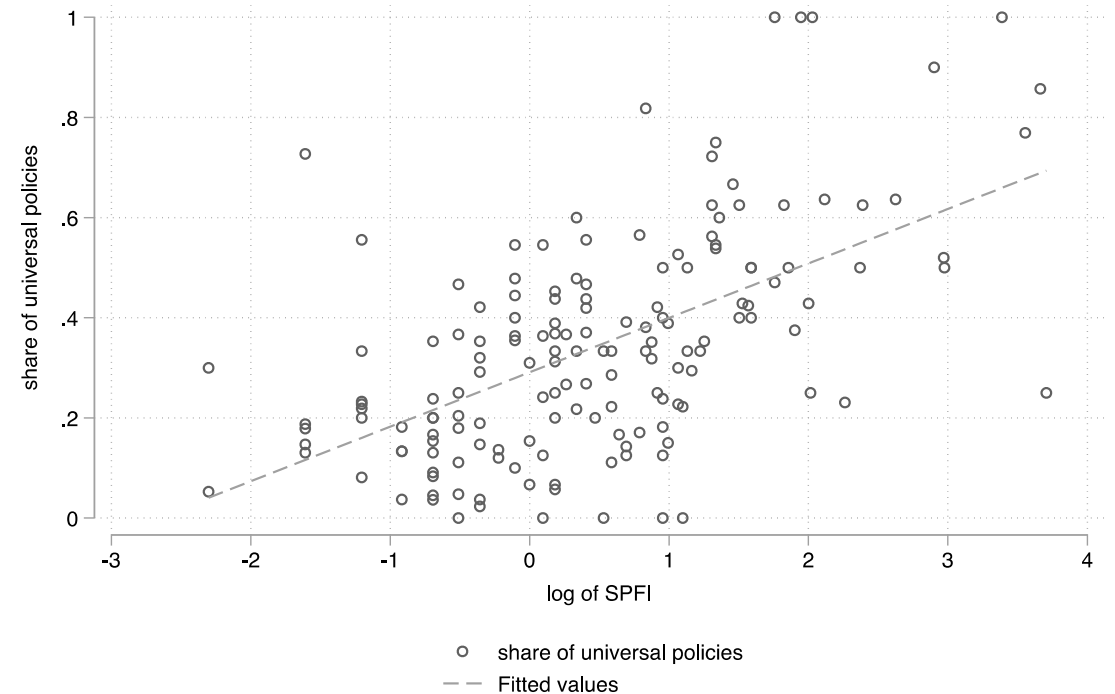
Exploring scalability through targeted versus universalist measures

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Universal policies more prominent where SP gaps exist

- Less SPF implementation (ILO 202 Social Protection Floors), more universal pandemic responses
- Variations across high income countries versus rest of the world: overall targeted responses dominate but share of universal policies is lower in high income countries



Source: author's construction based on UNESCWA 2022, FES 2022

Universal or targeted

Targeted:

Selectivity – mostly based on defined need

Dominant method

Fiscally more feasible

Inclusion/exclusion errors

Political support – who benefits

Social costs (stigma/shame)

Universal:

Available to all

More contested

Expensive

No targeting costs

Political support - fairness

Social cohesion (?)

