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Global knowledge sharing on social protection—A tropical G20 legacy

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ACRONYMS

4Ps: Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program—Philippines conditional cash transfer programme

ABC: Brazilian Cooperation Agency (*Agência Brasileira de Cooperação*)

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AI: Artificial Intelligence

APSP: Asia-Pacific Social Protection (Week)—Regional event co-organised with the Asian Development Bank

AusAID: Australian Agency for International Development—Merged into DFAT in 2013

BASIC: Better Assistance in Crises (Research)—FCDO-funded programme

BDP: Bureau for Development Policy—UNDP

BMZ: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development Germany

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa—Grouping; membership has since expanded

CAR: Comprehensive Accountability Report—G20, St Petersburg 2013

CCT: Conditional Cash Transfer

CDEMA: Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

DFAT: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—Australia

DFID: Department for International Development—UK; merged into FCDO in 2020

DINTE: Directorate for International Studies (Diretoria de Estudos Internacionais)—Ipea

DWG: Development Working Group—G20

ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

EPWP: Expanded Public Works Programme—South Africa

ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia—United Nations

EU: European Union

EWG: Employment Working Group—G20

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation—United Nations

FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—UK; formed from the 2020 merger of DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

G20: Group of Twenty

G7: Group of Seven

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GESS: Global Extension of Social Security—ILO

GIZ: *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*—Germany; successor to GTZ

GTZ: *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*—Germany; predecessor of GIZ

HIPC: Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (Initiative)

IBSA: India, Brazil, South Africa (Dialogue Forum)

IDB: Inter-American Development Bank

ILO: International Labour Organisation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IPC: International Poverty Centre—Predecessor of IPC-IG, 2004–2009

IPC-IG: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth—Renamed from IPC in 2009; discontinued by UNDP in 2022, succeeded by IPCid

IPCid: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Development—Hosted by Ipea; continues IPC-IG's work

Ipea: Institute for Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*)—Brazil

ISPA: Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments

ITC: International Trade Centre

KfW: Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau—German government-owned development bank

LDCs: Least Developed Countries

LEA: Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty—Ghana

LICs: Low-Income Countries

LMS: Learning Management System

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

MDS: Ministry of Social Development Brazil

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MENASP: Middle East and North Africa Social Policy Network

MICs: Middle-Income Countries

MIS: Monitoring and Information Systems

MRE: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministério das Relações Exteriores*)—Brazil

MYAP: Multi-Year Action Plan—G20 Seoul Development Consensus

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

NREGA: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act—India

OAS: Organisation of American States

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OPM: Oxford Policy Management

OSSREA: Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa

PAA: Food Acquisition Programme (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos)*—Brazil

PKH: *Program Keluarga Harapan*—Indonesia conditional cash transfer programme

PSNP: Productive Safety Net Programme—Ethiopia

RSR: Rapid Social Response—World Bank

SDG(s): Sustainable Development Goal(s)

SIDS: Small Island Developing States

SPIAC-B: Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board

SSBG: Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth—G20 Framework, adopted at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit

STAAR: Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice, and Resources Facility—FCDO-funded

T20: Think20—G20 engagement group

TRANSFORM: A Leadership and Transformation Learning Initiative on Building and Managing Social Protection Floors

TT-SSC: Task Team on South-South Cooperation—G20

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UN-DESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNRISD: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

USA: United States of America

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USP2030: Universal Social Protection 2030—Global Partnership

WFP: World Food Programme

WHO: World Health Organization

1 ABSTRACT

This paper traces the institutional history of the socialprotection.org platform, established at the recommendation of the G20 Development Working Group in 2011. The G20 response to the financial crisis prompted recast social protection as an automatic macroeconomic stabiliser and recommended a knowledge-sharing platform to support low-income countries in strengthening their social protection systems. Drawing on institutional archives and semi-structured interviews with country delegates and institutional architects, the study examines why the DWG delegated custody of the platform to a Global South project (the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, IPC-IG, in Brazil) and follows its subsequent operational evolution. The findings reveal a central paradox. Over its first decade, the platform achieved technical success as an unbranded global public good. Yet within the G20 DWG process, it suffered a political "fading memory". The paper then examines the platform's recent re-engagement with the G20 under the Brazilian (2024) and South African (2025) presidencies and challenges it is likely to face amid reduced commitment to international development cooperation.

Keywords: social protection; G20 Development Working Group; knowledge sharing; international development cooperation

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The motivation for this working paper arose in 2025 during the period I worked in an advisory capacity for the Government of Brazil's G20 Development Working Group (DWG) team. Upon reviewing the draft zero of "Universal Social Protection Floor System—Outline for High-Level Principles on Universal Social Protection Floors," a policy document developed under the social protection priority of the South African G20 Presidency, I noted a complete absence of references to the 2010–2012 foundational processes that established the socialprotection.org platform and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). This administrative amnesia was equally evident during formal DWG sessions and broader delegate discussions.

To address this gap, the Brazilian delegation requested an agenda item during the third DWG meeting in Durban, South Africa, in May 2025, providing an opportunity to present the platform's history alongside its recent operational and governance updates.

Archival research conducted for that presentation revealed significant gaps in institutional memory: the official G20 DWG repository (https://dwgg20.org/) omits all working documents prior to 2013. The formal texts from the 2010–2012 ministerial cycles are preserved in the G20 Research Group repository at the University of Toronto (https://g20.utoronto.ca/). Reconstructing the political rationale behind the platform's creation required direct access to internal unpublished draft documents and interviews with the original architects of the "Pillar 6: Growth with Resilience" agenda.

I am indebted to the key informants[1] who shared their technical records, correspondence, and personal recollections of the 2010–2012 negotiations. Federico Bonaglia (OECD

1. See Annex A.

Development Centre) generously provided critical early draft documents and institutional context. Rachel Slater first highlighted the structural significance of these negotiations to me in 2023, emphasising Australia's insistence on anchoring the global platform within a Global South institution like the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). Her early advice directly informed the research design of this project and led me to interview Robin Davies in December 2025. As Australia's formal delegate to the DWG during the design of the Seoul Multi-Year Action Plan, Robin Davies provided invaluable insights into the operational mechanics of Pillar 6. His subsequent work as an independent observer of the G20 framework proved essential for clarifying the structural causes of the institutional "fading memory" documented in this paper.

Ambassador Luís Antonio Balduino, Brazil's delegate to the DWG during 2010–2012, confirmed that institutional memory regarding the platform's origin had similarly eroded within the Brazilian government, a shift primarily explained by the fact that the IPC-IG's early diplomatic contact with the DWG was channelled exclusively through United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Vinícius Pinheiro (ILO) provided a vital perspective on the division of labour between the DWG and the Employment Working Group (EWG), alongside the normative influence of the Bachelet Report during the French G20 Presidency in 2011. Thierry Sorret (UNDP) verified the central role of Shantanu Mukherjee as the primary UNDP focal point for early knowledge-management deliverables.

A formal interview with Shantanu Mukherjee could not be realised. A detailed analysis of archival e-mail logs between the former UNDP Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) officials and IPC-IG staff, catalogued by Mariana Hoffmann prior to her departure from the Centre, clarified the rapid evolution and subsequent disengagement of UNDP headquarters from the operational architecture of the platform. I am grateful to André Lyra and Igor Uriel from the socialprotection.org IT infrastructure team, who successfully recovered internal institutional e-mails from the 2010–2016 period, which were critical to reconstructing the operational timeline. Mariana Balboni and Marina Carvalho provided indispensable historical data and verified recent administrative updates regarding the platform's current governance transition.

Rathin Roy and Radhika Lal (former UNDP staff at the IPC-IG) provided clarity on the distinct mandates of UNDP headquarters and the IPC-IG, emphasising how Australia-commissioned analytical work originally solidified the Centre's technical credentials to host the platform. Lilian Hamada and Kerri Elgar contributed critical accounts of the 2011 French G20 Presidency debates, establishing how a Brazil-hosted platform resolved competing inter-agency interests.

My work with the platform was made possible by the sustained institutional backing of the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) and by the work of researchers and former institutional leaders such as Ivan Oliveira, José Eduardo Brandão, Rafael Osorio, Ricardo Campante, Luis Henrique Paiva, Alexandre Cunha, Sergei Soares, Paulo Jacinto, Alexandre Yawata, among others. I am grateful for the support of successive Ipea administrations that managed the complex administrative transition following the dissolution of the IPC-IG and the negotiation of the agreement that allowed the platform to survive. The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) led by Ambassador Ruy Pereira provided critical support during this process. The current Ipea administration under Luciana Servo's leadership at Ipea and Keiti Gomes at the Department of International Studies have scaled up support to the platform, as confirmed by the finalisation of the agreement with UNRISD.

I am grateful to the General Coordination of the G20 at Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), specifically Secretaries Celeste Badaró and Diogo Almeida, Minister Felipe Hess, and Counsellor Flávio Pazeto, for welcoming Ipea's technical inputs within the G20 DWG during the G20 Brazil and G20 South Africa presidencies. Sincere thanks are also due to the South African G20 DWG coordinators, especially Josephilda Nhlapo-Hlope, for facilitating the presentation of the platform and to the country delegates for their engagement with this issue. Finally, I acknowledge Ministers Renato Godinho and Saulo Ceolin, coordinators of the Task Force for the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty during the G20 Brazil, for our close collaboration and for reaching out to the socialprotection.org platform and the SPIAC-B in the process of building the Global Alliance.

For research assistance, this project used artificial intelligence tools, including SciSpace, NotebookLM, Gemini Pro, and Claude Cowork. These models provided computational support to establish, handle, cross-reference, and compare a database of more than 250 archival sources and papers. Claude Cowork was also used for copyediting. This support improved the analytical precision and structural organisation of the final text.

3 DISCLAIMER

The author was formally affiliated with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) from its establishment in 2004 until its administrative dissolution in 2022. During the foundational 2010–2012 G20 negotiation cycles, the author was engaged strictly in directing the internal analytical and research outputs of the Centre and did not participate in the political deliberations of the G20 Development Working Group in any official capacity.

However, I directly led the technical negotiations regarding the structural transition from the initial automated search prototype to the fully operational, unbranded version of the gateway launched in 2015. This process was managed in close coordination with officials from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), formerly AusAID, including Lisa Hannigan, Joanna Pickles, and Tom Tanhchareun. On the IPC-IG side, this effort was supported by Mariana Hoffmann, Zena Mouawad, Diana Sawyer, Rafael Osorio (Ipea), and Sergei Soares (Ipea). Following its development phase, the platform's operational deployment was steered by Alicia Spengler, who secured the initial compliance and collaboration of the multilateral agencies. It was subsequently consolidated by Mariana Balboni, who institutionalised the gateway as a global hub for social protection. Currently, I represent Ipea in the Secretariat of the socialprotection.org platform. The views and analytical conclusions expressed in this working paper belong solely to me and do not represent the official positions of Ipea, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), or any of the bilateral funding agencies that support socialprotection.org. Any remaining errors and omissions are also my responsibility."

4 INTRODUCTION: THE TRIPLE F CRISIS AND THE G20 MACROECONOMIC RESPONSE

In response to the global instability of 2007-2009, often termed the "Triple F" crisis due to its converging finance, food, and fuel price dimensions,[2] several middle-income countries expanded their social protection programmes. They achieved this expansion by increasing transfer values and loosening eligibility criteria to incorporate more beneficiaries.[3] These measures were designed to shield vulnerable populations while ensuring a rapid economic recovery by stimulating internal demand. This counter-cyclical response was possible largely due to the institutional infrastructure established during the late 1990s and early 2000s to support the implementation of diverse social assistance schemes in the Global South.[4]

The implementation of these interventions, particularly Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), was most prominent in Latin America (Cecchini et al. 2012). This regional expansion was exemplified by *Bolsa Família* in Brazil, *Familias en Acción* in Colombia, *Progresa* in Mexico, and *Chile Solidario* in Chile. Adoption also grew in Asia, encompassing programmes like Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) in Indonesia and Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines (Saguin and Sha 2021). Parallel to these developments, international cooperation supported the testing and scaling up of pilot cash transfer programmes across Sub-Saharan Africa during the mid-2000s in countries such as Kenya and Zambia, as well as Ghana (Garcia and Moore 2012; Niño-Zarazúa 2010).[5]

A distinct novelty of these programmes was that they were not designed merely as temporary safety nets responding to structural adjustment measures. In most cases, they were established as permanent features of comprehensive social protection systems. These systems proved capable of acting as shock-responsive instruments during crises by expanding beneficiary coverage or increasing transfer values, while retaining a long-term ambition to link with sectoral policies. By fostering links with health, education, and nutrition, they aimed to build human capital and facilitate transitions into the labour market or entrepreneurship. This perspective extended beyond Latin America cash transfers. It was also embedded in new forms of public works such as the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia, the *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (NREGA) in India and the *Expanded Public Works Programme* (EPWP) in South Africa. This new wave of employment programmes intended to go beyond short-term objectives as they emphasised skills building and asset creation (Lal & Veras Soares, 2012; McCord, 2012).

2. The term *"triple-F crisis"* was used in the literature to describe the mutually reinforcing impacts of the global financial crisis, the food price crisis, and the fuel/energy price shock that unfolded between 2007 and 2009, particularly affecting low- and middle-income countries. See (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2009; Samuels et al., 2011; Sumner & Wolcott, 2009).

3. Later on the specialised literature termed these procedures as vertical and horizontal expansion, respectively, as key shock-responsive social protection tools (Oxford Public Management, 2017).

4. During the 2008–09 crisis, several Global South nations leveraged pre-existing or rapidly expanded social protection systems as counter-cyclical tools. Experiences from Brazil (*Bolsa Família*), India (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), China (Minimum Livelihood Guarantee, or Dibao), Mexico (*Oportunidades*), Indonesia (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai*), and South Africa (social grants and the Expanded Public Works Programme) demonstrate that these interventions successfully stabilised household incomes while maintaining the domestic demand necessary to accelerate broader economic recovery (Barrientos, 2013; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2009; International Labour Organization, 2011a; Lal & Veras Soares, 2012).

5. While much of the policy focus in Latin America centered on conditional cash transfers (CCTs), there was also distinct interest in unconditional models, including social pensions and child allowances. This interest grew because the administrative costs of monitoring conditionalities were often considered too high for low-income or even middle-income states (Barrientos, 2013).

