



PROJECT OUTLINE

The ILO Recommendation on Social Protection Floors:
Basic Principles for Innovative Solutions

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November 2015

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Introduction

One of the core activities of the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been, since its establishment in 1919, the setting of international social security standards. The Preamble to its Constitution sets forth a number of goals in this respect, including: the protection of workers against sickness, disease, and injury arising out of employment; the protection of children, young persons, and women; and provision for old age and injury.¹ However, despite the various social security conventions and other international instruments with ambitious objectives, the vast majority of the world's population still has no access to social security protection, or very little. To address this global protection gap, the International Labour Conference in 2001 decided to give the highest priority to bringing social security to those who are not covered by existing schemes.²

In the years that followed, the ILO recognised that 'in the twenty-first century ILO standards must face the new realities of globalization and a growing informal economy that have been reshaping the classic social security architecture'³, and it was acknowledged that the various social security conventions do not sufficiently promote the extension of social security to the informal economy in the developing world. After the completion of several studies on this issue,⁴ it was concluded that 'the basic deficiency of the existing ILO instruments lies in the lack of the requirement of universal access to at least a basic set of benefits.'⁵ The Conference demanded the development of a new instrument to this end, which was realised in the form of a Recommendation on national social protection floors.⁶ The main objective of this Recommendation is 'to protect in the first place the presently unprotected, the poor and the most vulnerable, including workers in the informal economy and their families, to ensure that they can enjoy effective essential social security throughout the life cycle.'⁷ In June 2012, the International Labour Conference adopted this Recommendation No. 202 with an impressive tripartite consensus: 452 votes in favour, 0 against, and 1 abstention.

The apparent global consensus on the need for national social protection floors is a promising starting point for action. Many international organizations are involved in the elaboration of the social floor concept, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, several other United Nations Organisation's agencies, and a great number of (international) non-governmental organizations. The economic crisis has importantly contributed to the sense of urgency to realise social protection of the

¹ Preamble to the Constitution of the ILO, adopted by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

² ILO *Social Security: A New Consensus* (2001 International Labour Office Geneva).

³ ILO *Social Security and the Rule of Law* (2011 International Labour Office Geneva) 1.

⁴ For an overview, see: ILO *Social Security for All. Investing in Global Social and Economic Development. A Consultation Discussion Paper 16* (2006 Social Security Department Geneva).

⁵ ILO *Setting Social Security Standards in a Global Society* (2008 International Labour Office Geneva) 34. See also ILO *Social Security and the Rule of Law* (2011) 48-151.

⁶ For a more elaborate description of the development towards the Social Protection Floor Recommendation, see: ILO (2012) 5-8.

⁷ ILO (2012) para 39.

most vulnerable in order to reduce poverty. Many governments in the developing world have embraced the initiative and are involved in designing their own social protection floors, geared towards the specific characteristics and the levels of development of their countries. However, the design and implementation of new social protection schemes is a complicated political and legal exercise. The Recommendation is meant to guide governments during these processes. It provides, as a main guiding tool, a set of principles that should be applied in respect of all aspects of a national social protection floor.

A clear and practicable list of principles that responds to the specific situation in developing countries with large informal sectors seems extremely useful indeed, all the more since social protection floors may consist of a variety of measures with different objectives and implemented through different methods. Such a list can serve as a starting point and policy guideline for governments establishing and maintaining their social protection floors. Nevertheless, at first sight, the catalogue of principles included in the Recommendation does not come across as a systematic and coherent one. It rather reflects what it actually is, namely, a collection of principles and values put forward during the drafting process of the Recommendation by the different stakeholders – the ILO office, governments, employers, and employees – with their different backgrounds, expertise, and interests. The need for consensus has made the list lengthy, a bit rambling, and sometimes overlapping. Moreover, the various principles and their relevance for a social protection floor are not systematically explained. All this may affect the applicability and the impact of the Recommendation in practice.