SP policy innovation – design matters

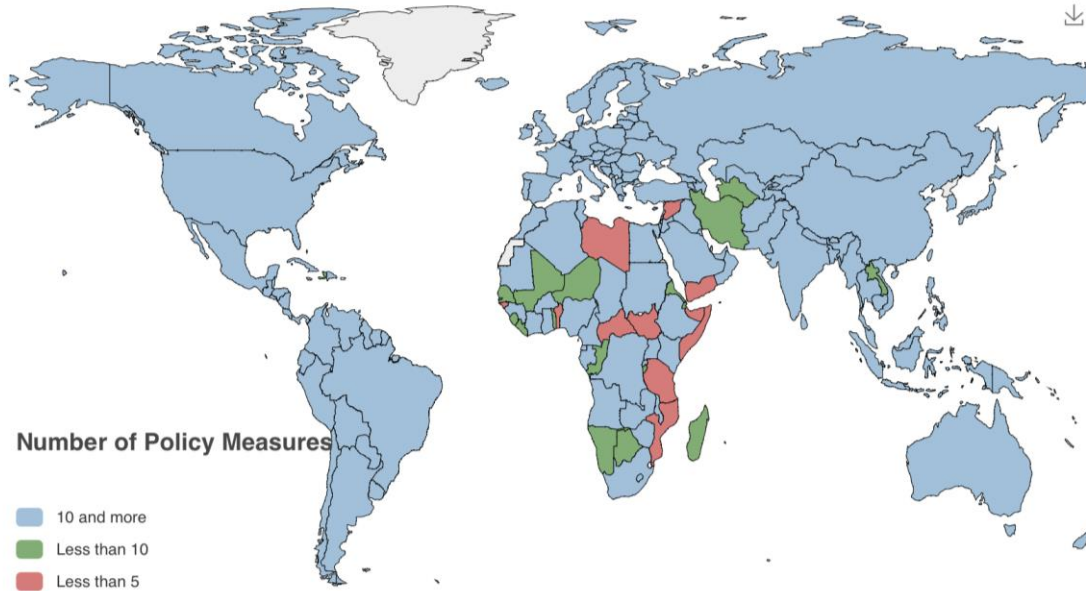
- Rapid expansion in SP due to pandemic in 2020/2021 (UNESCWA, 2021)
- SP as vital tool for crisis response (Behrendt 2021)
- Institutional learning

- Design: adequacy, equitable, inclusive, timely
- Adaptive Social Protection

- Universal or targeted approaches best given existing SP systems?

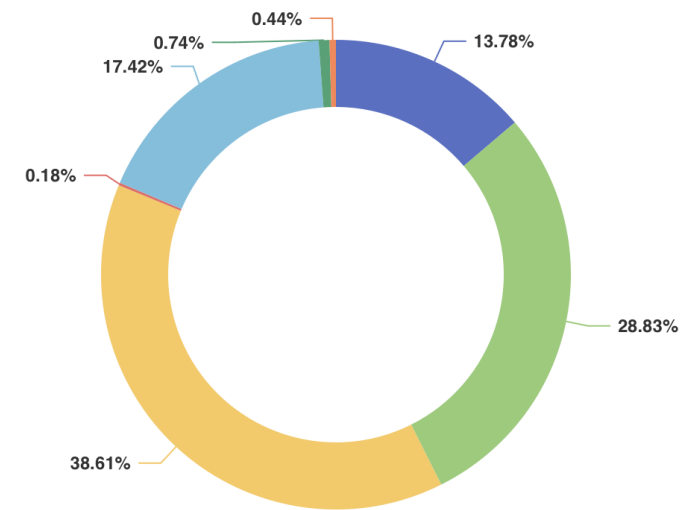
Pandemic response (Covid stimulus tracker UNESCWA)

COVID-19 - Policy responses 



Source: UNESCWA (2023), <https://tracker.unescwa.org>

Percent distribution of Government support among people 



Specific vulnerable population Employees & Self-employed Other Individuals and families Children
Unemployed Women Older people

Source: UNESCWA (2023), <https://tracker.unescwa.org>

Defining universal

Policies that ‘aim to reach every citizen passing a basic criterion, often categorical schemes for all people of a certain age [e.g. pensions] or status [e.g. child benefits]’ (Devereux et al. 2015: 9)

Examples in the data

Universal: all, children and adolescents, elderly, families/hh (not specified), individuals (not specified), individuals and families, youth

Targeted: people with disabilities, categorically targeted hh, Female-headed household, indigenous people, PMT targeted hh, unemployed, specific vulnerable pop, ...

