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Aid's impact on social protection in low- and middle-income countries

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Abstract: This study conducts an international comparative analysis of the recent evolution of social protection systems in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and Asia-Pacific (APAC) regions, paying particular attention to the role of foreign aid in these dynamics. It asks: Has foreign aid contributed to the development of social protection systems? If so, what actors have driven this process? What modalities and financial instruments have been used to support social protection systems? What other factors have contributed to the recent evolution of social protection systems? To address these questions, we implement Tobit models with endogenous regressors (IV-Tobit), and fractional response models with endogenous regressors (FRM). Overall, we find that aid has contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South: an increase in social protection aid by one percentage point is estimated to lead to an increase in the share of countries' population covered by social protection by approximately 0.25 per cent, which is not negligible. The analysis also identifies key factors that have underpinned the recent expansion of social protection systems, including the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, their insertion into the global economy, and their level of income inequality. Donors' influence and policy diffusion seem to contribute to the expansion of social protection in some regions, particularly LAC and APAC, but not in SSA. The paper provides a discussion of plausible reasons underpinning these differences.

Key words: foreign aid, social protection, Global South, instrumental variables

JEL classification: H55, I38, O19, O57

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Note: Appendices 1, 2, and 3 are available as supplementary material here (https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/aids-impact-social-protection-low-and-middle-income-countries).

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1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating economic and social consequences brought about by lockdown and containment measures have exposed significant gaps in access to social protection systems within and across countries in the Global South. The ILO (2021: 19) estimates that more than half of the global population remain with no access to any form of social protection, although coverage rates vary markedly across world regions, from above 95 per cent in Western Europe to around 15 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. In many contexts, the pandemic has exacerbated the structural inequalities in access to social protection and disproportionately impacted informal workers, the poor, and other marginalized groups that are not covered by contributory social insurance or non-contributory social assistance programmes (Henson et al. 2020).

At the same time, the multiple and in many cases unprecedented policy responses introduced by national governments to mitigate the effects of the pandemic have underscored the urgent need to expand the coverage of social protection systems to better protect vulnerable populations and adequately respond to future crises.[1]

In this paper, we follow the ILO (2021: 29) and adopt a definition of social protection systems that reflects a set of public measures that are 'designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle. Social protection includes nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection, old-age benefits, disability benefits, and survivors' benefits.' These 'public measures' include distinctive policy strategies within social insurance, social assistance, and labour market regulation.[2]

Our focus is on interventions within non-contributory social assistance, as they represent the most important changes to social protection systems in Low-Income Countries (LICs) and middle-income countries (MICs) over the past two decades. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) such as Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and Mexico's *Progresa-Oportunidades-Prospera*; social pensions such as Lesotho's Old-Age Pension; unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) such as South Africa's Child Support Grant; and public works such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program are prominent examples of this wave of social protection in the Global South.[3]

These programmes have emerged in contexts where contributory social insurance schemes remain truncated, partly due to the persistence of informality and the dominance of subsistence agriculture.[4] Nonetheless, the pace at which social protection systems have expanded, as well as the type of programmes that have been adopted, varies substantially across countries and world

[1] For a comprehensive synthesis of policy responses in the area of social protection that sought to counter the impacts of COVID-19, see Gentilini et al. (2022) and ILO (2020).

[2] Social insurance includes contributory schemes designed to protect workers against life-course and work-related contingencies. Social assistance includes tax-financed and donor-funded policy instruments designed to address poverty and vulnerability (ILO 2021). Labour market regulation consists of legal frameworks aimed at ensuring minimum employment standards and safeguarding workers' rights.

[3] For a typology of social assistance, see Barrientos and Niño-Zarazúa (2010) and Niño-Zarazúa (2019).

[4] Informal employment represents about 80–90 per cent of total non-agriculture employment in LICs and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), and about 35–60 per cent in upper-middle-income countries (UMICs). Similarly, employment in agriculture, measured as a percentage of total employment, remains above 60 per cent in LICs and about 40 per cent and 20 per cent in LMICs and UMICs, respectively (World Bank 2019).

regions. Unsurprisingly, the poorest countries and fragile states observe the largest gaps in coverage and the most limited fiscal and administrative capacity to implement social protection systems to scale (Andrews et al. 2012; Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2012; Niño-Zarazúa 2019).

In an address to the 75th session of the General Assembly in 2021, the UN Secretary-General called for additional domestic resource mobilization efforts and international solidarity to assist LICs in closing the gap in access to social protection systems (United Nations 2021). There are normative and economic arguments that support this proposition.

From a social justice perspective, efforts to address current deficits in social protection coverage, particularly among poor countries and vulnerable populations, are welfare-enhancing (Sen 1970; Rawls 1971) . From a human rights perspective, the realization and fulfilment of social protection coverage and an adequate standard of living is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, particularly in Articles 22 and 25 (United Nations General Assembly 1948).[5]

From an economic angle, at the macro level, countries with well-developed social protection systems are in a better position to utilize these policy structures as countercyclical measures in times of crisis (Stiglitz 2013). At the micro level, a growing literature shows overall positive socio-economic impacts of these policies on households' well-being (Baird et al. 2013; Barrientos and Niño-Zarazúa 2010; Bastagli et al. 2019; Hillier-Brown et al. 2019; Kabeer and Waddington 2015; Lagarde et al. 2007; Malerba and Niño-Zarazúa, forthcoming; Owusu-Addo and Cross 2014).

Prior to the recent expansion of social protection, many LICs and MICs witnessed a series of important political and political economy developments that reshaped both state–society relations and interactions with domestic and external actors, institutions, and donors. In the area of development assistance, aid targeted at supporting social protection has historically captured a very small fraction of global aid budgets (about 2 per cent of total official development assistance), although in absolute terms it increased by approximately 60 per cent between 1995–99 and 2015–19 (see Table 2). While human rights principles and pro-poor redistribution have been valid reasons put forward by donors for the adoption of social protection (UNDP 2016), there are other factors that have underpinned its expansion. The socio-economic conditions that prevail in aid-recipient countries and the structure of their economies and political institutions, as well as external factors can all play an important role in shaping the level of adoption and institutionalization of social protection systems.

This study conducts an international comparative analysis of the recent evolution of social protection systems in LICs and MICs in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Asia-Pacific (APAC) regions, paying particular attention to the role of foreign aid in these dynamics. It asks: Has foreign aid contributed to the development of social protection systems? If so, what actors have driven this process? What modalities and financial instruments have been used to support social protection systems? Are there distinct features of aid delivery by types of donor? What other factors have contributed to the recent evolution of social protection systems? Taking an international comparative perspective is key to understanding the

[5] Article 22 states: 'Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.' Article 25 states: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.'

heterogeneous political and economic conditions and dynamics that are shaping social protection systems in the Global South.

Overall, econometric analysis indicates that aid has contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South: an increase in social protection aid by one percentage point is estimated to lead to an increase in the share of countries' population covered by social protection by approximately 0.25 per cent, which is not negligible. In SSA, results indicate a positive and statistically significant effect of aid on the expansion of social protection systems, with a size effect in the order of 0.26 per cent. Results from LAC (0.12 per cent, $p<0.1$) and APAC (0.24 per cent, $p<0.1$) provide further evidence of a positive effect of aid on the scale of social protection systems in the Global South.

The analysis also identifies key factors that have underpinned the recent expansion of social protection systems, including the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, their insertion in the global economy, and their level of income inequality. Donors' influence and policy diffusion, the political ideology of incumbent regimes, and previous aggregate shocks also appear to have contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in some regions, particularly LAC and APAC, but not in SSA. The paper provides a discussion of plausible reasons underpinning these differences.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature on the determinants of social protection expansion in LICs and MICs, focusing in particular on the role of foreign aid. Section 3 presents a discussion on the recent evolution of social protection, including the main data sources for measuring the scale of these systems. Section 4 discusses the definitions of social protection aid that are used in the analysis as well as an analysis of the main sources of financing in terms of type of donors, and aid modalities. Section 5 introduces the econometric methods used in the analysis whereas Section 6 presents the results. Section 7 discusses the findings with regard to key theoretical predictions highlighted by the literature. Finally, Section 8 concludes with some reflection on the implications of the findings for policy.

2 Literature review

This section relies extensively on the findings of systematic review conducted by Niño-Zarazúa and Tiburcio-Manon (forthcoming) on the determinants of adoption and expansion of social protection systems in LICs and MICs. Within this literature, we focus in particular on works that examine the role of external actors, which through foreign aid, donor influence, and the diffusion of successful policies are expected to promote the expansion of social protection in LICs and MICs.

Most of the studies that adopt an econometric approach rely mainly on cross-sectional variation at country level, making meaningful comparisons challenging. However, even if econometric methods can mitigate estimation constraints, the main challenge remains the identification of the causal aid–social protection relationship. Indeed, the quantitative literature has not in our view offered credible causal evidence of the impact of aid on social protection expansion. Qualitative studies tend to acknowledge their limitations, too. For the most part, they are explicit about the trade-offs between in-depth process tracing and the number of cases studied. Overall, the literature highlights important findings.

