

## Building more inclusive, equitable, and resilient societies: towards the World Social Summit 2025

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### Key points

The proposed World Social Summit 2025 provides an opportunity for a renewed global social contract. The relevance of the Summit will depend on the extent to which the process to agree on its core agenda includes relevant perspectives from around the globe. In this document, we propose some priorities for the Global South:



Social protection should have a universal approach, independent of an individual's labour status.



Governments have to prioritise affirmative action policies. These can significantly increase women's participation in the labour market, particularly in leadership positions.



The global community must develop new ideas and incentives to encourage private investments in critical infrastructure for the Global South, particularly in Internet accessibility.



States should give specific attention to enhancing their capacity to develop effective policies in all these priority areas.



Young people bring new perspectives and new ideas. They need to be actively engaged in the Summit's preparation.

COVID-19 has highlighted the existing vulnerabilities to crises that can arise and threaten the health, economy, and stability of countries. Under these circumstances, there is an opportunity to develop response plans that include a global perspective on current challenges and threats, especially for countries from the Global South. Developing solutions with a long-term perspective for a sustainable development agenda is indispensable. In fact, "humanity's welfare—and indeed, humanity's very future—depend on solidarity and working together as a global family to achieve common goals. For people, for the planet, for prosperity and for peace" (United Nations, 2021a, p. 3).

The World Social Summit 2025, proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General is an important opportunity for humanity to conceive such a response plan with a global perspective (United Nations, 2021a).

This will be a moment not only to scrutinise humanities' challenges and progress so far but especially to outline a global development plan with significant participation of stakeholders (e.g., nation-states, multilateral agencies, NGOs, etc.). Since the World Summit for Social Development that took place in Copenhagen in 1995, these stakeholders have not had the opportunity to meet in such a comprehensive way to discuss the specific needs required to create a new social agenda. The world has changed immensely in the three decades elapsing since the 1995 summit, thereby presenting an urgent need for a renewed set of commitments and a plan to advance a new social contract.

In academia and policy circles, extensive discussions across the globe should take place before the Summit in 2025. Those discussions should incorporate the views of as many stakeholders as possible, especially from the Global South. This brief is the first contribution to such a process of discussions. Taking the 12 commitments of our common agenda (United Nations, 2021a) as a starting point, this policy brief prioritises a set of commitments along a unitary pillar: labour. Such focus arises after identifying a key feature of families' budgets. In non-poor households, labour income accounts for around four-fifths of family income; the remaining income comes from rents and transfers. Labour income accounts for half of the family income in poor households, while rents and transfers account for the other half. This highlights the central role of labour income to define people's well-being.

In the next section, we prioritise those commitments from the viewpoint of household income for all in the Global South. These prioritised proposals constitute part of a social protection system that leaves no one behind:

■ **Social protection should be conceptualised as a citizen's right above and beyond a worker's right.** ■

changing paradigms from workers' rights to human rights; placing women and girls at the centre, combating the most unfair and unjustified form of inequality; taking care of the end of the demographic bonus: listening to and work with youth; improving digital connection and cooperation; ensuring sustainable financing; building trust and boosting partnerships. After a brief discussion of these priorities, we will discuss some of the issues regarding their implementation and effectiveness in the Global South. Then we will conclude by outlining what to expect from the World Social Summit 2025.

