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## **Global Approaches to Social Policy**

*A Survey of Analytical Methods*

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prepared for the UNRISD project  
New Directions in Social Policy:  
Alternatives from and for the Global South

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# **Introduction to Working Papers for New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South**

This paper is part of a series of outputs from the research project New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South.

The project examines the emergence, nature and effectiveness of recent developments in social policy in emerging economies and developing countries. The purpose is to understand whether these are fundamentally new approaches to social policy or welfare systems which could offer alternative solutions to the critical development challenges facing low- and middle-income countries in the twenty-first century. This research aims to shed light on the policy options and choices of emerging/developing countries; how economic, social, political and institutional arrangements can be designed to achieve better social outcomes given the challenges of the contemporary development context; how the values and norms of human rights, equity, sustainability and social justice can be operationalized through “new” social policies; and how experiences, knowledge and learning about innovative approaches can be shared among countries in the South. For further information on the project visit [www.unrisd.org/ndsp](http://www.unrisd.org/ndsp).

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## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AU	African Union
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CCT	Conditional cash transfers
DfID	Department for International Development
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IGOs	Intergovernmental organizations
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information technology
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## Summary

This paper aims to contribute to a scholarly dialogue aimed at fostering understanding of the nature of border-spanning (or transnational) practices and relations that structure and connect social policy across countries in different parts of the world. The premise of the paper is that diverse kinds of border-spanning social processes permeate social life and social policy formation in myriad ways. They are woven into the very texture of social life. They are institutionalized and enduring, and they are variable, multi-faceted and pluralistic. Good research and analytical approaches and methods are needed to move beyond and behind the abstractions of globalization and to help comprehend this *concretely* in relation to social policy. Based on an extensive survey of published research on this topic aiming to identify the most promising analytical approaches, this paper considers the scope and results of major research initiatives across low-, middle- and high-income countries and across different policy sectors and issues.

In doing so, the discussion highlights that border-spanning forces and structures are variously enabled, governed, regulated and opposed by a range of national and transnational actors working in relation to defined socio-institutional contexts, within and across myriad domestic and cross-border spheres of global (and sub-global) governance and policy making. Three aspects of this are identified as crucial in mediating the manifestations and impacts of transnational dynamics: context, institutions and politics. Local, national and regional contexts mediate globalizing processes of convergence and unification. Heterogeneous and path-dependant changes in welfare states point to more moderate claims about the impacts of globalizations. Finally, the dynamics of political contestation, resistance and opposition determine the pace, course, timing and effects of globalizations on welfare institutions, social policy making and social policy outcomes.

This paper also highlights that the methods, approaches and perspectives studies of global and transnational social policy and their analysis are multiform and multidisciplinary. Such studies have variously focused on policy making processes in spheres of global (and sub-global) governance; the influence of transnational policy on domestic policy reform; new sub-global transnational political spaces in which social policy projects are inscribed; and connections and interdependencies forged between health and welfare institutions, providers and users through different kinds of global networks. However, there are significant research opportunities to purposively foreground the ways in which border-spanning social formations, institutions and actors *relate to and influence the course of national and sub-national social policy development*. This paper accordingly calls for a greater emphasis on the *co-production* of social policy by combinations of national and transnational actors in defined settings. As part of this, it calls for case studies within a comparative framework, which are needed for theory-building.

The broader question addressed by this paper is whether social policy can still be understood as the outcome of sociopolitical forces exclusively rooted in and playing out through domestic spheres of governance. This question points to deep-rooted and difficult analytical and methodological issues relating to the analysis of social and public policies, whether at national or transnational levels. Indeed, the delineation of border-spanning phenomena in relation to social policy raises several fundamental questions regarding received knowledge about the nation state, sovereignty and territorial autonomy embedded in models of social policy and development; the prioritization given to the study of single societies at the expense of comparative analyses capable of providing a rich source of data and theories for “developing” and

“developed” worlds alike; and the “co-production” of social policy by combinations of intersecting and interacting national and transnational actors, institutions and forces. In emphasizing the promise of an analytical approach focused on the co-production of social policies, it opens up the path for a productive dialogue among methodological nationalists and methodological transnationalists in relation to social policy and development. Such a dialogue holds out the promise of significant conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical advances that in turn are capable of profound insights into the sources, dynamics and consequences of greater interconnectivity and interdependence characteristic of the conditions of contemporary social policy development and change.

## Introduction

A perennial concern among scholars of social science is how social, political and economic globalizing processes are shaping contemporary societies. Burgeoning multidisciplinary literatures highlight the diverse activities, exchanges, links and ties routinely spanning international state borders, and the ways in which globalizing processes generate increasing interdependence between all countries. From the perspective of this paper, and the UNRISD project New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South, the key question arising is how these cross-border relations of connectivity and interdependence among populations, economies, institutions and polities around the world mediate and influence the course of social policy, welfare programmes, human welfare, and ultimately, the conditions of social development.

Several prominent kinds of border-spanning activities are central to addressing this key question. Illustratively, these include cross-border flows of capital, goods and services; cross-border flows of images, information, cultural modes and sociopolitical ideas; cross-border movements of people; and cross-border sites and spaces of political engagement and action. Such border-spanning activities permeate social life and social policy formation in myriad ways: in relation to awareness of global social and environmental issues, the processes by which laws and policies are made, the organization and content of advocacy and reform campaigns, the content, scope and nature of social provision, and the lived experiences of individuals and families, among other things.

The overall aim of this paper is to contribute to a scholarly dialogue aimed at fostering understanding of the nature of border-spanning (or transnational) practices and relations that structure and connect social policy across countries in different parts of the world. If “social life crosses, connects, underlies, alters, transcends and even transforms boundaries and borders, as well as structures, processes and agents ostensibly contained in them” (Khagram and Levitt 2005: 1), then we need good research and analytical approaches that help comprehend this *concretely* in relation to social policy, and move beyond and behind the abstractions with which this paper has, of necessity, begun. This paper has two such concretizing objectives. First, it seeks to identify diverse actors, structures, sites, spheres, processes and ideas that are related to the interactions between national and transnational social policies of various kinds. Second, it considers the implications of these globalizing processes and forces for social policy analysis.

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