



Fingo Policy Brief on the Second World Summit for Social Development, in Doha, Qatar 4 -6 November 2025

Summary

The Second World Summit for Social Development (sometimes called WSSD2), will take place on November 4-6, 2025, in Doha, Qatar. At the Summit, Heads of State are scheduled to sign a political declaration on social development that will become known as the Doha declaration. This represents a critical 30-year milestone since the landmark 1995 Copenhagen Declaration for Social Development¹ which created three core objectives: **poverty eradication, full and productive employment, and social integration**.¹ Despite the long-term presence of this foundational framework for social development, UN General Assembly Resolution 78/261 explicitly acknowledges "serious concern that advancements have been slow and uneven, with significant gaps still existing" in achieving these commitments after three decades.²

The Second World Social Summit in 2025 therefore aims to "address the gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and give momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."³ The summit will focus on the original Copenhagen three pillars while addressing contemporary challenges including digital transformation, climate resilience, demographic transitions, and universal social protection systems. The primary outcome will be the Doha Political Declaration, already agreed by consensus through intergovernmental negotiations, which reaffirms Copenhagen commitments while aligning with 2030 Agenda implementation, and building on the Pact for the Future and looking ahead to the next round of development for global goals after 2030.⁴ The three-day summit will feature six plenary meetings, two high-level roundtables focused on strengthening social development pillars and assessing implementation gaps, and multiple solutions sessions showcasing innovative approaches.⁵

Process development and institutional coordination

The summit emerged from UN Secretary-General António Guterres' 2021 "Our Common Agenda" report, which specifically proposed a World Social Summit in 2025⁶ to advance universal social protection (SDG 1.3, part of SDG 1 "No Poverty"). Social protection is also known as social security, i.e. benefits provided to individuals on the basis of risks faced across the life cycle (e.g., unemployment, disability, maternity, etc.) and to those suffering general poverty and social exclusion⁷. Social protection programmes play an important role in stabilising economies and supporting vulnerable groups. The UN World Social Report 2024 found that people in countries with strong social protection systems have fared better during recent crises. However,

¹ [Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 | Second World Summit for Social Development 2025](#)

² <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/261>

³ [Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 | Second World Summit for Social Development 2025](#)

⁴ https://www.globalpolicywatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GPUNW_WSSD2.pdf

⁵ [Doha Solutions Platform for Social Development | Second World Summit for Social Development 2025](#)

⁶ [The second United Nations World Social Summit 2025 | Global Policy Forum Europe](#)

⁷ [Social protection | International Labour Organization](#)

only half of the world has access to at least one social protection benefit. Delivery of social protection in crises can use different mechanisms to systems delivering social protection in situations of stability.⁸

UN DESA (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs) has served as the lead organizing institution for the Social Summit through its Division for Inclusive Social Development. The International Labour Organization (ILO) established dedicated coordination mechanisms including a Working Party that prepares tripartite input from governments, employers, and workers.⁹ The preparatory process has been led by co-facilitators Ambassador Philippe Kridelka (Belgium) and Ambassador Omar Hilale (Morocco), following a structured timeline from Member State input collection in February 2025 through consensus on the Political Declaration by August 2025. Regional consultations and stakeholder hearings have been integrated throughout this process, though with notable limitations compared to the 1995 Copenhagen preparations.

Critical civil society concerns

There are opportunities for civil society to participate at the Social Summit through a Civil Society Forum, and global or regional civil society networks (Forus and GCAP) are mobilizing globally to ensure the Doha Declaration translates into inclusive, accountable national action. This aims to counter a widespread feeling among civil society organisations that the preparation of the Social Summit was not well resourced and as a result was not inclusive. Civil society organizations have raised three fundamental criticisms of the 2025 WSSD process;

- (1) **Civil society exclusion:** unlike the extensive and inclusive preparatory process that characterized Copenhagen 1995, the current process has been "notably shorter and significantly more state-driven," with civil society "largely on the periphery" as intergovernmental negotiations take precedence¹⁰. The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) notes that civil society now provides commentary on predetermined frameworks rather than shaping the agenda as they did in 1995.
- (2) **Lack of measurable targets:** the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors criticizes the absence of quantitative commitments across most social development areas, arguing that "discussion of inequality must be addressed with data on measurable dimensions that are systematically monitored."¹¹
- (3) **Accountability challenges in implementation:** given the persistent gaps between policy proposals and concrete action, critics emphasizing that "implementation must match ambition" (ICSW) while to improve accountability, the Global Call for Action Platform (GCAP) urges "instituting review mechanisms every 3–5 years to hold states accountable."¹²

