KEY POINTS

- The social protection floor (SPF) is a global initiative led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to provide social security to vulnerable groups.

- The SPF neglects the rapidly growing population of international migrants and focusses principally on citizens from lower-income countries.

- The SPF requires a method to evaluate the social protection gap that exists between citizens and non-citizens in countries that receive migrants in order to improve protections for all.

- The SPF Advisory Group must collaborate more closely with transit and receiving countries, middle- and high-income countries, and regional organizations to reduce the gaps in social protection between citizens and non-citizens.

INSERTING MIGRANTS INTO THE GLOBAL SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOOR

MARIE-HÉLÈNE RATEL, GABRIEL WILLIAMS AND KEEGAN WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTION

Unprecedented human migration is an issue of critical importance in today's rapidly globalizing world. International migrants constitute a group with more people than the population of Brazil, and they send more money home each year than the entire value of Argentina's economy (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2013). Migration flows have doubled since 1980 and show no signs of slowing down due to growing inequalities in global development, population pressure, environmental change and conflict (Koser, 2010). Compared to the majority of citizens in many countries, migrants face heightened risks because they do not receive adequate social protections such as health care, income security, education, housing or access to clean water and sanitation.

In 2009, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (UNCEB) called for a global social protection floor that led to the initiative of the same name the following year (ILO, 2013). By aiming to create a basic level of social protection for all peoples worldwide, the SPF is a positive step to maintaining UN principles, but it ultimately neglects migrants. Without the adoption of the SPF by countries where migrants transit or reside so that migrants are adequately covered and lacking a way to evaluate the status of social protection, the initiative does not meet its goals. To demonstrate the gap between citizens and non-citizens, and to move the SPF forward toward improved protections for

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migrants, a method for measuring social protection across specific contexts was developed for this brief and its use as a standardized tool to evaluate progress is strongly recommended.

THE SPF

To respond to the economic crisis of 2008–2010, the UNCEB created the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group in 2010 — composed of political leaders, policy makers and experts in social protection — to find best practices for protecting vulnerable groups in national social security systems. The resulting SPF initiative recommends extending essential protections as widely as possible, as well as raising the bar of social protection over time. The benefits of a successful SPF would be to reduce poverty and inequality, while promoting human security, political stability and economic growth (Bachelet, 2011). To achieve this, the ILO is leading a coalition of 19 UN bodies, international financial institutions and 14 development partners, including bilateral donors, developments banks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Even with its wide mandate and broad support, the SPF initiative recommendations have only been adopted by seven countries — all in the less-developed world (ILO, 2013). Voluntary participation has been limited because the SPF does not have clear standards of evaluation in order to guide implementation.

MIGRANTS AND THE SPF

Given that there is no unified system globally governing migration, the human rights of migrants remain largely unrecognized and unprotected in many countries. As they move from one country to another, migrants' ability to obtain access to health care, income security, education, water and sanitation, and housing depends

predominantly on their immigration status, which often intersects with other factors such as occupation, level of education, ethnic background or gender. Since most countries only provide protection for citizens, migrants are frequently restricted from accessing critical public goods. Even migrants in the few developed countries where legal recognition affords protection are routinely faced with laws, regulations and measures that prevent them from attaining basic rights comparable to citizens (Andersson and Nilsson, 2009). Until now, the SPF has focussed primarily on low-income (and also migrant-sending) countries with inadequate social protection for citizens (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011). Yet, providing social protection to all vulnerable populations cannot be achieved unless migrants' rights and protections are also addressed in middle- and high-income countries.

EVALUATING THE STATE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION TO ADVANCE THE SPF

Two key shortcomings of the SPF are its inadequacy to incorporate migrants and a deficit of adoption by richer countries. To move the initiative forward, we propose a method to evaluate the state of social protection in a variety of countries for citizens and non-citizens. The lack of direct, standardized and generalizable tools in the SPF hinders its adoption. If the SPF becomes effective, then it will likely be adopted by more countries. To be effective, policy makers need to be able to assess progress and make targets for the future.

The evaluation tool proposed here is a scale rated for six social protection indicators targeted by the SPF documentation: health care, employment insurance, pensions, education, housing, and water and sanitation (UNCEB, 2010). The indicators are then given a score using the three public good criteria established by the UNDP:

participation, entitlement and access (Thoyer, 2002). Five different immigration statuses were assessed: citizen, permanent resident, migrant worker, undocumented migrant worker and refugee. To calculate a country's score, the social protection of each status was measured and then all statuses were added together for a total score for a particular indicator. The result is a number from 0 to 3 for each status, 0 to 15 for each indicator and 0 to 90 for a country on social protection, with high-scoring countries having better protection than low-scoring countries.