Objective and Context of the Project

The general objective of this project is to add to the body of knowledge about the creation and implementation of social protection floors, and, in this way, to contribute to their development. Within the context of this general objective, the project seeks to assess the catalogue of principles included in the Recommendation from a legal perspective and to see how and to what extent they are implemented in national schemes. The study will focus on the suitability and implementability of the principles with the view to extending social security of informal workers.

Accordingly, questions to be addressed are the following:

1. What is the meaning of the principles with respect to the extension of social security for informal workers?
2. How and to what extent are these principles implemented in national regulations?
3. Which principles or which groups of principles are most relevant for the protection of informal workers?

On the basis of the study, ideas will be developed to strengthen the guiding function of the principles with the view to better protection of informal workers. For example, a categorization of the principles in order to improve their practicability, implementation tools and indicators could be developed.

The project is a follow-up of different studies recently concluded within the framework of the Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy (Munich) and the Centre for International and Comparative Labour and Social Security Law (Johannesburg). In the project ‘International Standard Setting and Innovation in Social Security’, finalised in 2013, it has been found, among other things, that the existing international standards do not cover several social risks in an integral manner, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and migration.⁸ In addition, new methods of social protection fall outside the scope of the existing standards, which are based on traditional concepts of social insurance and social assistance. It has also been concluded that the ILO Recommendation on national social protection floors may constitute a positive response to various observed problems. This new research project builds further on these conclusions. It furthermore connects with two projects that deal with social security principles and with a study on the setting up of a social protection floor in southern African countries.⁹

Methodical Approach

For the examination of the principles within the context of a social protection floor, two tracks will be followed. The *first track* involves an analysis of the different principles on the basis of the text of the Recommendation, the preceding ILO and UN documents, and academic discourse. It will include an inventory and a discussion of legal implications and difficulties related to the principles.

EXAMPLES

The Recommendation states as one of the main principles that a benefit within the framework of a national social protection floor should be prescribed by law.¹⁰ The ILO has emphasised the importance of the rights-based approach in several attending documents. However, it has not been explained what exactly is meant by the term ‘law’. One would think that this approach would exclude innovative bottom-up schemes that are not based on national laws or regulations. Nevertheless, examples of successful schemes, such as insurance set up and run by the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, were put forward under the Decent Work Agenda¹¹ and used to be mentioned in relation to a national social protection floor or, in general, as good examples of extending social security.¹² At the same time, such grassroots initiatives have not been included in the collection of successful social protection floor experiences published by the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the ILO.¹³ This raises the question of how the rights-based

⁸ U. Becker, F. Pennings, T. Dijkhoff (eds) (2013), *International Standard Setting and Innovation in Social Security*, The Hague: Kluwer International.

⁹ U. Becker, D. Pieters, F. Ross, P. Schoukens (Hrsg.) (2010), *Security. A General Principle of Social Security Law in Europe*. Groningen: Europe Law Publishing; C. Mesa Lago, E. Hohnerlein, L. Ossio, A. Simonovits (2012), ‘Re-reforms of Privatized Pension Systems’, *ZIAS* 3/3012, pp. 189-316; M. Nyenti & L.G. Mpedi (2012), *The Impact of SADC Social Protection Instruments on the Setting Up of a Minimum Social Protection Floor in Southern African Countries*, *PER/PELJ* 2012(15).

¹⁰ Recommendation No. 202, Art. 3(b) and Art. 7.

¹¹ ILO (2001), Report of the Director-General: Reducing the Decent work Deficit - A Global Challenge, Report I(A); ILO (2002), *Decent Work and the Informal Economy*, Geneva; Christoph Ernst et al. (2012), *Decent Work and Empowerment for Pro-Poor Growth*, OECD.

¹² See, for example: European Working Group on Social Protection and Decent Work and the Grow Up Free from Poverty Coalition (2010), *Protecting People, Transforming Lives*; Olivier et. al (2012), *Informality, Employment and Social Protection: Some Critical Perspectives for/from Developing Countries*, ILERA, p. 12; Solidar, *Social Protection for All. An Action Guide*, 12; Giorgia Giovannetti et al. (2010), *The 2010 European Report on Development. Social Protection for Inclusive Development*, Brussels: European Communities, p. 57.