Inspired and informed by these innovations, international organisations and national ministries engaged in diverse global and regional knowledge-sharing and policy transfer initiatives (Howlett & Saguin, 2021). In Latin America, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Organisation of American States (OAS) facilitated regional, and occasionally global, knowledge exchange (Gonnet, 2021).[6] At the global level, DFID (former UK bilateral cooperation agency), GiZ (German Technical Cooperation agency) and AusAID (former Australia cooperation agency) played an important role in supporting trilateral cooperation on social protection.

The International Poverty Centre (IPC), which became operational in 2004 and was renamed the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in 2009, was a distinctive vehicle in the ecosystem of institutions and initiatives supporting knowledge sharing and policy transfers on social protection at both regional and global levels during the late 2000s. A partnership between the UNDP and the Government of Brazil, the IPC-IG was a hybrid UN-managed and government-supported initiative that served as a catalyst for several knowledge exchange processes, drawing heavily on the host country's experience,[7] while expanding its scope beyond it. It played a crucial role in producing knowledge and shaping policy dialogues regarding emerging social protection programmes in the Global South.

Unlike purely UN-led processes, the IPC-IG was anchored in developing country experience. It bridged research, through its linkages with the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea),[8] and implementation expertise by facilitating government-to-government exchanges (Morais De Sá E Silva, 2017; Niño-Zarazúa, 2010; Pomeroy et al., 2021). Additionally, Brazil's engagement with the IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, South Africa) and the BRICS, alongside regional integration processes, provided the IPC-IG with diverse entry points, a strong South-South perspective, and the convening power to support learning without adhering to standard organisational blueprints (Stone et al., 2021; Waisbich, 2023).

These regional and global knowledge-sharing mechanisms operated within the theoretical framework of policy diffusion and instrument constituencies. International organisations and research hubs, such as the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the IPC-IG, functioned as critical nodes that facilitated the transnational movement of these policy instruments. By acting as knowledge brokers, they enabled the translation and diffusion of localised Global South innovations into accepted global development paradigms (Gonnet, 2021; Howlett & Saguin, 2021).

This process of institutionalisation and domestic expansion of social protection coincided with a major shift in framing occurring in the G20, which adopted a formal development agenda following the 2009 London leaders' summit and the 2010 Seoul Development Consensus (Callaghan, 2013; O'Keeffe, 2013). The G20's strategic elevation of social protection was reinforced by a growing recognition that previous international frameworks, particularly

6. Similar processes were also observed in Sub-Saharan Africa with the Livingstone process (Niño-Zarazúa, 2010) and in Asia to a lesser extent (Saguin & Sha, 2021)

7. Brazil's pioneering role in scaling up conditional cash transfer programmes like *Bolsa Família* placed the country at the forefront of international development cooperation. Besides Brazil traditional engagement in South-South cooperation, the evidence generated around these programmes helped it become the focus of trilateral cooperation initiatives.

8. The institutionalization of these domestic policies allowed domestic research institutes to generate crucial evidence that became the basis for widespread South-South policy diffusion (Leite et al., 2015). Ipea research played a crucial role in this process.

the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were inherently flawed because they were blind to the fundamental conditions necessary for sustained, resilient economic growth, most notably effective social protection systems (Davies, 2014b). In this context, the G20 began to approach social protection as a core macroeconomic stabiliser rather than an isolated micro-level safety net. This shift was driven by a pragmatic determination to protect global prosperity, allowing economic shocks to be absorbed rather than magnified across borders (Davies, 2014b). Under this macroeconomic resilience framework, the expansion of social protection became a critical instrument strengthens state resilience and maintaining global aggregate demand during times of crisis (Davies, 2014a).

The G20 committed to supporting low-income countries (LICs) in building the instruments necessary to benefit from the Framework for Strong, Sustainable, and Balanced Growth adopted at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit (G20 Leaders, 2009a). This commitment occurred as upper-middle-income countries rapidly expanded their own social protection systems. The Development Working Group (DWG), established in 2010 under the Korean Presidency, advanced this agenda by adopting Social Protection as a key action under the "Pillar 6: Growth with Resilience" of its Multi-Year Action Plan (MYAP). This pillar emphasised the importance of knowledge sharing from middle-income to low-income countries and improving coordination among international organisations providing social protection advisory services (G20 Development Working Group, 2010).

This paper documents the process that led to the creation of the knowledge-sharing platform socialprotection.org, a G20 DWG recommendation during the 2011 French Presidency, which was implemented by the Brazil-based IPC-IG with financial support from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). The paper relies on a review of official and unofficial draft documents published or circulated between 2010 and 2012 among stakeholders involved in the G20 DWG MYAP Growth with Resilience Pillar. It also draws on ten semi-structured interviews with key informants, including country delegates and advisors from Australia, France, and Brazil, alongside international organisations representatives and former IPC-IG staff.[9]

This paper examines the institutional rationale behind the G20 Development Working Group's decision to delegate the mandate for the social protection gateway to the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). It traces the platform's operational trajectory and its structural relationship with sister G20 recommendations, specifically the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). The study concludes by assessing the platform's ongoing relevance within contemporary development cooperation frameworks.

Following this introduction, Section 2 examines the emergence of knowledge sharing on social protection as a core mandate within the G20. The paper then shifts to the platform's institutional origins, with Sections 3 and 4 detailing the rationale for delegating the hosting mandate to the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the subsequent operational steps culminating in the 2015 launch of socialprotection.org. Section 5 contrasts the platform's technical expansion with its fluctuating political visibility within the Development Working Group (DWG), highlighting its recent resurgence under the 2025 South African G20 presidency. The study concludes by assessing the ongoing necessity of global knowledge brokering in social protection and identifying structural alternatives to sustain these processes across rotating G20 presidencies.

9. See full list of interviewees in Annex A.

5 SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE G20: THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT

Established in 1999 in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis, the G20 (Group of Twenty) used to bring together finance ministers and central bank governors from G7 and other developed (e.g. Australia and Republic of Korea) and developing countries to share information and coordinate measures with a view to preventing the global spread of financial crises and to reducing systemic risk. Before 2008 crisis, the G20 was restricted to what is known in its current configuration as the Finance Track. Development issues were very marginal in the G20 discussions and restricted to its intersection with finance. As a result, challenges faced by low-income countries only appeared in the context of discussions around debt relief such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and access to international finance.

With the 2008 crisis, the G20 was upgraded to the level of head of states and governments (G20 leaders) with a deeper and broader focus that has evolved, not without criticism, to encompass several (sustainable) development issues, including employment and labour markets, social protection systems, food security, inequality, gender, climate change, and international development cooperation.

The G20's role expanded beyond crisis prevention and macroeconomic coordination to include support for development-oriented policies aimed at building resilient economies and sustaining inclusive growth. A first hint on the new status of "development" on the G20 agenda came from the 2008 G20 Washington leaders' declaration on financial markets and the world economy that reaffirmed the importance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and of their development assistance commitments as they were conscious "of the impact of the crisis on developing countries, particularly the most vulnerable" (G20 Leaders, 2008).

The 2009 G20 London Declaration framed recovery around the principle that sustained growth must be inclusive, socially grounded, with benefits extending to emerging and low-income countries as well as future generations. It was in this context that social protection was elevated to one of the priorities of the G20, with a clear commitment to "making available resources for social protection for the poorest countries" mainly "through voluntary bilateral contributions to the World Bank's Vulnerability Framework, including the Infrastructure Crisis Facility, and the Rapid Social Response Fund" (G20 Leaders, 2009b).[10] The London Summit also saw the G20 call upon the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and other relevant organisations, to "assess the actions taken and those required for the future" initiating a formal relationship that would become crucial for the technical work around social protection in the G20 (G20 Leaders, 2009b).

10. Rapid Social Response (RSR) Multi-Donor Trust Fund has functioned as an upstream financial mechanism to build adaptive social protection. The fund distributed USD149.8 million across 420 grants during its fifteen-year lifespan, de-risking the administrative delivery systems required to anchor larger lending streams (World Bank Group, 2024). This initial technical assistance mobilized USD8.5 billion in International Development Association (IDA) concessional financing alongside USD8.7 billion in International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) operations as of December 2021 streams (World Bank Group, 2024). Sub-Saharan Africa captured exactly half of all RSR allocations by both volume and value, totalling USD74 million streams (World Bank Group, 2024). RSR grants directly financed the creation of unified social registries and targeting platforms in Malawi and Liberia, establishing operational delivery infrastructures where formal safety nets were previously absent. These small-scale technical investments allowed recipient states to permanently replace reactive crisis relief with predictable, systems-based social protection (World Bank Group, 2024). It is also important to mention that by funding analytical work, piloting innovations, and supporting country operations, RSR has helped generate the data, evidence, and operational models that underpin platforms such as ASPIRE, S4YE, USP2030, and SPIAC-B (World Bank Group, 2024).

In addition, the G20 London Declaration also welcomed the reports of the London Jobs Conference and the Rome Social Summit and the key principles they proposed that took place on the eve of the G20 London meeting. The report produced with inputs of the London Jobs Conference was further refined and submitted to the 2009 Pittsburgh summit. The report presented the results of an ILO survey and initial assessment of employment and social protection measures implemented by 54 countries across various regions and income groups between mid-2008 and 30 July 2009. The results showed that lower and middle-income countries, on average, implemented a higher number of measures to stimulate demand and expand social protection compared to labour market policies. High-income countries, conversely, invested more in stimulating labour demand and labour market policies. Low-income countries generally undertook fewer policy initiatives, most likely due to resource and capacity constraints (International Labour Organisation, 2009).

The adoption of the G20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable, and Balanced Growth (SSBG) at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit can be seen as the foundational agreement of the new phase of the G20 coordination efforts. The "sustainable" dimension of the framework meant it should be consistent with social and environmental goals, and its "balanced" dimension implied it should be "broadly shared across countries and regions"; avoid "persistent internal (within countries) or external (between countries) imbalances"; and support convergence toward higher standard of living (G20 Leaders, 2009a). References to social protection and employment in the new G20 format were mostly related to this framework. Social protection, referred to as social safety nets, was seen as an instrument that could be used to attenuate the impact of the crisis on poor households, sustain aggregate demand through internal consumption and in doing so help to address external trade imbalances without recurring to protectionism. At that point, the ILO, the UN, the World Bank, and even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have been pointing out the role of social protection as a countercyclical measure capable to cushion the impact of the crisis (International Labour Organisation, 2009; International Monetary Fund, 2009, 2010; United Nations General Assembly, 2009).

The Toronto G20 Leaders' Declaration (2010) marked a transitional phase in the incorporation of employment and social protection concerns into the G20 agenda by explicitly welcoming the recommendations of the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers Meeting held in April 2010. This political recognition was followed by a gradual differentiation of responsibilities across the G20's dual-track structure. Within the Finance Track, employment considerations were increasingly addressed through the implementation of the Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth (operationalised by the Framework Working Group) where job creation and inclusive demand were framed as outcomes of sound macroeconomic coordination.[11] In parallel, the leaders agreed to establish a Working Group on Development, asserting that narrowing the development gap and reducing poverty are integral to the broader G20 objective of achieving strong, sustainable, and balanced growth. This group was instructed to elaborate a development agenda and multi-year action plans to be adopted at the Seoul Summit in November 2010.

11. The inclusion of ILO, alongside the IMF, World Bank and OECD, to support the Mutual Assessment Process (MAP) set up to monitor the implementation of the Framework on Strong Sustainable and Balanced Growth (SSBG) was a clear signal that concerns around employment should also be dealt with by the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (Finance Track).

6 THE SEOUL MANDATE: EMBEDDING SOCIAL PROTECTION WITHIN THE DWG

The 2010 Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth and its accompanying Multi-Year Action Plan (MYAP) annexed to the G20 Leaders' Declaration adopted a framework to mitigate the impact of external economic shocks on developing countries, elevating social protection to a central priority under the "Growth with Resilience" pillar, designated as Pillar 6 and co-facilitated and led by Australia, Indonesia and Italy (G20 Leaders, 2010a, 2010b).[12]

Following the shift in the G20 approach to social protection - seen as an automatic macroeconomic stabilisers capable of providing structural income security for poor households and sustaining aggregate domestic demand during macroeconomic disruptions—[13] the DWG MYAP committed to supporting developing countries to strengthen their social protection programmes. Specifically, under Pillar 6, Action 1, G20 leaders explicitly requested that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in consultation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other multilateral development banks, undertake three core activities. These were: (i) identifying, mapping, and analysing lessons learned from the implementation of specific social protection mechanisms across developing countries, particularly Low-Income Countries (LICs), during and after the crisis; (ii) formulating concrete, actionable, and evidence-based best practice guidelines compiled from these documented country experiences; and (iii) making specific strategic recommendations on how to actively surmount structural, financial, and legal barriers that inhibit cross-country programme replication, expansion, and knowledge sharing (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011).

This final mandate for cross-country knowledge management directly converged with MYAP Pillar 9 (Knowledge Sharing). During the 2011 DWG deliberations in March 2011 (Paris meeting), member states strongly rejected the imposition of "one-size-fits-all" mandates, insisting instead that social protection frameworks must respect "national ownership" and be tailored to a country's specific fiscal and institutional context (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011; International Labour Organisation (ILO) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2011). It was instrumental for the social protection mandate of the Growth with Resilience Pillar that Pillar 9 explicitly requested the Task Team on South-South Cooperation (TT-SSC) and the UNDP to work on recommendations for scaling up knowledge-sharing activities through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation. This approach was chosen so that LICs could adapt proven models from MICs rather than having rigid frameworks imposed upon them from the outside (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011). From the interviews with DWG Australian delegate and advisors co-leading Pillar 6, it was clear that knowledge sharing grounded on South-South and trilateral cooperation processes was largely seen as a form to avoid top-down agency-led process. Such an approach as we will discuss in the next section would have important implications for the choice of the host of the social protection knowledge sharing platform.

12. Overall, the DWG MYAP had other 8 pillars: Infrastructure; Human Resource Development; Trade; Private Investment and Job Creation; Food Security; Financial Inclusion; Domestic Resource Mobilization; and Knowledge Sharing.

13. Critics challenge the G20's economic framing of social protection. From a Global South perspective, the G20 Development Consensus prioritized market-oriented mechanisms and aggregate growth over structural economic transformation and redistributive social justice (Zondi, 2013). Assessments of G20 food security policies likewise indicate that the forum favoured short-term stabilisation measures over addressing the deep roots of chronic poverty(Clapp & Murphy, 2013). This framework treats social protection as an instrumental tool to facilitate growth, contrasting sharply with the rights-based entitlement models defended by civil society networks and critical scholars.

