UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM STAFF COLLEGE

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ONLINE

13 MAY 2026 - 17 JUN 2026

Social Protection for Sustainable Development

Governance and Human Rights

Sustainable development and the SDGs



LANGUAGE
English

DURATION
6 weeks

ENROLL BY
28 Feb 2026

PRICE
Free

LOCATION
ONLINE

TARGET
Everyone

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This six-week facilitated online course is designed for professionals and practitioners who wish to deepen their understanding of social protection in the context of sustainable development.
The programme promotes a universal, life-cycle approach, placing emphasis on partnerships, design, financing and implementation of comprehensive social protection systems that reduce vulnerabilities across all population groups.

Introduction

The global community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a comprehensive framework to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Among these objectives, social protection has been recognized by Member States as a critical policy instrument to safeguard individuals and families from social contingencies and market shocks throughout the life cycle.

Target 1.3 of the SDGs specifies that countries must "implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable." Recent assessments indicate that approximately 52.4 % of the global population are covered by at least one social protection cash benefit. Despite this advancement, a substantial proportion of humanity remains unprotected, underscoring the urgency of accelerating progress.

The convergence of multiple systemic risks including large-scale displacement, climate-related hazards, informal labour markets, demographic transitions and digital transformations, means that robust social protection systems are more essential than ever to build resilience for individuals, households and societies.

Underpinning this agenda is the principle that social protection is not merely a policy choice but a human right, anchored in international frameworks and normative commitments. National policies must align with these frameworks to ensure dignity, inclusion, and the principle of leaving no one behind.

The Pact for the Future, adopted by Member States in September 2024, reaffirmed the imperative to establish well-designed, sustainable and efficient social protection systems for all within the broader architecture of global sustainable development and just transitions. In response, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its partners launched a new phase of their Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All, covering 50 priority countries and delivering over 148 institutional changes between 2021 and 2024 in support of legal coverage expansions.

Despite these concerted efforts, the pace of advancement remains insufficient to meet the 2030 targets in many regions. Sustained political commitment, strengthened financing mechanisms, institutional innovation, and improved data systems will be required if universal social protection coverage is to be realized within the current decade.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Demonstrate the case for universal social protection systems as foundational to individual well-being, societal resilience and sustainable development
2. Explain how social protection constitutes a human right and understand its implications for national policy frameworks
3. Interpret social protection as a strategic investment and lever for achieving the SDGs and promoting inclusive growth
4. Apply concrete policy tools and steps to design, finance, implement and deliver nationally appropriate social protection systems
5. Identify global trends, tools and good practices in social protection, especially in contexts of elevated risk and crisis
6. Advocate effectively for universal, comprehensive, rights-based and sustainable social protection systems within their national or regional context

Course methodology

The online courses of the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) are designed to deliver high-impact learning while respecting professionals' time constraints. The structure combines self-paced modules with applied learning components such as case studies, interactive exercises, and group collaboration. Participants benefit from live moderated webinars featuring subject-matter experts, with recordings available to ensure flexibility across time zones. A dedicated facilitator guides participants throughout the course and provides feedback on assignments. The online platform enables peer-to-peer learning among professionals from diverse organizational and geographic backgrounds. Although interactive and participatory, the course design allows participants to determine their own weekly study plan. Over six weeks (approximately five hours per week on average), the format delivers the academic rigor and applied relevance characteristics of UNSSC programmes.

Course contents

Introductory week: What is social protection?

- Definitions of social protection
- History of the welfare system and early social protection
- Where we stand today in 2025, including global coverage levels, main gaps, and key challenges in the current social protection landscape

Week 2: Present and Future: Social Protection, Partnerships, and the 2030 Agenda (the "why" and "who")

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the lead-up to 2030
- Social protection and the SDGs, including updates on SDG 1.3 progress
- Social protection and the 5Ps
- Key partnerships in the social protection field, including new actors in digital, climate and humanitarian contexts
- Lifecycle risks and emerging vulnerabilities linked to demographic, environmental and economic changes

Week 3: Key pillars of social protection (the "what")

- Social protection floors, universal social protection and updated ILO standards
- Instruments of social protection, including social assistance, social insurance and labour market policies
- Complements to social protection systems, including graduation approaches, Cash Plus, informal social protection, care policies and discussions on universal basic income
- Coverage, adequacy, comprehensiveness and sustainability in changing contexts
- Social protection as a human right, including international labour standards and evolving national social protection regulations

Week 4: Designing, financing and reforming social protection systems (the "how")

- The policy and reform cycle of social protection systems
- Designing nationally appropriate and inclusive social protection systems
- Adopting and updating national strategies for social protection, including alignment with the Pact for the Future (2024)
- Fiscal space and financing social protection, including new financing opportunities and constraints
- Reforming social protection systems to strengthen coverage, governance and long-term sustainability

Week 5: Implementing comprehensive social protection systems (the "how")

- Implementing social protection systems, including institutional arrangements, delivery mechanisms and coordination
- The role of information systems and data, including digital public infrastructure
- Monitoring and evaluating social protection systems, including learning and accountability
- Initiating a culture of universal and rights-based social protection

Week 6: Looking ahead: global trends and adaptive social protection (the "future")

- Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection in the context of climate, economic and social risks
- Global trends in the social protection field in 2025, including digitalization, demographic change and the evolution of work
- Advocacy for universal, comprehensive and sustainable social protection

Target audience

This course is designed for professionals from a wide range of organizational backgrounds, including government bodies, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, media, and non-governmental organizations. Prior experience in social protection is not required; rather, the course seeks motivated individuals who will apply the knowledge gained to advance inclusive social protection in their respective contexts.

Cost of participation

The course is free of charge.