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POLICY BRIEF

UNIVERSAL PROTECTIONS

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Abstract

A renewed commitment maximising the productive potential of their citizens is the relevant and high-profile contribution the G7 can make to a global and socially just transformation.

Universal access to basic services has underpinned prosperity in the G7. Public services now need to be expanded for the 21st century, to include protections that enhance people's capacities, capabilities, and opportunities for economic and social participation while also supporting the climate transition and leveraging the potential of digital democracy.

G7 countries should commit to providing universal access to transport and digital services as part of a comprehensive set of Universal Basic Services that, together, enhance productivity, increase social cohesion, and protect citizens through the global energy transition.

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Challenge

Increased productivity, common effort to transition to more sustainable lifestyles, and increased cost of living resulting from the accelerated global energy transition all require broader and more comprehensive social protections.

The sustainable and inclusive economic growth of the future will come from broader specialisation, supported by continuing education and training to create high-quality decent work in a sustainable future economy. That growth requires strengthened social protections that go beyond the compensatory redistribution and insurance schemes of the past.

The social conditions that promote willingness at all levels – local, regional and national – to engage in global climate action depend on broader and more comprehensive social security. Insecurity is not experienced in isolation but the result of intricately and inextricably linked domains of insecurity. Social protections across all the basic necessities are needed to actively participate on social, economic, and democratic life.

The existing welfare models have not achieved a level of security necessary to generate the level of social cohesion needed in the 21st century. Insecurity blocks the productivity needed for inclusive growth, prevents the transition needed for sustainability, and threatens liberal democracy.

New forms of social protection are needed that remake the social contract between citizens and governments in a way fit for the 21st century aimed not only at economic security but also at social solidarity and personal agency.

New methods of delivering and funding social security are needed that enhance people's capacities and capabilities at the local level, whilst also supporting the climate transition and leveraging the potential of digital democracy.

Social protection systems that are more efficient, not dependent on economic growth, and embedded in the social infrastructure of communities through the provision of access to services will make them more resilient and crisis-resistant.

To succeed in the coming decade, the G7 countries will have to dramatically increase the efficiency and efficacy of their social protection systems. Access to the basic ingredients of prosperity will have to be more widely available, preferably universal.

To these ends, social protection systems will have to become more adaptable, empowering, inclusive, and sustainable. They will need to be aimed not only at economic security but also at social solidarity and personal agency.

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Proposals

G7 governments commit to prioritising the expansion of their universal service protections.

Both the access to the protections and the breadth of protections provided need to be widened.

- Conditionality is eliminated or reduced, so that all contributors are also protected. This model of universal entitlement is necessary to establish the reciprocity required for the expansion of the protections.
- Guaranteed access to care, transport, food, and digital services needs to be added to the 20th century basket of education, health, housing and legal services, therefore creating a 21st century basket of public goods.

G7 nations can lead the world by establishing universal access to seven basic social protections as automatic and reciprocal entitlements of citizenship:

- shelter
- food
- education
- health & care
- transport
- information
- legal services

These 'Universal Basic Services'[1] (UBS) increase people's capacities, capabilities and bring opportunities for economic and social participation through the shared infrastructure of public services — building a solid foundation from which people can thrive, drive place-based change, as well as providing people the resilience to navigate through the next wave of social and economic transformations within the economy including data and Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation and climate change. Equally, UBS can lead to the creation of new products and markets thereby, providing employment and incomes in areas which do not demand high skills such as retrofitting houses positively aiding the transition to net zero.

UBS focuses on a whole systems approach at a local level tackling inequalities related to transport, digital access, and education simultaneously, as insecurity is not experienced in isolation but the result of intricately and inextricably linked domains of insecurity. One current area of insecurity is related to the rise in energy prices across Europe and the cost of living crises impacting many households in the UK. UBS has the potential to alleviate many of the negative impacts associated with such crises.

The G20 countries India and Indonesia have both taken a universal approach to providing key public services. Since 2018, India has adopted a universal access approach to healthcare through the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) scheme after the ineffectiveness of previous health insurance schemes and has received recognition from the WHO Director General for the provision of free healthcare.[2]

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The tax-financed scheme enabled healthcare access for vulnerable, low-income groups and eased pressure on state services as citizens could receive "cashless secondary and tertiary care at private facilities".[3]

Moving towards universal health coverage, the Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (JKN) single-payer National Health Insurance programme was implemented by the Indonesian Government in 2014 to reform and improve their healthcare system. The programme has received financial support from the World Bank.[4]

Implementations

i. Universal Information Service. Basic digital connectivity becomes a universal entitlement through vouchers that citizens can use to pay for basic connectivity services from their chosen provider. Providers claim the voucher value through automatic payment in return for the guarantee to maintain digital access for the citizen.

