

GLOBAL SOCIAL POLICY AND INEQUALITY

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B. Synonyms

Inequality, global social governance, globalization, social policy, public policy

C. Definitions

Global Social Policy

The term Global Social Policy (GSP) was first used by Deacon and colleagues (see Deacon et al 1997) to describe the role of global actors (e.g. international organisations) in prescribing social policy and the mechanisms of *global redistribution*, *global social regulation*, and *global social rights* in the development of supranational social policies (Deacon 2007). These three identified mechanisms specifically frame GSP and influence the shape of national social policies, which are in turn shaped by the governance mechanisms of GSPs, for example, the complex relationships between international policy actors such as the United Nations (UN) and its various agencies (e.g. World Health Organization [WHO], International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], World Bank) (Kaasch, Koch, and Martens 2019).

Globalization

Ideas concerning globalisation vary depending on the theoretical approach adopted. However, most theories of globalisation suggest this phenomenon has resulted in people and countries becoming closer and a sense

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that geographical boundaries have become more permeable. Globalization is driven largely by advances in information communication technologies (ICTs; e.g., internet) and enhanced mobility of goods and people across the globe, diminishing the effects of time and space in social relations and economic production (Held & McGrew 2003; Robertson 1992; Scholte 2005).

Inequality

Inequality is related to power imbalances and differences between people within society in multiple context and situations. In relation to global social policy, Christiansen and Jensen (2019) identified several different types of inequality and these include resource inequality (e.g., income), vital inequality (e.g. health), and existential inequality (e.g., rights). While not exhaustive, these examples are specific to the field of global social policy.

Social Policy and global social policy

Social policy is a sub-domain of public policy whereby the responsibility of governments in achieving set public goals is to serve citizens and the overall national development of a country (Kwon 2013). Public policy includes common characteristics of policy instruments to achieve objectives combined with policy actors or institutions to implement the policies (Kwon 2013). Fitting within that broader definition, Deacon (2007) described global social policy (GSP) as a practical and scholarly form of action by governments impacting the social and welfare sectors of society. Specifically, GSP policy can be researched, theorised or practiced across three dimensions (Deacon 2007) and includes a rights-based approach (e.g. citizenship), a sectoral approach (e.g. housing, health), and an issues-based approach (e.g. social justice, agency of provision through state, market, family).

Global Social Policy: An Introduction

The following chapter explores GSP in relation to global inequality and how this is interconnected with globalization, the governance of GSP, and the notion of redistribution, regulation, and rights associated with social policy. GSP, according to Deacon et al (1997, p. 195), is described as:

A practice of supra-national actors [which] embodies global social redistribution, global social regulation, and global social provision and/or empowerment, and ... the ways in which supranational organisations shape national social policy (see Yeates, 2014, p. 10).

In the literature, organizations may be referred to as either supra-national (Deacon 2007) or transnational (Yeates 2014), whereby the power and influence of such organizations (e.g., United Nations) extend beyond a single country. This latter issue of power and influence points to the emerging role of international agencies which have become more prominent in what is termed the global governance of social policy.

GSP is a term encompassing the idea of globalization impacting on social policy in two directions (Deacon 2007). First, the globalization of social and economic life has meant that countries can no longer formulate and implement social policy without acknowledging social and economic forces that have their origins beyond its territorial borders, operating at either global or regional levels. An example of external policy influences impacting policies of individual countries is the European Union; a project where a single European market was created with the feature of common European trade policies and a single currency (Holden 2018). A further example is in the case of countries becoming a signatory to the labour standards set

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by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and aligning their industrial relations legislation to those standards (Morris, 2018).