Thematic gaps and areas for development

1. Some informants to Fingo expressed concerns about the lack of representation in the World Social Summit of **humanitarian needs, international humanitarian law, and the humanitarian to development continuum**. It is clear to civil society working in **crisis-affected contexts** that there are special considerations in social development for these contexts. These concerns include a desire for acknowledgement of the special role of non-state providers of frontline social development services, and in some cases issues around trust and legitimacy of governments. Providers of social development in crises are often fragmented and may not be officially recognized. The types and sources of financial resources and technical assistance that are necessary to maintain social development results in crises can be different, for example, requiring international financial support.
2. **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** advocates noticed the space for SRHR in the Doha Declaration became weaker over the development of the drafts of the Declaration, probably reflecting

⁸ [Social development in times of converging crises: A call for global action | United Nations](#)

⁹ [Matters to be considered by the General Affairs Committee: the ILO's tripartite input to the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025](#)

¹⁰ [On the Road to the Second World Summit for Social Development: A Mid-Point Reflection](#)

¹¹ [GCSPF's position on REV 1 of the Political Declaration WSSD2 - www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org](#)

¹² [World Social Summit 2025: GCAP Calls for Bold Political Declaration to Transform Social Development – Global Call to Action Against Poverty \(GCAP\)](#)

the politicization of SRHR but also a loss of attention from SRHR advocates. Given the primacy of SRHR for gender equality, advocates have expressed hopes that champions will raise the issue vocally in Doha, and continue to consolidate their support for SRHR globally.

3. The Doha Declaration is largely silent on the question of financing, perhaps as financing for development was covered at the Fourth Financing for Development Conference (FfD4) in Sevilla in June 2025. *The Compromiso de Sevilla*¹³ outlines the following sources of finance for development: domestic public resources, domestic and international private business and finance, international development cooperation, international trade, and debt and debt sustainability. There is however no modelling at present **on what roles these different sources of finance should play in financing for Social Development**, and therefore no means to hold countries or donors accountable to financing the outcomes. Concerns expressed by lower and lower-middle income countries (LLMICs) about the challenge of delivering social development for their citizens in the context of **overwhelming debt burdens** were not reflected in the Doha declaration. This lack of political linkage between the two conferences also leaves the private sector without a clear articulation of their role in social development, in their different dimensions of employer, provider of services, generator of tax revenues and corporate responsibility. Civil society networks have emphasized that social spending must be shielded from austerity measures and debt conditionalities, ensuring that financing reforms discussed in Seville directly support social protection and inclusion goals.
4. While applauding the development in policy on social protection, several informants to Fingo noted that the expressions of commitment regarding **Universal Health Coverage** do not go far enough. Lack of attention to Universal Health Coverage and financial protection for health (SDG 3.8.2¹⁴) will undermine Social Protection. 4.5 billion people in the world lack comprehensive healthcare and more than 1 billion people annually are pushed towards poverty due to catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenditure.¹⁵ A significant gap in the declaration was insufficient focus to **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** as the world's major driver of premature mortality, including NCDs in crisis situations, although NCDs are the major source of premature death globally. Given that women live longer than men and in poorer health, addressing NCDs is also critical for gender equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.
5. A number of groups raised the importance of **Beyond GDP** or **Wellbeing Economy** approaches as a new approach to decision-making to improve social development and other development goals. Some countries were concerned about being ruled out of international financing support due to their increasing GDP, which does not take into account their other vulnerabilities, leading to calls for the Multi-dimensional vulnerability index. This did feature in the declaration. Other countries like Finland were calling for a renewed form of decision-making in light of Pact for the Future and progress since the SDGs, that considers the social and ecological and economic dimensions of social policy questions. This is considered in the declaration but requires further work and methodological development for the gains of *Wellbeing Economy* approaches for sustainable development to be realised.
6. Care and support, and the **care economy** arose from developing country regions (certainly from LAC and Africa) due to its possibility of addressing demography, gender equality and formalising informal work. In particular countries such as Kenya, which has been developing a Care Policy on care economy principles highlights the ways which taking a Care Economy approach can result in especially women, being better included in the formal workforce and social protection systems.

¹³ <https://financing.desa.un.org/ffd4/outcome>

¹⁴ [SDG 3.8.2 Catastrophic health spending \(and related indicators\)](#)

¹⁵ [Tracking Universal Health Coverage : 2023 Global Monitoring Report](#)
<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099652109152323107/idu051ce03f40370f045f30bf7e04bcd3eb96c9b>

Recommendations

Objectives for governments, UN and other duty bearers

1. Create safe and brave spaces for diverse voices to participate in social development

Governments must recognize that social policy requires **more inclusion of diverse voices** than has been the case in the preparation of the Summit. Civil society can and does participate effectively in the ongoing development of social policy at national and local levels. Civil society, and especially representatives of communities at risk, require safe spaces in which difficult things can be said safely, and different viewpoints can be heard. Duty-bearers must recognize the greater challenge of equal participation for discriminated against groups. They should also note that some networks and communities of interest act as filters, not platforms for marginalized voices, so a diversity of participation approaches is required. Concerns about the inclusion of discriminated-against groups includes Europe, as Civicus has noted narrowing of civil society space in European countries at the moment. A key call for support here is for the **UN to amplify to governments the critical role that civil society plays in planning, monitoring and accountability, and to create safe and meaningful spaces for civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the Doha Declaration**. We call on ILO and UN Desa to recognise the greater challenge of equal participation for some groups and use networks and communities of interest to raise their voices where local, national or other geographic channels for voice act as filters, not platforms.