First, multilateral and bilateral organizations seem to have played an important role in promoting social protection. Among others, the literature identifies the influential role of the World Bank,

Dfid, UNICEF, ILO, European Union, World Food Programme, and USAID, especially in the context of sub-Saharan Africa (Cherrier 2016; Ulriksen 2016; Simpson 2018; Ouma 2019; Abdulai 2021), but also in Southeast Asia (Dadap-Cantal et al. 2021) and at the global level (Dodlova 2020). There are studies that focus on the role of the World Bank in expanding social protection systems in Latin America (Béland et al. 2018; Saguin and Howlett 2019), as well as the influence of the Asian Development Bank, WFP, and GIZ in Southeast Asia et al. 2015). Their hypothesized contributions are either *direct*, through funding and conditionalities, or *indirect*, through persuasion, encouragement of further resource mobilization, and capacity building (Cherrier 2016; Ouma and Adésínà 2019).

Different donors seem to have distinct preferences for specific types and designs of programmes that recipient countries are expected to adopt, e.g. the World Bank's inclination for CCTs and conditionalities in general (Simpson 2018; Dodlova 2020). Likewise, international agencies tend to resort to successful models from other latitudes when promoting social protection policies (Béland et al. 2018; Saguin and Howlett 2019). While the literature does contrast the preferences of donors, it does not explicitly study the consequences that potentially conflicting preferences among donors have brought about when they attempt to influence domestic policies.

Donors also appear to be particularly persuasive when they can frame their preferred programmes according to the interests of national elites (Abdulai 2021; Ulriksen 2016; Wanyama and McCord 2017). Social protection is particularly likely to emerge when international organizations meet public-minded bureaucracies (Kwon *et al.* 2015; Lavers and Hickey 2016). Importantly, however, this literature does recognize the potential disadvantages of excessively politicizing social protection (Hickey and Bukenya 2020).

Although foreign aid is described as overwhelmingly positive in the literature, the role of donors is not always positive. Donor policies may not be optimal due to, for example, orthodox views on how social security and social assistance programmes should be integrated into a system (Dadap-Cantal et al. 2021). Niño-Zarazúa and Tiburcio-Manon (forthcoming) also identify other key categories of explanatory factors that underpin the development of social protection systems, including i) historical legacies and path dependence; ii) the role of institutions, in particular democratic institutions, political settlements, and the judiciary system; iii) economic and demographic factors; iv) the role of ideas; and v) covariate shocks. We rely on this evidence to control for these factors in the econometric analysis presented in Section 5 below.

3 The evolution of social protection in the Global South

Measuring the scale and evolution of social protection systems in an international comparative perspective remains challenging due to data limitations and differences in the conceptualization and definition of social protection across the organizations that track progress and collect information on the scope and coverage of social protection programmes.

Social protection systems are defined in this study as nationwide policy portfolios aimed at protecting populations against life-course and employment-related hazards that threaten acceptable levels of well-being; supporting their productive capacity; and facilitating their full participation in society (Gough et al. 2004; Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2012; ILO 2021). These 'policy portfolios' are underpinned and supported by institutional, legal, and administrative capabilities and the fiscal space that countries have in which to build integrated management information systems, beneficiary registries, monitoring and evaluation systems, and delivery mechanisms that will facilitate the coordination and management of multiple programmes and welfare entitlements

in a harmonized and cost-effective manner. Countries with well-developed systems and financial resources are in a better position to support large-scale social protection programmes with nationwide coverage. Thus, we focus on the nationwide *coverage* of social protection programmes as a proxy for the scale of social protection systems.

While nationwide coverage, measured as the total of all beneficiaries of all functioning social protection programmes in country *i* in period *t*, is an imperfect proxy for the scale of social protection systems, we argue that in the absence of accurate data, it is ultimately the best indicator of the capabilities that countries have for institutional and financial arrangements—and their management and implementation—to distribute entitlements and provide protection to eligible populations.

We examined the most relevant data sources[6] for measuring the scale of social protection systems in LICs and MICs, namely: the ILO's World Social Protection (WSP) database; the World Bank's ASPIRE database; and the Social Assistance, Politics, and Institutions (SAPI) database.[7]

The first two databases provide relevant information on the current scale of social protection systems at a cross-sectional level, but without the key longitudinal information that is needed to measure the evolution of these systems. The third database provides information on the evolution and current take-up of social protection systems, in particular social assistance programmes, over the past two decades and allows us to take advantage of the time and spatial variation in social protection expansion to conduct econometric analysis.

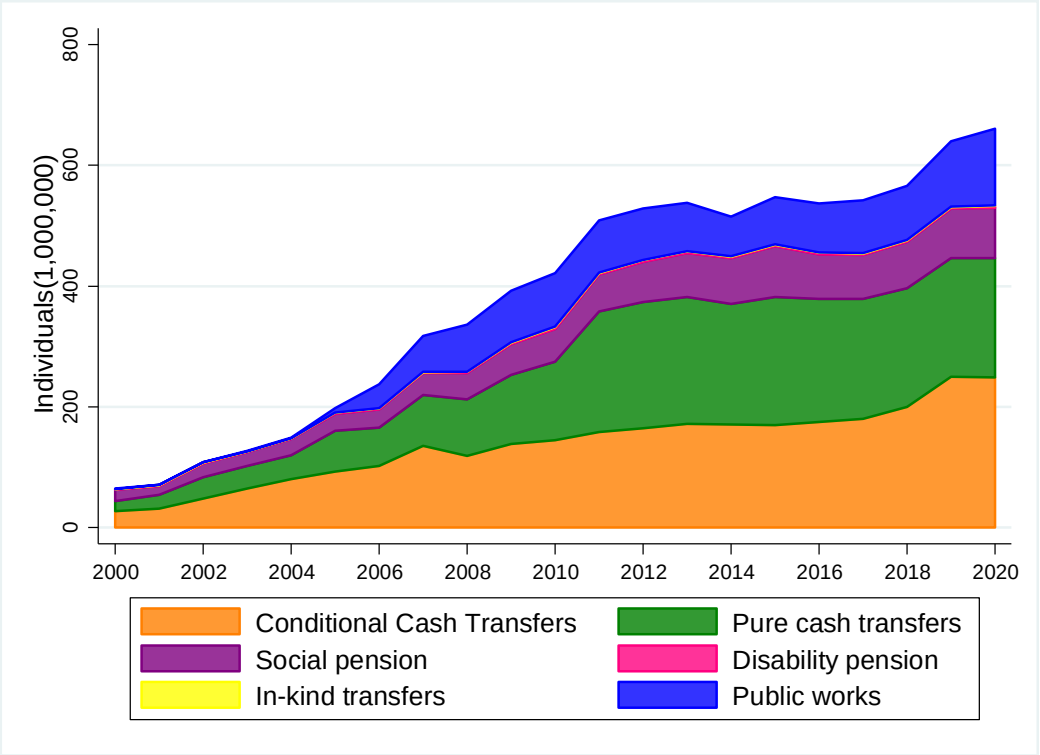
We focus on two indicators: the first indicator measures the total coverage of direct and indirect beneficiaries by type of programme in millions of beneficiaries and captures the *absolute* scale of social protection systems and their evolution over the past two decades. The second indicator normalizes absolute coverage by national populations to provide a measure of the expansion of *relative* coverage of social protection across countries.

Figure 1 shows the recent evolution of social assistance by type of programme based on the SAPI database, with CCTs and UCTs showing the largest increases in terms of absolute coverage. Figure A.1 and Figure A1.2 in Appendix 1 show the evolution of the absolute scale of social assistance by world regions and the World Bank's country income classification. The largest expansion of social protection systems in SSA is observed among UCTs, followed by social pensions and public works. In LAC, in contrast, CCTs have dominated the extensive expansion of social protection, followed by social pensions, while in APAC there is a more equal distribution of social protection take-up—public works, CCTs, and UCTs being the favoured policies for providing support to vulnerable populations.

[6] We discuss these data sources in Appendix 1.

[7] This paper uses the 2021 version of the SAPI database, which is not publicly available. The previous version (2018) is hosted on UNU-WIDER's website: https://www.wider.unu.edu/project/sapi-social-assistance-politics-and-institutions-database.

Figure 1: Number of beneficiaries (in millions) by type of programme



Source: authors' calculations, based on the SAPI database (version 2021).

Data show a significant jump in the scale of coverage in the mid-2000s and then a gradual expansion of social protection systems to the end of 2020.[8] We exploit this temporal variation in the data, as well as the spatial variation in the scale of coverage, to estimate the effect of aid on the expansion of social protection systems worldwide. In the next section, we present a statistical analysis of the composition of and trends in aid flows targeted at supporting social protection systems. We discuss aid measures and the data sources used for analysis.

4 Measuring aid to social protection

In this study, we focus on aid allocations to support social protection systems in the developing world. Aid is broadly defined as the 'transfer of concessional resources from one government to another government, nongovernmental organization, or international organization to promote long-term beneficial change' (Lancaster 2009: 799).

Aid is commonly channelled through distinct modalities and financial instruments. In the OECD-DAC CRS terminology, 'type of aid' refers to the modalities used to distribute aid, including budget support (general or at sector level); core contributions and pooled programmes and funds; project-type interventions; and experts and other technical assistance. In contrast, the term 'type of finance' is used to distinguish the financial instruments used in the delivery of aid, e.g., grants, debt instruments, equity, guarantees, mezzanine finance, and debt relief (OECD 2018).

[8] See Table A1.5, Table A1.6, and Table A1.7 in Appendix 1 for a list of the largest social protection programmes in the SSA, LAC, and APAC regions, respectively.

In order to measure aid to social protection, we take two alternative definitions of social protection aid that are consistent with the conceptual definition of social protection systems adopted in this study. The first, 'narrow' definition encapsulates donor support to activities that fall under OECD-DAC CRS purpose code 16010 (Social Protection), which include those listed in the left column of Table 1. The second, 'broad' definition covers the activities included in the 'narrow' definition plus support to the activities (under various other codes) listed in the right column of Table 1.