¹³ UNDP (2011), Special Unit for South-South Cooperation & ILO, *Sharing Innovative Experiences*, New York: UNDP.

approach should be interpreted: Does it include non-codified rights regimes, sometimes referred to as 'living law'? How does this approach relate to grassroots initiatives, often community based? In a similar way, various difficulties concerning other principles will be addressed.

The *second track* focusses on the application of the principles through case studies. Because of the nature of social protection floors – providing a *basic* level of social security – the project will focus on the developing and emerging market countries with large informal economies. In this part of the project, it will be investigated to what extent the principles listed in the Recommendation are applied indeed within social protection schemes that are considered as a part of a national social protection floor. Related legislative deficits and/or implementation failures will be identified and discussed. The case studies will be performed by national experts. For the selection of the cases, the examples of successful social protection floor experiences put forward by the ILO and United Nations Development Programme are used. These schemes are specifically designed to extend social protection to vulnerable groups of persons that are not protected by employment-related social insurance, mainly informal workers. Appendix II provides further details on the selection of the cases.

EXAMPLES

An example of an innovative social protection scheme fitting in the social protection floor context is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme in India. This scheme provides for 100 days of employment per year to members of any household in rural areas who are able and willing to do unskilled manual work. The jobs are usually in public works projects on infrastructure and the salary is according to the statutory minimum wage(s). In the case study it will be examined in what way and to what extent the different principles are incorporated in the scheme and where problematic issues relating to the principles arise. Questions can be raised, for example, on how the principle of equal treatment is safeguarded under this scheme, since it involves hard manual labour, or what the principle of universal protection means in this context. The case studies will address these questions and discuss their implications.

Importance of the Project

The ILO and other participating organizations have published several documents in which the social protection floor concept is explained and discussed.¹⁴ Furthermore, they have been occupied with collecting and documenting examples of national social security schemes that fit in the social protection floor concept.¹⁵ The scheme descriptions and discussion papers are easily accessible through the two main websites on this subject (social-protection.org and socialprotectionfloor-gateway.org) and are meant to promote the development of national social protection floors. However, in-depth academic studies that address the various problems and shortcomings of the Recommendation and of the schemes at stake are still scarce, especially legal studies. This project addresses the gap in the steadily growing body of knowledge in this field. The assessment of the principles in view of extending social security to informal workers as well as the case studies will provide in-depth information that is not available yet. The project will therefore significantly

¹⁴ For example, ILO (2010), *Extending Social Security to All. A Guide through Challenges and Options*, Geneva; ILO (2012), *Social Protection Floors for Social Justice and a Fair Globalization*, Geneva; ILO & WHO (2009), *The Social Protection Floor. A Joint Crisis Initiative of the UN Chief Executives Board for Co-ordination on the Social Protection Floor*, Geneva.

¹⁵ For example, UNDP & ILO (2011), *Sharing Innovative Experiences. Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences*, Volume 18, New York.

contribute to the knowledge, clarification, and concretisation of the Recommendation and the principles that it enshrines.

The assessment of the selected schemes on the basis of the principles will bring to the surface at what points the schemes do well and at what points they may fall short of the social protection floor perspective. An identification of non-compliance with certain principles may contribute to the improvement of similar schemes in future. The case studies will furthermore bring a variety of options to consider in building national social protection floors and provide an overview of pitfalls and obstacles that should be avoided or overcome. In addition, through the assessment of the different schemes, the value of the different principles in relation to unconventional social security will become apparent, which will strengthen the guiding role of the Recommendation.

Output

The output of the project will consist of several elements.

- An exploratory paper addressing the principles as well as the different questions that may be raised in relation to the Recommendation.
- A workshop (2 or 3 days) with the different contributors to the project in order to attune the various case studies and accentuate the focus of the research.
- Final output: A volume edited by Tineke Dijkhoff and George Mpedi. The first part of the volume comprising a theoretical discussion of the principles and the identified legal issues (results of track 1), the second part comprising the case studies (track 2), followed by the conclusions in which the outcomes of the various studies will be brought together and discussed. For a provisional outline of the volume, see Appendix I.