Table A4: Distinction into universal and targeted policies by target beneficiary

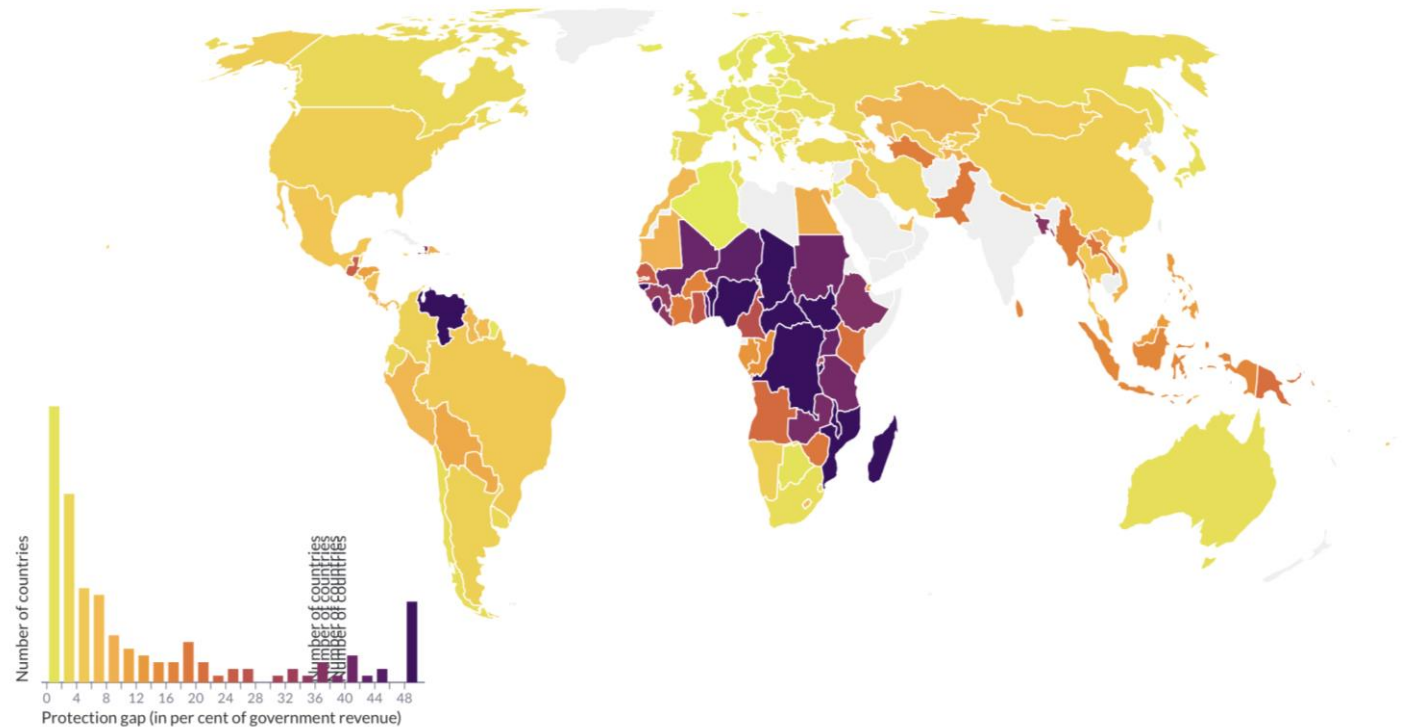
| Target beneficiary | Universal | Targeted | Total |
|---|-----------|----------|-------|
| All (people, business, and economy)* | X | | 549 |
| Categorically targeted households | | X | 107 |
| Children and adolescents | X | | 42 |
| Coronavirus patients | | X | 10 |
| Elderly | X | | 96 |
| Employees | | X | 555 |
| Families/households (not specified) | X | | 111 |
| Female-headed households | | X | 15 |
| Homeless people | | X | 8 |
| Indigenous people | | X | 10 |
| Individuals (not specified) | X | | 248 |
| Individuals and families | X | | 102 |
| Non-SMEs | | X | 299 |
| Non-citizens including migrants, refugees, and stateless people | | X | 29 |
| People in prison | | X | 2 |
| People with disabilities | | X | 33 |
| Poor households (PMT targeted) | | X | 89 |
| SMEs | | X | 413 |
| SMEs/non-SMEs | | X | 722 |
| Self-employed workers and professionals | | X | 203 |
| Specific vulnerable population | | X | 117 |
| Students | | X | 42 |
| Unemployed | | X | 177 |
| Victim of gender-based violence against women | | X | 10 |
| Women | | X | 26 |
| Women employees | | X | 17 |
| Women entrepreneurs | | X | 16 |
| Youth | X | | 20 |
| Total | 1,168 | 2,900 | 4,068 |

Note: PMT = proxy means tested; * this is a non-aggregated category included in the dataset and thus not one constructed by the author: it is thus not possible to separate this category into e.g. people only and business only as separate categories.

Source: author’s construction based on UNESCWA (2022).