Second, the globalization of economy and society has led to the emergence of a number of supra-national organisations and social movements that are increasingly influential in framing social policies at the international level. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are examples of supra-national organisations involved in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (RPRSPs) initiative. The RPRSP was started in the mid-90s by the World Bank and then signed off by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the late 90s (Vetterlein 2010), to assist countries in applying for debt relief as part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. This second direction of GSP acknowledges that many social issues addressed at the level of individual countries are often global in scale (Deacon 2012). A further example is where numerous countries ratified the United Nations (1966) *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). This action prioritized the issue of rights globally and confirmed the commitment of individual countries to universal human rights of dignity, freedom, justice and peace by promoting the ability of all humans to pursue economic, social and cultural development [see Part 1, Article 1, ICESCR].

The interlinking of GSP with inequality (see above examples) points to a concern with the impact of globalization on social policy formulated at the level of individual countries, but also a growing awareness of how economic globalization has created a need for social policies formulated and enacted at a supra-national level (Deacon 2007; Yeates 2008). Many international actors at a government and non-government level continue to play a crucial role in the GSP process and in monitoring their implementation and measuring their success (e.g., the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals).

Inequality and its relationship with Global Social Policy

The term 'Inequality' has an immediate, binary link to its counterpart, 'Equality'. Inequality may be understood as differences between individuals, groups or collectives of people, who are then socially positioned through power imbalances or affordances within society (Alacevich and Soci 2017). Inequality has been described as “an issue of social justice” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013, p.22) and brings to the forefront questions of a moral and political nature concerning the sustainability of a just and fair society where there is equality of opportunity and outcomes and the realisation of human rights for all (Christiansen & Jensen, 2019).

Alacevich and Soci (2017) identified three overarching features of inequality that impact upon many areas of social and economic life:

1. “Inequalities reinforce each other”,
2. “Inequality is inherited” (p. 26), and
3. “Inequality is a threat to the good functioning of democracy” (p.27)

However, Christiansen and Jensen (2019) illustrated a more detailed analysis of global inequality and emphasised the importance of the following four factors in contributing to global inequality:

1. Geographical place of birth (p. 2),
2. Limited opportunities and differences globally between resource inequality (income and wealth), vital inequality (reduced life expectancy resulting from poor working conditions and reduced access to health care), and existential inequality (recognition of humanity and rights) (p.3),

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3. The modern world is characterised by a paradox of global suffering and inequality seated alongside “wealth, technology, and productive capacities” (p. 3), and
4. Inequalities occur at an international and national level.

This last factor is qualified by Alacevich and Soci (2017) who suggested that international and domestic inequality were interdependent on each other. These authors stated, “inequality trends between countries combine with trends within countries to produce a broad spectrum of interrelated phenomena” (p.6) They further emphasized the key influence of inequality in shaping globalization and democracy across the world.

Christiansen and Jensen (2019) traced the history of global inequality from its initial identification as ‘international inequality’ in the 1970s with the food crisis, then shifting to ‘global inequality’ in the 1990s. Milanovic (2012) further defined inequality in relation to international equality with respect to gross domestic product (GDP) between countries, national inequality as relating to the citizens of a country, and global inequality as relating to global citizens living in the one world (as measured by the Gini co-efficient). However, despite the descriptions of global inequality, the literature has primarily focused on the economic dimensions of inequality (Alecevich & Soci 2017).

The United Nations and GSP have spanned the last 60 years and have been described as the UN development decades and agendas on human rights; one of which includes addressing inequality (Koehler, 2017). Global Inequality is reported in the Human Development Report and through means of the Inequality-adjusted HDI as well as the Gender Inequality Index, Gender Development Index, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (p. 2, UN HDR Report, 2016). Applying a human development approach to inequality was pivotal in creating and implementing the Millennium Declaration (MD; advocating a more equitable world) and the Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs) and more recently the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over 190 countries confirmed their commitment to the SDGs.

The SDGs present a shared vision of humanity and identifies set targets and goals for developing and developed countries for achieving these goals. This includes social protection of people’s rights. Social protection resulting from reduced poverty and inequality is addressed through GSPs. Milanovic (2012) explored the historical implications of global inequality and suggested one of the main issues impacting inequality was migration and the challenges this presented to recipient countries and the need for the global community to address the growth of poor countries at a GSP level. Social protection through GSP assists in reducing inequalities (e.g., poverty) and promoting the social and economic inclusion of all people.