Time Schedule

Time target	
November 2015	Invitations to national experts for participation (case studies) Search for a publisher
November 2015	Submission of a funding application for the conference
December 2015	Introductory paper as a basis for the case studies sent to the contributors (theoretical framework – discussion of the legal basis and brief explanation of the principles)
January 2016	Decision about the funding for the conference
May 2016	Deadline for the first draft of the case studies
May/June 2016	Conference in Johannesburg – discussion of first drafts of the case studies

September 2016	Deadline for the revised case studies
November 2016	Concluding chapter by the editors
January 2017	Editing of the manuscript
February 2017	Manuscript forwarded to the publisher

Relevant Literature

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- Mesa Lago, M., E. Hohnerlein. & L. Ossio, A. Simonovits, 'Re-reforms of Privatized Pension Systems', in *ZIAS* 3/2012, pp. 189-316.
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- Piron, L.H. (2004), *Rights-Based Approaches to Social Protection*, Theme Papers on Social Protection, London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Sepúlveda Carmona, M., *Final Draft of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the UN General Assembly, 18 July 2012.
- UNDP & ILO (2011), *Sharing Innovative Experiences. Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences*, Volume 18, New York.

Appendix I: Provisional Outline of the Book

1. *Introduction*

PART I

2. *The Recommendation on National Social Protection Floors*

A theoretical discussion of the instrument, including:

- Background and development of the Recommendation
- The concept of a national social protection floor
- The relevance of the instrument for developing countries

3. *The Principles*

- Discussion of the given principles: background, legal basis and explanation
- Legal issues, features, and challenges (national, regional and international perspective)
- Possible categorisation of the principles

PART II

4-11. *Case Studies*

QUESTIONS:

- To what extent does the scheme comply with the basic principles listed in the Recommendation (both in terms of regulation and in practice)?
- What are the related legislative deficits and/or implementation failures?
- What can be concluded on the basis of the case study about the applicability and/or suitability of the given principles in relation to the social protection of informal workers?

STRUCTURE:

- Background, context and description of the scheme, including
 - the role of / relationship with the Social Protection Floor Initiative / ILO / Recommendation 202
 - data (if available) on the impact on poverty and/or coverage of informal workers
 - an account of existing problems/issues regarding the scheme
- Assessment of the scheme on the basis of the principles:
 - state responsibility
 - universality of protection
 - entitlements based on law (incl. inspection, enforcement, effective and accessible complaint- and appeal procedures)
 - adequacy and predictability of benefits (accessibility, sufficiency, and responsiveness to the specific needs)
 - non-discrimination (including gender, nationality, status of employment)
 - financial solidarity
 - good governance
 - coherence of policies
 - social participation (both in the design and administration of a scheme) and freedom of association
- Discussion of legislative deficits and/or implementation failures flowing from the assessment
- Conclusions about the meaning, applicability and suitability of the principles in their specific context and, if possible, recommendations for tackling the problems/deficits

PART III

11. *Conclusions*

Appendix II: Selection of the Case Studies

Ideally, the selection of schemes should cover the different pillars of a social protection floor as well as different parts of the world consisting of developing countries and emerging economies. Furthermore, to optimally contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the building of social protection floors, innovative schemes of different design are to be examined. At the same time, the limited scale of the project requires choices to be made. The first choice involves a focus on cash transfer schemes, thus excluding health insurance. Of course, health care is a fundamental pillar of a social protection floor; however, health insurance characteristics differ greatly from cash benefit schemes. By exclusively dealing with the latter, the project will lead to focused and coherent results, providing a comprehensive insight in the applicability and value of the principles in relation with a variety of cash benefits. An investigation of health care schemes in the light of the Recommendation could be the subject of a next project.