SPFI – Social Protection Floor Index

- Data from 2018
- Financing gap expressed as minimum share of a country's GDP needed to close existing income and health protection gaps
- Income: aggregated poverty gap (PGR) as % of GDP
- Health: public health expenditure using avg. staffing ratios¹ and allocation using birth attendance shortfall²
- Using 50% of median income poverty line



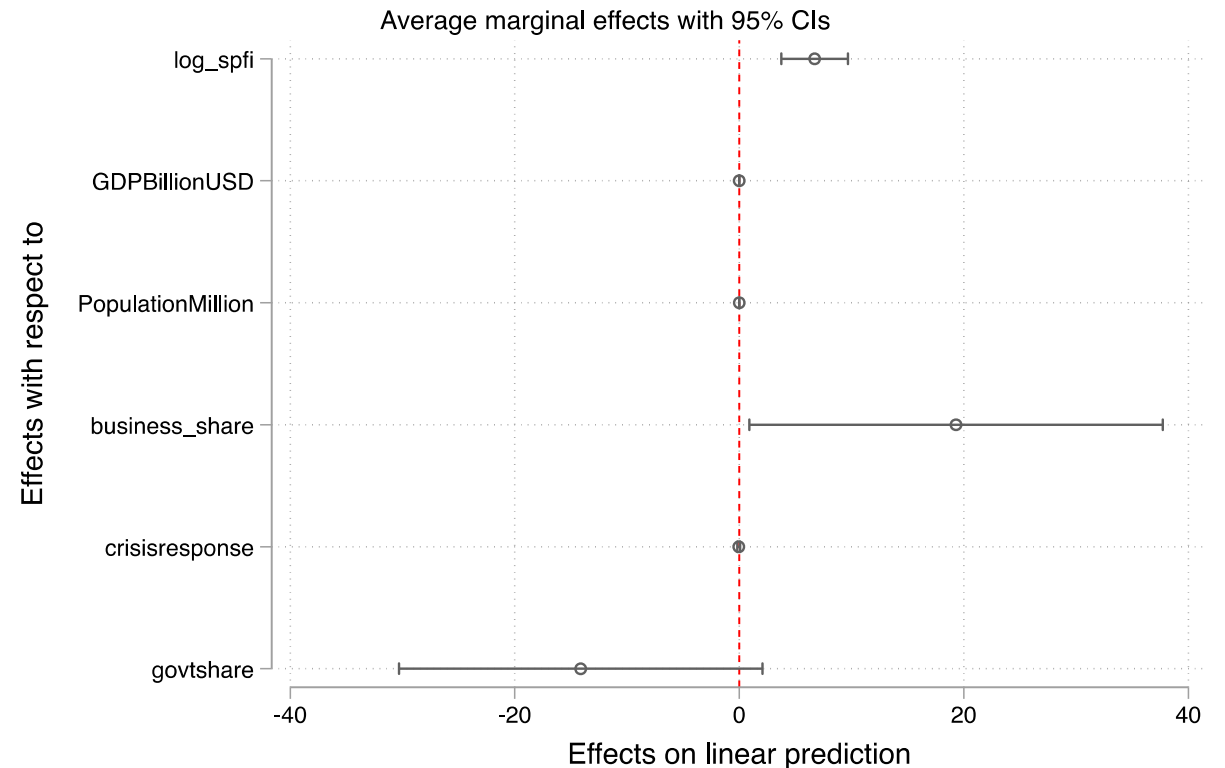
Source: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2023: <https://www.fes.de/en/shaping-a-just-world/international-community-and-civil-society/translate-to-english-social-protection-floor-index-2020>

¹ medical staffing ratio, avg 5.9 per 1000 people across 167 countries (0.5 std, 4.3 % of GDP health spending)

² percentage of births attended by professional measured against normative benchmark of 95% births professionally attended

SPF gaps and universalism – a first association

- Universalism chosen as effective pandemic relief where SP gaps exist
- Ad-hoc/ once-off design shift or lasting changing going forward?
- Re-thinking conceptual boundaries of Social Protection – new and old beneficiaries (businesses)
- Financing: short-term crisis relief versus long-term implementation



Source: author's construction based on UNESCWA 2022, FES 2022

A case for universalism?

- Existing SP systems matter for the design of crisis response
- Political feasibility: Does the accumulated experience of crisis have lasting changes on voter's fairness perceptions - universal versus targeted and political support
- Fiscal feasibility: What are sustainable financing mechanism for either – more responsive/ fine-tuned targeting versus larger scale universalism?
Costs of horizontal versus vertical expansions