   The IGP piloted a UBS project in Tower Hamlets[5], east London, where households were provided with free broadband internet connection, a Google Chromebook digital device, and basic information and communications technology (ICT) training and support. Findings from the project show important beneficial impacts in four key areas: home schooling and learning opportunities; work and employability opportunities; physical and mental health wellbeing and behaviours; time and costs savings.

ii. Universal Transport Service. Following the lead of various countries[6] and local governments, G7 nations should fund free local public transport systems across all areas. Free transport enables people to participate in the economy e.g. through work, job interviews, accessing healthcare and education services such as hospitals and schools.

   IGP in partnership with Camden Council piloted UBS in transport and internet connectivity[7] (data coverage and hardware) as people travelled into work. This pilot showed how a connected infrastructure of public services enables people to participate socially and economically and build a 'secure livelihood'.

   Korean cities and countries among Europe[8] have adopted fare-free transport including Estonia where access to healthcare for the elderly improved. Equally, results from Korea show reduced transport and economic costs to households.

iii. Local authorities across the G7 to implement UBS pilots to test and explore what a 21st century welfare state focussed on the provision of universally accessible, collectively provided services will look like. The importance of services such as access to digital communications, transport, child and social care also determine an individual's ability to lead a fulfilling and flourishing life. The pandemic has also revealed and exacerbated inequalities: from access to digital services, housing, and affordable childcare, to education and health outcomes and it is clear that these cannot be effectively addressed by existing welfare systems.

We advocate for greater implementation of UBS as a way for G7 countries to introduce and promote new social protection systems based on a series of new principles that remake the social contract between citizens and governments. Such social protection systems are likely to be diverse in character but will focus on developing capacities and capabilities for citizens to engage equally in societal well-being and transformation which is not just about income insecurity but also about creating a new basket of new public goods.

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Endnotes

[1] Percy, A., Portes, J., & Reed, H. (2017).

[2] Gupta, I., and Patel, N. (2020).

[3] Ibid.

[4] World Bank, (2021).

[5] Moreno, J.M., Woodcraft, S., Islam, K., and Yasmin, S. (2021).

[6] https://freepublictransport.info/city/

[7] Gould, G., & Moore, H.L. (2021).

[8] https://freepublictransport.info/city/

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About the Authors

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Professor Henrietta L. Moore is the Founder and Director of the Institute for Global Prosperity and the Chair in Culture Philosophy and Design at University College London (UCL). A leading global thinker on prosperity, Professor Moore challenges traditional economic models of growth arguing that to flourish communities, businesses and governments need to engage with diversity and work within environmental limits. Her work crosses disciplines, from social science to the arts to business innovation and she applies these different perspectives to inform research and policy at all levels.

Her recent work has seen her transition beyond academia into the public sphere providing commentary on topics such as Universal Basic Services, Brexit, Artificial Intelligence, displaced people and the gender pay gap as a respected leading intellectual. She retains ongoing interests on issues of globalisation, mass migration, gender, social transformation and livelihood strategies, new technologies and agroecology which have shaped her career and her engagement with policy making. She is committed to involving grassroots communities in the production of new types of knowledge through citizen science.

Professor Moore is an Advisory Panel Member for the Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity and part of the Rebuilding Macroeconomics Management Team. She serves as President of the British Institute in Eastern Africa and on the Scientific Advisory Council at DEFRA, UK Government. She is a Trustee at the Barbican Centre Trust, a Fellow of the British Academy, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, an Academician of the Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, and a Member of the Institute of Directors.

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Andrew Percy is Co-Chair of the Social Prosperity Network at the Institute for Global Prosperity, UCL. He leads the IGP's work on 21st century welfare and was the lead author on the 2017 IGP report on Universal Basic Services.

Andrew joined the IGP in 2016 to launch the Social Prosperity Network, a cross discipline research collaboration focused on the contribution of social safety to sustainability and prosperity.

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Andrew has worked in cybersecurity in the UK and USA since the early '80s, as well as stints teaching in Egypt, producing UK's first hip hop album with Positive Beat Records, and in finance.

Current work: examining the political paralysis in developed societies to understand how we move forward in the face of parallel challenges of climate crisis, insecure livelihoods, and democratic participation.

Latest works:

Universal Basic Prosperity (2021):
[https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10138869/]

National Contributions (2021):
[https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10138866/]

The Case for Universal Basic Services (2020) - Polity Press, co-authored with Anna Coote, NEF.

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Rayhaan is a Research Assistant at the IGP, PROCOL UK team. He completed a MSc in Economics at University College London (UCL) in 2020 and also has a BSc in Economics from City University of London. He supports the Institutes work across various projects including the Rebuilding Prosperity Campaign, Rebuilding Macroeconomics and the portfolio of work the Institute undertakes in the UK.

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Katrina joined the IGP as a Research Associate in 2021, supporting the Institute's portfolio of work on the UK economy. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge and has research interests in food systems, gender inequalities, and social injustice.

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The Think7 engagement group under the German G7 presidency 2022 is jointly chaired by the Global Solutions Initiative and the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) as mandated by the German Federal Chancellery.