2. Uphold gains in gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Partners concerned with **gender equality and/or sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)** around the world look especially to the Nordic countries to help safeguard gains made since the Beijing Declaration for these causes. SRHR remains essential for women's rights and dignity, and to support women's participation in the economy. Fingo also urges governments to work in future sessions of CSocD and other inter-governmental processes to develop language on Universal Health Coverage in social development so as to better include groups who are marginalized or invisible in the Second World Social Summit, such as LGBTQ+ people, who are not referenced in the declaration.

3. Prepare for investments and cooperation for social development with countries in crisis.

In implementing the Doha Declaration, governments and the multilateral system must pay close attention to the different challenges of **delivering social policy outcomes in contexts affected by crises** such as conflicts, natural disasters or severe poverty. These contexts require appropriate forms of cooperation and investment, and there are special considerations about securing equitable outcomes in such contexts. Civil society groups have huge experience and insight to contribute to the design of solutions in such contexts. Donors can play a role in **supporting platforms where actors in crisis contexts can cooperate to build a suite of specific policy recommendations for social development in crisis**, to inform post Agenda 2030 goals.

4. Shift the power, and create channels for marginalized people to speak

In terms of all planning and financing for development, shifting the power to national governments must happen, with national plans providing the framework for all financial contributions. This must be combined with strong mechanisms for ensuring that the voice of people, civil society and marginalised groups are being listened to.

5. **Address the gaps in the Doha Declaration within Universal Health Coverage.**

We call on Member States to develop the language on **financial protection for health**. We also urge national plans to better recognize important health technology, policy and social gains achieved since Copenhagen e.g. in SRHR, in the acceptance of the health rights of different groups, and in non-communicable diseases as well as health in crises. Addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is a critical part of Universal Health Coverage and should also be supported in donor commitments towards national health plans. There is also a major connection to the Doha Declaration pillar of employment, as health and care are major employers and a source of quality jobs during a time of demographic, climate, and digital transitions, as well as an intervention for gender equality.

6. **Reviewing the Sevilla Commitments and the Doha Declaration together to promote a financing model that secures social development.**

The Sevilla Commitment from the Fourth Financing for Development conference agreed on sources of finance, and there is an assumption in the Doha Declaration that more resources will come on stream for social protection, universal health coverage and inclusion measures. However, the two declarations are not linked through a political pathway that channels increased finance to social development. Many countries are weighed down by debt, or by exclusion from measures of financial assistance appropriate to their multi-dimensional vulnerability. Therefore, we call **on donors to recognize social development as an investment area** that will enable countries to write their own development pathways and the urgent need to invest resources as described in the Sevilla Commitment. The recognition of the different tools in the financing toolkit should be reviewed, linking FfD4 to WSSD2, alongside their appropriateness to different contexts and needs.

This work **aligning FfD4 and WSSD2 to create a financing model for social development** should be urgently undertaken so that all actors understand their responsibilities towards social development.

7. **Jobs that build economies and deliver social and climate gains**

Governments must build on the focus in the Second World Social Summit on employment to encourage win-win economies that deliver social and climate outcomes alongside jobs

Governments should also be encouraged to invest in shaping economies that provide quality jobs in line with social and climate transitions. For example, the health and care sectors are major employers and need respect and investment alongside digital development and governments can learn from the experience of pioneers in developing Care Economy approaches, such as Kenya.

For civil society: Dissemination of solutions which counter narratives of hopelessness

We are calling for **civil society to role model clear, solution-oriented explanations of the actions that help citizens shape the social policy outcomes** outlined in the Doha Declaration and to demonstrate the **scalable solutions it provides for urgent problems in social development**. Civil society both actively channels the voices of citizens into policy and planning, and also can act as a service provider (often under the coordination of government and sometimes alongside the private sector). It has also played successful roles in accountability, enabling countries to course-correct in the implementation of their policies, and in raising issues in human rights for national and international action. All of these **demonstrate the actions that Governments can take to move forwards with the implementation of the Social Summit and respond to both the needs and solutions designed through civil society**.