■ **Figure 1. Summary of the 12 commitments, 2020**



**Note.** Adapted from 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General' by United Nations, 2021a.

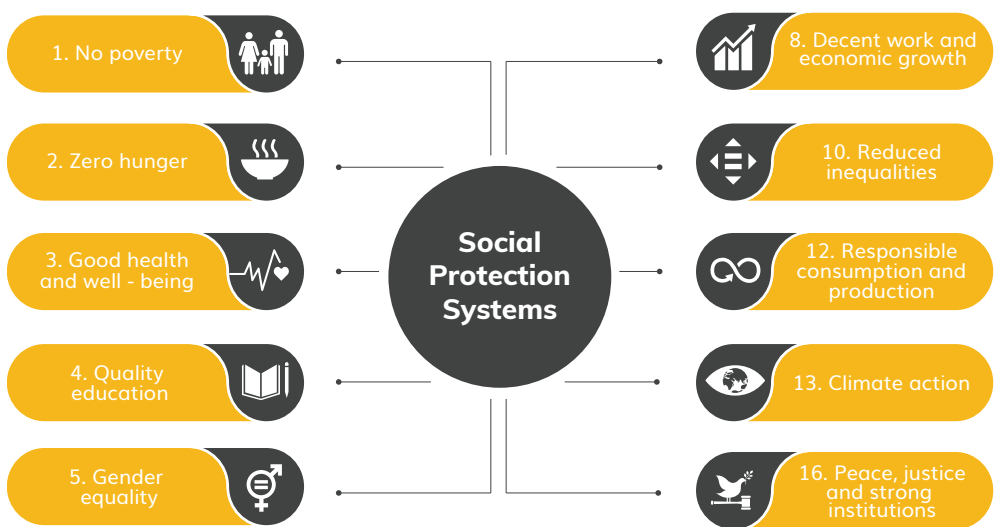
**Social protection to leave no one behind: changing paradigms from workers' rights to human rights**

*The reality and the problem*

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the fragmented state of social protection systems in most countries. It has also emphasised the need for a strong social protection system, which is essential to counteract the effects of adverse circumstances, providing vulnerable people ways to cope with them. A new design and improvements in social protection systems would work as the basis for peaceful societies to leave no one behind and eradicate extreme poverty (United Nations, 2021a).

Figure 2 illustrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that a strong social protection system supports. As can be seen, these systems are fundamental components for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

■ **Figure 2. Social protection systems' objectives**



**Note.** Adapted from 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General' by United Nations, 2021a.

In Latin America, 40% of the region's population does not have access to social protection programmes (Rubio, Escaroz, Machado, Palomo, Vargas, & Cuevo, 2020). Among the causes of it highlights the rampant informality that prevent workers from accessing public programmes. In Africa, the informal economy also works as an impediment to access social protection programmes. In fact, 92% of African women operate in the informal economy, which inhibits their access to social security

systems (United Nations, 2021a). Also, in South Asia, a major proportion of the population is excluded from social safety nets. For example, in Afghanistan, less than 10% of the population is included in social safety nets (Bloch, 2020).

Social protection programmes are essential to recovering from a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, they can serve to safeguard household income and consumption levels (no poverty, zero hunger). In the medium- and long-term, they can help to reduce inequalities in all sectors, promote inclusive growth, and strengthen social cohesion (quality education, gender equality) (Cuéllar-Marchelli, Flores, Góchez, & López, 2020; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2020).

Yet, social protection programmes fail to reach important segments of the population due to inconsistent designs (Levy, 2008). First, in many countries, labour legislation stipulates that a key part of social protection (health insurance, pensions, and unemployment insurance) is obtained by contributions from formal employment. Unfortunately, in highly informal societies, reaching a high coverage of basic social protection through formal employment is simply illusory. Then governments, realising the poor coverage of social protection systems based on formal employment, offer different forms of non-contributory social protection with heterogeneous quality. The resulting coexistence of contributory and non-contributory social protection results in perverse incentives towards increased informality. This contributes to the stratification of the society according to the social protection household's access. This is also a detriment to aggregate productivity, limiting the possibilities of generating well-being for all.

### ***Some elements of the solution***

There are three elements at the root of this problem: (i) the Bismarckian ideal of accessing social protection through jobs, (ii) the coexistence of contributory and non-contributory means of accessing social protection, and (iii) the low investments in good quality social protection for all.

For more than a century, much of humanity has lived under the idea that social protection is a worker's right. This is a sensible idea in the developed world, where informality is not a serious issue, but this is not the case in the Global South. Here, it should be conceptualised that social protection is a citizen's right above and beyond a worker's right. This would require moving towards the real universalisation of social protection without the need for a job contract and eliminating the coexistence of contributory and non-contributory mechanisms. This, of course, will require significant financing, as well as new financial engineering to make it affordable.