THE RESULTS

The evaluation method was tested using a case study approach for three middle-income developing countries (Morocco, Ukraine and Malaysia), and one developed country (Sweden), since these are major receiving, sending and transit countries with different types of migrants. This method provides a standardized way to better understand the state of migrants and social protection in these countries. Although these countries have had unique policy traditions and historical legacies regarding social protection for decades, applying the evaluative method underscores an apparent similarity in social protection gaps across these differing traditions. To illustrate these gaps, Table 1 shows only citizens and undocumented migrant workers, as they are at opposite ends of the social protection continuum in each country selected.

TABLE 1: SOCIAL PROTECTION GAP FOR UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS AND CITIZENS

	Sweden	Morocco	Ukraine	Malaysia
Citizen Score (/18)	18	15	15	13
Undocumented Migrants Score (/18)	8	5	3	2
Social Protection Gap	10	10	12	11

Source: Authors.

The results show the state of social protection for migrants to be poor in all four countries. Particularly, having a precarious immigration status reduces entitlement, access and participation to public goods such as health care, employment insurance, pensions, education, housing, and water and sanitation. In most cases, countries do not provide legal entitlement to these protections for undocumented migrants and, where they do, accessing them is difficult. Because of their alienation from society, undocumented migrants cannot politically participate in the decision-making process for how protection is determined or distributed. The gap between citizens of Morocco or Sweden, for example, is less than that between citizens and undocumented migrant workers in Sweden (see Table 1). Even as the best case scenario, the renowned Swedish welfare system does not score half of the possible points for non-citizens, while citizens have a perfect score (full access to all protections), and the gap persists in Ukraine, Morocco and Malaysia.

The surprising result here is not only that migrants remain widely unprotected regardless of where they live, but that the gap is relatively constant across different country contexts. These findings show that if the SPF aims to improve protections for vulnerable groups, then it must widen the scope of its efforts to include a range of countries, despite different levels of development. To achieve its goals, the SPF must gain traction in middle- and high-income nations, requiring a greater focus on vulnerable migrant populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUDING MIGRANTS IN THE SPF

Migrant groups should be included in the SPF Advisory Group.

- The Advisory Group should initiate a "vulnerable population" working group in which migrant advocacy groups will be included to assess their specific social protection needs. The working group should have transnational migrant advocacy groups and NGOs to promote bottom-up approaches and develop strategies to empower migrants, notably refugees and undocumented workers. The group should also include transit and receiving countries to ensure a universal application of the SPF, since thus far the SPF has mainly focused its efforts on poorer countries. Middle- and high-income countries have greater financial resources to implement policies that will improve protection for the growing number of migrants; moreover, regional organizations such as the African Union, the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations should be included in the Advisory Group to observe challenges facing their countries in providing universal social protection. Policy recommendations can only be implemented successfully if they are sensitive to the local context. Regarding migrant populations, representatives from regional organizations should expand the number of countries participating in the SPF.

International agreements and frameworks aimed at protecting migrants should be integrated into the SPF mandate.

- Including missing migrants in the SPF must be addressed from a human rights-based approach in accordance with the human rights principles proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights, to ensure that all receive protection equally and universally. More practically, the SPF Advisory Group should work in accordance with the Global Forum on Migration and Development's policy recommendations, which aim to include migrants in the development agenda.

The SPF Advisory Group should encourage more collaboration across countries that send, receive and have transit migrants.

- In order to implement specific initiatives and ensure protection without borders to migrants, the SPF Advisory Group should encourage countries to enter into talks aimed at creating better protection policies for migrants. These policies include portability agreements that provide social protection and benefits across borders and remittance matching for diaspora groups. These agreements can be implemented as part of wider bilateral or multilateral trade agreements, and can help establish a planned, protected flow of migrant groups from one country to another. Portability of benefits can also help tackle poverty in old age if migrants were to return home. Migrant-sending countries typically have lower purchasing power parity in their home countries and would require less pensionable benefits than citizens of the receiving country, making the process inexpensive.

The SPF Advisory Group should incorporate and use the method of evaluation proposed in this brief as a basis for evidence-based policy.

- The method outlined in this brief shows the social protection gap between citizens and non-citizens in a variety of country contexts, and demonstrates the need to improve social protection for migrants in richer countries. Establishing clear criteria for countries to improve their social protection of migrants will lead to greater involvement by these countries and greater attention from the international community. Targets from these results could be modelled after the successful UN Millennium Development Goals, but with more local context, and would expand the SPF to migrants while raising the international profile of the SPF.

CONCLUSION

The SPF has enormous potential to protect vulnerable groups within a wide array of country contexts. Until now, the SPF has been limited by lack of adoption from middle- to high-income countries as well as unclear standards of evaluation. This brief has shown that gaps in social protection between migrants and citizens exist in middle- and high-income countries in addition to low-income countries, and therefore need to be part of the SPF in order to protect migrants. In evaluating and extending social protection, the SPF Advisory Group provides the best forum for this goal to be met. The recommendations in this brief provide the impetus for this group to address the missing migrants in their policies, encourage adoption by wealthier countries, and establish clear and fair standards of evaluation of the SPF.

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