The Policy Impact of Globalization

Globalization has been described through metaphors such as the ‘space of flows’ (e.g., Castells 1996) — of capital, goods, people, images, finance, ideas, regulations, policy and cultures — across the globe. Some authors (Knox, Savage & Harvey 2006) suggested social relations in globalization have been reconfigured in the form of networks transforming economic, social and political life, whereas Castells (2006) asserted that society was undergoing transformation via the diffusion of networking into all aspects of activity based on digital communication technologies. Urry (2003) extended this idea to suggest the world was now constituted as a global complex of linked networks.

Some broadening of the definition of globalization needs to be stated here as these concepts are important for understanding how power and influence between countries and supra-governmental organisation and

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across those entities manifest. Some theorists have challenged early accounts of globalization that emphasised its homogenising effects (e.g., McDonalidization of culture, homogenous policy settings), noting that globalization's impact on individual countries or regions is dialectical and uneven. For example, globalization's impacts on national policies are mediated by a raft of mechanisms (e.g., legislative, cultural, networks of dissemination), which can be considered sources of diversification of globalization effects (Thompson 2015). An example here is the way the ILOs Conventions may be taken legislated in different nation states.

In contrast, Rizvi (2006) refuted the idea of globalization as an external force for change and instead argued globalization be considered an *outcome* of discourses and social practices that constituted the phenomenon in particular ways and for particular purposes. Here, discourses and other governing technologies deployed (e.g., benchmarking, league tables) would then be considered important in the production of "global imaginaries" which included the ways that entities from individuals to nation states imagine the dimensions of lived space. Rizvi (2006) noted imagination:

“involves processes through which people engage with ordinary life, consider options and make decisions, now in new forms of collaborations that are no longer confined to local communities but span across national boundaries.” (p. 193)

On another level, the league tabling of countries with respect to their performance on particular educational performance indicators may prompt policy makers to consider how they are positioned relative to other nations and how future competitiveness in the global economy may be impacted as a result (see Hay, 2009; Lingard, 2010, Sellar and Lingard, 2013).

To refer to GSP as a contemporary field of investigation and discourse signals the historical alignment of shifts towards globalization and global governance with policies aimed at the social and economic welfare of the world's population; sometimes described as a global citizenry. Globalization of social policy including the related concept global governance speak to social movements that transcend, or at least traverse, the geo-political boundaries that define individual countries or nation states.

International Actors and Global Social Policy

The following section provides a description of key actors involved in the global governance of social policy. Where appropriate, this description includes a brief overview of the actor's field of activity and points to overlapping activities with other actors (e.g., organisations) mentioned. The literature describes actors at the global level as either international or supranational actors and these terms are used interchangeably.

The discourse of GSP is described as a process and practice involving the networking, partnership, and collaboration between international actors in what is identified as global social governance (Kaasch, Koch & Martens, 2019). The contribution of international and national actors is important in discussing GSP and their role in global social governance and their influence on international trends, ideas, and the creation of national policies. Kaasch, Koch and Martens (2019) highlighted the relevance of mapping out key actors in GSP and identifying each actor's role in terms of global social governance and how they potentially contributed to solving policy issues at a global level.

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There are two types of actorhood involved in what is potentially a principal-agent model of governance (Kaasch, Koch & Martens 2019) whereby a *supporting actor* or a *meaningful player* engages in a role on the global stage and politically to assist nation-states (principals) in dealing with policy problems or issues (Rittberger et al 2006) by using international organisations (IOs; agents or actors/players). These roles are more definitive based on the topics engaged with and their inter-actions or inter-relations with other actors and described as “cooperative, competitive, conflictive or even bordering on rivalry” (Kaasch, Koch & Martens, 2019, p. 90).

