

The Programa Bolsa Família and its Relevance for the ILO's Concept of the Social Protection Floor

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During the last decade the role of social protection has been strengthened in the international debate on development. Inspired by various concrete examples of social policies in the Americas and elsewhere, the model of 'inclusive growth' has developed. Social protection is no longer seen only as a condition that favours development, but as an indispensable element of equity that can have sustainable effects on opportunities and the potential of a country's future development (ILO, 2011). It is now understood as a right to which everyone should have access.

This development has been strongly supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and was most recently expressed in ILO Recommendation No. 202 on the social protection floor (SPF) (ILO, 2012). The ILO aims to extend social protection by means of a two-dimensional strategy: the vertical dimension refers to the quantity of social security branches covered and to the quality of the benefits, and usually consists of obligatory and voluntary contributory schemes. It seeks a progressive achievement of higher levels of protection according to Convention No. 102 (on minimum standards of social security). The horizontal dimension refers to the quantity of people covered and aims at the rapid implementation of national SPFs containing basic social security guarantees at a nationally defined level in line with Recommendation No. 202. These basic guarantees are universal access to essential health services, and basic income guarantees for families with children, for people of working age who are not able to obtain sufficient income themselves, and for elderly people (ILO, 2012: art. 4–6).

The SPF leaves the concrete design and adequate combination of schemes and programmes as well as the level of the benefits to each country, allowing the adaptation of the recommendations to its context and capacities. Benefits should permit a dignified life for everyone (ibid: art. 8), and the guarantees should be inscribed into national law to turn them into a right for all citizens (ibid: art. 7). The SPF emphasises furthermore that social policies should be coordinated together with other policies (ibid: art. 10) and that a system of monitoring should be established (ibid: art. 19). Whenever possible, SPFs should be financed by national resources (ibid: art. 12). In addition member states are asked to develop 'national strategies to extend social security' (ibid: art. 14).

The SPF was inspired by different international experiences, which proved that it is—conceptually and logistically— possible to construct large-scale programmes with a positive impact on poverty and inequality. SPF policies should be coordinated with a number of other policies, such as education, employment and health, and extend the range of social protection beyond the classic contributory regimes. One example is conditional cash transfers (CCTs), which combine monetary transfers to poor families with access to social services. The Brazilian Programa Bolsa Família (PBF) is one of the largest and most successful CCTs, with an important demonstrative international role. The programme combines the objectives of alleviating extreme poverty

through monetary transfers to families below the poverty line, and of interrupting intergenerational poverty transmission by ensuring the realisation of the beneficiaries' right to health and education. To manage the conceptual challenges involved—for example, regarding registering, targeting and monitoring— innovative and exemplary mechanisms of coordination, evaluation and management were developed. It should be stressed that the programme reaches 13 million families (over 50 million people) at a cost of only 0.5 per cent of GDP. An additional aspect to be highlighted is the embedding of the PBF in the Sistema Único de Assistência Social (SUAS) and its integration into the national extreme poverty eradication plan *Brasil sem Miséria*, launched in 2011. It is thus an important element in the long-term strategy of Brazilian social security policies. The PBF also shows that it is possible to develop an anti-poverty programme that is based on rights and not a 'gift' to poor people by some governor.

In the view of the ILO's Social Protection Department, the Brazilian experience, and especially the PBF, documents that it is possible to gradually expand non-contributory policies which universalise, in a coordinated way, access to basic social benefits, at a comparably low cost and with an elevated impact as proposed by the SPF concept (UNDP/ILO, 2011; ILO, 2013).

When looking into future possible developments of the Brazilian social security system, it is very likely that the PBF will continue its development and might be increasingly linked to other social services, such as measures to support the inclusion of beneficiary adults into the formal labour market (already in process). It will be important to guarantee financing for the programme in the long term. Looking at demographics and the lower number of young people in the future suggests that the principles of universalism can be further applied by coordinating the PBF and the contributory *Salário Família*, to provide universal child benefit coverage. A programme targeting adults of working age could also evolve, offering them, for example, access to services that facilitate integration into the labour market. This is especially important, as there is still a coverage gap regarding unemployment benefits and other labour market programmes, which currently focus on formally employed workers.

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