The Civil Society Forum at the Social Summit can create space for new ways of looking at the social economy, like well-being economy and “beyond GDP” thought leadership as well as acting as an advocate for areas such as SRHR, equalities, and for civil society space itself.

Background

UN DESA information on the Second World Summit for Social Development [Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 | Second World Summit for Social Development 2025](#)

Forus hosts a global resource hub for civil society on the Social Summit [Campaigns | Forus](#)

Fingo and UNRISD convened a Nordic multi-stakeholder consultation on progress since the Copenhagen Declaration and hopes for the Second World Summit on Social Development. [Perspectives from Civil Society in the Nordic Countries: Paving the Road to the Second World Summit for Social Development](#)

Impacts

The Second World Social Summit and the Doha declaration will provide an important framework for developing the next set of **global sustainable development** goals after the Sustainable Development Goals end in 2030. It will also promote **sustainable development** at the national level by informing national frameworks on poverty eradication, work, and inclusion.

The Doha declaration defends the gains secured in the development of the **human rights** framework leading up to the original Copenhagen declaration, and those developed since. It makes clear calls for **equality and non-discrimination** as a general principle, and specifies some of the poverty, employment and inclusion rights of specific discriminated-against groups, **including inclusion of persons with disabilities**. The Doha declaration in that respect provides a useful tool for civil society monitoring and accountability for equality and non-discrimination, particularly in relation to the named groups. The Doha declaration further demonstrates language that is new in UN documents but is in line with the development of understanding of older people's rights, which has been crystallised in the decision to develop a Convention on the Rights of Older People. The Doha Declaration includes seven references to "older persons" spanning entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, participation, housing, and protection from discrimination and 3 commitments on "population ageing" including recognition that by 2030, people 60+ will outnumber youth, with the fastest growth in the developing world¹⁶, and requires policies to respond. However, the rights of groups who are not yet reflected in international agreements, such as the rights of LGBTQ+ people, are not referenced in the document. It will be important for civil society to support groups of marginalized people who do not see themselves reflected here to secure voice and access to national social development plans to promote their rights. **International donors could also play a role in creating a platform for the groups invisibilised in the Doha declaration to reflect on risks, gaps and opportunities arising from the Declaration.**

The Doha declaration makes links throughout between the social development agenda and **climate and biodiversity** while leaving any detailed planning regarding climate to the UNFCCC processes. It demonstrates an awareness of global work linking the need for social protection to just transitions. It shows an acknowledgement of the need to help people support themselves through the likely job displacement and re-skilling of the green and digital transitions, and the resulting re-organisations of work. Therefore, the preparations for the Doha declaration could have gone further than only considering whether to support the implementation of the *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions*. **Linking poverty reduction efforts via jobs and social protection, to climate, digital and demographic transitions would be a fruitful channel for government, private sector and civil society dialogue and design during implementation.**

The Doha declaration developed over the course of its drafts to better reflect the **evolving distribution of power** globally and the need for **shifting the power** to national states charting their own development pathways. Nevertheless, it did not go as far as the *Compromiso de Sevilla* after the Fourth Financing for Development conference, in describing national plans as the basis for future cooperation. While the document assumes a virtuous circle of formalization of employment, increase in tax revenues, and increased

¹⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing>

coverage of social protection and healthcare, it falls short of addressing the demands of lower and lower middle income countries for review of debt arrangements, and does not specify the volumes of concessional finance that should be provided by rich countries if these investments in social development are to happen which would put all countries on a pathway to thriving.

Despite regional dialogues offered in the preparation of the process by actors such as ILO and UNRISD, and despite the Civil Society Forum to be convened at the Summit by the NGO Committee for Social Development, **conditions for civil society action and participation** during the preparation of the Social Summit have been weak. Informal consultations in discussions convened by FORUS (with Fingo) and CONCORD have highlighted groups of factors affecting civil society participation, including: (1) scarcity of resources for civil society organizations during a period of funding cuts (2) concerns for some civil society about being present at the Summit for political reasons (3) the lack of significant public outreach (4) the number of competing conferences in 2025 vying for civil society attention. FINGO, FORUS and some other organisations globally are seeking to carry out more civil society and public communications in the run up to the Summit and beyond, into the implementation period and design of monitoring of the Summit at future Commissions for Social Development meetings, to bring about wider opportunities for meaningful civil society engagement.

Civil society organizations - and especially national platforms of NGOs and CSO networks - can help ensure these commitments translate into action, by fostering national dialogues, documenting progress, and linking local realities to global accountability mechanisms.

Additional information

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I am grateful to the input of many civil society organizations in Finland and globally who have generously provided their comment on the development of the Second World Social Summit, and their suggestions for the growth and development we should seek to bring about in the future.

Fingo is the umbrella organisation of 250 Finnish civil society organisations engaged in development cooperation, sustainable development and global citizenship education and an expert in global development