To provide the technical underpinning for these recommendations, the G20 commissioned a comprehensive analytical report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) titled *Growing with Equity: Social protection for inclusive and resilient growth*. In June 2011, the co-facilitators of the "Growth with Resilience" pillar (Australia, Indonesia, and Italy) circulated this draft report and during the DWG meeting in Cape Town strategically focused on three (out of six) core recommendations from the ILO-UNDP report to address the structural barriers in global social protection expansion. First, they actively picked up "Recommendations 2 and 6," which explicitly requested the establishment of a "knowledge exchange network" in convergence with the actions under Pillar 9 (Knowledge Sharing). The co-facilitators recognised that these two recommendations provided a unique opportunity to operationalise South-South and triangular knowledge-sharing by linking it directly to on-going cooperation processes in the area of social protection in developing countries. They sought to create a mechanism within existing structures (explicitly presenting the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth—IPC-IG as an option), to facilitate the generation and transfer of knowledge on effective social protection approaches.

Second, the co-leads prioritised the report's call for greater multilateral coherence, adopting "Recommendation 3," which urged international organisations providing technical advisory services and financing (including the ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank, and regional development banks) to design and implement a mechanism to improve inter-agency coordination. This recommendation addressed the reality that international organisations historically operated with very different methodologies and approaches to social protection. By adopting this recommendation, the co-leads aimed to form a joint advisory structure capable of delivering coherent, country-led support on the design, fiscal sustainability, and management of national social protection systems.

Together, the deliberate selection of these three complementary recommendations by the co-facilitators during the 2011 DWG meetings laid the direct institutional groundwork for the subsequent creation of both the socialprotection.org gateway and the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). In the case of the knowledge sharing platform, the 2011 Report of the Development working group recommended the establishment of such platform before the 2012 Mexico Summit (G20 Development Working Group, 2011): "*We recommend the establishment of an effective knowledge sharing platform before the Mexico Summit, to be hosted by, or in cooperation between, relevant international organisations, and building on existing mechanisms as appropriate, to facilitate the generation and transfer of knowledge on effective social protection approaches, drawing particularly on the experiences of middle-income countries for the benefit of LICs".* The DWG specified three core thematic areas for the platform to prioritise, stating that it should give particular attention to knowledge sharing regarding: *"(i) the financial sustainability of social protection mechanisms, (ii) the conditions for progressive realisation of comprehensive social protection coverage and (iii) the particular challenges faced by fragile states*" (G20 Development Working Group, 2011b).

The recommendation established the strategic and systemic importance of this initiative for the G20's broader development agenda by declaring that the platform "should also serve as a demonstration of concept for a broader G20 knowledge sharing for development platform (G20 Development Working Group, 2011; G20 Development Working Group, 2012).

7 DEFINING THE INSTITUTIONAL HOST: FROM POLITICAL MANDATE TO OPERATIONAL ARCHITECTURE (2011–2013)

The deliberations regarding the institutional host for the knowledge-sharing platform, as seen in the previous section, started during the 2011 Development Working Group (DWG) meetings but were only definitively resolved in the lead-up to the 2012 Mexico Summit during a DWG meeting in March 2012 in Seoul (G20 Development Working Group, 2012). The evolution of the host selection was characterised by intense inter-agency negotiation. During the March 2011 DWG meeting in Paris, members agreed on the need for a knowledge sharing network but left the institutional base as "(…) nominate a well-established centre—to be determined—with demonstrated and unique expertise in this area as the institutional base to support the knowledge-sharing network, working in close cooperation with relevant international and national bodies." (G20 Development Working Group, 2011a). Following the delivery of ILO-UNDP report, which formally recommended the establishment of a 'knowledge exchange network' that 'could be hosted by a specific agency and owned by a broad initiative of agencies', the identification of the host started being openly discussed (International Labour Organisation (ILO) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2011). In the *Issues Paper* prepared for the June 2011 Cape Town meeting, the co-facilitators translated this broad mandate into a concrete proposal by advancing two distinct options, both UNDP-led initiatives, to anchor the new network. They explicitly proposed the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in Brazil, drawing on its established South-South policy networks as well as its analytical work commissioned by Australia. Alongside the IPC-IG, the co-facilitators proposed the newly established UN Global Pulse initiative, suggesting that its regional 'Pulse Labs' could serve as an innovative, technology-driven model to integrate real-time crisis impact monitoring into the knowledge-sharing architecture (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011).

During this period, Australia emerged as a decisive advocate for locating the platform in the Global South, explicitly favouring the IPC-IG. This preference was strategically grounded in an on-going collaboration as Australia had already commissioned analytical work from the IPC-IG in June 2011 to inform the DWG's "Growth with Resilience" pillar and intended to build upon the Centre's established South-South networks (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011). Australian delegates, alongside other member states, viewed the inclusion of a developing country as a core institutional partner highly positively, as it mitigated the perception of a Northern-dictated development agenda and empowered a capable institution within the BRICS to facilitate peer-to-peer horizontal. Beyond its technical expertise, the preference for the IPC-IG's was also linked to the micro-level bureaucratic ethos that characterised Brazil's diplomatic strategy at the time. Brazilian bureaucrats deliberately rejected traditional terms like 'aid' or 'assistance,' viewing them as hierarchical and condescending, and instead insisted on 'horizontal partnership' and 'cooperation' (Farias, 2019; Inoue & Vaz, 2012). This internal bureaucratic philosophy also matched the anti-hierarchical demands of the Global South delegates within the G20.

However, following the formal recommendations of the G20 Cannes Summit, institutional manoeuvring among international organisations resumed.[14] In December 2011, the

14. It is important to bear in mind that during this period international organizations like the ILO, World Bank, and UN agencies fiercely debated whether global policy should prioritize targeted 'safety nets' or universal 'Social Protection Floors' and country delegates were having similar debates at the ILO on the eve of the adoption of the Social Protection Floors recommendation (Cichon, 2013; Deacon, 2013). The DWG's 2011 recommendation to establish an inter-agency coordination process (which culminated in the SPIAC-B) and to avoid blueprints and one-size-fits-all models was a direct response to these institutional battles.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) circulated a draft non-paper evaluating potential hosting arrangements. The ILO invoked the recent global momentum for Social Protection Floors as an argument for its leadership, emphasising its century-long normative mandate and its existing Global Extension of Social Security (GESS) databases (International Labour Organisation, 2011b). The non-paper relied heavily on the findings of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, known as the Bachelet Report (Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, 2011), to justify a rights-based approach to social protection. It also emphasised the declarations made by the G20 Ministers of Labour regarding social protection floors rather than the economic argument that has underpinned the DWG discussion under the Pillar 6. Participants of the initial DWG meetings under the Korean and French presidencies interviewed for this research have emphasised that delegates (particularly those from Australia and Korea) had deliberately approached development and social protection through an economic lens, focusing on its role as an automatic macroeconomic stabiliser capable of cushioning vulnerable populations from economic shocks and sustaining aggregate demand. These DWG Pillar 6 architects initially sought to move away from UN-dominated, rights-based debates, preferring to focus on pragmatic, country-driven South-South learning and the financial sustainability of social protection programmes in low-income countries.

Nevertheless, the ILO non-paper acknowledged the limitations of a single-agency monopoly, noting that agencies like the World Bank and UNDP possessed significant funding and knowledge-management track records, even if they lacked specialised social protection normative mandates. Consequently, the ILO proposed alternatives including a joint inter-agency arrangement or outsourcing the platform to a specialised IT firm in a developing nation like India (International Labour Organisation, 2011b).

The single-agency proposal faced significant resistance within the DWG. Member states and technical partners recognised the risk that an agency-centric platform could alienate other major agencies and organisations and sought to avoid the imposition of an agency-specific blueprint on the initiative. To manage institutional tensions and fulfil the G20 mandate, a decentralised technical architecture was formally proposed and accepted in the lead-up to the 2012 Mexico Summit. The final architecture submitted to the Development Working Group in March 2012 was the product of an intense inter-agency diplomatic evolution.

While the initial UNDP December 2011 draft proposal envisioned a straightforward repository with a generic linkage of networks and discussion space hosted via UNDP's Teamworks with IPC-IG curation, without highlighting specific counterpart databases or broader governance boards and stating that UNDP would provide the resources for two years (UNDP, 2011b), subsequent iterations, particularly the January 2012 draft, transformed the project into a negotiated compromise. The January draft removed the UNDP's financial guarantee and added a formal acknowledgment that the platform was based on preliminary consultations among the ILO, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), UNDP, WHO, and the World Bank. The text was altered to simply state that financing the Teamworks platform "would require resources from the consortium of agencies," reflecting the failure to secure centralised funding for the backend infrastructure. It formally linked the two sister recommendations of the G20 DWG by adding a new objective: "to facilitate the working of the inter-agency coordination mechanism". In terms of operations, it explicitly added that the platform must coordinate with the ILO's Global Extension of Social Security (GESS) network. It also established that the platform's advisory board must act "in alignment with the activities of the proposed Social Protection Interagency Advisory Board" (UNDP, 2012).

The International Labour Organisation's December 2011 non-paper clearly influenced both the January draft and the March 2012 final proposal's objectives and normative safeguards. Responding to the ILO's push to tightly link knowledge sharing with global coordination, the March 2012 proposal explicitly defined the platform as a complementary tool to facilitate the workings of the new inter-agency coordination mechanism (SPIAC-B) (G20 Development Working Group, 2012; International Labour Organisation, 2011b).

The March 2012 proposal conceptualised the platform as an aggregating portal and dynamic gateway that would access accumulated knowledge scattered across different international organisations (G20 Development Working Group, 2012). To address potential inter-agency friction and prevent any single institution from imposing rigid, single-agency blueprints on developing countries, the plan was governed by several core diplomatic principles: it would utilise neutral branding to feature all involved organisations equally, accommodate users with diverse needs, and host tools and frameworks in a strict non-prescriptive manner, including accommodating common positions that might emerge from the coordination mechanism (G20 Development Working Group, 2012).

Under this model, existing websites from stakeholders like the ILO, World Bank, and UNICEF would act as equal entry points redirecting users to a joint backend space. Beyond data aggregation, the proposal outlined a complex platform designed to host e-discussions, real-time webinars, user profiles with organisational affiliations, and structured capacity-building modules. Showcasing the ILO's successful negotiation to integrate its own assets into the platform, these capacity-building modules explicitly included a proposed online course to be developed by the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin, alongside a formal mandate that the platform operate in coordination with the ILO's Global Extension of Social Security (GESS) network (G20 Development Working Group, 2012). Ultimately, this evolution from the initial December draft into the final March proposal reflected a complex institutional compromise, embedding the normative frameworks of the Bachelet Report,[15] the databases of the ILO, UNDP knowledge-sharing infrastructure and the IPC-IG south-south learning network into a shared G20 mandate

Within this framework, the IPC-IG was positioned to play a curation role, with the backend networking space designed to be hosted on UNDP's "Teamworks" domain, which had broader systemic ambitions within the G20 architecture (UNDP, 2011a). The knowledge sharing mandate was explicitly recognised by the DWG as a cross-cutting tool that needed to be mainstreamed across all development pillars. For that reason, the UNDP Knowledge Management Group was discussing with the co-chairs of Pillar 9 (Knowledge Sharing) to use Teamworks as the unified domain for joint spaces across multiple G20 action plans, including Pillar 4 (Private Investment and Jobs) and Pillar 5 (Food Security) (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators Pillar 9, 2011). The Social Protection platform (Pillar 6) was thus deliberately designed to serve as the critical "proof of concept" for this broader G20 knowledge-sharing ecosystem (G20 Development Working Group, 2011b).

The G20 2012 Progress Report of the Development Working Group, presented in June 2012, welcomed the implementation of the commitments, noting that the social protection gateway would be hosted by the UNDP, in collaboration with the World Bank and the ILO, notably without explicitly mentioning the IPC-IG's specific role. In fact, diagrams showing how the aggregator

15. The final March 2012 proposal explicitly embedded the Social Protection Floor normative framework into its core justification, stating: "This proposal also takes into consideration the conclusions of the Bachelet report and the recommendations of the G20 Ministers of Labour and Employment Meeting".

function of the platform would work simply added the IPC-IG South-South Learning Gateway as an additional portal to be included as primary source. By July 2012, during the first meeting of the newly formed Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) in New York, the platform's role was formally recognised in the Board's terms of reference. The terms foresaw that the "Social Protection Knowledge Sharing Platform, as requested by the G20, will support the activities of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Board to the extent possible. The platform, designed to enhance the sharing of knowledge among a broad spectrum of users including agencies, governments, academia and NGOs, will broaden the reach of activities of the Board while also facilitating collaboration between agencies themselves" (SPIAC-B, 2012).

Despite this formal alignment, the realisation of this ambitious architecture was blocked by a lack of consolidated financing and persistent difficulties in sustaining inter-agency collaboration. As funds were not forthcoming from the broader consortium of agencies, the UNDP Knowledge Management Group disengaged from the process. The practical responsibility for both the hardware and the content fell on the IPC-IG, which relied on the bilateral funding provided by AusAID to develop the prototype to implement the automatic search previous proposed by the UNDP Knowledge Management Group. The fragility became evident when the initial prototype was presented to the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) during its second meeting in October 2012 in Hyderabad, India. The prototype was not well received. Board members were unconvinced about the added value of an "automatic search" website, noting that automated links were technologically impossible for some agencies due to technical hurdles and/or security standards - and that human moderation would be indispensable. This would require dedicated budget for each involved agency.

After reflecting on the discussions and recommendations from the SPIAC-B October 2012 meeting, AusAID/DFAT and the IPC-IG concluded that the platform required moderation and a significant conceptual shift. They determined that the platform needed to go beyond the original tripartite partnership (ILO, World Bank, UNDP) to work with a diverse array of institutions and initiatives, transforming it into a broader South-South learning space for development practitioners, policymakers, and experts across agencies, governments, NGOs, and academia. To address the persistent inter-agency friction regarding the "ownership" of knowledge and approaches, the proposed revamped gateway would stay strictly unbranded. Furthermore, focus would be given to concrete country-level experiences capable of informing learning and study tour missions, thereby enabling horizontal cooperation between countries in the Global South. In this new collaborative framework, users would not have a passive role; instead, sharing information on communities of practice beyond the directly involved members became crucial, allowing practitioners to act as both users and information providers. The revamp also envisaged a capacity development component, which would initially focus on the training activities of UN agencies but later develop its own training options.