The following table identifies some of the key IO actors, and their overall purpose or mission and relationship to global social policy. It also identifies organisations that operate under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN).

Table 1. International Organisation Actors in GSP

UN	International Organisation	Acronym	Purpose/Mission
✓	International Labour Organization	ILO	Established in 1919 under the United Nations, the ILO is an organisation comprising 187-member states and aims to bring together representatives from governments and employers’ and workers’ organisations. The ILO sets international labour standards, promotes rights at work and encourages decent employment opportunities, the enhancement of social protection and the strengthening of dialogue on work-related issues (ILO 2019).
x	International Monetary Fund	IMF	Established in 1944, the IMF is governed by the 189 countries that make up its membership. The IMF’s main goal is to promote financial stability at an international level and for countries to cooperate by assisting with international trade, sustainable economic growth, employment, and the reduction of global poverty (IMF nd)
x	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD	Motto is ‘Better Policies for Better Lives’ – richest nations. Their goal is to “help guide countries towards globally recognised standards and ambitious reform agendas to unlock greater prosperity and well-being for citizens” (****, para 6).
✓	United Nations	UN	Founded in 1945, the UN is comprised of 143 Member States (i.e. countries) and in shaping the future of humanity through its Charter, which is to
✓	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs	UNDESA	This department is underpinned by the United Nations Charter and aims to “help countries translate their global commitments into national action in the economic, social and environmental spheres” (UNDESA 2019, para 2)
✓	United Nations	UNDP	Focus on helping 170 countries and territories achieve development priorities (e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Goals) (UNDP 2019)

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UN	International Organisation	Acronym	Purpose/Mission
	Development Programme		
✓	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO	Focus on founding and building peace by helping countries to develop educational tools, promote cultural heritage and foster scientific programmes and policies with an overall aim of working towards meeting the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2019)
✓	United Nations International	UNICEF	The aims of UNICEF are underpinned by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to realise the rights of the child by ensuring that “every child survives, thrives and reaches his or her potential” (UNICEF 2018 p.1)
x	World Bank	-	A development bank leading global aid organisation that commenced in the post-war period.
✓	World Health Organization	WHO	The Constitution was signed on 22 July 1946 and entered into force on 7 April 1948; this latter date is celebrated yearly as World Health Day. The World Health Organisation directs the international health within the UN by promoting global health (WHO 2019)
x	World Trade Organization	WTO	An international organisation aimed at facilitating global trade agreements and negotiations, sorting disputes, and monitoring policies between member nations while assisting developing countries.

Many of the above IOs have functions that are complementary or at least overlap to some extent in their purpose or mission. For example, UNDESA, OECD, WTO, World Bank, and the IMF are all concerned with reducing inequalities (e.g., poverty) across the globe and promoting development in poor countries. However, Kaasch (2013) highlighted previous and current research in the field of GSP pointing out that the political and ideological orientation of IO's have led to conflicting positions regarding social policy prescription, particularly in the case of those for developing countries. This author described one such example related to pensions systems/models separately developed by the ILO and the World Bank and how the “war of position” (Kaasch 2013, p. 49) between actors and ideas on the best pension model created conflict between other IO's about public versus private pension systems and how they in turn affected governance structures and the enactment or restriction of ideas.

Governance of Global Social Policy

The following section deals with the governance of Global social policy along a number of dimensions with specific attention given to the form that governance of social policy takes when social policy is proposed at the global level. The concept of GSP is related to scalability of social policy from legislation and implementing policy at the national state level to formulating and implementing GSPs at the global level. Governance of social policy deals with complex interactions between policy actors when formulating policy at the IO level, and, in turn, how policy settings may then come to be translated and transformed in the process of its implementation in a particular country.