## Place women and girls at the centre, combating the most unfair and unjustified form of inequality

### *The reality and the problem*

Generally, societies are structurally imbalanced in terms of the opportunities that males and females enjoy; this is more pronounced in the Global South. Those imbalances occur at different stages of the life cycle and are multidimensional: education, labour, health, public spaces, domestic spaces, politics, justice, violence, and many others. The COVID-19 crisis has had a negative impact on women, exacerbating many of those imbalances. Special mention is made to the labour markets where, in general, female labour participation has decreased. In Latin America alone, 3 million women lost their jobs during the pandemic. Comparing participation rates, the rate of women has decreased six percentage points more than that of men (Bustelo, Suaya, & Vezza, 2021).

According to the World Values Survey, more than half of the respondents in many countries in South Asia and MENA agreed that men have more rights to a job than women when jobs are scarce. In contrast, only around one in six respondents in developed countries said the same (Madgavkar, White, Krishnan, Mahajan, & Azcue, 2021). In Latin America, it can also be observed that the characteristics associated with productivity are the same for both sexes. However, social norms determine that men receive greater job opportunities in the labour market (Galarza & Yamada, 2014; Ñopo, Chong, & Moro, 2010).

Fewer income generation possibilities for women imply fewer possibilities of bargaining power at home and limiting opportunities in many life spheres (Miro Quesada & Ñopo, 2022). Differences in productivity do not justify such lower income generation. Action is needed.

### *Some elements of the solution*

While the current COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to work on solutions to this long-lasting and encompassing problem, it also poses some challenges. At the same time, it is necessary to reject reactive and hasty measures—such as lockdowns and mobility restrictions—without a gender perspective. It also calls to move toward consistent, long-term initiatives that promote equal opportunities and better working conditions (Bustelo et al., 2021; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019). It requires to work both in the long- and short- term with policies for adults and children alike. Also, it is important that the solutions do not reinforce gender roles through public policy and should encourage the inclusion of men in traditionally female activities, both paid and unpaid (Tebaldi & Bilo, 2019).

Affirmative action policies remain controversial. Yet, they are essential to equalise opportunities for those that have been historically neglected. Women's representation at the top levels of corporations is still a pending issue. Also, equality of opportunities in schools and an integral gender equality approach should be introduced in educational systems to nurture the birth of new social interactions with less stigma and more respect for all.

## **Take care of the end of the demographic bonus: listen to and work with youth**

### *The reality and the problem*

Youth well-being, participation, and empowerment are key drivers of sustainable development and peace worldwide (United Nations, 2021b). In 2020, globally, youth employment—those aged 15-24—declined by 8.7%, compared to 3.7% for other adults (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2021). In Latin America, the age group most affected by the reduction in employment during the pandemic was youth (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2021). Providing jobs for all young job seekers remains a daunting challenge. For example, despite positive economic growth rates in South Asia, this represents an ongoing problem (Rahman, Islam, & Zafar, 2020), forcing people to migrate in search of better opportunities (Ekanayake, 2022).

■ **Policy coherence and cooperation on fiscal policies at the global level, systematisation of digital trade issues, and stricter treatment of illicit flows are essential to close the financing gaps.** ■

Also, one of the forthcoming challenges of the pandemic will be to maintain and strengthen youth participation in school. Many have already abandoned the schooling system; some of them will return, but many others will abandon it as well over the next months and years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], & World Bank, 2021). As a result, a growing segment of the population will be neither working nor studying. These are the two main channels for human capital accumulation. To detach from them will be detrimental to the youth. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, this was already a challenge of concern (de Hoyos, Rogers & Székely, 2016), which will be magnified in the upcoming years.