While the narrow definition can be more closely associated with aid activities that aim to develop and strengthen systems that distribute welfare benefits in cash or in kind, the broader definition also considers activities that assist both active and passive labour market policies, as well as economic assistance for people living with HIV, which is a population subgroup that is particularly large and vulnerable in SSA.

Table 1: Social protection aid by definition

Activities under the 'narrow' definition (CRS code 16010)	Activities under the 'broad' definition
1. Social protection or social security strategies 2. Legislation and administration 3. Institution capacity building and advice 4. Social security and other social schemes 5. Support programmes 6. Cash benefits, pensions, and special programmes for older persons, orphans, persons with disabilities, children, mothers with newborns, those living in poverty, those without jobs, and other vulnerable groups 7. Social dimensions of structural adjustment	Activities 1–7, plus 8. Employment creation (CRS code 16020) 9. Special programmes to mitigate the effect of HIV/AIDS (CRS code 16064) 10. Labour rights (CRS code 16070) 11. Social dialogue (CRS code 16080)

Source: authors' compilation based on the OECD-DAC CRS code classification.

In order to measure these two definitions of aid to social protection, we resort to the OECD-DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) dataset. We focus on aid commitments in constant prices for total ODA grants, ODA loans, and other official flows (non-export credit), as the series in constant prices are the most appropriate for longitudinal analysis. We rely on commitments data, since their annual coverage is more complete and because disbursements data cannot be regarded as a reliable source before the mid-2000s due to misreporting issues. Nonetheless, the correlation between commitment and disbursement data is high, especially since the mid-2000s, when aid budgets became systematically reported in the CRS data system (see Figure A2.1 in Appendix 2).

Aid to social protection, measured as a percentage of total global aid to all sectors of activity, has historically captured only a very small fraction of global aid budgets, although in absolute terms aid to social protection increased by approximately 60 per cent between 1995–99 and 2015–19 (see Table 2). Taking the broad definition of social protection aid as a benchmark, and focusing on the period 1995–99, we observe that global donors allocated approximately US$4 billion annually to support social protection systems worldwide, which represented approximately 3.8 per cent of total developmental aid budgets.[9] By the period 2015–19, global aid to social protection had

[9] We refer to total developmental aid as the sum of overseas development assistance (ODA) allocated with the purpose of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Total developmental aid includes all activities listed in the CRS purpose codes from 110 to 998; it excludes military aid, peacekeeping expenditures, and aid for nuclear energy and certain cultural activities. For more details on the coverage of total ODA, see https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm.

increased to US$6.6 billion, although these funds remained marginal, representing just above 2 per cent of total overseas development assistance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Aid to social protection by type of donor and aid definition (in US$ million at constant prices)

Source of aid	Aid definition	1995–99	2000–04	2005–09	2010–14	2015–19
Global aid	Total developmental aid	106,482	127,722	195,470	230,048	304,889
	Broad (%)	3.81	3.64	2.82	2.47	2.16
	Narrow (%)	3.42	3.05	2.26	1.92	1.65
Top five donors	Total developmental aid	35,988	47,764	74,382	69,790	89,605
	Broad (%)	0.85	0.79	1.48	1.53	0.94
	Narrow (%)	0.50	0.36	1.16	1.27	0.61
Multilateral aid	Total developmental aid	47,547	44,319	63,835	93,804	133,173
	Broad (%)	7.14	8.54	5.66	3.95	3.60
	Narrow (%)	6.82	7.66	4.83	3.13	2.95
Bilateral aid	Total developmental aid	58,934	83,402	131,635	136,244	171,686
	Broad (%)	1.12	1.04	1.44	1.45	1.05
	Narrow (%)	0.69	0.60	1.01	1.08	0.64
OECD-DAC countries aid	Total developmental aid	52,803	71,643	111,703	112,533	138,959
	Broad (%)	1.09	1.00	1.37	1.29	0.86
	Narrow (%)	0.72	0.60	0.97	0.97	0.53

Note: global aid is measured as the sum of total aid from OECD-DAC countries, multilateral donors, and non-DAC countries. Multilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, ILO, and FAO. Bilateral aid is measured as the sum of aid from DAC and non-DAC members, whereas DAC countries aid measures exclusively aid flow from DAC countries. The top five donor countries for the *entire* period are the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Netherlands, and Germany. From 2000, the top five donors in decreasing order are the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and France. For the full list of agencies listed under each category, see the OECD-DAC and CRS code lists available at: https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/dacandcrscodelists.htm.

Source: authors' calculations based on OECD-DAC CRS.

At the global scale, and measured in absolute terms, social protection aid based on either the narrow or the broad definition followed an upward trend from the 1990s until 2008, when it reached a maximum historical level, and then it remained flat at around US$4.4 and US$5.5 billion during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008–09, respectively. In recent years, aid volumes to social protection have gradually recovered to US$6.5 and US$8.1 billion in 2019 based on the narrow and broad definitions, respectively.

However, when we measure aid flows to social protection as a percentage of total aid allocation, we observe a different pattern (see Table 2). While we find an increase in the relative share of social protection aid to global developmental assistance during the late 1990s and early 2000s, these shares begin to show a downward trend from the mid-2000s, which continues after the financial crisis. More specifically, social protection aid peaked at approximately 3.8 and 3.4 per cent of total aid flows in the period 1995–99 and since then has shown a gradual downward trend to 2.2 and 1.7 per cent in the period 2015–19, based on the broad and narrow definitions, respectively.

Thus, absolute and relative aid measures together indicate that while aid flows to social protection have followed an overall positive trend in absolute volumes, these trends have been outpaced by the more active dynamism of development assistance going to other sectors such as health and education (Addison *et al.* 2015; Niño-Zarazúa 2016), leading to an overall decrease in the share of aid budgets being allocated to support social protection systems. This may also be indicative of a declining weight accorded to social protection as a development policy within the global development agenda.

4.1 Aid by type of donor

In order to better understand the recent dynamics of social protection aid, we break down the analysis by type of donor. Interestingly, we find that multilateral organizations have been the largest contributors of aid to social protection since the early 1990s, contributing over two-thirds of development finance to the sector. The dominant influence of multilaterals is in clear contrast to what we observe in development aid to all sectors of activity, in which bilateral aid has featured prominently, providing more than half of financial resources (see Figure A2.2 and Figure A2.3 in Appendix 2).

In terms of absolute volumes, bilateral social protection aid has oscillated over the longer term, but observing a growing pattern since the late 1990s, first peaking at around 1 per cent of total aid (broad definition) in the mid-1990s, then falling in the early 2000s before increasing again from 2005. Qualitative evidence reported in Niño-Zarazúa et al. (2022) indicates that the patterns in bilateral aid can be linked to a myriad of factors, including changes in foreign policy priorities in development sectors and countries, demand-driven responses to crises and shocks in recipient countries, corrupt practices and antidemocratic behaviour of recipient governments that lead to the rescission of cooperation agreements, and wide-ranging objectives in bilateral strategies for development cooperation (e.g. allocating resources to social protection to jointly improve access to education or health care utilization).

4.2 Aid modalities

Regarding aid modalities, the data in the OECD-DAC CRS dataset are unreliable prior to 2010, which makes our analysis truncated and restricted to the past decade. Despite these constraints, the available data provide interesting insights. We observe that both bilateral and multilateral aid are concentrated in project-type interventions, usually devoting more than half of total contributions to social protection (based on the broad definition) through this aid modality. Multilaterals also rely on budget support and, to a much lesser extent, on technical assistance to support social protection systems, while bilaterals channel a significant proportion of their operations via core contributions, pooled programmes, and funds (see Figure A2.4 and Figure A2.5 in Appendix 2). The preference for project aid over other modalities such as budget support is symptomatic of broader considerations that relate to governance issues, state capacity, and foreign policy, all of which, as we discussed below, underpin the relationship between donors and recipient countries.

Data also show that grants, which are transfers in cash, goods, or services for which no repayment is required, are the main financial instrument used by bilaterals to contribute to social protection systems. The preference for this financial instrument reflects the fact that recipient countries of aid in the area of social protection are increasingly LICs, especially in SSA. This pattern is symptomatic among bilateral donors, which distribute aid primarily through grants, vis-à-vis multilaterals (especially the World Bank), which rely more on debt instruments, especially among LMICs and UMICs (see Figure A2.6 and Figure A2.7 in Appendix 2). Indeed, looking at how aid flows are distributed across countries by their per capita national income, we observe significant differences between bilateral and multilateral agencies. Multilateral aid to social protection has been distributed among both UMICs and LMICs, while bilateral aid has been distributed largely among LMICs, and also to support non-country programmable aid and regional bodies (see Figure A2.8 in Appendix 2).

Data also show that aid to social protection has been cyclical, spiking in response to aggregate shocks including financial crises (e.g. the East Asian Financial crisis of 1998–99 and the 2008–09 global financial crisis) and price shocks (e.g. the world food crisis of 2007–09). Indeed, as shown

in Figure A2.8, between 2009 and 2011, aid to social protection witnessed the largest increase over the period under analysis, particularly among UMICs and LMICs, reflecting countries' increasing demand for resources to scale up and reform social protection systems in response to the global financial crisis (World Bank 2012; Deacon 2013). The increasing demand for social protection aid also coincided with the emergency situations arising from the world food crisis of 2007–09 (Chiripanhura and Niño-Zarazúa 2016; Devereux 2016; Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2010).