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GSP operates in different ways to national public policy requiring different approaches for understanding how it exerts its influence at the national or regional level. Alluding to these differences, Kwon (2013) posed the question, are the MDGs (or SDGs) global social policy? Kwon points out that GSP lacks a government with a mandate for social intervention, and therefore may not be regarded as public policy in the traditional sense. However, as Deacon (2007) noted, a range of supra-national actors (i.e., UN, OECD, World Bank, ILO) have emerged since the middle of 20th Century and asserted considerable influence on how individual nation states formulated, implemented, and evaluated their social policies. This influence pointed to alternative mechanisms, outside the legislative powers of nation states, through which supra-governmental organisations exerted influence in the shaping of social policies within countries (Yeates, 2014).

One way of thinking about the governance of GSP is in terms of structures and organisations including policy actors who operate between the levels nation states and international organisations. Such actors would include expert policy communities (Hass, 1990), non-government organisations and think-tanks, and international organisations). GSP in this sense derives from ‘complex multilateralism’ (O’Brien et al., 2000) that facilitates the formulate policy at the level of international organisation and also to provide networks for policy uptake and implementation in specific regions or countries. What is implicitly rejected here is an instrumental notion of GSP that assumes that policy formulated within an international organisation is adopted by a particular country in an unmediated way.

By contrast, researchers point to the influence of governance of global social policy as a process that is mediated by a raft of factors such as political influences, local cultural differences, policy histories and the influence of local policy actors and groups. Acknowledging that the governance of GSE is a complex multidimensional process, Hulme and Hulme (2012) have described how global policy governance is realised. Beginning from the position that ‘global policy formation involves the movement of ideas, structures and practices across national borders’ they describe how researchers have conceptualised this process through various models and metaphors including policy transfer, policy diffusion, policy borrowing and policy learning. While somewhat different in their scope and focus, concepts such as policy transfer and policy borrowing have become useful concepts for understanding how knowledge for policy formulation has circulated internationally to influence countries social policies. For example, Lingard and Sellar (2013) demonstrated how the OECD, including between-country comparisons of PISA data, was used to globalise concerns around links between an individual country’s education performance and their future competitiveness in the global economy.

Yet, common policy concerns can often lead to divergent policy approaches as policy priorities are transformed by political priorities and commitments. Hay (2009) and Kapitzke and Hay (2011) demonstrated how the same concerns with economic competitiveness in Australia led to the development of programs to establish industry-school and school-community partnerships to support the schooling-to-employment transitions of students at risk of disengaging from education. These studies showed that while globalization of the governance of education certainly impacted on the priorities of national education systems, local factors such as the differing political programs of federal and state governments remain important influences on policy implementation.

The governance of social policy not only concerns the mechanisms by which supra-governmental organisations may exert influence on the policies of national governments but represents, in part, a political

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project that attempts to directly confront neo-liberal political ideology (Deacon, 2007). Neoliberalism asserts that markets are the most appropriate mechanisms for distributing goods and services and government intervention (such as taxation, and redistribution and industry regulation) should be minimised to ensure their efficient working (Harvey, 2005). Global capital and particularly transnational corporations now comprise complex networks of production and supply chains that span the globe. The increasing ease with which capital can relocate production, has to some extent, increased pressure on national governments with respect to their capacities to raise revenue to provide social policies aimed at social protection and national investment (Hayward, 2012). Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs (1997) thereby argued if capital now operates at the global level, social policy, if it is to continue to provide social protections for populations within countries, must therefore be rescaled to shift the authority for its enforcement to the global level. Accordingly, these authors proposed GSP as a political project aimed at strengthening global governance of social policy through supra-national organisations while at the same time, providing a sustainable social policy alternative to that provided by neo-liberalism.

GSP Processes

Redistribution

Advocates for stronger and enforceable social policy articulated and implemented at the global level have advocated for the need for greater regulatory powers to supra-governmental organisations, particularly calling for greater redistribution of resources between states. For example, Deacon (2007, p. 109) has argued that “a global social reformist project would call for more rather than less redistribution of resources between states” (p. 109).