### *Some elements of the solution*

A holistic approach to the problem of youth employability should take into account the rapid demographic changes that the Global South is undergoing (Ñopo, 2020). People in the Global South live longer now,

implying a longer work tenure. The absence of vigorous job creation induces extra challenges for new job seekers, especially young ones. This converts the challenge of youth employability into one of job creation. This requires sustained economic growth, especially in labour-intensive industries, thereby necessitating the suppression of the pending challenge of labour informality.

However, this is not enough. In addition to the challenge of job creation, it is necessary to work on the challenge of human capital accumulation. An education system that better adapts to youth needs—paying attention to their employability but extending their impact beyond that—is urgently needed. In a globalising world, migration would also be considered an important component of the dynamics involved in identifying a solution. This requires better integration among schooling systems and labour markets across the globe.

## **Improve digital connection and cooperation**

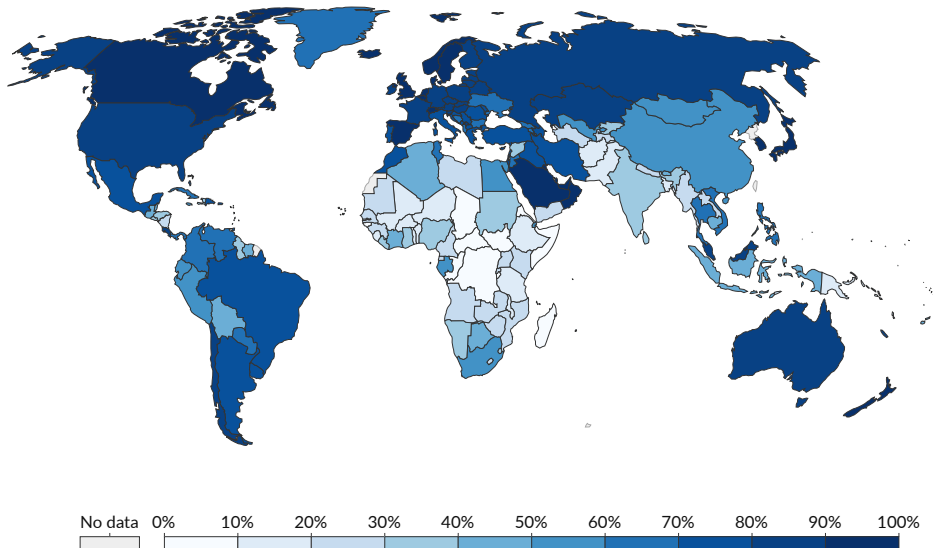
### ***The reality and the problem***

The Internet has become the main channel for connectivity since the late 20th century, especially since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become a necessary tool for human capital in its two main modes: accumulation and use. The Internet provides access to information to millions of people, which fosters collaboration, connection, and sustainable development. It is a global public good that should benefit everyone (United Nations, 2021a). However, connectivity is very low in the Global South, especially in Africa and South Asia (Ortiz-Ospina, Ritchie, & Roser, 2019).

The pandemic highlighted the importance and necessity of digital connectivity. For persons with high-quality Internet access, their productivity was enhanced, but for those lacking connectivity, not only did they have lower productivity, but also many jobs were lost. Internet access has become another layer of complexity to the multifaceted and multidimensional aspects of inequality (Albrieu, 2021; Albrieu, Allerand, & de la Vega, 2021).

Setting up online classes with video conferencing and interactive lectures in the midst of a pandemic became impossible due to this lack of Internet connectivity (George, 2020). Therefore, providing free and affordable access to information has the potential to reduce the digital divide (Souter, 2017), bring about social change (Franquesa & Navarro, 2017), and become a catalyst to realise the SDGs.





**Note.** From the 'International Telecommunication Union' by World Bank, 2021 as cited in the 'Internet' by M. Roser, H. Ritchie and E. Ortiz-Ospina, 2016, Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/internet#citation>. CC BY 4.0.