However, the bulk of multilateral aid distributed in the aftermath of the financial crisis, in particular from the World Bank, was channelled to MICs that already had social protection programmes in place. Many LICs were unable to absorb social protection aid because they had not yet introduced social protection programmes to scale. This underscores the importance of building social protection systems in order to be in a position to utilize these policy structures as countercyclical instruments in times of crisis.

4.3 Aid by world regions

This finding is corroborated when we break down aid flows by world regions. LAC countries have been the largest recipients of financial support throughout the entire period under analysis, absorbing about 60 per cent of global aid to social protection in the 1990s and as much as 65 per cent in the period 2000–05, before gradually declining to about 30 per cent by the 2010s.

Countries in SSA and the MENA region have been the second and third largest recipients of global social protection aid over the past decade, both regions observing an increasing share, from just 8 per cent and 4 per cent in the 1990s, to 24 per cent and 16 per cent since the last half of the 2010s, respectively (see Table 3 and also Figure A2.9 in Appendix 2).

The large concentration of social protection aid in LAC, as well as the growing trend in aid budgets going to SSA, is largely driven by multilateral agencies, which have played a key role in supporting the expansion of social protection systems in those regions (see Figure A2.10). In the case of LAC, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization have been the driving forces in the financing and strengthening of social protection systems; whereas in the case of SSA, the World Bank has been by far the largest direct contributor of financial resources to the expansion of social protection over the past decade, although with financial support from donor countries. Bilateral aid has been somewhat more evenly distributed, the largest share being allocated to the MENA region and to regional institutions and non-country programmable aid activities. More recently, over the second half of the 2010s, larger (although still small) proportions of bilateral aid have been allocated to countries in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and SSA (see Figure A2.10).

The increasing focus by DAC countries and multilaterals on LICs and fragile states, particularly in SSA, makes aid work in this area more complex and challenging. These challenges are symptomatic of the precarious conditions at various levels, including administration (e.g. limited population registries and an unprofessionalized bureaucracy), programmes (e.g. dysfunctional and ineffective delivery systems), and policies (limited resource mobilization capacity and fiscal capacity to sustain programmes and systems to scale) (Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2012; World Bank 2012), and in part explains the stronger coordination and harmonization between bilaterals and multilaterals in the process of assisting social protection systems in the past decade. At the centre of these international development efforts is the following question: Has aid contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South? And if so, through which channels and mechanisms? We take advantage of advanced econometric methods and the available data to test empirically whether aid, and other key underlying factors highlighted by the literature, have

contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South. In the next section, we discuss our empirical strategy.

Table 3: Average annual aid to social protection by donor 2000-2019

	All	Asia-Pacific	Latin America	Sub-Saharan Africa
Narrow definition				
DAC	583.6	248.6	71.4	178.4
Non-DAC	8.0	3.0	0.016	1.1
Bilateral	685.4	290.5	86.2	193.4
Multilateral	3,312.3	688.0	1,890.2	541.1
Top5	421.3	179.3	45.2	121.9
Non-Top5	3,576.4	799.2	1,931.2	612.6
Broad definition				
DAC	804.8	331.1	109.5	246.1
Non-DAC	8.1	3.0	0.017	1.1
Bilateral	1,040.3	469.9	132.1	276.2
Multilateral	3,870.4	816.4	2,200.0	630.0
Top5	542.3	221.7	70.6	150.5
Non-Top5	4,368.4	1,064.6	2,261.6	755.7

Note: narrow definition includes donations received for social protection. Broad definition includes donations received for social protection, employment creation, social mitigation of HIV/AIDS, labour rights, and social dialogue. Commitments at constant prices in millions of US$.

Source: author's calculations, based on OECD´s Creditor Reporting System.

5 Methodology

Since data on social protection coverage allow us to measure both the scale and evolution of social protection systems, in absolute numbers of beneficiaries as well as in relative terms, normalised by countries' populations, we implemented two empirical strategies.

The first strategy takes advantage of the gradual evolution of social protection systems over the past two decades, looking at the absolute coverage that these systems provide to vulnerable populations, based on the SAPI database. Looking in particular at the distribution of coverage of non-contributory programmes, we observe a left-censored normal distribution (see Figure 1), which reflects the fact that many countries in early years did not have systems of social protection in place, and it was not until the early 2000s that we began to observe a positive and growing coverage in a larger number of LICs and MICs.

5.1 Tobit model with an endogenous regressor

Since we suspect aid allocations to be endogenous and inversely correlated with the scale of social protection systems, the use of ordinary least squares (OLS) would render biased and inconsistent estimates. In order to address these constraints, we follow Newey, (1987), and implement a Tobit model with endogenous regressors (IV-Tobit). This instrumental variable approach, which has

been implemented in similar contexts (see Niño-Zarazúa and Santillán-Hernández 2021), takes the following form:

$$C_{it}^{*} = \beta X_{it-1} + \delta A_{it-1} + \lambda_t + u_{it}, \quad (1)$$

where

$$C_{it} = max\,(0, C_{it}^{*}),\ i = 1, \ldots N, \text{t= } 1, \ldots, T,$$

and

$$A_{it-1} = X_{it-1} + \gamma z_{it-1} + \lambda_t + \upsilon_{it}. \quad (2)$$

C_{it} measures coverage of social protection programmes (in thousands of beneficiaries) in country *i,* and time *t*; A_{it-1} is our variable of interest and measures the amount of aid that goes to support social protection systems in country *i,* and in time t-1, based on either our 'narrow' or 'broad' definition as described in the previous section. X_{it-1} is a vector of control variables that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection across our sample of countries, based on the evidence arising from the systematic review of the literature, whereas λ_t controls for universal time trends.

We note that the latent dependent variable, C_{it}^{*}, is censored at zero with only C_{it} being observed, i.e. $C_{it} = C_{it}^{*}$ if $C_{it}^{*} > 0$, and $C_{it} = 0$ if $C_{it}^{*} \leq 0$, therefore, the error terms, u_{it} and υ_{it}, follow a left-censored at zero distribution, N(0,$\sigma_{u|\upsilon}^{2}$).

Finally, z is a vector of instrumental variables that are expected to be correlated with A_{it-1} but not with C_{it}. We note that the aid variable, A, as well as the controls in vector X are lagged one period to capture possible delayed feedback effects that aid and other economic, political, and demographic factors can have on contemporaneous levels social protection coverage, and also mitigate the endogenous relationship between aid and scale of social protection systems, since contemporaneous levels of coverage cannot determine aid allocations decisions in period t−1.

5.2 Fractional response model with an endogenous regressor

The second empirical strategy takes advantage of the scale of social protection coverage relative to the size of the populations in the corresponding countries. However, since social protection programmes cover just a fraction of these populations, we follow Wooldridge (2005) and Rivers and Vuong (1988) and adopt a fractional response model with an endogenous regressor (FRM). In our case the FRM exploits information on coverage based on the SAPI database, which is normalised by countries' populations.[10] Thus, the fractional response of social protection coverage C_i is $0 \leq C_i \leq 1$, with probabilities $P(C_i{=}0){>}1$, or $P(C_i{=}1){>}0$.

Since social protection aid, A_i is continuous but expected to be endogenous, we set up the following conditional mean model:

[10] We ran the FRM models using the World Bank's ASPIRE and ILO's WSP datasets. Unfortunately, these datasets only report cross-sectional information at country level, which limited our ability to capture the temporal variation in programmes' take up and its correlation with social protection aid. Therefore, we focus on the SAPI database for the econometric analysis. Results based on the ASPIRE and WSP databases are available on request from the authors.

$$E(C_i|\mathbf{z}_i, A_i, a_i) = \Phi(X_i\beta_i + a_i) \quad (3)$$

$$A_i = \mathbf{z}_i\gamma_i + \upsilon_i, \quad (4)$$

where

X_i is in this case a nonlinear function of $\mathbf{z}_i$ and A_i, and a_i is an omitted factor that is correlated with donors' decisions to distribute aid to support social protection systems, A_i, but uncorrelated with the exogenous vector of covariates $\mathbf{z}_i$. The average partial effects can be obtained from the following average structural function:

$$ASF(X_i) = E_{a_i}[\Phi(X_i\beta_i + a_i)] = \Phi(X_i\beta_{ai}), \quad (5)$$

where

$$\beta_{ai} = \beta_i/(1 + \sigma_{a_i}^2)^{1/2}. \quad (6)$$

The instrumental variables

We implement the IV-Tobit and FRM models with the inclusion of two different combinations of instruments in z. The first combination uses (i) inflation in the donor country weighted by the trade intensity between donor and recipient countries, and (ii) the share of women in the parliament of the donor country weighted by a rainfall shock in the recipient country.

The second combination of instruments uses (i) the inflation in the donor country weighted by the trade intensity between donor and recipient countries but combines it with (ii) the left-wing government parties' seat share as percentage of all governing parties' seat share in donor countries weighted by a rainfall shock in the recipient country.

The rationale behind the use of donor country inflation weighted by trade intensity is that donors are more likely to be generous with aid when their domestic economies are in an upswing, which may be linked to higher inflation. This link would be stronger, the deeper a trade relationship is between donors and recipient countries.

The use of the share of women in parliament, or of the share of left-wing government parties, relies on the assumption that both groups are likely to be more generous with the provision of aid than their corresponding counterparts. In other words, female parliamentarians are more likely to support aid policies than their counterpart male parliamentarians, as well as left-wing parties are more likely to be in favour of giving aid than right-wing parties. Both instruments are weighted by rainfall shocks in the recipient country as a proxy for an income shock that would show greater need for financial assistance in the recipient country.