While many academics and policy makers remain supportive of stronger GSP, one of the greatest constraints to the realisation of GSP is the issue of redistribution. Redistribution of a countries wealth falls within the domain of fiscal policy at the level of the nation state. Within democratically elected governments, progressive taxation systems raise funds that are redistributed in the form of transfer payments (unemployment benefits, aged pensions) and to fund a raft of social welfare and to invest in what are described as public goods (e.g., public transport infrastructure, public health, education). Fiscal policy has a significant redistributive impact in developed regions, with transfers having a larger equalizing effect than taxes (Wang and Caminada, 2011).

The establishment of a system of global redistribution of the kind that can be envisioned at the level of nation states is still to be realised. Since 1970, the UN has had in place a strategy for redistribution which targets a contribution from developed countries of 0.7% Gross National Income to provide predictable multi-year financing of programs. However, most developed countries have resisted this target, most notably the US, which remains amongst one of the lowest contributors (Deacon, 2007).

International efforts that do have some redistributive effects are collectively termed Official Development Assistance (ODA) of which around two-thirds is provided by bilateral aid arrangements with the other one-third administered by multi-lateral organisations (Deacon, 2007). The key IO responsible for the measurement of poverty internationally and the funding of programs aimed to address it is the WB (Holden 2018). ODA as a mechanism of global redistribution tend to be poorly directed in terms of relative need globally, unreliable in terms of long-term planning and tends to remain tied to the economic or political aspirations of donor countries. For example, much bilateral aid has historically been in the form “tied” aid provided on the condition that recipient countries contract development projects using business located in the donor country.

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From the early 2000s, the redistributive focus of IOs has overwhelmingly been targeted on the reduction of poverty in the world's poorest countries. This focus on poverty has been consolidated as GSP through the UN's MDGs and SDGs (Holden, 2018). Currently, the UN's SDG 1 targets the elimination of extreme poverty globally measured by the number of people living on less than US\$1.25 Per day (UN, 2016). According to the UN (2016), the cost of meeting this goal is in the order of \$175 Billion per year, representing less than 1% of the combined income of the world's richest countries.

While the elimination of world poverty is a laudable aim, Deacon (2007) has suggested that this focus represents a far more limited aspiration than a vision aimed at "reducing global inequality" (Deacon 2007 p. 111). Further, Deacon suggests that the continued international focus on poverty within and amongst the poorest countries is one reason that global redistribution and global inequality remain virtually excluded from the discourse of ODA. Clearly, in the absence of an internationally agreed upon standard for redistribution of wealth from rich countries to poor countries in support of development programs, the funding of development programs will remain challenging. Nevertheless, there have been some gains within the limited redistributive scope of ODA especially through the 2000s. The leadup to the 2005 G8 summit saw some improvements led largely by the UK and framed by a report by the then Chair of Management Committee of the IMF, Gordon Brown's (2001) Tackling world poverty: A global New Deal. Redistribution came into focus around consistent funding required to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2005).

Moreover, innovative funding solutions aimed at specific issues have emerged which have a redistributive element. An example of this is the French-German proposal to add a levy to airline tickets sold to fund specific programs launched in 2006 (Wahl, 2006). Noting the potential shortfall of resources to fully fund implementation of the SDGs, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (2018) proposed that countries focus on universal goals of *leaving no person behind* and suggested governments explore ways to redistribute and reallocate national budgets through initiatives and programmes to achieve the social outcomes envisioned in the SDGs.

Regulation

There are many forms of regulatory regimes that operate at the global level which govern such areas as food quality, the maritime industry and health care. However, this section focuses on labour regulation for two related reasons: (1) regulation of global capital intersects with and potential impacts on other GSP areas such as poverty, standards of living, health and social protection; (2) regulation and its enforceability or otherwise, impacts on the domain of rights, particularly worker's industrial rights and other human rights such as the rights of children.