### ***Some elements of the solution***

When understood as an information highway, the Internet can clearly be conceptualised as a public good. It is expected to benefit societies not only in terms of education and work. As has been witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also been very useful for health issues and, in general, for daily social interactions, trading goods, and providing services. Not enjoying access to the Internet has become a new form of social exclusion.

Not only does connection to the Internet have the nature of a public good, but also it is clearly global. This implies that the financing of its infrastructure (updated network cabling, licenses, etc.), should also be conceived in a global manner. This requires working on market mechanisms allowing for subsidising low-income localities/countries/regions with resources coming from those who can profit the most from the network. In the aggregate, this would also require work on ensuring global sustainable financing, which is outlined below.

### **Ensure sustainable financing**

#### ***The reality and the problem***

The preceding proposed priorities would require a significant amount of financing. For the average country in the Global South, their education and health systems would require between one and two GDP points of extra financing, and social protection would cost between two and three extra GDP points (Anton, Hernandez, & Levy, 2013). With the current

levels of tax collection in the Global South, it would be nearly impossible to successfully attend to all these issues. Additionally, in low-income developing countries, the financing needs to implement the SDGs are enormous. Public financing—external and domestic—may not be sufficient to cover the projected financing gap for the realisation of the SDGs.

### *Some elements of the solution*

Each country will require additional local financing to implement the proposed agenda. However, there are three elements of the current situation that will shape the solution: (i) many aspects of the pending problems are global, such as the digitalisation outlined above; (ii) national economies worldwide will become more integrated as time progresses; and (iii) multilateralism should emerge as the provider of global public goods. This configures a situation in which global multilateral funding should play a renewed and invigorated role (Expert Working Group, 2022).



**An education system that better adapts to youth needs—paying attention to their employability but extending their impact beyond that—is urgently needed.**



To this end, it will be necessary to carry out various actions, such as investment incentives and partnerships, to reach those left behind (United Nations, 2021b). Also, this is where the private sector becomes more relevant (Bhattacharya & Sabin, 2020). As public financing alone would not be sufficient, coordination between the public and private sectors is important. Additionally, evidence suggests that policy coherence and cooperation on fiscal policies at the global level, systematisation of digital trade issues, and stricter treatment of illicit flows are essential to close the financing gaps (Bhattacharya & Sabin, 2020).

Last but not least, we propose a final challenge below—one that goes beyond human capital— which targets social capital and cohesion.

## **Build trust and boost partnerships**

### *The reality and the problem*

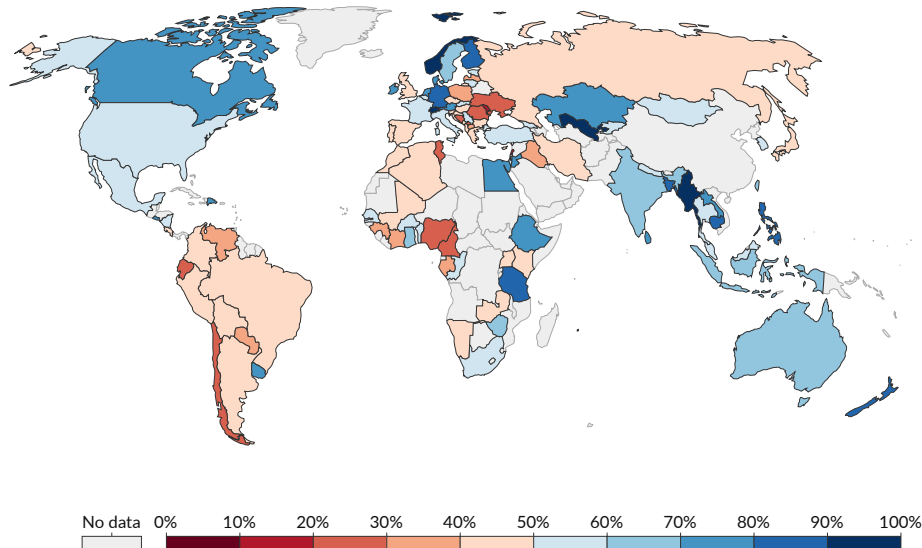
Trust in public institutions and in leaders is essential for social and economic progress, allowing people to cooperate and express solidarity with one another (Perry, 2021).