To execute this vision, it was agreed that the gateway would continue to be hosted by the IPC-IG, which was well-placed to take a leadership role in further developing and managing the platform. Firstly, facilitating South-South knowledge exchanges was already a core part of its mandate. Secondly, the IPC-IG had already laid substantial groundwork on South-South knowledge-sharing on social protection. It possessed a worldwide network that could be rapidly mobilised and expanded to contribute to the gateway, alongside a team of researchers with vast experience and knowledge in different fields of social policies, mostly linked to the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) of the Government of Brazil.

This redesign effort culminated at the fourth SPIAC-B meeting in Brussels in October 2013 (IPC-IG, 2019). As per the report of the meeting's session on Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building, "the IPC-IG presented a proposal to enhance the G20 Gateway on Social Protection. The Gateway was proposed as a source of unbiased information on social protection, not branded or simply serving the advocacy efforts of various agencies. Greater participation from SPIAC-B members and from developing and middle-income countries was suggested. The IPC-IG suggested that a round of consultations and feedback on the site would begin the process, while Australia offered to fund the project going forward if there was an endorsement from the Board". This crucial endorsement and financial backing ultimately secured the platform's future architecture and operational independence.

8 THE IPC AND THE IPC-IG WORK—WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN BRASÍLIA?

The previous sections showed that the IPC-IG's selection as host of the socialprotection.org platform was neither accidental nor purely the result of G20 deliberations in favour of a specific UN agency with a core mandate on social protection. As advanced by Bob Deacon in his comprehensive historical and institutional account of the process that led to the adoption of the International Labour Organisation's 2012 Social Protection Floor Recommendation, the positioning of the platform within a Latin American centre was fundamentally consistent with the broader structural shift where much of the new, innovative work and expertise on social protection was emerging directly from the Global South (Deacon, 2013).[16] In the specific case of the IPC-IG, it was the outcome of a decade-long process of institutional evidence and knowledge production, capacity-building, international partnerships, and South-South knowledge-brokering. This section traces that trajectory—from the Centre's founding in 2004 to the launch of the South-South Learning Gateway in 2010—to explain why the IPC-IG was the natural choice by many advisors, when the G20 DWG needed a credible custodian for its mandated knowledge-sharing platform.

Established in 2004 as the International Poverty Centre (IPC) in Brasília, the Centre was created as a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Brazil through the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea). This institutional architecture gave it a unique character: the international legitimacy of a UN initiative combined with the analytical rigour and policy credibility of a flagship Brazilian research institution (International Poverty Centre, 2012; Porto De Oliveira, 2019). Government of Brazil commitment was tangible: office space was provided at no cost, Ipea researchers were seconded on a part-time basis, and the Centre had direct access to Brazil's extensive social policy implementation experience (International Poverty Centre, 2012; Leite et al., 2015). Unlike traditional UN-led development hubs, the IPC-IG operated from within the Global South,

16. As for the second reason put forward in Deacon's book for the hosting of the platform in Brazil, we found no evidence in our documental review and interviews with key informants. Deacon heavily emphasizes the role of contingency and the nationalities of key policy entrepreneurs in shaping this institutional outcome. He states that it was "no accident" that the global knowledge platform found its home in a Latin American institution, specifically noting the influence of the outgoing ILO Director-General, Juan Somavia (from Chile), and his key Cabinet officer responsible for social protection, Vinicius Pinheiro (from Brazil). The key supporter of the IPC-IG was AusAID, and to a lesser extend UNDP headquarters largely motivated by the (potential) partnership with their Global Knowledge management teams. Even the Government of Brazil was not heavily involved in lobbying for the IPC-IG as stated by Brazil's delegate to the G20 DWG who was one of the key informants interviewed for this research.

conferring a credibility advantage in facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges rather than top-down knowledge transfers (Morais De Sá E Silva, 2017). Such assessment was also shared by key senior advisors to AusAID at the time they first proposed the G20-recommended knowledge platform to be posted in a Global South country.

The Centre rapidly built its publication output and partnerships. By 2007, it had published 54 documents covering cash transfer programmes across Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.[17] The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) funded comparative research and bi-regional exchanges connecting Latin American social protection models with emerging programmes in South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia.[18] The German agency for technical cooperation GTZ (now GIZ) financed impact evaluations of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes in Paraguay (Ribas et al., 2008; Veras Soares et al., 2008, 2010), CCT implementation assessments in El Salvador (Britto, 2007), and policy dialogue among these two countries (Veras Soares & Britto, 2007).[19] These partnerships positioned the IPC-IG as a convener of horizontal South-South learning that explicitly sought to "move away of blueprints and focus on the heterogeneity of experiences" (Roy, 2011). This heterodox, country-driven approach reflected Brazil's broader foreign policy strategy of deploying 'soft power' through horizontal, non-conditional technical cooperation (Dauvergne & Farias, 2012; Leite et al., 2015). This Southern-led ethos unintentionally anticipated the political dynamics of the G20 Development Working Group (DWG), where developing-country delegates strongly rejected 'one-size-fits-all' mandates and insisted that global social protection platforms explicitly respect national ownership (G20 Development Working Group Co-facilitators, 2011).

A defining milestone was the formal establishment of the Brazil-Africa Cooperation Programme on Social Protection in 2008, a trilateral initiative involving the IPC-IG, DFID, and Brazil's Ministry of Social Development (MDS). The programme translated Brazil's recent innovation on social protection (notably *Bolsa Família* and the *Cadastro Único* registry) and the research associated to their development, monitoring and evaluation into actionable technical assistance for African governments.[20] Beyond written publications, the IPC-IG developed a website dedicated to the project that stored documents produced to support these exchanges, including multimedia learning tools, such as the multilingual documentary *A Journey through Social Protection in Brazil*, designed specifically to disseminate these bilateral experiences to a wider audience of African policymakers. A concrete outcome was the direct collaboration with the Government of Ghana to support the design of the Livelihood Empowerment Against

17. A notable output of this cross-regional strategy was the special issue of the Centre's magazine, Poverty in Focus No. 15: "Cash Transfers—Lessons from Africa and Latin America" (International Poverty Centre, 2008a) which provided a comparative framework for policymakers in both regions.

18. To document these country-level experiences, the IPC-IG published a dedicated series of *Country Studies*, such as Country Study No. 19 on Uganda (Ssewanyana, 2009), Country Study No. 20 on Zambia (Chiwele, 2010), and Country Study No. 7 and No. 8 analysing South Africa's social protection schemes (Pauw & Mncube, 2007b, 2007a) and Country Study No. 15 and 17 on Honduras and Nicaragua, respectively (Moore, 2008, 2009).

19. Despite being financed by GTZ (GIZ), this project contributed to the larger research project: "Growth, Inequality, Poverty and Cash Transfers: A comparative study of Poverty Impacts and Institutional Aspects in Selected Countries in Africa and Latin America", funded by DFID, GTZ, and UNDP. (International Poverty Centre, 2012).

20. The Brazil-Africa Cooperation Programme's knowledge-sharing strategy also relied heavily on practical immersion. A notable milestone was the "Study Tour on Social Promotion and Protection" hosted by the IPC-IG in August 2008, which brought together 26 government officials and representatives from Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, the African Union, and the African Development Bank to study Brazilian social protection mechanisms (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2009).

Poverty (LEAP) programme (Leite et al., 2015)[21] and the participation of Brazilian officials and IPC-IG researchers in the regional consultations and in the First Conference of Ministers in charge of Social Protection in Africa, organised by the African Union in Windhoek, Namibia, in October 2008. (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2009)

The IPC-IG also facilitated knowledge exchange within the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum, hosting its Academic Forum in Brasília in April 2010 with over 120 policymakers and researchers. The insights and policy recommendations generated from these high-level plurilateral debates were subsequently captured and disseminated globally in *Poverty in Focus* No. 21, "What can IBSA Offer to the Global Community?" (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2010b). The publication addresses a diverse array of social protection themes, organised around the imperative of moving from isolated safety nets towards integrated social protection systems.

By 2010, the IPC-IG had accumulated a repository of over 280 policy-oriented research publications, including accessible *One Pagers* and evaluation reports that mapped development programmes across more than 60 countries. Its practitioner network had grown to over 42,000 professionals across 189 countries and 1,600 collaborative research centres in 106 developing countries (International Poverty Centre, 2012). This scale of decentralised, country-driven knowledge-sharing naturally evolved into the proposal for a comprehensive digital hub.

In October 2010, the IPC-IG launched the "South-South Learning Gateway on Social Protection" during a workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, titled "A Policy Dialogue and a South-South Learning Event on Long-Term Social Protection for Inclusive Growth". Showcasing the Centre's convening power, the event gathered nearly 80 policymakers, advisors, and researchers representing a diverse array of countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Furthermore, the workshop successfully mobilised a heterogeneous mix of institutions, bridging dialogues between inter-governmental bodies (such as UNICEF, the ILO, and the African Union), bilateral donor agencies (DFID, GTZ), regional research institutions (OSSREA, CEPRA, IDS), and civil society organisations such as HelpAge International and World Solidarity Mondiale (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2011).

The Gateway itself was designed as a "virtual bookcase" and collaborative online platform that mapped social protection policies across 94 countries, specifically explaining the social protection frameworks of 45 African nations, 17 Latin American and Caribbean nations, and 29 Asia-Pacific nations. It provided a virtual space for practitioners to share experiences and databases (Roy, 2011). To document and amplify the diverse policy innovations presented during the Johannesburg workshop, the IPC-IG compiled the key highlights into a dedicated issue of its flagship magazine, *Poverty in Focus* No. 22 (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2010a).[22] Much like the Gateway it promoted, this publication highlighted a rich diversity of Southern-led experiences, presenting a menu of fiscally affordable social protection policies that deliberately avoided the empty rhetoric of imported "best practice" blueprints to instead

21. The technical assistance to Ghana involved three highly operational missions by Brazilian MDS staff in July, August, and September 2007. These missions focused on transferring operational knowledge regarding the Single Registry, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the management of conditionalities, which directly informed the rollout of Ghana's LEAP programme in 2008 (International Poverty Centre, 2008b).

22. *Poverty in Focus* No. 22 served as a dissemination tool for the Gateway, capturing the complex policy dialogues between ministries of finance and social development from across the Global South, ranging from Brazil, Namibia, Mozambique, Indonesia, India and East Timor. By compiling these insights, the publication effectively demonstrated the IPC-IG's capacity to aggregate and share concrete, country-level policy alternatives.

focus on concrete, adapted country-level innovations. Moreover, it already introduced some of the discussion that was influencing the G20 DWG, as stated in the introduction of the issue. "*the recent global economic and financial crisis revealed (…) the importance of social protection in shielding the poorest and most vulnerable people from the worst impacts of a sudden shock to the economy. Social protection programmes such as cash transfers and expanded public works were also important instruments for raising domestic demand in many of the stimulus packages that were introduced to counter the downturn. As the world starts a fragile recovery, however, there may be a temptation to roll back programmes as the intensity of the economic shock dissipates. Countries could instead explore opportunities for prioritising and institutionalising social protection programmes. Social protection can also contribute to economic growth by reducing inequality and strengthening social justice and cohesion. (…) ministries of finance and planning need to drive discussions not only on the fiscal space for financing social protection programmes (an important issue in its own right), but also on how to entrench social protection more effectively in a country's longer-term development strategy, as a means of making the growth process stronger, more resilient and more inclusive.*" (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2010a).

This accumulated infrastructure (institutional credibility, a South-South practitioner network, bilateral partnerships, and an operational digital gateway) and its demonstrated capacity to drive horizontal, country-driven learning without relying on top-down blueprints (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2011; Roy, 2011) laid the technical foundation for its eventual selection as the host of the G20 knowledge-sharing platform when the G20 DWG sought to "nominate a well-established centre (…) with demonstrated and unique expertise in this area (…) as the institutional base to support the knowledge-sharing network, working in close cooperation with relevant international and national bodies." (G20 Development Working Group, 2011a).

In June 2011, AusAID formalised a cost-sharing agreement with the IPC-IG to produce the flagship report *Social Protection, Employment and Inclusive Growth*, cementing the Centre's role in providing the G20's analytical underpinning on social protection and crisis resilience.

The knowledge products and the international conference delivered by the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) under its cost-sharing agreement with AusAID[23] served as the foundational content and analytical framework for the G20's global social protection knowledge-sharing platform.

The analytical inputs sponsored by AusAID focused heavily on the experiences of the Global South, emphasising how developing countries designed social protection not just as temporary relief, but as a structural component of national development. The central message across the resulting knowledge products, including the flagship report segments (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2013b, 2013a), the article "Global South Innovations in Social Protection" (Lal & Veras Soares, 2012), and *Poverty in Focus No. 25. Recent Developments n the Role and Design of Social Protection Programmes - A Policy Dialogue, Expert Workship and South-South Learning Event* (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2013c) was that social protection must move beyond the narrow framing of short-term safety nets. These products documented how large-scale social protection programmes implemented in emerging economies prior to the 2008 financial crisis acted as powerful macroeconomic

23. As discussed in the previous sections, this established relationship was instrumental in Australia's advocacy for the IPC-IG as platform host during the 2011–2012 DWG deliberations.

stabilisers with significant countercyclical value. By securing basic consumption and investing in human capital, these programmes expanded political and fiscal space, generating medium- and long-term payoffs that essentially "paid" for the interventions. A critical gap identified in the research was the need to integrate "flagship" programmes into social protection systems capable of responding to structural vulnerabilities while addressing issues like food security, productive inclusion, and employment.

The Policy in Focus No 25 was largely informed by the "Policy Dialogue, Expert Workshop and South-South Learning Event" organised by the IPC-IG in Brasília from 3–5 December 2012. Gathering policymakers and experts from 15 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the conference focused on the operational transition towards integrated social protection systems. Key messages from the conference included the indispensable role of Monitoring and Information Systems (MIS) and Single Registries as the "backbone" of integrated social policy, functioning as critical tools for decision-making, operational management, transparency, and the cross-referencing of beneficiaries across health, education, and cash transfer sectors (as demonstrated by experiences in Brazil, Chile, and Indonesia). The event also highlighted the intersection of social protection and employment, exploring how public works programmes (such as South Africa's EPWP and India's NREGA) and institutional procurement mechanisms for smallholder farmers (like Brazil's PAA and Johannesburg's Zero Hunger strategy) serve as engines for productive inclusion and job creation.