Economic globalisation and the increased mobility of investment capital has meant that transnational corporations (TNCs) have sought to relocate production facilities in localities that offer competitive advantages with respect to taxation, distribution, cheap labour and fewer industrial regulations (Porter, 1990). This has placed pressure on governments in developing countries, where wages are low and workers' rights limited, to maintain existing low levels of regulation (Holden, 2014). This apparent shift in the balance of power in favour of international capital has resulted in both debates about and various attempts to realise regulation and worker's at the global level. Debates concerning labour regulation are divided between those advocating, on the one hand, for greater powers accorded to international organisations to enforce compliance to such regulations. On the other hand, neoliberals argue that global capital should have the freedom to self-regulate their activities through such measures as setting their own standards for corporate conduct and responsibility.

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The key supra-governmental organisation that has a key role in maintaining and improving conditions for Labour internationally is the ILO. The role of the ILO is usually described through the organization's three main activities: standard- setting, technical advice and cooperation with member countries and research (ILO, 2019). However, Kott and Droux (2013) has suggested that the scope of the ILO should be broadened to include its role as a forum where ideas and expertise circulate and are exchanged and where policy options and social models emerge and are promoted (p. ix). According to Deacon, (2007), the ILO had significant influence in shaping labour policies during the interwar years and during the period which saw the rise of welfare states in developed countries from 1950-1970s. However, from the mid 1970's the so called "crisis of welfare" and the rise of neo-liberal policies challenged workers protections.

One attempt by the ILO to establish enforceable protections for workers at the international level came in the form of a move to insert within the rules of the WTO, requirements for countries to comply with labour standards developed by the ILO as a condition of membership (Deacon, 2007). This clause would have ensured all members complied with minimum labour standards. However, the suggestion was ultimately rejected in 1996 on the basis that it constituted a form of protectionism favoring developing countries and that such a condition would ultimately threaten the economic development of the global south, by excluding them from world trade (World Trade Organization: Ministerial Conference, Singapore, 9-13 December 1996).

From that point, the ILO strategy then shifted to developing the Declaration of the ILO on Fundamental Principles and rights at work (1999) which detailed a set of standards for protecting rights of workers and developing strategies to encourage countries to adopt the principles voluntarily. However, the ILO took the step of making membership contingent upon adopting the standards (Deacon 2007). The ILO promotes eight fundamental Conventions that specify the fundamental principles of rights at work in four general areas: a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; 3) the effective abolition of child labour; and 4) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (ILO, 2019). SDG 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (United Nations, 2016) relates most closely to the work of the ILO. While compliance of individual countries to the ILO's standards remains voluntary, its ability to influence the rights of workers lies in its capacity to influence national policy debates by strengthening policy actors "especially at the national level, where social and labour rights are actually implemented" (Kott and Droux, 2013, p 9).

The future for GSP

Overall, GSP is difficult to encapsulate in a single synthesis of policy formulation and enactment across multiple social policy domains, nationally and internationally. In attempting to synthesise the GSP movement, we identified two main tensions in the literature which have implications for the future traction of GSP. The first tension is between the ideal of GSP, and GSP implementation at national levels. Social policies, especially those aimed reducing inequalities and redistributing economic resources, are dependent on the commitment of national governments to develop effective policies that might achieve those aims. The second tension revolves around the idea of GSP as a social justice agenda which potentially provides a counterpoint to neoliberal policy agendas and competing political tensions across and within countries. Consequently, the collective and individual responses of countries, through the actions of actors such as governments and IOs themselves, affect the policy traction on human rights experienced by citizens globally. These actions may result in inequalities which are structurally entrenched and enduring at an international level. The future traction of GSP is difficult to predict in any one policy domain, due to the tensions noted above and the ways

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these tensions manifest at the national and local levels of policy formation and implementation. The hope for social justice and reducing of inequalities lies in the goodwill of national governments in embracing the social justice aspirations of GSP and the international community of actors (e.g. United Nations) in its monitoring across the SDGs.

Cross-References

Global Policy-Making Process of Inequality Reduction: Equalities and Non-equalities of Inequality
Governmental Policies for Anti-discrimination

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