Our prior here rely on extensive evidence that shows a strong correlation between rainfall shocks and a declining agricultural output (Auffhammer et al. 2006; Fishman 2016; Lesk et al. 2016), poorer firm-level performance (Islam and Hyland 2019), undesirable health outcomes (Maccini and Yang 2009; Hyland and Russ 2019), a lower GDP growth (Brown et al. 2014; Damania et al. 2020), and a higher likelihood of civil conflict (Miguel et al. 2004). Thus, rainfall shocks are expected to have detrimental effects on vulnerable populations. The weighting of each of the four instruments is done following Dietrich and Wright (2015)'s approach.

Data on donor inflation comes from World Bank's World Development Indicators, data on parliamentary or government composition are from the Comparative Politics Dataset (CPDS),

dyadic trade data come from Correlates of War Project, while annual rainfall data come from the Terrestrial Precipitation: 1900-2014 Gridded Monthly Time Series (Matsuura and Willmott 2014) (see Table A3.8 in Appendix 3).

Model specifications

We adopt several versions of the IV-Tobit and FRM models that capture dimensions that are expected to influence the scale of social protection systems as highlighted by the literature outline above.

The first model, which we refer to as Model 1, includes in vector *X,* indicators that measure the potential effects of countries' economic conditions and external factors beyond foreign aid. Specifically, we include: the log income per capita lagged one period to capture the stock of physical capital and the rate of economic convergence in aid-recipient countries; the annual rate of economic growth in order to measure the dynamism of the economies; the share of total government revenues to GDP (excluding grants and social contributions), to capture the redistributive fiscal capacity of countries to scale up social protection coverage; total natural resources rents (the sum rents from oil, natural gas coal, minerals, and forest), measured in percentage of GDP, which are expected to support economic diversification but also potentially undermine social protection expansion via state capture (Currie and Gahvari 2008; Caselli and Cunningham 2009; Caselli and Michaels 2009); the unemployment rate measures the conditions in the labour market and the potential demands for protection among the working-age population; trade openness, measured as the sum of imports and exports normalized by GDP, captures the extent to which a country is engaged with the global economy, and may face the need to improve competitiveness at the potential cost of decreased social security expenditures; the number of donors involved in the expansion of social protection systems in a given country, to capture the density as well as potentially competing agendas by external actors; the average number of social protection programmes in neighbouring countries, which measures the potential policy diffusion effects in the expansion of social protection systems.

A second model, which we refer to as Model 2, adds to Model 1 factors that are associated with socio-demographics, including the age dependency ratio as proportion of the working-age population, which is likely to influence the type of social transfer programmes that are adopted by political regimes; the fertility rate, which is expected to affect aggregate demand and future requirements for social services and welfare benefits; the under-five child mortality rates, which we proxy for material deprivations that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems.[11] We employ child mortality rates due to the significant informational gaps in our sample regarding poverty headcount rates, and because of the high correlations between child mortality and income poverty (Haile and Niño-Zarazúa 2018).[12] We also include the share of the urban population, which is expected to influence the type of social protection benefits that are adopted by government; population density, measured as the number of people per square kilometre of land area. Higher population density is expected to reduce the unit costs of delivering welfare benefits, thus increasing the probability of their expansion and the Gini index measures the level of income inequality in a country, and how economic disparities may influence preferences for

[11] Child mortality rates are estimated by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, constituted by UNICEF, WHO, World Bank and UN DESA Population Division, and were extracted from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2019).

[12] The Pearson correlation (r) coefficient, which measures a linear dependence between under-five child mortality rates and the poverty headcount ratio at $1.90 a day (2011 PPP) in the period 1009-2015, was in the order of 0.99 for East Asia and the Pacific, 0.92 for Latin America, 0.96 for South Asia, and 0.96 for sub-Saharan Africa.

redistribution as highlighted by the literature (Benabou 2000; Alesina and Giuliano 2011; Acemoglu et al. 2015; Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2021).

A third model (Model 3) adds to Model 1 indicators that capture the influence of history and path dependence in the expansion of social protection systems, including the number of years since independence, to capture the maturity of national institutions; and a dummy variables to measure whether a country *i* was a colony of three dominant former colonial powers, namely Britain, France and Spain.

A fourth model (Model 4) adds to Model 1 dimensions that capture the effect of institutions to the expansion of social protection systems, including the state of democracy measured by the Electoral Democracy Index from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), and which is expected to facilitate the expansion of social protection via political pressure and demands of social policy reform; the quality of government, which we proxy by the bureaucratic quality index from the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), which measures the soundness of institutions and the quality of the civil service; the level of party institutionalization, which reflects the capacity of incumbent governments to implement social protection policies, and make credible commitments to voters; a measure of compliance with judiciary, which captures the extent to which judicial courts serve as vehicles to expand social policy; and military spending—measured as a share of GDP—which captures the financial resources dedicated to defence and security, and can have positive or negative effects depending on the level of state fragility and conflict and the type of regime in control of public finances (Brauner 2015; Rota 2016).

A fifth model (Model 5) adds to Model 1 dimensions in the domain of political ideology that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems, including dummies that measure whether a ruling government in time t has a centrist, leftist or rightist political orientation.

Finally, a sixth model (Model 6) adds to Model 1 additional controls that capture the effects of aggregate shocks on the expansion of social protection systems, including the number of years a country *i* was immersed in a financial crisis in period t-1; and a dummy variable measuring whether a country *i* experienced a weather shock in period *t*. We present a summary of all indicators used in models (1-6) and their sources in Table A3.1 in Appendix 3.

When implementing the above models, we consider several functional forms. For the case of IV-Tobit models, the first functional form adopts a linear-linear specification, in which coverage is measured in millions of beneficiaries, and social protection aid—which is based on either the broad or narrow definitions—is entered in levels, in millions of US dollars at constant prices. The second functional form adopts a linear-log specification, in which coverage is linear and aid is entered in logarithm, whereas the third functional form adopts a log-log specification.

The linear-linear specification measures how much coverage increase in terms of number of beneficiaries for every dollar increase in social protection aid. The linear-log specification provides a more meaningful interpretation as it shows the absolute change in the level of coverage associated with a per cent change in social protection aid allocations. The log-log specification has the advantage of smoothing the data and allowing coefficients to be interpreted as elasticities.

For the case of the FRM models, since coverage is measured as percentage of countries' populations, we enter social protection aid in three different forms: the first specification measures aid in levels, the second specification measures aid in per capita terms to account for the size of countries' populations and their budgetary requirements for redistribution, whereas the third specification enters aid in logarithmic form.

The first specification provides information about how much coverage increases for every additional dollar in social protection aid. The second specification provides information about how much coverage increases for every per capita dollar of social protection aid that is allocated to the corresponding country. Finally, the third specification provides the most straightforward interpretation of the models, as it shows the change in coverage as the result of a one percentage point increase in social protection aid. We estimate all models and specifications for several groups of donors and world regions.

6 Results

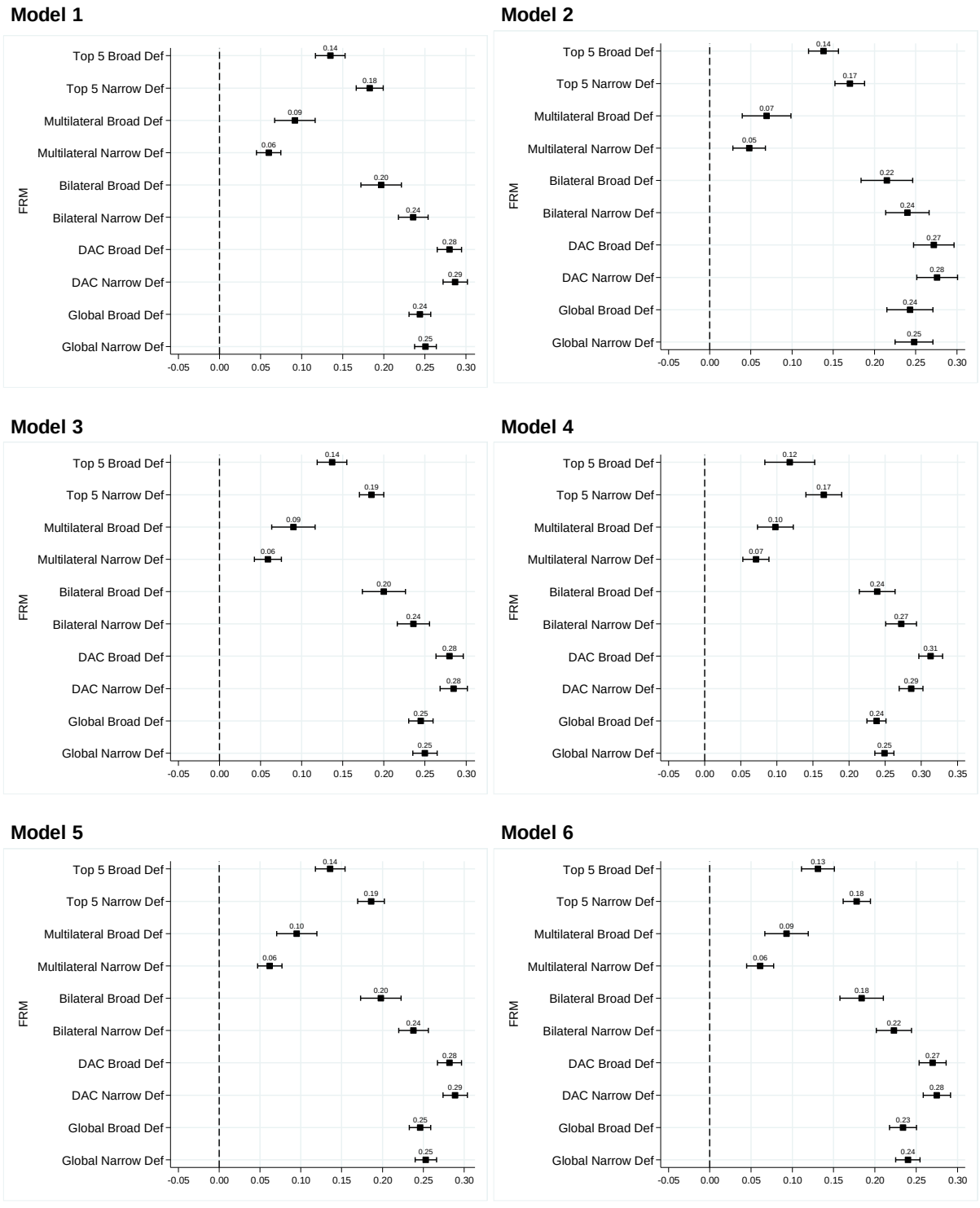
We focus the discussion on the preferred FRM models, which account for the size of countries' populations and better capture the simultaneous correlation between social protection aid and countries' budgetary requirements for redistribution. Our discussion of the results is based on the linear–log functional form equations due to its straightforward interpretation, although we present full results based on the IV-Tobit models and other functional forms in Appendix 3.