These knowledge products and the international conference were designed to generate the foundational content required to populate the G20 social protection gateway. Recognising the vital linkage between the physical dialogues and the digital platform, AusAID and the IPC-IG signed a no-cost extension of their agreement in 2012. The explicit justification for extending the project to June 2013 was to provide sufficient time to finalise the products related to the December 2012 South-South learning event, ensuring that these outputs would "feed into the Flagship Report as well as the G20 social protection gateway". The objective was to ensure the platform offered high-quality, peer-reviewed content on crisis response, systemic resilience, and cross-country adaptations from its inception.

Despite the success of the knowledge generation phase of the agreement, the technical development of the platform prototype faced significant institutional turbulence already mentioned in the previous section. Simultaneously, a major institutional shift occurred regarding the IPC-IG's administrative positioning. Originally linked to the UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) at headquarters in New York, the IPC-IG was transitioned to operate under the UNDP Brazil Country Office. This decentralisation coincided with severe challenges in negotiating collaboration among the international agencies tasked with the G20 mandate.[24] Faced with the disengagement of the UNDP Knowledge Management team over funding shortage and the resistance from SPIAC-B partners regarding the Teamworks architecture, the original prototype

24. The immediate consequence of the Centre losing its formal designation as a UNDP Global Centre was the loosening of institutional ties previously mediated by the international staff embedded within the IPC-IG, alongside a disruption of their entry points at UNDP headquarters. This decoupling significantly diminished the Centre's structural linkages to G20 processes. The IPC-IG had to internalize these global knowledge-brokering functions by relying on consultants working directly alongside Ipea researchers, who increasingly assumed the scientific coordination of the research portfolio. However, these new administrative arrangements generated persistent friction with incoming UNDP Resident Representatives. Lacking institutional memory of the IPC-IG's global origins, these representatives sought to reclassify and subsume the Centre as a standard implementer of national projects under the strict jurisdiction of the Brazil Country Office. This operational misunderstanding prompted Ipea to request the formal reinstatement of the IPC-IG's global status, to no avail. This unresolved divergence in institutional missions led the UNDP to unilaterally terminate the hosting cooperation agreement with the Government of Brazil in June 2022. The following sections return to this issue to examine how Ipea supported socialprotection.org through these complex institutional challenges.

was ultimately abandoned. Recognising that a successful platform required active moderation, independent funding, and an unbranded identity to avoid "ownership" disputes, the IPC-IG and AusAID shifted their strategy. In early 2014, a new Third-Party Cost-Sharing Agreement was established between the IPC-IG and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT, formerly AusAID), providing over AUD560,000 specifically for the implementation of the "Social Protection Knowledge Sharing Gateway (Global)". This financial intervention allowed the IPC-IG to bypass inter-agency gridlock and fully develop the revamped, independent platform that would officially launch as socialprotection.org in September 2015.

The timeline in Table 1 traces the key milestones in the IPC-IG's evolution that led to its selection as the custodian of socialprotection.org.

TABLE 1. From the IPC to socialprotection.org, key milestones (2004–2013)

Year	Milestone	Significance
2004	International Poverty Centre (IPC) established in Brasília as a UNDP–Brazil (Ipea) partnership	First Southern-based UNDP-affiliated research hub; Brazil provides office space and senior researcher secondments
2006–2007	Rapid expansion of publication output; launch of DFID and GTZ-funded bi-regional research programmes	Quadrupled working paper output; comparative research bridges Latin American and African social protection systems
June 2007	Bi-Regional Conference on Social Protection and Poverty Reduction, Cape Town	First major South-South exchange linking Latin American CCT experience with sub-Saharan African policy needs
2008	Trilateral Brazil-Africa Cooperation Programme launched; IPC-IG supports Ghana's LEAP programme design	Operational model of South-South technical assistance; trilateral cooperation involving Brazil's Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and DFID.
2009	Centre renamed International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)	Broadened mandate
April 2010	IBSA Academic Forum hosted in Brasília (120+ participants from India, Brazil, South Africa)	Network reaches over 42,000 practitioners in 189 countries; trilateral South-South cooperation formalised
October 2010	South-South Learning Gateway on Social Protection launched in Johannesburg	Launch of the South-South Gateway on Social Protection
June 2011	AusAID cost-sharing agreement for G20 flagship report on social protection and crisis resilience	IPC-IG formally tied to G20 DWG technical work
March 2012	G20 DWG Seoul meeting formally designates IPC-IG as host of the socialprotection.org gateway	G20 mandate operationalised; IPC-IG's Southern credibility and existing infrastructure seal the choice
October 2013	SPIAC-B Brussels meeting endorses redesigned platform; AusAID commits continued funding	Platform's architecture and operational independence secured; transition to the open socialprotection.org model

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on IPC-IG Annual Reports and G20 DWG Documentation.

9 THE SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG PLATFORM: TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT AND POLITICAL DISCONNECTION

The socialprotection.org platform was officially launched on 12 September 2015 as an unbranded knowledge-sharing hub, the result of a process that began with the G20

Development Working Group's 2011 recommendation and survived a rejected prototype and inter-agency disagreements. What followed was a decade of sustained operational growth, carried out without much communication with the political body that had called the platform into existence. In this paper we dubbed this process as "fading memory": the G20 DWG progressively lost institutional awareness of the platform it had mandated, even as that platform became one of the most active global public goods in the social protection field.

This section examines both sides of that paradox. It first evaluates the platform's fulfilment of its four original mandates and traces its growth trajectory from 2015 to 2025. It then describes the financial architecture that sustained the platform in the absence of G20 funding, before analysing the structural mechanisms, rooted in the G20's own accountability architecture, that severed the platform's high-level political visibility. The section closes with the institutional transition of 2024 and the recent political reconnection achieved under the Brazilian and South African G20 presidencies.

9.1 EVALUATING THE MANDATES AND PLATFORM GROWTH

The platform carried four distinct operational mandates into its launch. Two originated from the 2011 DWG report: facilitating knowledge transfer from middle-income countries for the benefit of low-income countries, and addressing three thematic priorities, namely, fiscal sustainability, progressive coverage, and fragile-state resilience (G20 Development Working Group, 2011b). The remaining two emerged from the 2012 inter-agency negotiations: operating as a strictly unbranded, neutral hub free from single-agency ownership (Balboni et al., 2022), and serving as the primary collaboration infrastructure for SPIAC-B (SPIAC-B, 2012).

TABLE 2. socialprotection.org, key growth metrics (2015–2025)

Year	Members	Online Communities	Publications / Documents	Cumulative Webinars	E-courses
2015	412	n.a.	1,107	0	0
2016	1,416	26	2,061	15	0
2017	2,495	31	2,919	42	0
2018	3,595	40	3,697	73	5
2019	4,466	40+	4,894	95	8
2020	6,425	58	6,717	162	13
2021	9,017	64	8,731	207	19
2022	11,540	64	10,204	251	26
2023	13,642	64	11,435	290	30
2024	16,080	62	14,257	338	31
2025	17,346	63	14,919	380	33

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on socialprotection.org Annual Reports (2016–2025).

By 2025, the evidence of operational delivery across all four mandates is substantial. The platform grew from an initial cohort of 412 members at launch to 17,346 registered users by the end of 2025 (socialprotection.org, 2026). Its geographic composition reflected the

South-South orientation the DWG had specified: 36 per cent of members were based in Sub-Saharan Africa, 14 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 11 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa (socialprotection.org, 2026). The comparative database expanded to host 715 Programme Profiles and 569 Legal and Policy Frameworks, while the platform organised 380 cumulative webinars with over 114 partner organisations (socialprotection.org, 2026). Table 2 traces these precise growth metrics, illustrating the platform's evolution from a simple repository into a broader capacity-building tool.

The thematic mandates were integrated into the platform's knowledge architecture through dedicated streams. The "Social Protection in Crisis Contexts" Online Community became the platform's largest, with 591 members by 2025, and proved its operational value during the COVID-19 response (see Box 1). On fiscal sustainability, user surveys identified programme financing as a priority concern among government officials, prompting the platform to compile knowledge products on fiscal space and co-organise the "Fiscal Space for Social Protection" webinar series with HelpAge International (socialprotection.org, 2016). On progressive coverage, the platform maintained a long-standing partnership with the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), which produced advocacy campaigns and the dedicated Social Protection Hub for the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha in November 2025 (socialprotection.org, 2026).

The neutrality mandate was operationalised through the platform's independent domain and absence of institutional branding. This design enabled it to aggregate content from nearly 2,000 collaborating stakeholder organisations by 2025 (socialprotection.org, 2026). IPC-IG Research Report No. 77, which applied a knowledge-brokering analytical framework, concluded that the platform had moved beyond the initial "informing" strategy (passive dissemination and content curation) to actively "linking" expertise to specific policy needs, "matchmaking" across institutional boundaries, and "collaborating" through formalised partnerships (Balboni et al., 2022). This trajectory, from a simple repository to an active intermediary, corresponds to what the G20 DWG had originally envisaged (for an operational breakdown of the platform's current state and its 2026 structural redesign, see Annex B.

The SPIAC-B support mandate generated a distinct line of operational results. The platform functioned as the digital backbone for the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) tools, hosting the full ISPA Tools suite (https://ispatools.socialprotection.org/), organising 15 dedicated webinars reaching 584 attendees, and producing a promotional video on country-level application (Balboni et al., 2022). It provided working environments for several SPIAC-B working groups: the Gender-Responsive Social Protection Working Group administered an Online Community exceeding 200 members and organised 19 gender-related webinars; the Digital Convergence Initiative hosted its "Talking Interoperability" dialogue series and its first Global Virtual Country Convening in 2025; and the Working Group on Linking Humanitarian (Cash) Assistance and Social Protection used the platform to publish the "Tipsheets for Applying the Common Principles" and organise its 2025 Annual Workshop in Geneva (socialprotection.org, 2026).

BOX 1. The socialprotection.org platform during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis triggered the platform's most intensive operational deployment since launch. The Platform, working jointly with the IPC-IG research team and in partnership with DFAT and GIZ, activated an emergency task force that operated between March and October 2020. The task force produced a real-time global mapping of social protection policy responses, organised 32 dedicated webinars involving 26 stakeholder organisations that attracted over 6,000 live attendees, and distributed a weekly policy newsletter reaching thousands of practitioners (Balboni et al., 2023; socialprotection.org, 2021).

Two special issues of the IPC-IG Policy in Focus magazine (Volume 19, Issues 1 and 2) followed, systematically mapping 786 social protection responses across 129 countries. The publications documented how developing nations rapidly introduced emergency cash transfers and digital delivery mechanisms, and compiled case studies from Pakistan, Cambodia, Morocco, and Colombia to provide evidence-based experiences for low-income countries attempting to mitigate the crisis (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2021a, 2021b).

The analytical outputs addressed three structural challenges exposed by the pandemic. First, the persistent coverage gaps affecting the "missing middle": informal workers who qualified neither for traditional social assistance nor for social insurance (Bilo et al., 2021). Second, the question of whether emergency expansions could be transitioned into permanent, adaptive systems capable of moving towards universal coverage (Rutkowski, 2021). Third, the fiscal sustainability of universal social protection in a post-pandemic context of severe budgetary constraints (Bierbaum et al., 2021).

The crisis response also reaffirmed the platform's neutrality mandate. During the pandemic, the platform hosted contributions from the World Bank, the ILO, UNICEF, civil society organisations, and national policymakers, facilitating debates on contested policy options, including universal basic income and wealth taxes, without adopting the institutional position of any single agency (Balboni et al. 2022).

9.2 THE FINANCING ARCHITECTURE

The G20 political mandate gave socialprotection.org institutional legitimacy but allocated no dedicated budget. The entire cost of developing, launching, and operating the platform for its first decade rested on bilateral financing arrangements. The platform's governance framework draws a structural distinction between core funding, which covers fixed operating costs, and project-based funding, where external organisations transfer resources to the platform to deliver specific activities (UNRISD & Ipea, 2025).

Australia has been the platform's primary financial partner since inception. Through AusAID (later DFAT), the Australian Government funded the first cost-sharing agreement with UNDP in 2011 that financed the IPC-IG analytical work that gave basis to the platform, the South-South learning event in Brasilia in 2012, and the platform's initial prototype. A second agreement in 2014 financed the full development and launch of socialprotection.org in September 2015. DFAT then sustained the platform through successive agreements covering software maintenance, server hosting, core personnel, and content operations. As documented in sections 4 and 5, Australia's financial role was inseparable from its political one: Australian delegates in the DWG were among the strongest advocates for locating the platform in the Global South. AusAID's early investment gave the IPC-IG the operational resources to transform a G20 recommendation into functioning infrastructure.

Germany joined as a second core funder in December 2015 through GIZ, on behalf of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), three months

after the platform's launch. GIZ's contribution strengthened the platform's capacity-building work, particularly in e-learning content and the adaptive social protection course series. Between 2016 and 2022, DFAT and GIZ jointly covered the platform's fixed operational costs, including server infrastructure, core staff, and GIZ/BMZ supported the AI-based content classification tools. Table 3 summarises the financing phases.

TABLE 3. socialprotection.org, financing by period (2011–2025)

Period	Major Funder	Instrument / Amount	Purpose
2011–2013	AusAID (now DFAT)	Cost-sharing agreement with UNDP	IPC-IG G20 flagship report, South-South learning event, and first platform prototype
2014–2015	DFAT	Third-party Cost-Sharing Agreement	Full development and launch of the revamped socialprotection.org (September 2015)
2016–2019	DFAT (primary); GIZ (secondary)	Successive cost-sharing agreements	Platform maintenance, content curation, capacity building, and webinar programme
2020–2022	DFAT & GIZ (co-funders)	Annual/biennial agreements	COVID-19 emergency response, Online Communities expansion, SPIAC-B workgroup support
2022–2024	DFAT (primary), GIZ, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office FCDO, USAID; transition period	Bridge funding	Continued operations during IPC-IG dissolution and transfer to UNRISD & Ipea
2024–present	DFAT (primary)	Moving into diversified fundraising model	Platform re-anchored under UNRISD and Government of Brazil (Ipea) joint governance

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on UNDP–AusAID/DFAT cost-sharing agreements; socialprotection.org Annual Reports.

