

Introducing the Handbook of Social Protection Systems

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Social protection has been increasingly recognised by experts from different fields as a key instrument for social, economic, political, and environmental development. It is also known for tackling multiple goals related to the reduction of risk, poverty and inequality at once. Yet, its instruments are often seen in isolation, programmes are still managed in silos and the systemic aspect is often overlooked.

Engaging in critical discussions about the systemic aspect of social protection and outlining what it really takes to pursue a systemic approach has motivated the two editors, Prof. Dr. Esther Schüring from H-BRS and Dr. Markus Loewe from the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) to launch the very first Handbook on Social Protection Systems in late 2021.

The Handbook calls for a systemic approach to social protection, meaning that programmes within a country should: (i) talk to each other; (ii) be transparent and accountable; (iii) adjust their support to different groups in society according to their specific needs and possibilities; and (iv) be understood as a key ingredient of the social contract between government and citizens. It is unique in combining conceptual debates with practical insights, bridging the divide in the academic debate around social protection in the global South and North, and offering insights for newcomers as well as social protection experts.

The multimedia application supplements the open-access version in that it has additional features such as expert videos in addition to the original content. Key facts and highlights along with introductory videos prove helpful for the readers pressed for time. Similarly, advanced readers and experts in the field can test their knowledge through quizzes and directly proceed to more specialised chapters. Furthermore, the application allows for users to search by keyword, create their own highlights and store notes.

The systemic aspect of social protection is discussed in various areas, subdivided into eight parts:

- **Part I** establishes the five main social protection instruments and the conceptual and design considerations that are necessary for a coordinated system.
- **Part II** discusses the systemic aspects in the design of social protection systems. These include discussions

on target groups, targeting financing options, social protection actors or human rights approaches.

- **Part III** highlights the importance of policy coordination and harmonisation of different instruments. It discusses how social budgets can reflect the systemic aspect and stresses that related areas such as humanitarian aid are also part of the broader system.
- **Part IV** introduces design options for systems to be inclusive of gender and disability, just as it introduces groups in focus such as children, the informal sector and refugees, which are often not catered to (sufficiently) within standard social protection systems.
- **Part V** introduces the delivery of single programmes, focusing on cross-cutting elements such as integrated data management and portability of benefits.
- **Part VI** highlights the importance and specificities of political economy in the coordination of social protection responses.
- **Part VII** addresses the effects of social protection systems by giving an overview of useful databases and analytical methods used to assess their effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Part VIII** outlines the future challenges facing social protection systems, such as demographic change, globalisation, climate change, and the future of work, closing with a discussions of reform options.

Table 1. Multimedia features and their benefits

Faster reading	Expert content	Individualisation
Key facts and highlights	Interviews	Own highlights
Quizzes	Podcasts	Notes
Introductory videos	Animated videos	Keyword search

Note: While the key facts, highlights and quizzes are featured in each part, the introductory video is available per part.

References:

- Schüring, E., and M. Loewe (editors). 2021. *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Schüring, E., and M. Loewe (editors). 2021. *The multimedia application of the Handbook on Social Protection Systems*. Bonn: Litello GmbH.