Before turning to the results, we point out that, on the basis of the Wald tests of exogeneity for both the FRM and IV-Tobit models, which are presented at the bottom of Tables A3.2 to A3.97 in Appendix 3, we can reject the null hypothesis of no endogeneity. Thus, the test results support our choice of implementing an IV-Tobit and FRM with endogenous regressors, which account for the endogeneity of social protection aid.

Overall, results indicate that aid has made a positive and statistically significant contribution to the expansion of social protection systems in LICs and MICs. Taking as the benchmark the global sample of donors, which includes DAC countries, non-DAC countries, and multilateral donors, and focusing on Model 1, which is estimated using the FRM method as our baseline, we find that a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid based on our narrow definition leads to an increase in the share of countries' population covered by social protection of approximately 0.25 per cent. The size of the coefficient estimate remains similar when we estimate Models 2 to 6, which include different sets of controls, although the point estimates vary across groups of donors (see Figure 2). Indeed, social protection aid from DAC countries appears to yield the largest impact on social protection systems at the global scale, with point estimates in the order of 0.29 per cent for every percentage point increase in social protection aid. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, as well as the top five donors (the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and France), all report positive and significant effects.

As expected, social protection aid based on our narrow definition yields slightly larger effects than aid measures that are based on the broad definition, in part due to two factors: first, aid activities under the narrow definition *directly* support institutional capacity, administration, legislation, and related strategies to distribute and scale up cash or in-kind benefits to vulnerable populations; and second, our indicator of coverage, which proxies the scale of social protection systems, does not accurately capture active and passive labour market policies that are included in the broad definition of social protection aid, leading to lower-bound impact estimates. Therefore, in the sections that follow, we focus on estimates that are based on the narrow` definition of social protection aid.

Figure 2. Effects of aid to social protection on coverage by type of donor. Fractional response model. Global sample



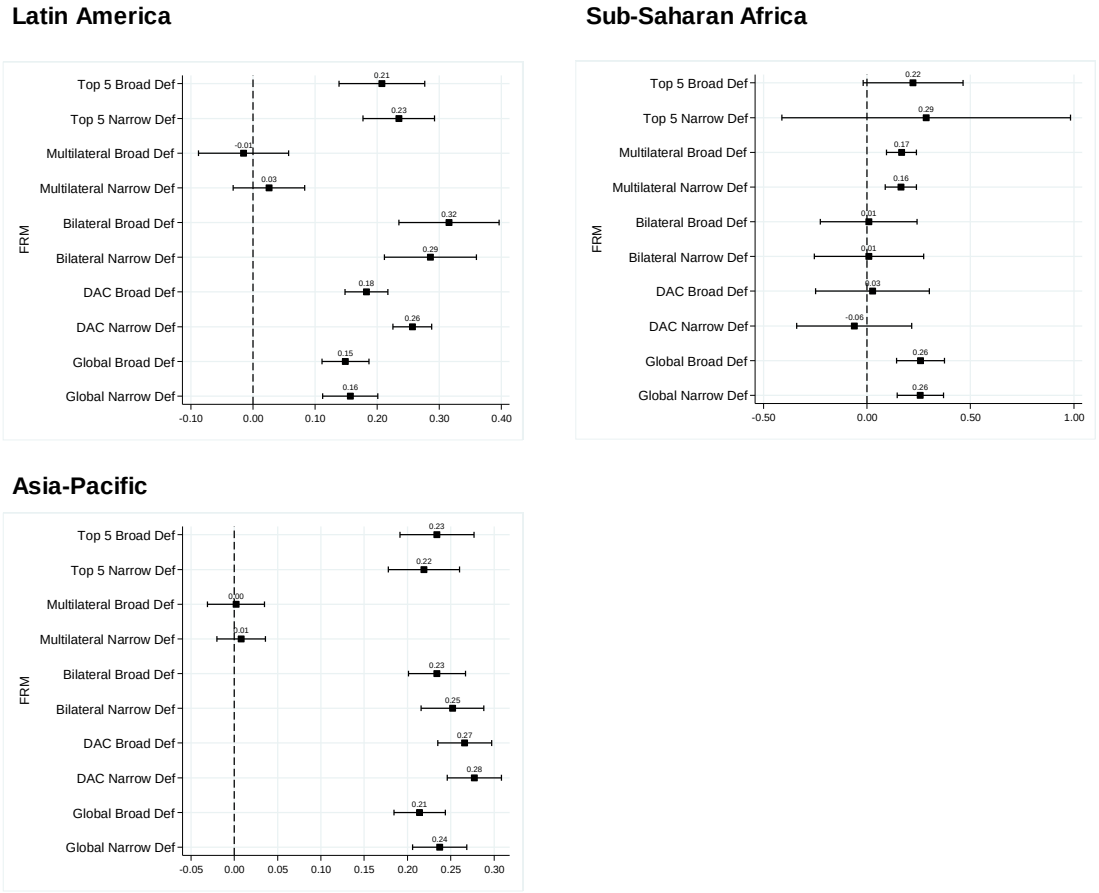
Note: fractional response model with an endogenous regressor estimates with log functional form. The log of aid is lagged one period. Full results are presented in Appendix 3. The variables included in each model are presented in Table A3.1 in Appendix 3. The ropeladder plot shows markers for point estimates, and spikes for confidence intervals at 90% levels. Spikes crossing the reference line at zero show coefficients that are significantly different from zero.

Source: authors' calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD's Creditor Reporting System.

6.1 Regional heterogeneity

When we run the models by world regions, we find a considerable variation in the statistical significance of aid by type of donor (see Figure 3). Focusing on Model 1 as our benchmark, and looking at the results from sub-Saharan Africa, we find that the effect of social protection aid in the region is only significantly different from zero for the case of global donors, which seems to be driven by multilateral aid. This is not surprising, given the sphere of influence that multilaterals, in particular the World Bank, have had in the region, not only in terms of financing and the related conditionalities—a channel highlighted by Cherrier (2016), Ulriksen (2016), Simpson (2018), Ouma (2019), Ouma and Adésínà (2019), and Abdulai (2021)—but also in terms of policy diffusion and knowledge transfer (Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2012; Brooks 2015; Schmitt et al. 2015; Hickey et al. 2020).

Figure 3: Effect of social protection aid on coverage by type of donor. Fractional response model. Model 1 by world regions.



Note: fractional response model with an endogenous regressor estimates with log functional form. The log of aid is lagged one period. Full results are presented in Appendix 3. The variables included in each model are presented in Table A3.1 in Appendix 3. The ropeladder plot shows markers for point estimates, and spikes for confidence intervals at 90% levels. Spikes crossing the reference line at zero show coefficients that are significantly different from zero.

Source: authors' calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD's Creditor Reporting System.

The insignificant effect of bilateral aid in the case of SSA could be associated with several underlying factors, including: (i) a more limited allocation of resources channelled directly by bilaterals relative to multilateral agencies; (ii) the heavy reliance of bilaterals on project aid and grants, which carry the risk of reducing domestic resource mobilization and crowding out public

spending on social protection, as pointed out by Benedek et al. (2014) and Cordella and Dell'Ariccia (2007); and (iii) the likely lagged effects arising from the more recent, and therefore shorter, bilateral engagement with social protection systems in SSA, relative to the longer history observed in other world regions such as LAC and APAC.

Overall, results for SSA indicate that a 1 percentage point increase in global aid leads to an increase in social protection coverage by approximately 0.26 per cent, which is a similar order of magnitude to the point estimates obtained from the global sample of countries. Results for LAC (0.12 per cent, $p<0.1$) and APAC (0.24 per cent, $p<0.1$) provide further evidence of a positive effect of aid on the scale of social protection systems.[13]

In order to provide an economic interpretation of our findings, we present in Table 4 the effect of a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from the global sample of donors on the scale of social protection coverage among the top five recipient countries of social protection aid in each world region over the period 2015–19.