The question was “How much do you trust each of the following: your national government?” The “share of people who trust” is the sum of those who responded “a lot,” and “some.”

There has been an overall breakdown in trust in major institutions worldwide due to both their real and perceived failures to deliver results,

be fair, transparent and inclusive, as well as provide reliable information, and make a difference in people's lives (Ali, Hassan, Hossain, UI Hoque, Ur-Rashid, Matin, & Rabbani, 2020; United Nations, 2021a).

■ **Figure 4. Share of people that trust their national governments, 2020.**



**Note.** From the 'Surveys' by Wellcome Global Monitor, 2022 as cited in the 'Internet' by E. Ortiz-Ospina and M. Roser, 2016, Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/trust#citation>. CC BY 4.0.

The United Nations seeks to foster partnerships through greater interaction between the UN system, financial institutions, and development banks, as well as with civil society focal points in all UN entities (United Nations, 2021b).

For developing countries, which are mostly located in the Global South, there exists the South-South Cooperation (SSC) mechanism. It is a tool used by states, international organisations, academia, civil society, and the private sector to collaborate and share knowledge, skills, and successful initiatives in specific areas such as agriculture, human rights, urbanisation, health, and financial inclusion.

South-South Cooperation has facilitated exchanges between developing countries facing similar challenges and has stimulated the recognition of different development models and actors in the Global South (Morales et al., 2021). It has proved to be very valuable in recent efforts on financial inclusion, as formal and informal institutions tend to be more similar across countries than with respect to those in the North (Alvarez, 2021).

However, the disparity in access to COVID-19 vaccines is evidence of the need for more effective and complementary South-South cooperation

(United Nations, 2021b). This does not imply that this type of cooperation has played a relevant role in the crisis, but only that more of it is needed.

### *Some elements of the solution*

The COVID-19 crisis can be an initial step to strengthening the institutions of countries in the Global South. This, in turn, will enable regional cooperation to combat crises and reduce their economic impact. This will also bring long-term economic benefits through increased intra-regional trade, accelerated shared growth, poverty reduction, and cooperation in priority areas such as energy, food security, logistics, and infrastructure (United Nations, 2021a). Trust building is neither simple nor fast; it is a process that requires consistent perseverance from the global community.

■ **Affirmative action policies remain controversial. Yet, they are essential to equalise opportunities for those that have been historically neglected.** ■

### ■ **On implementation and effectiveness from the Global South**

The World Social Summit 2025 should consider the need for countries to have a guide to developing effective and successful policies. For the design of public policies, certain indispensable components must be taken into account to improve their effectiveness.

According to Martínez (2019), there are eight desirable components of a policy institutional framework:

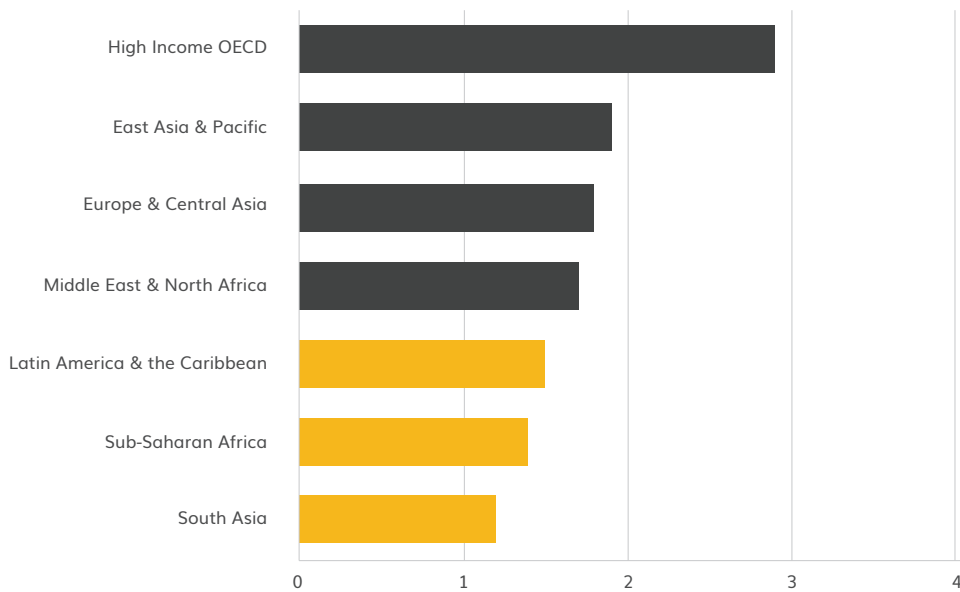
1. The existence of a long-term strategy
2. Consideration of rights and gender approaches
3. The existence of clear rules known to all actors
4. The existence of arrangements for coordination
5. The development of permanent technical capacities
6. The existence of mechanisms for collecting and analysing reliable information
7. The incorporation of oversight and auditing mechanisms
8. The participation of social actors

The problems highlighted above are not new, and despite the efforts of countries to develop public policies to combat them, they persist. Therefore, it is necessary to look at how effective policies are in the Global South. Moreso, it would be important to acquire clear commitments toward implementation and action plans. It would be very valuable to arrive at a set of actionable steps towards the desired goals.

It is necessary to consider that despite good intentions in the implementation of policies, they may not have the expected results. Mainly, policy implementation may fail for two reasons (Artuc et al., 2020):

- The absence of complementary measures is needed to make the chosen policy effective.
- Inadequate capacity of existing institutions and administrative systems

■ **Figure 5. Public policy index, 2014**



**Note.** Adapted from 'The Politics of Policies: Revisiting the Quality of Public Policies and Government Capabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean' by M. Franco and C. Scartascini, 2014. The index summarises the information according to six characteristics: policy stability, policy adaptability, policy coordination and coherence, policy implementation and enforcement, policy efficiency, and public-regardedness of policies. The values range from 0 to around 4 (4 being the highest).

## ■ What to expect from the World Social Summit 2025?

In line with the commitments that are a priority for the Global South, the forthcoming World Social Summit 2025 should be a platform to: i) promote a reform of the social protection system, decoupled from the labour situation; ii) promote the development of policies with a gender perspective; iii) promote transparency and strengthen institutions; iv) create ideas to encourage investment in Internet accessibility; v) generate incentives for greater private investment; vi) increase the importance of international relations; and vii) recognise that youth bring new perspectives and new ideas.

However, while acknowledging the current challenges facing the world today and the goals to be achieved, there are no proposed methods

to address these problems and achieve these goals. To this end, taking into account the effectiveness of public policies in the Global South, a road map or guide is needed to encourage countries to achieve effective improvements.

One approach to developing a road map that works effectively would be to follow six proposed steps, which are: i) acknowledge issues, ii) show their importance, iii) develop global awareness, iv) propose a response guide, v) share previous successful responses, and vi) follow up on goals achieved. This road map should be presented to governments so they can have a guide to approach their own national issues, according to the perspective provided in this brief. Also, as it was mentioned, the importance of the participation of representatives of the social society is indisputable. This road map should help them acknowledge problems that directly affect them as well as enable them to present the road map to the responsible authorities to work together to find and enact solutions.

Finally, it is important to clarify that the future relevance of a World Social Summit 2025 depends on the extent to which the process is continued and given global importance (Deacon et al., 2005).

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Founded in 2013, Southern Voice is a network of 59 think tanks from Africa, Asia and Latin America. It contributes to the global dialogue on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Southern Voice's ultimate aim is to address the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' and 'participation deficit' in the development dialogue. It does this by producing, promoting, and disseminating evidence-based policy analysis by researchers from Global South countries.

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