Cash transfers are defined as direct, regular and predictable non-contributory cash payments that aim to provide poor and vulnerable households with sufficient resources to enable them to maintain a basic livelihood.¹⁶ These payments are typically targeted to the poor and vulnerable and can be provided in many different ways, such as child benefits, old-age pensions, disability benefits. Increasingly frequent, benefits are made conditional upon the fulfilment of behavioural requirements by the recipients, often involving school attendance of the children and regular medical consultations. During the past two decades, cash transfer programmes have significantly gained in popularity as an instrument to reduce poverty and vulnerability in developing countries. There is evidence that cash transfers can reduce the depth and severity of poverty, reduce inequality, increase access to health and education services, and strengthen household productivity.¹⁷ As such, they can constitute an important part of a national social protection floor. In fact, almost all of the ILO examples of successful social protection floor experiences are either health care schemes, or cash transfer schemes (unconditional as well as conditional) and many low income countries are considering new programmes in the near future. In view of these developments, the choice for a focus on cash transfer schemes is both relevant and topical.

For the selection of case studies, the examples of successful social protection floor experiences put forward by the UNDP and the ILO are used as a basis.¹⁸ The schemes mentioned in this document are all meant to extend social security to vulnerable groups of persons that are not protected by ‘traditional’ – employment related – social security. Because of their explicit link with the Social Protection Floor Initiative, it is our hypothesis that the schemes mentioned in this context comply with the principles laid down in the Recommendation at least to a certain extent. At the same time, several

¹⁶ See, for example, WB (2012), *Safety Nets: Cash Transfers*.

¹⁷ See, for example, WB (2012), *Safety Nets: Cash Transfers*; C. Arnold, T. Conway and M. Greenslade (2011), *Cash Transfers Literature Review*, DFID Policy division; M. Samson (2009), *Social Cash Transfers and Pro-Poor Growth*, OECD; R. Ballard (2013), ‘Geographies of Development II: Cash Transfers and the Reinvention of Development for the Poor’, *Prog Hum Geogr*, 17 January 2013; IDEAS (2011), ‘Cash Transfers as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction: A Critical Assessment’, *IDEAS Policy Brief No. 3/2011*; A. Barrientos (2010), ‘Social Protection and Poverty’, *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper Number 42*, UNRISD, p. 14 vv.

¹⁸ UNDP & ILO (2011), *Successful Social Protection Floor Experiences*, Geneva: International Labour Office.

schemes were designed before the launch of the social floor idea or derived from old-established schemes, while others are new and perhaps suffer from unforeseen problems. Therefore, it is likely that several compliance gaps exist with the list of principles included in the Recommendation. It is the purpose of the case studies to identify these gaps and evaluate their implications.

Our selection covers child benefit, unemployment, and old age and includes means-tested as well as universal schemes, conditional as well as unconditional benefits, and stand-alone schemes as well as schemes that are part of a combination of benefits. This variety in design ensures a rich spectrum of information about the application of the principles within cash transfer schemes. The selected cases do not equally represent the different continents. This follows from the fact that 7 of the 15 countries in the UNDP/ILO publication are in Latin America, the forerunner in social protection innovation, 4 in Asia and 4 in Southern Africa. Furthermore, several schemes in Asia and Africa are only in the initial stage and have only been partly implemented, which makes them unsuitable for the project – for an assessment on the basis of the principles it is necessary that the scheme has been running for at least a few years and that sufficient information is available. The selected schemes indicated in the table below seem most suitable for the project and together form a balanced set of differently designed cash benefit schemes.

Selected schemes for the research project “The ILO Recommendation on Social Protection Floors. Basic Principles for Innovative Solutions”			
CCT = conditional cash transfers			
Children/families	Name of the scheme	Design	Information
Mexico	Oportunades (2004)	Means-tested (poverty and vulnerability criteria) CCT (regular attendance at school and medical appointments); incl. food support in kind, basic health care, scholarships	UNDP/ILO 2011; SPF-gateway; http://www.oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/wb/Web/oportunidades_a_human_development_program ; http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/reducing_poverty/case/119/summary/Mexico-Oportunidades%20Summary.pdf ;
South Africa	Child support grant + access to essential services (2001)	Means-tested, targeted at children 0 to 18 years of age	GESS; SPF-Gateway; UNDP/ILO 2011, UN 2012; http://www.services.gov.za/services/content/Home/ServicesForPeople/Socialbenefits/en_ZA
Argentina	Asignacion Universal por Hijo (<i>Universal child allowance</i>) (2009)	<i>Child allowance</i> , CCT, means-tested, targeted at children 0 to 18 years of age; the child must be a member of a family group that is unemployed or active in the informal economy, - up to the age of four years (inclusive) the child must complete all compulsory health examinations and vaccination schemes; as from the age of five years and up to the age of 18 years the child must attend a public education establishment.	UNDP/ILO 2011; ISSA; http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---secsoc/documents/publication/wcms_secsoc_28022.pdf Interesting because it exclusively covers informal workers and the unemployed – extending the existing scheme for formal workers.