The platform also relies on project-based initiatives to scale its outputs. External organisations commission specific activities (online courses, webinar series, communications campaigns) and these projects may include on a voluntary basis an administrative contribution of up to 15 per cent directed towards core operational costs (UNRISD & Ipea, 2025). Project-based partners have included multilateral organisations and UN agencies (WFP, UNICEF, ILO, FAO, UNDP, ADB, IDB), bilateral agencies beyond the core funders (FCDO, USAID, Brazil's MDS), and academic institutions such as the University of Bath and the University of Birmingham.

9.3 THE "FADING MEMORY" MECHANICS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The platform's operational success ran in parallel with a progressive loss of political visibility within the G20 DWG. Understanding why requires examining the structural characteristics of the G20 itself.

Robin Davies, who served as Australia's delegate during the platform's design phase and later observed the G20 development agenda as an independent analyst, identified the core dynamic as early as 2014. Davies argued that the G20's development agenda is inherently episodic, informal, and dependent on heavy delegation to international organisations (Davies, 2014a). Once the G20 mandates a specific output, such as a knowledge platform, an inter-agency board, a set of assessment tools, it treats the resulting work as "industrial" activity that is necessary but operational. The G20 positions itself above this work rather than managing it. Because the G20 delegates this operational work and then rotates its presidency annually,

it easily detaches from the survival requirements of the initiatives it has created. The political attention moves to the incoming presidency's priorities; the mandated initiatives continue operating, but without a high-level sponsor pressing their case in each successive communiqué (Davies, 2014a).

While Davies' observation diagnoses the broader structural detachment of the G20 development agenda, this macro-level dynamic was directly operationalised against the socialprotection.org platform through a highly detrimental administrative decision. The 2013 St. Petersburg Comprehensive Accountability Report (CAR) classified the foundational commitments, namely establishing the knowledge-sharing gateway and building international policy coherence through SPIAC-B, as "Complete, ongoing monitoring". This status removed both items from the active annual tracking cycle, relegating them to triennial reviews. The timing was notable: the 2013 CAR simultaneously acknowledged that the knowledge gateway was not yet operational, stating that merely a "prototype of the Gateway is being tested with the aim of making it fully operational in 2013." By administratively declaring the commitment complete before the platform had launched, the DWG severed the accountability link that might have sustained the platform's political visibility across successive presidencies.

The consequences accumulated over the following decade. Once shifted to "ongoing monitoring," SPIAC-B and the socialprotection.org platform appeared less frequently as core deliverables in DWG progress reports. The most substantive late-stage references occurred during the 2017 German and 2018 Argentine presidencies, focused narrowly on the ISPA tools. The 2018 Buenos Aires Annual Progress Report noted that "the SPIAC-B continues its work stream on Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) tools, with four tools finalised (...) and more than 56 tool applications of different tools at country level." After 2018, explicit mandates requesting SPIAC-B to report to the DWG largely disappeared until the 2024 Brazilian presidency.

This political disconnection produced a series of missed opportunities where the platform's capabilities directly matched emerging G20 priorities, yet no structural link existed to connect them.

The first concerned food security and nutrition. The 2013 St. Petersburg Development Outlook (Group of Twenty, 2013) mandated a review of food security and nutrition opportunities, explicitly requesting the incorporation of inputs from SPIAC-B, a commitment later overseen by the 2014 Australian presidency (G20 Development Working Group, 2014). In response, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) delivered a joint review in 2014 that firmly embedded social protection as a critical mechanism to support medium-term agricultural growth and rural resilience (Food and Agriculture Organisation & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). This report explicitly positioned SPIAC-B as a central institutional driver for coordinating global advocacy, executing inter-agency joint work at the country level, and advancing capacity building and knowledge sharing (Food and Agriculture Organisation & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). This cross-pollination, however, stalled in subsequent years as illustrated by the Matera Declaration on Food Security (Group of Twenty, 2021b). When the G20 adopted this declaration under the Italian Presidency in 2021, the text explicitly emphasised nutrition-sensitive social protection, school feeding programmes, and emergency food assistance (Group of Twenty, 2021b). Yet, neither SPIAC-B nor socialprotection.org were structurally embedded in the declaration's implementation framework, despite the platform's

accumulated evidence base on how food systems and cash transfers interact and the development of a dedicated ISPA tool on food security and nutrition.[25]

The second, and arguably largest, missed opportunity concerned the COVID-19 emergency itself. During the Saudi (2020) and Italian (2021) presidencies, the G20 endorsed the "Support to COVID-19 Response and Recovery in Developing Countries". This framework explicitly called on countries to rapidly design and implement "temporary basic income or other direct support programmes such as cash transfers," and to reinforce safety nets to mitigate massive job losses, especially in the informal economy (Group of Twenty, 2020). During the 2020 Saudi presidency, the G20 explicitly committed to "support multi-stakeholders partnerships, through north-south south-south and triangular cooperation" and to "support developing countries in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on extreme poverty by sharing experiences" (Group of Twenty, 2020). In the *2021 Rome Update* on the G20 Action Plan, the Development Working Group (DWG) emphasised that "inclusive policy dialogue is key for enabling effective and coordinated multilateral responses" and highlighted the necessity of sharing "experiences, challenges and lessons learnt" to navigate the recovery (Group of Twenty, 2021a). Simultaneously, the G20 Foreign Affairs and Development Ministers in the Matera Declaration emphasised the urgent need for "technical assistance" and "capacity building" in social protection (Group of Twenty, 2021b). The G20 made these urgent appeals for policy dialogue, South-South cooperation, and capacity building without recognising that the infrastructure specifically designed to execute them already existed and was already performing precisely this function through its emergency task force (see Box 1).

The DWG consistently bypassed both socialprotection.org and SPIAC-B in subsequent years. The 2022 Indonesian Presidency prioritised Adaptive Social Protection as a core component of the *G20 Roadmap for Stronger Recovery and Resilience in Developing Countries* (G20 Development Working Group, 2022).The following year, India's 2023 presidency focused intensely on extending adequate and sustainable social protection to gig and platform workers while addressing global skill gaps, priorities advanced by the Labour and Employment Ministers and tracked by the DWG (G20 Development Working Group, 2023). Both agendas perfectly aligned with SPIAC-B's mandate and the platform's existing content streams, which already featured dedicated e-learning courses on adaptive social protection and expert podcasts on the gig economy (socialprotection.org, 2022, 2025). Yet, both initiatives advanced entirely independently of the inter-agency coordination and reporting structures established by the G20 in 2012.

9.4 THE RECONNECTION WITH THE G20 DWG

The institutional architecture of the platform underwent a significant transition in 2024. Following the dissolution of the IPC-IG in 2022, which had led to an interim management arrangement under UNDP Brazil with a new memorandum of understanding with Ipea, the hosting of socialprotection.org was transferred in May 2024 to a partnership between the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea). The new governance structure introduced a formal Advisory Committee and an explicit commitment to strengthen outreach and reporting to the G20 Development Working Group (UNRISD & Ipea, 2025).

25. See https://ispatools.socialprotection.org/tools/food-security-and-nutrition/.

The political reconnection followed swiftly. Under Brazil's 2024 G20 Presidency, the platform contributed to the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty by providing support to the knowledge infrastructure underpinning the Policy Basket, a curated set of evidence-based social protection instruments available for member-country adoption (socialprotection.org, 2025). Consolidating this renewed momentum, the SPIAC-B was asked to elaborate a report titled *Social protection and the way forward to eliminate poverty and ensure human dignity and adequate nutritious food for all* for the G20 Task Force for the Establishment of a Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty (SPIAC-B, 2024). This was the first substantive G20 engagement since the 2013 accountability process.

TABLE 4. socialprotection.org and the G20, engagement timeline (2010–2025)

Year / Presidency	G20 DWG Action	Platform Status	DFAT / SPIAC-B Link
2010—Korea	Seoul MYAP adopts Pillar 6 (Growth with Resilience) and Pillar 9 (Knowledge Sharing)	Pre-platform: IPC-IG South-South Learning Gateway launched (Oct 2010)	AusAID co-leads Pillar 6
2011—France	Cannes DWG recommends unbranded knowledge gateway; SPIAC-B created	IPC-IG shortlisted as host; AusAID funds flagship report	Australia advocates for Global South host
2012—Mexico	Los Cabos DWG endorses IPC-IG as custodian; prototype developed	First prototype presented to SPIAC-B (Hyderabad, Oct 2012): rejected; redesign begun	DFAT–UNDP cost-sharing signed
2013—Russia	St Petersburg: accountability report requested; Knowledge Sharing commitment declared 'Complete' (Dec 2013)	Brussels SPIAC-B endorses redesign; DFAT commits ongoing funding	Knowledge Sharing pillar 'mainstreamed'
2015—Turkey	No explicit DWG mention	socialprotection.org officially launched, September 2015	DFAT AUD560,000 agreement enables launch
2016–2020 (various)	Platform absent from G20 Leaders' declarations; SPIAC-B not named	Platform grows steadily; COVID-19 emergency response (2020)	GIZ joins as co-funder from ~2016
2024—Brazil	Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty: platform provides Policy Basket knowledge hub	Platform support the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty; Ipea joins governance	IPC-IG dissolved (2022); UNRISD–Ipea agreement (May 2024)
2025—South Africa	'Call to Action' on Universal Social Protection (Skukuza Ministerial) explicitly names socialprotection.org for SDG 1.3 progress	First formal G20 recognition since 2013; platform re-anchored	UNRISD & Ipea joint governance confirmed

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on G20 DWG Documents (2010–2025); socialprotection.org Annual Reports; (Balboni et al., 2023).

Under South Africa's 2025 Presidency, the G20 Development Working Group issued the "Call to Action: Towards inclusive, resilient and sustainable development through Universal Social Protection Systems and Floors" (G20 Development Working Group, 2025). This document explicitly named socialprotection.org as a key platform for accelerating progress towards SDG Target 1.3 on universal social protection, directing that international support mechanisms "should leverage existing initiatives recommended by the G20 DWG such as the Social Protection Interagency Board (SPIAC-B), the knowledge-sharing socialprotection.org platform, as well as other supporting initiatives, such as USP 2030" (G20 Development Working Group, 2025). The Call to Action also mandated SPIAC-B, working with the ILO, to monitor and report annually to the DWG on implementation progress, and called for biennial G20 social protection stocktaking workshops hosted on a rotating basis by G20 members (G20 Development

Working Group, 2025). This represented the first formal G20 Leaders-level acknowledgement of the platform since the 2013 accountability process, and it reinstated the annual reporting mechanism that the St. Petersburg CAR had effectively dismantled twelve years earlier.

The 2023 T20 Policy Brief (Balboni et al., 2023), had called for precisely this re-engagement, positioning the platform as an underutilised asset for the SDG decade of action. That the South African presidency acted on this recommendation, embedding both the platform and SPIAC-B into the Call to Action's implementation architecture, closes a twelve-year gap in the G20's institutional memory.

9.5 REMAINING CHALLENGES

A persistent challenge throughout the platform's growth was the relatively low institutional engagement of national policymakers in low- and lower-middle-income countries, the audience the G20 had prioritised in 2011 (Balboni et al. 2023). While practitioners, researchers, and agency staff were highly active, converting platform membership into tangible policy influence at the country level required stronger partnerships with regional bodies and developing countries' cooperation agencies. The absence of sustained G20 political backing compounded this difficulty. Without high-level endorsement from the DWG, the platform lacked the convening authority to formally engage national governments and South-South cooperation agencies in its activities (Balboni et al., 2023).

The trajectory of the platform strongly affirms a progressive technical success. Originating as a simple "virtual bookcase" and addressing a rejected automated prototype in 2012, it transformed into a sophisticated, multi-lingual knowledge-brokering hub equipped with artificial intelligence suites, active communities of practice, and a broad set of e-learning frameworks. By fulfilling these four complex mandates, the platform successfully transitioned the G20's high-level political aspirations into a tangible, sustained global public good. However, the G20 Development Working Group was not aware of this achievement.

The political commitment received during the G20 presidencies of Brazil and South Africa signals that there is potential to spread over a broader range of supporting countries, the support for the platform. Given the hibernation of the G20 DWG during the USA G20 presidency, such commitment will be tested when the G20 DWG (hopefully) resume its activities during the UK G20 presidency in December 2025.

10 QUO VADIS

In 2025, the platform marked ten years of continuous operation. Despite its recent re-anchoring within the G20 Development Working Group (DWG), shifting international development priorities and the regular rotation of G20 presidencies create operational uncertainties for the platform's long-term trajectory. The South African Call to Action and the final push towards the 2030 goals and targets, particularly target 1.3 on increasing social protection coverage, via the Doha commitments offer a clear window for the platform to collaborate closely with national governments in low- and middle-income countries. Concurrently, ongoing institutional restructuring across various United Nations agencies means the platform must adapt to a changing multilateral ecosystem and can become even more important to facilitate joint work, synergies, and on the funding side, economies of scale.

The formal transition of the platform's hosting from the UNDP Brazil country office to UNRISD, alongside the continued analytical partnership with Ipea in Brasília, established a stable institutional framework (UNRISD & Ipea, 2025). This transition enabled the creation of an Advisory Council. This new board architecture allows traditional SPIAC-B partners as well as national government representatives to formally join the governance body. Open the space for governments to directly advise on the strategic and operational direction of the platform, considering their needs and priorities. This unbranded framework ensures that diverse international partners can implement activities while maintaining a flexible, shared public good.

Such openness can remedy the historical limitation of the gateway related to the uneven engagement of policymakers and development cooperation agencies within low- and middle-income states. Moving forward, the platform must prioritise the active inclusion of developing countries that currently lead South-South learning on social protection and related fields (e.g. food security and nutrition). These nations should have a direct say in steering the platform's thematic focus and knowledge-sharing methods. The past isolation of the platform and SPIAC-B from the G20 political track during, for example, the Indonesian and Indian presidencies prevented the development of technical tools and knowledge sharing as per the presidencies priorities are social protection instruments. The current partnership with Ipea—a government of Brazil think tank - provides a diplomatic bridge to restore this collective ownership and strengthen horizontal peer learning.