In Ethiopia, for example, a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from an annual average of US$253 million would lead to an increase in coverage of approximately 260,000 beneficiaries from a baseline of 8.4 million people currently receiving a cash transfer programme in that country, amounting to a daily cost of US$2.6 per beneficiary. In Kenya and Uganda, a 1 percentage point increase in social protection aid from levels of approximately US$65 and US$64 million, respectively, would lead to an increase in coverage of approximately 123,000 and 99,000 beneficiaries from a baseline level of coverage of 1.3 and 0.67 million people, amounting to a daily cost of US$1.4 and US$1.8 per beneficiary, respectively. The results reveal a degree of variation in the impact of aid, which ceteris paribus is likely to be contingent upon the unit cost and design features of transfer programmes in each country, as well as the economies of scale that are achieved with more developed systems.

Table 4 also reveals not only considerable variation in the scale of social protection systems, but also a markedly unequal distribution of aid budgets, even among the top aid-recipient countries. In SSA this ranges from US$253 million in Ethiopia (approximately US$2.5 in per capita terms) to US$64 million in Uganda (approximately US$1.7 per capita), irrespective of the relatively low level of public spending on social protection and the high dependency on aid to finance government spending in this area. In Malawi, for instance, 38 per cent of public spending on social protection is funded with aid money, this despite the small rate of coverage and the limited public resources that are allocated to support social protection systems in that country.

The fact that our results point to a positive correlation between government revenues (excluding grants and social contributions) and the scale of social protection systems in SSA and LAC (see Table 5), underscores not only the vital role that aid plays in supporting, and in many cases sustaining, social protection systems in the short to medium term, but also the role that aid can play in strengthening the capacity of governments to mobilize resources that are essential to finance social protection spending in the longer term.

[13] For summary results of Models 2–6, see Figures A3.1–A3.7 in Appendix 3.

Table 4: Effects of social protection aid on coverage 2015–19

Top five recipients of social protection aid	Average aid (constant US$ millions)	Average coverage (millions)	Coverage as % of population	Grants as % of total aid	Public social protection expenditure (% of GDP)	Contribution of aid to social protection expenditure (%)	Public social protection expenditure (constant US$ millions)	Effect of 1% increase in aid on social protection coverage
Sub-Saharan Africa								
Ethiopia	253.04	8.40	7.88	16.8	3.17	16.71	1,260	260,155
Nigeria	190.18	0.11	0.01	4.2	0.71	5.78	3,154	467,335
Malawi	82.72	0.91	5.11	71.2	0.99	37.82	63	43,203
Kenya	64.88	1.28	2.60	13.7	2.29	4.63	1,210	123,526
Uganda	64.13	0.67	1.61	68.1	2.19	2.89	707	98,622
Latin America and Caribbean								
Argentina	537.52	5.50	12.49	0.3	17.50	0.85	63,043	53,484
Colombia	192.84	7.48	15.36	10.7	14.07	0.42	41,282	58,926
Mexico	185.99	43.68	34.88	1.1	11.95	0.13	140,059	151,104
Panama	129.58	0.48	11.74	1.3	9.79	2.42	5,296	4,921
Ecuador	101.77	1.66	6.06	4.0	7.77	1.27	7,713	20,103
Asia and Pacific								
Bangladesh	190.23	22.31	13.91	24	1.65	4.49	3,219	370,327
Pakistan	135.25	35.36	16.88	5.6	0.17	27.94	457	472,642
Philippines	122.89	31.60	29.86	3.7	2.20	1.76	6,744	242,008
China	95.80	56.00	4.05	7.7	6.28	0.01	695,030	3,249,791
Mongolia	75.94	1.01	32.45	3.1	14.39	4.35	1,691	7,106

Note: estimates based on the FRM with an endogenous regressor (Model 1) with log functional form. The log of aid is lagged one period. Model 1 includes number of years since the introduction of ILO conventions, log of income per capita, average number of programmes in neighbouring countries, trade openness, rate of economic growth, government revenues excluding grants and social contributions, and natural resources rents. Full results are presented in Appendix IV.

Source: authors' calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD-CRS.

7 Discussion

Our empirical strategy also allows us to test key theoretical predictions with regard to the factors that are expected to influence the expansion of social protection systems, as highlighted by the literature, and which we group into six broad areas, namely: external actors, economic and demographic conditions, historical legacies and path dependence, institutions, the role of ideas and ideology, and external shocks.

In Table 5 we present a summary of the empirical findings based on the IV-Tobit and FRM models and the linear–log functional form. Full details of the results are presented in Tables A3.2 to A3.97 in Appendix 3.

The qualitative literature in particular highlights the role of donor influence, which through negotiation, persuasion, and pressure has contributed to the emergence and expansion of social protection systems (Ulriksen 2016; Wanyama and McCord 2017; Ouma 2019; Ouma and Adésínà 2019; Hickey and Bukenya 2020; Abdulai 2021). From our analysis, we believe that large portions of donors' influence effects are captured in the models by the aid measures, given that aid volumes and aid modalities are often accompanied by conditionalities that seek to influence certain behaviours of aid-recipient governments. Nevertheless, we include a second proxy for donor influence, which measures the number of years since a country adopted any of the ILO Social Security Conventions, which consider minimum standards in the areas of medical care, sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, old age benefits, employment injury benefits, and family benefits.

The adoption of Social Security Conventions signals states' willingness to adopt international standards and norms, through legal and regulatory frameworks that are expected to facilitate the adoption and institutionalization of social protection systems. A longer commitment to these international norms would signal a stronger donor influence on the adoption of social protection systems. However, the negative coefficient reported for SSA reflects the fact many countries in that region either have not adopted any of the ILO conventions[14] or have done so more recently than countries in other world regions, which helps to explain the positive coefficient estimates reported for LAC and APAC countries.

Another strand of the literature emphasizes the role of policy diffusion and policy transfer in the expansion of social protection systems, which are assumed to materialize, in part at least, via cross-border spillover effects (Borges Sugiyama 2011; Devereux 2013; Brooks 2015; López-Cariboni and Cao 2015; Schmitt et al. 2015; Vacaflores and LeSage 2020). We test this proposition by the inclusion of an indicator that measures the number of existing transfer programmes in neighbouring countries. Interestingly, we find that while our measure of policy diffusion is a strong positive predictor of the scale of social protection systems at the global scale, the parameter estimate turns negative when we focus on SSA. This is likely to be the result of (1) low levels of absolute and relative coverage, measured by the total number of direct and indirect beneficiaries across SSA and the share of vulnerable populations covered by social protection programmes, respectively, and (2) the high levels of between-country inequality in access to social protection

[14] The following countries have not adopted any of the ILO Social Security Conventions: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

benefits observed across SSA, which in turn leads a negative correlation arising from countries with above regional-average coverage being neighboured by countries with below-average coverage. Thus, the evidence does not, at least in the SSA context, support the proposition that policy diffusion is a strong predictor of the adoption and expansion of social protection systems, as previous qualitative studies seem to suggest.

The literature also underscores the catalytic role of economic conditions and socio-demographic characteristics in the adoption and expansion of social protection systems in developing countries (Segura-Ubiergo 2007; Huang 2014; Abu Sharkh and Gough 2010; Carnes and Mares 2015).

Our analysis does indeed provide evidence of a strong correlation between the scale of social protection systems and the level of economic development and the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, which are proxied by the log of income per capita lagged one period and the annual rate of economic growth, respectively. Results also show a strong positive correlation with government revenues and level of trade openness, which underscores the importance of supporting LICs and MICs in strengthening their redistributive fiscal capacity and improving the conditions that facilitate their competitiveness in the global economy.

The abundance of natural resource rents shows a strong negative correlation with the expansion of social protection systems in SSA, which—although at first hand it may appear counterintuitive—is not surprising given the fact that non-tax revenues often face less scrutiny and demands for accountability from taxpayers than tax revenues, which can lead to rent-seeking behaviour and patronage (Collier 2010; McGuirk 2013). Furthermore, resource rents generate incentives for the incumbent to remain in power and utilize these resources not programmatically, for vote buying and clientelistic purposes (Caselli and Cunningham 2009; Addison et al. forthcoming). The fact that many countries in SSA are electoral autocracies exacerbates these dynamics and helps to explain the negative correlation that is observed from the parameter estimate that measures the level of democracy in SSA, as well as the positive association that we find with the measure of quality of government.

The rate of unemployment does not seem to strongly influence the expansion of social protection, presumably due to the large scale of the informal economy and subsistence agriculture across the Global South, which probably mitigate the political pressure by the working-age population for social protection redistribution. However, results also show that the level of income inequality, measured by the Gini index, is a strong determinant of the scale of social protection systems, which suggests that high levels of inequality may put pressure on incumbents to implement a limited redistribution, as highlighted by Benabou (2000), Alesina and Giuliano (2011), Acemoglu et al. (2015), and Niño-Zarazúa et al. (2021).

In terms of socio-demographic conditions, we note that models that include under-five child mortality rates, which capture the extent of material deprivation in aid-recipient counties, show the expected negative and significant sign and yield smaller aid effects, which indicates the greater challenges aid activities face in contexts of widespread poverty. Empirical results also give support to previous studies that show how the prevalence of HIV and its catastrophic consequences in terms of mortality and morbidity have acted as an incentive for incumbent regimes to introduce and scale up certain types of transfer programme, especially in southern countries of SSA (Gauri and Brinks 2008; Ellis et al. 2009; Mokomane 2013; Lamprea 2017).