Working age			
Chile	Chile Solidario (2004)	CCT; part of life cycle protection, red protege	UNDP/ILO 2011, Barrientos 2010, p. 15; http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/UNICEF-WB_systems_note_formatted.pdf
India	Mah. Gandhi National Rural Empl. Guarantee scheme (2006)	CCT on work; 100 days of employment per year at the minimum wage; rural households; unskilled manual work	UNDP/ILO 2011
Rwanda	Vision 2020 Umurenge Progr. (2008)	<i>Public works</i> , 100 days employment per year; still small scale, only for the extremely poor (landless), lack of information	UNDP/ILO 2011, spf gateway http://devinforwanda.gov.rw/Publications ; http://www.unicef.org/rwanda/RWA_resources_socprotectimpl.pdf
Old age			
Namibia	National pension (1992)	Universal, 60yrs and older;	UNDP/ILO 2011, UN 2012 http://www.pension-watch.net/pensions/country-fact-file/namibia
Bolivia	Renta Dignidad (2008)	Universal old-age pension, 60yrs and older; for people also receiving other retirement pensions the benefit is 75%.	UNDP/ILO 2011
Brazil	Rural Social Insurance Programme (1992)	(Flexible) contributory pension and disability progr for people engaged in the agrarian sector.	UNDP/ILO 2011
Thailand	Pension scheme (Dec. 2009)	Universal pension scheme, 60yrs and older, for people receiving no other regular income;	UNDP/ILO 2011 http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2012/social-protection-older-persons.pdf http://www.pension-watch.net/pensions/country-fact-file/thailand

The participants are as follows:

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Pablo ARRELLANO ORTIZ, Professor of labour law and social security at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile	Chile Solidario, Chile; conditional cash transfer scheme
Tineke DIJKHOFF, researcher at Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy, Munich, Germany	Project coordination

Mariana FILCHTINGER FIGUEIREDO, Pontificia Universidad Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil	Rural Social Insurance Program, Brazil; contributory targeted scheme
Gabriela MENDIZÁBAL BERMÚDEZ, Professor at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences of Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, Xalostoc, Mexico	Opportunades, Mexico; means-tested conditional cash transfer scheme and benefits in kind
Lethokwa George MPEDI, Professor and dean of the Law Faculty and director of the Centre for International and Comparative Labour and Social Security Law, University of Johannesburg, South Africa	Child Support Grant, South-Africa; means-tested targeted scheme; concluding chapter
Mathias NYENTI, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Centre for International and Comparative Labour and Social Security Law, Faculty of Law, University of Johannesburg, South Africa	National Pension, Namibia; universal cash transfer scheme
Lorena OSSIO BUSTILLOS, researcher at Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, Frankfurt, Germany	Renta Dignidad; universal cash transfer scheme
Laura PAUTASSY, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina	Universal Child Allowance, Argentina; means-tested conditional cash transfer scheme
Babu REMESH, Associate Professor and Director of the School of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies, IGNOU University, New Dehli, India	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, India; conditional work guarantee scheme
Emmanuelle ST-PIERRE GUILBAUT, Social Protection Department of the International Labour Organisation, Geneva, Switzerland	Policy responses on the Social Protection Floors Recommendation in developing countries
Worawet SUWANRADA, Professor at the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand	500 Bath Pension Scheme, Thailand; universal cash transfer scheme