When broader multilateral support wavers, international organisations often retreat into isolated programmatic niches. This institutional isolation undermines the systemic cooperation required for an integrated approach to sustainable development. Without clear coordination channels, shared policy advancements (such as common operational definitions of social protection delivery systems) risk being replaced by fragmented, agency-specific blueprints.

The recent integration of SPIAC-B as a working group within the Universal Social Protection 2030 (USP2030) partnership represents an effort to streamline overstretched institutional workflows. However, this structural shift may also introduce complex dynamics. The pragmatic, macroeconomic focus on social protection originally championed by the G20 DWG could become diluted within a broader advocacy framework. Conversely, this consolidation provides an opportunity to open membership beyond traditional international financial institutions and bilateral donors, creating an entry point for developing country development agencies to coordinate South-South and triangular initiatives.

Social protection remains an essential instrument to address economic shocks and household vulnerabilities, and at a broader level, it can be considered a lever for other sustainable development outcomes. Both the reconstituted SPIAC-B under the USP2030 and the socialprotection.org gateway are positioned to assist government through shared empirical evidence and collaborative diagnostics. Broadening practitioner participation enhances the platform's global relevance as the international community works towards SDG Target 1.3 (Balboni et al., 2022). The central question is whether this renewed political anchoring can withstand future shifts in rotating presidencies, or whether the structural fragmentation illustrated in this paper will reassert itself in future presidential cycles.

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ANNEX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

This annex details the key informants interviewed to reconstruct the historical trajectory of the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) and the establishment of the socialprotection.org platform. The interviews were conducted to gather firsthand accounts from delegates, advisors, and international organisation representatives directly involved in the negotiations between 2010 and 2012.

- **Rachel Slater**
  - **Position:** Advisor at the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) in 2010
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Advised AusAID on its engagement with the G20 regarding emerging social protection policies and strategies post-crisis.
  - **Date of Interview by e-mail exchange:** 3 February 2023. This interview was not part of the sequence of interviews dedicated to this Working Paper project. E-mail exchange with Rachel Slater was a first attempt to rescue the memory of the links between the G20 DWG political process and the idea of having a southern-based institution hosting it. It was prompted by the dissolution of the IPC-IG which led Ipea to reach out to SPIAC-B members to try to find a solution. Rachel was the first person to point out the importance of interviewing Robin Davies.
- **Robin Davies**
  - **Position:** AusAID Official in charge of Multilateral Partnerships and Development Agenda Support
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Australian Delegate to the G20 DWG in 2010.
  - **Date of Interview:** 14 November 2025
- **Federico Bonaglia**
  - **Position:** Head of Policy Dialogue Division, OECD Development Centre
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Technical Support for the DWG
  - **Date of Interview:** 23 November 2025
- **Vinícius Carvalho Pinheiro**
  - **Position:** Senior Advisor to the Office of the Director-General, International Labour Organisation (ILO)
  - **Date of Interview:** 25 November 2025 (IPC-IG, 2025).
- **Thierry Sorret**
  - **Position:** United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
  - **Date of Interview:** 1 December 2025

- **Ambassador Luiz Antonio Balduino Carneiro**
  - **Position:** Director of the Department of Financial Affairs and Services, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Brazilian Delegate to the G20 DWG during the 2010 South Korean presidency.
  - **Date of Interview:** 16 December 2025
- **Lilian Hamada**
  - **Position:** Advisor to the French DWG G20 delegation during its presidency
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Focal point for France in the DWG, accompanying negotiations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- **Kerri Elgar**
  - **Position:** AusAID
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** AusAID representative who strongly supported the knowledge-sharing platform based in the Global South.
  - **Date of Interview:** 18 December 2025
- **Radhika Lal**
  - **Position:** UNDP and IPC-IG
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Instrumental in securing the initial cost-sharing agreement with AusAID to develop research for the G20 DWG. She helped frame the platform as a country-led initiative built upon the IPC-IG's existing relationship with the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea)
  - **Date of Interview:** 18 December 2025
- **Rathin Roy**
  - **Position:** Director, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), UNDP
  - **Role in the G20 DWG:** Presented the IPC-IG's South-South Learning Gateway at the OECD and IPC-IG focal point for negotiations with UNDP headquarters.
  - **Date of Interview:** 20 December 2025

ANNEX B: THE 2026 STRUCTURAL REDESIGN OF THE SOCIALPROTECTION.ORG PLATFORM

When socialprotection.org launched in September 2015, its information architecture rested on four action-oriented pillars: Discover, Connect, Learn, and Share. Each pillar represented a distinct user behaviour. Discover aggregated publications, databases, and programme profiles. Connect housed the member directory and Online Communities. Learn hosted webinars, e-learning courses, and a glossary. Share provided submission forms through which registered members could upload publications, programmes, events, and other content directly to the platform's databases (socialprotection.org, 2016).

This framework served the platform well during its first decade. It offered an intuitive entry point for users unfamiliar with the platform's scope, and it scaled from an initial repository of roughly 2,000 publications and 412 members at launch to a knowledge base of over 14,400 publications and nearly 17,200 members by mid-2025 (socialprotection.org, 2026). The exponential growth of the repository, however, strained the original architecture. Content types that had been grouped under a single pillar, such as podcasts, databases, and legal frameworks housed together under Discover, required differentiation as their volumes increased. Users searching for structured policy data encountered the same navigation pathway as those seeking a blog post or a multimedia recording. The four-pillar model, designed around what users could do, no longer matched the granularity of what the platform contained.

In 2026, the platform underwent a full structural redesign, replacing the four pillars with six content-oriented navigation categories: Institutional, Resources, Policies and Programmes, Webinars and Events, Learning, and Network (socialprotection.org, 2026). The redesign reflected a shift from an action-based taxonomy ("what can I do?") to a content-type taxonomy ("what am I looking for?"). The tagline changed accordingly, from "the knowledge-sharing platform on social protection" to "the global hub for knowledge and collaboration on social protection."

The redesign also introduced three technological upgrades. Sparks, an AI-powered research assistant, enables members to query the publications database through natural-language prompts. An AI-powered Smart Search replaced the manual keyword-filtering process, improving content discoverability across the platform's 13,200 catalogued publications. A personalisation engine allows members to configure topic-based content feeds and save preferred resources (socialprotection.org, 2026). These features, funded by BMZ (the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), represent the platform's first integration of artificial intelligence into its knowledge-brokering infrastructure.

The sections that follow describe each component of the platform's architecture as it stood in 2026, tracing the evolution of each area from its origins under the four-pillar structure to its current form. The platform's primary audience remains policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on social protection in low- and middle-income countries.

B.1. POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The 2026 redesign elevated what had previously been a set of features buried under the Discover pillar into a standalone top-level category. The Policies and Programmes section consolidates three interlinked databases: Country Profiles, Programme Profiles, and Legal and Policy

Frameworks. Together, these databases provide policymakers with structured country-level evidence that merges legislative instruments, programmatic data, and socioeconomic indicators.

Programme Profiles

The Programme Profiles database was established to provide simplified, accessible overviews of public social protection interventions worldwide. Each profile captures core operational variables: programme objectives, targeting methods, coverage parameters, expenditure data, legal frameworks, management information systems, institutional stakeholders, and target population groups (socialprotection.org, 2016). The database's programmatic typology leans towards non-contributory social assistance, with social transfers (conditional and unconditional cash transfers, in-kind transfers, and subsidies) constituting the majority of entries. Labour market interventions and social insurance schemes are also tracked, though they represent a smaller proportion.

An analysis of the target populations recorded in the database reveals a strong programmatic emphasis on lifecycle vulnerabilities. Children are the most frequently targeted demographic group, a pattern consistent with the global advocacy push for child grants and universal early-years protections. The elderly and persons with disabilities follow. The database also documents global targeting mechanisms: categorical targeting is the most common selection method, followed by geographical targeting, means testing, proxy means testing, and community-based targeting.

The geographic coverage of the Programme Profiles evolved over time. In its early years (2015 to 2016), the database was heavily weighted towards Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), driven by foundational inventories mapping non-contributory programmes in those regions. To achieve broader coverage, the platform engaged in institutional matchmaking. A partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) facilitated the mass integration of Latin American and Caribbean programmes, directly linking the platform to ECLAC's regional database. Collaborative work with IPC-IG researchers and United Nations Volunteers extended mapping to South Asia and the Asia-Pacific. By 2025, the database contained 715 distinct programme profiles, with a footprint spanning Latin America, MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Asia-Pacific (socialprotection.org, 2026).

Country Profiles

Launched in November 2021, the Country Profiles feature was originally conceptualised to provide government entities, including the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Member States, with a consolidated knowledge foundation for social protection reform. The feature functions as an aggregator, merging the platform's existing country-focused content (publications, webinars, programme profiles) with macroeconomic and demographic indicators drawn from external data sources. The information gathered at the macro level includes health and social protection expenditures, GDP, population growth, and age ratios.

By 2025, users accessing a Country Profile could explore 569 specific legal and policy frameworks alongside the 715 programme profiles, along with relevant publications and webinar recordings for each country. The aggregation provides a consolidated snapshot

of a country's structural capacity and the legislative architecture underpinning its social protection system.

Legal and policy frameworks

For much of the platform's early history, legislative texts and national policy directives were absorbed within the general Publications database. Between 2020 and 2022, the knowledge management team established Legal and Policy Frameworks as a distinct, searchable content type. The specialised database grew from 324 catalogued documents in August 2022 to 569 specific frameworks by 2025.

The database broadly categorises its contents into two types: legal instruments and policy documents. Its objective is to map how national development plans and policy intentions translate into legally enforceable entitlements. The database serves as the primary anchor for the Country Profiles feature; by isolating these documents, the platform allows policymakers and researchers to locate the specific legislation and policies underpinning a country's social protection system alongside the programmatic data.

Specific research initiatives have drawn on this database for thematic analysis. The platform and the IPC-IG conducted reviews of legislative frameworks from a children's rights perspective across the MENA region and South Asia, assessing the statutory basis for children's right to social protection and the institutional accountability structures required to uphold it.

B.2. RESOURCES

The Resources category consolidates the platform's knowledge products under a single navigation heading. Where the old Discover pillar grouped publications, news, databases, multimedia, and blogs together without functional differentiation, the 2026 redesign organises these assets into seven distinct sub-categories: Publications, Blogs, Podcasts, Multimedia, Databases, Bulletins and News, and Glossary (socialprotection.org, 2026). This structure reflects an evolutionary process of disaggregation that unfolded between 2019 and 2025, as individual content types were progressively separated from the general publications repository to improve search precision and content discoverability.

The publications repository

The publications repository has historically been the most accessed feature of the platform. From an initial stock of roughly 2,000 documents in 2016, the database experienced sustained growth, reaching over 14,400 publications by mid-2025 (socialprotection.org, 2026). The platform classifies documents across four strategic dimensions: Social Protection Programmes, Social Protection Building Blocks, Social Protection Approaches, and Cross-cutting Areas.

The authorship and sourcing of publications relies on a hybrid model that blends institutional curation with crowdsourcing. In the platform's early years, member-submitted content peaked at nearly 38 per cent of the total repository in 2017, before stabilising between 12 and 15 per cent in later years. The remainder is mapped, reviewed, and uploaded by the platform's knowledge management team to ensure adherence to taxonomic standards. The institutional origin of the documents is dominated by the platform's core partners and

major multilateral agencies, including UNICEF, the World Bank Group, FAO, WFP, the ILO, UNDP, GIZ, and bilateral donors such as DFAT and DFID/FCDO.

The thematic distribution of publications has shifted over time. Social assistance, particularly cash transfers, consistently accounts for the majority of programme-related publications; between 2020 and 2021 alone, publications on cash transfers grew by 42 per cent. Cash transfers were the primary crisis-response instrument deployed by governments during the pandemic. In terms of system design, the most researched topics have been programme design and implementation, coverage, targeting, and monitoring and evaluation. By 2024 and 2025, situation analysis and needs assessment emerged as the dominant building block, a shift that reflects the global push to gauge vulnerabilities before deploying systemic expansions. Among cross-cutting themes, poverty reduction has held its position as the most prominent area, followed by health and labour market/employment. Publications addressing food and nutritional security gained traction in 2024 and 2025, directly mirroring the G20's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty.

The geographic distribution of the repository is consistent with the platform's original G20 mandate to support South-South cooperation. Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa have been the most heavily researched regions since the platform's inception. By the end of 2025, the Latin American and Caribbean region accounted for 2,596 documents, Sub-Saharan Africa for 2,061, and East Asia and the Pacific for 1,114. Within these regions, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia feature as the most frequent case studies. In terms of linguistic accessibility, the vast majority of publications are in English (historically between 79 and 87 per cent of the total database), with French accounting for 7 to 17 per cent and Spanish for 4 to 6 per cent. The platform also catalogues documents in Portuguese, Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, German, Russian, and Turkish.

Databases

For the platform's first several years, consolidated data sets and external databases were classified under the general Publications category. In January 2020, the knowledge management team created a specific Databases tab under the Discover menu. By August 2021, Databases was established as a distinct, searchable content type. The dedicated repository reached 92 catalogued databases by December 2024. These resources also serve as a critical input for the Country Profiles feature, where users can explore relevant national data sets alongside programmatic and legislative information.

Blogs

Launched on 11 January 2017, the blog section was established as an open space for members and partners to exchange insights through short-form, research-driven posts. The feature grew from 68 articles in its first year to over 1,000 published posts by the end of 2025 (socialprotection.org 2026). The platform categorises its blog outputs into several typologies: individual contributions from registered members (accounting for 45 per cent of all posts by 2025), newsletter blogs commissioned from specialists, sponsored or thematic blog series, posts from the Ambassadors Programme, webinar and event summaries, and republished articles.

The blog section's authorship spans a range of institutional affiliations. Contributors have included specialists from UN Women, the ILO, UNICEF Innocenti, FAO, and leading academics. The platform's Ambassadors have generated some of the most accessed content: Bolaji Aregbeshola's analysis of health care challenges in Nigeria garnered over 27,000 pageviews in 2020. It is worth noting that while the platform successfully engages country policymakers as readers and as speakers in webinars, the institutional records do not identify government officials as direct blog authors. The authorship of these short-form pieces is driven by practitioners, independent consultants, academic researchers, and technical advisors from international organisations.