The long-standing hypothesis that the political ideology of incumbent governments, in particular left-wing governments, influences preferences for redistribution (Jensen 2011; Barrientos et al. 2013; Sirén 2021) does not appear to hold in any of the world regions. In SSA, the parameter

estimates are insignificant, which could be attributed to the limited variation in political ideology that we observe across African countries over the period under analysis.

In LAC, results show that whether a left-wing or a right-wing government has introduced social protection programmes, these policies are often continued, and even expanded, when parties on the opposite side of the political spectrum subsequently take office (Pribble 2013; Niño-Zarazúa 2020). Thus, the evidence suggests that it is perhaps not the political ideology of parties but the prospects of enjoying an incumbency advantage that drives political support for social protection systems (Filipovich et al. 2018).

Finally, a strand of the literature finds that social protection systems are more likely to emerge and/or expand in the aftermath of aggregate shocks (Manor and Duckett 2017; Bossuroy and Coudouel 2018; Desai and Rudra 2019). International agencies can play an important role here, given the challenges and adverse conditions that developing countries face in times of crisis (Barrientos and Niño-Zarazúa 2011). While we find evidence of a positive correlation between past financial crises and the expansion of social protection systems in LAC, this correlation turns negative in SSA and insignificant in APAC, indicating the limited capacity of African countries to utilize existing social protection systems as effective countercyclical policy instruments. This weakness is in part due to the small scale of these systems but also to the reduced fiscal space and subsequent cuts in government spending that usually accompany the slowdown of economic activities as a result of the heavy reliance of African countries on commodity exports and their growing interconnectedness with international capital markets (Calderón and Nguyen 2016; Konuki and Villafuerte 2016; Ouedraogo and Sourouema 2018).

While weather shocks may have led to the emergence and expansion of social protection programmes in specific cases (see, e.g., Devereux 2009; Béné et al. 2012; Berhane et al. 2014; Gao and Mills 2018, for the case of Ethiopia), we do not find evidence that weather shocks have systematically triggered policy responses leading to the expansion of social protection systems in SSA, but in fact, we find that weather shocks seem to undermine the expansion of social protection in LAC and APAC regions. Further analysis will be needed to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the expansion of social protection systems once data become available.

Table 5: Determinants of the expansion of social protection systems

Determinants		Sub-Saharan Africa								Latin America								Asia-Pacific							
		Global aid				DAC aid				Global aid				DAC aid				Global aid				DAC aid			
		IV-Tobit		FRM		IV-Tobit		FRM		IV-Tobit		FRM		IV-Tobit		FRM		IV-Tobit		FRM		IV-Tobit		FRM	
		N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B	N	B
Foreign aid	Foreign aid (L1)	+	+	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+
Donor influence	Number of year since introduction of ILO conventions	-	-	-	-	-	-	NS	-	NS	NS	+	+	+	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+
Policy diffusion	Average number of programmes in neighbouring countries	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	-	-	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS
Economic conditions	Log GDP per capita in constant US$ (PPP)	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	GDP growth (annual %)	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	+	+	NS	+	NS	NS	NS	+
	Total natural resources rent (%GDP)	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+
	Trade openness	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total government revenue excluding grants and social contributions	NS	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Unemployment rate	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS
Demographics	Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population)	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	+	NS	+	+	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Fertility rate	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	-	-	-	-	+	+	NS	NS	+	+
	Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population ages 15-49)	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Child mortality rate	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Urban population	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	-	-	+	+	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Population density	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	-	-	-	-	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Gini index	+	+	+	+	NS	+	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	+	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+

History and path dependency	Years since independence		NS	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Former colony power: UK		NS	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
	Former colony power: France		+	+	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Former colony power: Spain		NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	+	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
Institutions	Democracy	Electoral democracy index	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
	Political settlements	Quality of government	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	NS	+	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
		Party institutionalization index	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Military expenditure (% of GDP)	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+
		Palma ratio (Top 10% / bottom 40%)	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	NS	+	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+
	Judicial system	Compliance with judiciary	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Ideas / Ideology		Right political orientation	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-
		Centre political orientation	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-
		Left political orientation	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-
Shocks		Years in financial crisis L1	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	NS	-	NS	NS	+	+	NS	NS	+	+	-	-	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		Rain shock	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-	NS	NS	-	-

Note: IV-Tobit: Tobit model with endogenous regressors estimates based on log-log functional form. FRM: Fractional response model with an endogenous regressor estimates based on log functional form. L1=lagged one period. Full results are presented in Tables A3.2 to A3.97 in Appendix 3. N stands for the 'narrow' social protection aid definition while B stands for the 'broader' social protection aid definition. NS=Not significant effect. + stands for a positive effect. – stands for a negative effect.

Source: authors' calculations, based on SAPI database and OECD's Creditor Reporting System.

8 Conclusion

In this study, we have taken a comparative perspective to investigate the contribution of foreign aid to the recent evolution of social protection systems in the Global South. Overall, findings point to a positive effect of aid on the adoption and expansion of social protection systems in the Global South. The positive effect holds across both the 'broad' and 'narrow' definitions of social protection aid, although it is clearer under the narrow definition. The results are broadly consistent with the scant literature that has investigated the impact of aid on social protection systems.

Importantly, we do not find any evidence of a detrimental effect of aid on the development of social protection systems, although there is a marked unequal distribution of aid budgets, irrespective of the prevalence of aggregate vulnerabilities and the generalized low levels of social protection spending across nations. This is an issue that requires careful consideration when adopting coordinated efforts between bilateral and multilateral agencies to support social protection systems.

At the global scale, social protection aid has exhibited a cyclical pattern, spiking in response to aggregate shocks including financial crises (e.g. the East Asian Financial crisis of 1998–99 and the 2008–09 global financial crisis) and price shocks (e.g. the world food crisis of 2007–09). The bulk of aid distributed in the aftermath of the 2008–09 financial crisis, particularly from multilaterals, was distributed to MICs that already had social protection systems in place. Many LICs were unable to absorb social protection aid because they did not have social protection programmes to scale. This underscores the importance of building social protection systems that enable countries to utilize these structures as countercyclical instruments in times of crisis.

The composition of aid type and finance type seem to matter as well as the preferred channels for aid disbursement. The fact that over two-thirds social protection aid in SSA—in both the broad and narrow definitions—has been channelled via multilaterals and executed in significant proportions through debt instruments and reimbursement grants (especially since the early 2010s), and in the form of budget support, technical assistance, and project aid signals a greater engagement of national governments in the development of social protection systems in that region.

Bilaterals rely extensively on project aid to allocate aid largely in the form of grants, which reveals complex logistical, technical, and foreign policy considerations that underpin the relationship between donor and recipient countries. While these strategies are often adopted with the aim of mitigating the risk of regime capture of aid budgets, especially in contexts of autocratic governance, they can also undermine domestic resource mobilization efforts that support social protection spending in the longer term.

Indeed, assisting low- and middle-income countries, especially those with a high dependency on commodity exports, to utilize social protection systems as countercyclical policy instruments in times of crisis will require not only the expansion in the scale and scope of these systems through financial assistance but also the building of tax collection and welfare delivery systems that will enable governments to effectively respond to crises.

However, the increasing focus of development agencies on LICs and fragile states, particularly in SSA, makes aid work in this area more complex and challenging. These challenges are symptomatic of the precarious conditions in these countries at various levels, including administration, programmes, and policies, and in part explain the stronger coordination and harmonization

between bilaterals and multilaterals in the process of assisting social protection systems in the past decade.

A major challenge in our analysis is the 'endogeneity' problem—in particular how to disentangle the impact of aid on the development of social protection systems from the influence of these systems on aid allocations. We acknowledge that due to data limitations we are not in a strong position to prove causality, despite the validity of our instrumental variables and all the tests that we have conducted to support our findings. Thus, our results should be treated with caution and as approximations to an actual causal relationship. Nevertheless, the multiple models and methods adopted in the analysis, as well as the extensive examination of the available data, give strong indications that targeted aid has contributed to building social protection systems in the Global South.

Our empirical analysis has allowed us to address relevant political economy questions posed by the literature, in particular with regard to the influence of external forces, economic conditions, socio-demographics, historical legacies, the quality of institutions, the role of ideology, and external shocks, which are informative for the process of decision making.

Results from the international comparative analysis indicate that while donors' influence and policy diffusion effects that are likely to materialize in conjunction with aid and conditionalities may have had a positive influence on the development of social protection systems in some contexts (e.g. LAC and APAC), these external factors are weaker in SSA as a whole.

Analysis also provides suggestive evidence that the economic dynamism of aid-recipient countries, their redistributive fiscal capacity, their prevailing terms of trade, and their level of income inequality are all positively associated with the recent expansion of social protection systems in SSA and other world regions. In contrast, structural factors such as the abundance of natural resource rents, the incidence of material deprivation, and the scale of unemployment seem to either hinder or have an ambiguous influence on the expansion of social protection systems. We have discussed possible factors underpinning these effects.

While the political ideology of incumbent regimes seems to play a role in influencing preferences for redistribution, which in turn has contributed to the expansion of social protection systems in the Global South as a whole, this influence appears to be weaker in SSA, in part due to the limited variation in the political spectrum (and ideologies) in the region.

Results also show that, whereas aggregate shocks, particularly financial crises, have triggered the expansion of social protection systems in other regions, especially in LAC, this association turns negative in SSA, in part due to the region's limited capacity to use social protection systems as countercyclical instruments, and also because of the reliance of African economies on commodity exports. We conclude by highlighting the important contribution of aid to building social protection systems, which could be combined with interventions that assist the development of tax collection systems, which are critical to achieving the long-term sustainability of social protection systems in the Global South.

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