

# ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION

unicef  
Office of Research-Innocenti



Gender-Responsive & Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) Research Programme 2018-2023



Aysha Akhter Khushi (18) started her own business selling eggs with the help of cash transfers. © UNICEF/UN069642/Kiron

## Why gender & social protection?

Evidence shows that social protection can address vulnerabilities to risks, shocks, and stressors, as well as improve well-being. Despite this profound impact on people's lives, social protection has fallen short of its potential for transformative effects for gender equality.

Risks and vulnerabilities are gendered, driven by harmful and discriminatory gender norms and leading to gender inequalities such as the disproportionate rate of unpaid care and domestic work.

When social protection lacks gender-responsive objectives, design, and implementation features, it fails to tackle the structural barriers to transformative gender equality and sustainable poverty reduction, and thus fails to address gender risks and vulnerabilities. These are multidimensional and require action on multiple fronts.

## GRASSP

GRASSP is UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti's new research programme examining gender-responsive and age sensitive social protection systems to enhance gender equality outcomes, and is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) and other partners.

## KEY MESSAGES

Social protection can help address poverty, encourage investment in people, & provide support during shocks from childhood through to old age

Girls & boys, women & men experience risks, vulnerabilities, & opportunities differently because of gender inequality

Poverty impacts well-being differently at different life stages

Despite their benefits, many social protection systems fail to address gender-related vulnerabilities & inequalities

Understanding how gender & age-related vulnerabilities & inequalities can be targeted through social protection can sustainably reduce poverty & achieve gender equality

## Why use a life course approach?

Ages and stages in the life course play a role in how people experience risks and vulnerabilities. Women and girls face specific risks due to their biological sex, which are compounded by gender norms. Life events—such as marriage, childbearing, or retirement—produce distinct risks and vulnerabilities for women and girls, which can interrupt girls' education and women's participation in the labour market and further increase their risk of poverty.

By using a life course approach, social protection can support individuals, including women and girls, during these critical times, reducing their risk to poverty and contributing to gender equality.

## What will we do?

Despite the potential of gender-responsive, age-sensitive social protection, not enough is known about what works, how it works, and why it works. Through GRASSP, UNICEF Innocenti will build a robust evidence base to fill this gap in understanding. By leveraging UNICEF's presence in 190 countries and drawing on partnerships with governments, international agencies, universities, and implementers, we will conduct cross-country research in 3 research streams.

Using a conceptual framework, GRASSP will outline pathways and mechanisms for social protection to achieve gender equality outcomes across the life course. We will assess the extent to which gender is integrated into different phases of the social protection cycle. GRASSP will test hypotheses and change pathways to move towards gender-transformative social protection, and ultimately achieve sustainable poverty reduction and gender equality.

## Using evidence for change

Research findings will be shared with stakeholders using strategic research uptake methods. In this way, GRASSP will seek to inform decision-making by UNICEF, development partners, policymakers, and practitioners, including DFID, the World Bank, and national governments. Ultimately, it will serve to incorporate gender and life-course considerations into social protection systems, policies, programmes, and institutions.

## Where will we work?

We will carry out cross-country research over Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Policies and programmes to:

- address gender-related risks and shocks that can draw people into poverty
- protect against gender-related vulnerabilities related to living conditions

**Examples** cash transfers, cash plus programming, health insurance & pensions, social services, labour market policies

### 3 RESEARCH STREAMS

# 1

Improve the conceptualization, measurement, & analysis of gender equality outcomes

*Synthesizing evidence, mapping & assessing existing measures of gender equality outcomes*

# 2

Unpack change pathways by exploring design & implementation features

*Moderating effects of gender-specific contextual factors & cost effectiveness*

# 3

Investigate how to institutionalize gender into social protection

*Political economy factors (e.g. financing) enabling integration of gender into social protection*

### FIND OUT MORE

UNICEF Innocenti conducts research to inform strategic policies & programmes of UNICEF and its partners, shape debates on child rights & development, & inform the global research & policy agenda for all children.

Explore more at [unicef-irc.org/grassp](https://www.unicef-irc.org/grassp)  
Follow the conversation using #GRASSP  
Contact [znesbitt-ahmed@unicef.org](mailto:znesbitt-ahmed@unicef.org)