



Request for research proposals

# Social protection, taxation, and crises

## Background

Under its [Domestic Revenue Mobilization programme](#) the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research ([UNU-WIDER](#)), with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), is requesting research proposals to improve the understanding of social protection and taxation in times of crises in the developing world.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, policymakers around the world sought to create a more solid financial system. A key part of the building process was to stress test the existing financial structures to detect and alleviate vulnerabilities. Beyond and above the difficulties in the financial markets, crises severely affect people's employment, incomes, and livelihoods — and these harmful impacts are more dangerous when people are poor and in a vulnerable position to begin with.

This has become very clear during the latest worldwide crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been rapid policy responses in many parts of the world in expanding existing, adding new social protection schemes and reducing tax loads on households. Yet many developing countries still lack a systematic approach to social protection and taxation, which would enable automatic and speedy assistance when crises hit across the entire income distribution. Thorough stress-testing of social protection and tax policies is therefore of crucial importance, and it is tremendously timely.

Against this backdrop, UNU-WIDER announces a Request for Research Proposals (RFRP) on social protection and taxation in times of crises in developing countries. We welcome research proposals that promote better understanding about proper crisis response, and the way social protection and tax systems can be made more sustainable. The research topics may include (but are not restricted to):

- How can tax-benefit systems support countries' paths through and out of economic crises?
- How can tax-benefit systems act as (automatic) stabilizers in crises in a developing country context?
- How can tax systems be and how have tax systems been levered in times of crisis to provide fiscal space necessary to buffer (at least the most) detrimental developments in terms of poverty and inequality?
- How can the benefit system support the most vulnerable groups through crises and beyond?

- What are the relevant merits of different targeting criteria and the extent of universalism in times of crises? How do proxies currently used to target benefits reflect changes in households' conditions in times of crises?
- Which political economy frameworks are beneficial for the development of stress resistant tax and social protection systems?

## Offer and expectations

UNU-WIDER invites proposals from qualified researchers for papers examining the questions as outlined above. Papers that pass initial screening will be considered for publication under UNU-WIDER copyright in the [WIDER Working Paper Series](#). In addition, papers further selected by the editorial team will subsequently culminate in a book proposal for an edited volume with a world-class academic publisher. The working papers need to be written in English and limited to 10,000 words or less (inclusive of text, tables, figures, footnotes, references, etc. — further information is found [here](#)) as this is likely to be the chapter specification of the planned book volume.

Papers may use either theoretical or empirical approaches with a focus on policies affecting households. Suitable empirical methods also include tax-benefit microsimulation, and UNU-WIDER has made microsimulation models available for selected countries via its [SOUTHMOD](#) programme.

Note that the topic of the request is **not** short-run humanitarian relief measures and analysis or evaluation thereof.

Proposals from individuals (or groups of individuals) as well as non-profit organizations are welcome. Applications from women and developing country researchers are particularly encouraged. Proposals may address one or more of the research questions.

Individual researchers will be issued UNU Consultant Contracts (CTC), while non-profit organizations will be issued UNU Institutional Contractual Agreements (ICA). A total research honorarium up to US\$6,000–10,000 will be paid upon delivery of a working paper and one-page summary of the main research findings, depending on the qualifications of the lead researcher and assessment of the proposal.<sup>1</sup> Both of these deliverables must be deemed acceptable by the editors before payment will be made. The honorarium is expected to cover all expenses associated with the conduct of the proposed research (including data collection, research assistance, etc.). It is not required to submit a budget.

One author of each successful proposal is expected to attend a 1–2-day workshop in June 2022 (date, venue and modality TBD) where near-final papers will be presented and discussed. Costs of attending an in-person workshop will be borne by UNU-WIDER in accordance with the United Nations University travel policy.

The workshop is intended for established and mid-career researchers, as well as early career researchers and PhD students currently working on, or interested in, issues related to taxation and revenue mobilization in developing countries.

While payment of the honorarium will be made upon delivery of the working paper and one-page summary discussed above, the final version of the book volume will not be complete at that point. After payment has been made, researchers may be asked to:

- 1 Respond to reasonable requests by the publisher and editors with respect to finalization of the book volume.
- 2 Participate in at least one knowledge-sharing event around the launch of the book volume.
- 3 Provide a one pager to be developed into a knowledge mobilization output (e.g. video, social media products, infographics, brief, blog, op-ed).

---

<sup>1</sup> In case of co-authorship the honorarium will be divided equally among the contributors

## Dates (EET – Eastern Europe Time)

16 November 2021	Launch of request for research proposals
15 January 2022	Final opportunity to send questions on the request for research proposals
31 January 2022	Proposal submission deadline
15 February 2022	Target date for informing on funding decisions
1 June 2022	Target date for submission of first drafts of papers
15 June 2022	Target date for work-in-progress workshop
15 July 2022	Target date for submission of revised near-final draft papers and a one-page summary of key findings
Q3/2022	Target date for submission of book proposal

Knowledge-sharing events will be planned subsequently.

## Evaluation process and criteria

Each proposal will be reviewed for scientific merit and feasibility. The proposals will be selected by the organizing team, consisting of Ravi Kanbur (Cornell University), Jukka Pirttilä (University of Helsinki) and Pia Rattenhuber (UNU-WIDER). Proposals will be selected on the basis of three criteria: (i) relevance to the research project, (ii) strength of empirical and policy contributions, and (iii) quality and clarity of writing. Based on this assessment, a pool of suitable proposals will be determined. From this pool, accepted proposals will be drawn considering additional criteria such as overall coherence of the envisioned book volume, diversity of topics addressed, and geographic diversity. Only the final decision on whether the proposal is accepted or not will be communicated to applying researchers. Applicants must not expect feedback on their proposals.

## Other considerations

For successful proposals:

- 1 Researchers or their institutions (non-profit) will sign a consultant contract or an institutional contractual agreement with UNU-WIDER that follows the UNU conditions of service for Consultant Contracts (CTC), or [Institutional Contractual Agreements \(ICA\)](#).
- 2 Researchers/institutions will transfer copyright of research produced under the contract to UNU-WIDER. The purpose of this copyright transfer is to allow UNU-WIDER to effectively negotiate with top academic publishers in order to seek the most desirable possible publication outlet for a related set of papers/studies, **and** to allow UNU-WIDER to license the planned book on full open access. If no (further) publication is to be expected by UNU-WIDER, the copyright can be transferred to the author(s). Any material published externally thereafter resulting from this body of work should carry due acknowledgement of UNU-WIDER as the original commissioning institute.

## Proposal submission procedure

- 1 The proposal should be no more than three pages of A4 paper in length, excluding cover page and references. Please use 12-point font, 1.5 line spacing, and standard margins. The proposal should clearly state the research objectives, study design and methods, data sources, and policy relevance. The cover page should contain the complete contact information of researcher(s) and a 120-150-word proposal abstract, which should summarize the research question, main method, data, and expected contribution to policy debate.

- 2 Submission of proposals is done electronically by using the online form on the RFRP announcement page. There are three forms to select from: one for individuals, another for groups of individuals, and a third for non-profit organizations. Details (such as address, gender, nationality, date of birth) of all researchers involved will need to be entered to the form and the cover page, the proposal, and short CVs (five pages or less) of researcher/s uploaded. Please familiarize yourself with the form in advance.
- 3 Submission of a budget is not required for the proposal.
- 4 Any questions on the proposal process should be sent to [research-proposal@wider.unu.edu](mailto:research-proposal@wider.unu.edu) by 15 January 2022. All queries and responses will be published on the [RfRP announcement page](#). Selected answers will be updated on a rolling basis.