Thematic blog series have tracked the global development agenda. A 12-part series produced with the IPC-IG analysed the COVID-19 pandemic's impact in the Global South. Subsequent series addressed Universal Social Protection (aligned with the USP2030 campaign), gender-responsive policies (drawing on the 2024 World Survey), climate adaptation for small-scale producers, and the implications of major ODA cuts for the social protection sector.

Podcasts

In March 2021, the platform launched the Social Protection Podcast. Each episode typically runs up to 35 minutes and is structured around a main interview, followed by a "Quick Wins" segment where guests share emerging news and resources. By December 2025, the podcast had released 57 episodes (socialprotection.org 2026). The 2026 redesign elevated podcasts to a standalone content type, and by 2026 the podcast library had grown to 364 episodes including webinar recordings and other audio content repackaged for the format (socialprotection.org, 2026).

The podcast seeks to enforce an editorial rule: every episode should feature at least one participant from the Global South and maintain gender and ethnic diversity among guests. The themes have tracked the shifting priorities of the social protection community worldwide. The inaugural series examined COVID-19 emergency responses, with attention to informal workers, refugees, and women. Subsequent series addressed Universal Basic Income (2022), social protection and gender-based violence (2023), and the gig economy in Southeast Asia, climate-related Just Transitions, and social protection in conflict zones, including episodes on Ukrainian refugees and Gaza (2024 to 2025). The episode on artificial intelligence in social protection became the most downloaded episode of 2025.

Production of specific series is co-funded by institutional partners. The Overseas Development Institute and GIZ partnered on the inaugural COVID-19 series. DFAT, FCDO, and UNICEF funded the gender-based violence series. FCDO, STAAR, and BASIC co-produced the 2025 series on social protection in conflict. The ILO partnered on the TRANSFORM Podcast Series reviewing a decade of capacity-building across Africa.

The podcast reached listeners in up to 170 countries. Europe and Central Asia consistently constitute the largest share of downloads (33 to 38 per cent), with Sub-Saharan Africa as the second-largest audience (14 to 19 per cent).

Newsletters

Launched in December 2015, the monthly newsletter evolved from a standard aggregation tool into a core knowledge-translation mechanism. By 2022, the newsletter was restructured

into two sections: one for general updates (upcoming webinars, publications, podcasts, and job opportunities) and another dedicated to a specific social protection theme. The platform began commissioning exclusive thematic blog posts from partner institutions and specialists for this second section.

In 2024, the platform launched a LinkedIn-format monthly newsletter. This format accumulated 3,280 new subscribers in its first six months and grew to nearly 5,000 subscribers and 19,465 article views by 2025. A quarterly Social Protection Digest, compiling practitioner guides and evidence-based studies, was also distributed through this channel.

Thematic coverage has adapted to global events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform launched a dedicated spin-off newsletter, Social Protection in Times of #COVID19. Produced by a collaborative task force, this bulletin released 23 issues between March and October 2020, mapping emergency responses for over 5,500 subscribers. In 2019, the newsletter introduced a deliberate geographic rotation, with consecutive monthly editions dedicated to South Asia, Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the MENA region, and Central Asia and East Asia and the Pacific. Regional bulletins, such as the bi-weekly newsletter for the Asia-Pacific Social Protection Online Community, supplement the global edition.

In 2024, socialprotection.org was tasked with producing Lifting Lives, the official newsletter for the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty under Brazil's G20 Presidency.

B.3. WEBINARS AND EVENTS

The 2026 redesign separated real-time events from structured capacity-building, assigning each to its own top-level category. The Webinars and Events section encompasses two sub-categories: webinars hosted by the platform and external events.

Webinars

Webinars have functioned as the primary vehicle for active knowledge exchange since the platform's launch. From an initial offering of 15 webinars in 2015, the platform scaled its broadcasting capacity to 364 hosted webinar sessions reaching 36,252 live attendees by August 2025, in partnership with 148 organisations (socialprotection.org, 2026). The 2026 website lists a cumulative total of 912 webinars, a figure that includes partner-hosted sessions and events for which the platform provided technical infrastructure.

The subjects covered in the webinars have tracked the global social protection agenda. In the foundational period (2015 to 2019), webinars focused on programme design, child allowances, cash transfers, gender, rural poverty, shock-responsive systems, and financing for social protection floors. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a massive pivot: 67 webinars were held in 2020 alone, covering universal basic income, protections for informal workers, gender-based violence, and government-to-person payment delivery. In the post-pandemic period (2022 to 2025), digital social protection emerged as the dominant theme, accounting for 33 per cent of webinars in 2023. Climate change adaptation, disability inclusion, and food and nutrition security became permanent fixtures.

The platform's success is linked to its capacity to host structured webinar series that allow for sustained, iterative dialogue rather than isolated presentations. The Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 series (32 sessions, co-organised with the IPC-IG, GIZ,

and DFAT) amassed over 6,000 live attendees. The Talking Interoperability series, driven by the Digital Convergence Initiative, focused on digital transformation in specific country systems. The ISPA Tools series, led by the ILO and the World Bank, trained practitioners on standardised assessment metrics. The USP2030 series, developed with the IPC-IG and the USP2030 Secretariat, promoted Universal Social Protection. Other partners that consistently co-organised series include UNICEF, WFP, FAO, Oxford Policy Management, and the Asian Development Bank.

The geographic distribution of webinar audiences reflects the platform's South-South mandate. Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and Central Asia have historically accounted for 25 to 30 per cent of the audience each. Targeted regional series expanded participation: MENA audiences rose to 13 per cent in 2024 and South Asian participation grew to 11 per cent in 2025. Government representatives consistently accounted for 18 to 22 per cent of live attendees. The panels featured country policymakers directly: examples include Nevine El-Kabbag (Minister of Social Solidarity, Egypt), Ariunzaya Ayush (Minister, Mongolia), Gabriel Lagomarsino (Vice President, Banco de Previsión Social, Uruguay), Cecilia Mbaka (Head, National Social Protection Secretariat, Kenya), and Mark Blecher and Lindi Mzankomo (National Treasury, South Africa).

To broaden inclusion, the platform increasingly provided simultaneous interpretation in French, Spanish, Arabic, and international sign language, reaching 19 translated sessions in 2025.

E-conferences and livestreams

The platform began incorporating livestreaming in 2017 to broadcast face-to-face gatherings, including the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement in Brussels and the Regional Seminar on Shock-responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean in Lima. The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a structural shift: in 2020, the platform created the e-Conferences content type. This dedicated digital architecture supported multi-day global events with expert clinics, virtual booth talks, and parallel thematic round tables.

The flagship 2020 e-conference, Turning the COVID-19 Crisis into an Opportunity: What's Next for Social Protection?, marked the platform's fifth anniversary. It gathered over 2,150 attendees from 112 countries, featuring 183 speakers and 28 moderators. The event was a joint effort of socialprotection.org, GIZ, DFAT, and the IPC-IG, with the active collaboration of 55 partner institutions. Subsequent e-conferences addressed digital social protection (three regional workshops in 2021, co-organised with GIZ, ADB, ECLAC, the African Union Commission, and the World Bank), disability and social protection inclusion (2022, with 14 co-organising agencies), and the Global Forum on Adaptive Social Protection in Berlin (2023, hosted by BMZ and the World Bank Group, attracting over 1,600 online participants from nearly 60 countries).

The platform's convening role extended to regional political processes. The Arab Ministerial Forum 2021, organised by the Regional UN Issue Based Coalition on Social Protection alongside the ILO, UNICEF, and UN ESCWA, brought together high-level social protection staff from 20 Arab countries. The active participation of these policymakers culminated in a formal Ministerial Declaration on a post-COVID-19 vision for the region. In 2025, socialprotection.org partnered with the USP2030 Secretariat to create the Social Protection Hub for the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha.

The platform has also supported the Asia-Pacific Social Protection Week in 2019 and 2023 (organised by ADB). Its contributions included technical and communications support, session development, speaker engagement, and broadcasting of selected sessions. Support for APSP Week 2026 has been secured.

B.4. LEARNING

The Learning category covers the platform's structured capacity-building activities. Under the 2026 redesign, it comprises two sub-categories: Courses and Training, and Academic Opportunities (socialprotection.org, 2026).

The Virtual Campus and e-Learning courses

The platform's Virtual Campus was originally conceived as a space to link external learning tools. In 2017, it was relaunched with an integrated Moodle-based Learning Management System, a critical upgrade that enabled the platform to co-develop and host both self-paced and instructor-led courses. By 2025, the platform had developed or hosted 35 online courses, issuing 4,004 certificates to practitioners globally (socialprotection.org, 2026). The LMS was upgraded in 2024 to the latest version of Moodle to optimise mobile compatibility and accessibility. The 2026 website lists 202 courses and training opportunities, a figure that includes both internally developed courses and external learning resources catalogued by the platform.

The thematic trajectory of the e-learning offer mirrors the growing complexity of the global social protection agenda. Foundational courses, such as "What is Social Protection? An Introduction" and "Social Protection Programmes," established baseline knowledge among practitioners. The platform then expanded into poverty analysis and the SDGs (in partnership with FAO and the ITC/ILO), adaptive and shock-responsive social protection (the ASPects Series, developed by IPC-IG with GIZ/BMZ support), digital social protection (courses on integrated information systems and data protection), and specialised intersections such as systems thinking for nutrition and child protection for children on the move.

The TRANSFORM curriculum represents the flagship e-learning initiative. Originally a face-to-face learning package focused on national social protection floors in Africa, led by the ILO, UNICEF, UNDP, and the EU Social Protection Systems Programme with funding from Irish Aid, it was adapted by the socialprotection.org team into an instructor-led e-course. The platform hosted Training of Trainers modules to build a regional network of e-facilitators capable of guiding cohorts through collaborative online discussions. Other major partnerships include the GIZ-funded Social Protection Fundamentals and Topics micro-course series, developed internally by the IPC-IG and socialprotection.org teams, and regional courses developed with WFP and CDEMA for the Caribbean, with the MENASP and the University of Birmingham for the MENA region, and with UNICEF Tunisia (supported by BMZ and KfW) for Arabic and French translations of core micro-courses.

Targeting country policymakers

A defining characteristic of the e-learning architecture is its explicit targeting of country policymakers and public officials in the Global South. The FAO poverty analysis courses initially targeted Morocco and Panama before being adapted for Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern

Africa. TRANSFORM was tailored for African contexts. The translation of micro-courses into Arabic expanded its reach in the MENA region.

Completion rates demonstrate the effectiveness of this targeting strategy. The Arabic version of "What is Social Protection?" achieved a 90 per cent certification rate, largely because the course was mandatory for government officials invited by UNICEF Tunisia, with public sector representatives accounting for 90 per cent of the cohort. The 2024 micro-courses achieved a 54 per cent certification rate, significantly higher than the rate typical of standard Massive Open Online Courses, due to integration into the formal training pipelines of UN agencies and partner governments.

B.5. THE NETWORK

The 2026 redesign absorbed the old Connect and Share pillars into a single Network category encompassing Online Communities, Member Profiles, Stakeholders, Ambassadors, and Job Opportunities. Content submission, which had been a standalone pillar (Share), was repositioned as a membership benefit rather than an isolated action. Submitting publications, joining communities, using the personalisation engine, and creating a member profile are now structurally positioned as elements of the membership value proposition (socialprotection.org 2026).

Membership and the value proposition

The platform offers free membership with eight defined benefits: access to the Sparks AI chatbot, AI-powered Smart Search, a personalised content experience based on topic preferences, newsletter subscriptions by theme, the ability to submit content, participation in Online Communities, access to the member directory, and a personal profile page. This structured articulation of membership value contrasts with the original model, which offered basic access without a clearly defined benefit framework (socialprotection.org, 2026).

The earlier Share pillar had provided mechanisms through which members could crowdsource the platform's databases by uploading publications, programmes, stakeholders, Online Communities, events, news, and surveys. This participatory model was critical to building the platform's early critical mass. In the first year, nearly 30 per cent of all available content was uploaded directly by members. As institutional partnerships grew and the total volume of content expanded, member-driven contributions stabilised at between 12 and 15 per cent of all new additions. All user-submitted content undergoes a structured review process by the knowledge management team to verify alignment with the social protection taxonomy.

Online Communities

The Online Communities constitute the backbone of the platform's networking infrastructure. Rather than operating as discussion boards, they are structured to support specific operational demands: working groups, Communities of Practice, or post-event follow-up mechanisms. By 2022, 40 different organisations were administrating 64 distinct communities on the platform.

The platform developed a differentiated access typology for these groups. Public Communities are open to all registered members without approval. Semi-Private Communities

require administrative approval. Hidden Communities do not appear in searches and serve as secure environments for internal working groups. Private Communities restrict access to invited members only. Repository Communities function as open hosting tools for public documents, without requiring active discussion. Open Communities allow anyone to view content but restrict active participation to members. Archived Communities, inactive for over a year, are closed to new members but preserve historical resources.

The most frequently debated topics within these groups mirror the global development agenda: poverty reduction, food and nutritional security, climate change adaptation, gender equality, and economic inclusion. The Social Protection in Crisis Contexts community, administered by Oxford Policy Management, UNICEF, and the European Commission, grew to 591 members by 2025 and serves as the platform's largest group. The Gender-Responsive Social Protection community, jointly administered by SPIAC-B, UNICEF, FCDO, FAO, DFAT, and the IPC-IG, functions as the knowledge management space for the SPIAC-B Gender Working Group. Other institutional administrators include ADB (Asia-Pacific Social Protection), DFAT and GIZ (Social Protection for Employment Community), the Nepal Red Cross Society and UNICEF (Forecast-based Action in Nepal), and the WFP and OPM (Sahel Social Registries).

To maintain engagement, active communities organise virtual hangouts and informal exchanges (the Crisis Contexts community hosts monthly sessions alternating between open discussions and guest presentations), structured e-discussions led by research programmes (such as the BASIC programme's discussions on assistance in protracted crises), and curated newsletters (the Asia-Pacific community releases monthly announcements with selected news, papers, and podcasts; the Social Protection for Employment Community maintains a resource matrix cataloguing over 200 publications).

The Social Space and member directory

In 2019, the platform developed a Social Space, an internal networking feature that enabled members to track the activities of peers, view newly uploaded materials, and curate personal reading lists. Under the 2026 redesign, these functions were integrated into the personalisation engine and the member directory. Members can now connect with professionals, view profiles, and access the Stakeholders directory through a unified interface.

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