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**Working Paper**

## Social protection and coloniality: Learning from the past and present. Côte d'Ivoire case study

IDOS Discussion Paper, No. 19/2025

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), Bonn

*Suggested Citation:* Lambin, Roosa; Bado, Arsène Brice (2025) : Social protection and coloniality: Learning from the past and present. Côte d'Ivoire case study, IDOS Discussion Paper, No. 19/2025, ISBN 978-3-96021-264-5, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), Bonn, <https://doi.org/10.23661/idp19.2025>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/320562>

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# **Social Protection and Coloniality: Learning from the Past and Present**

## **Côte d'Ivoire Case Study**

Roosa Lambin

Arsène Brice Bado



# Social protection and coloniality: learning from the past and present

## Côte d'Ivoire case study

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*The German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) is institutionally financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), based on a resolution of the German Bundestag, and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) as a member of the Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft (JRF).*

Suggested citation:

Lambin, R., & Bado, A. B. (2025). *Social protection and coloniality: Learning from the past and present. Côte d'Ivoire case study* (IDOS Discussion Paper 19/2025). German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). <https://doi.org/10.23661/idp19.2025>

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IDOS Discussion Paper / German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) gGmbH

ISSN 2751-4439 (Print)

ISSN 2751-4447 (Online)

ISBN 978-3-96021-264-5 (Print)

DOL: <https://doi.org/10.23661/idp19.2025>

© German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) gGmbH

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<https://www.idos-research.de>



Printed on eco-friendly, certified paper.

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## Abbreviations

AFD	Agence française de développement
AfDB	African Development Bank
CERAP	Centre de recherche et d'action pour la paix
CFA	West African CFA franc / Communauté Financière Africaine
CMU	universal health insurance / Couverture Maladie Universelle
CNPS	National Social Insurance Fund / Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale
CSO	civil society organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FIDES	Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development / Fonds d'investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NVivo	qualitative data analysis software
ODA	official development assistance
OIT	Organisation Internationale du Travail (French name for the ILO)
PAM	Programme Alimentaire Mondial
PFSP	Social Safety Net Programme / Programme de Filets Sociaux Productifs
PNAPA	social assistance scheme for the elderly / Projet National d'Assistance aux Personnes Âgées
PND	National Development Plan / Plan National de Développement
PTMP	Productive Cash Transfer Program / Programme de Transferts Monétaires Productifs
RAM	Medical Assistance Plan / Régime d'Assistance Médicale
ROSCAs	rotating savings and credit associations
RSTI	informal sector workers' insurance scheme / Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants
SAA	African Agricultural Union / Syndicat Agricole Africain
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SNPS	National Social Protection Strategy / Stratégie Nationale de Protection Sociale
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive summary

Côte d'Ivoire has experienced several phases of social protection expansion, retrenchment and reform – often with the involvement of external actors and influences. This study examines how colonial legacies and postcolonial dynamics – alongside domestic factors – have influenced social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire. Drawing on qualitative semi-structured interviews with stakeholders on the ground and documentary analysis, it offers a systematic and holistic analysis of the role and nature of external influence on social protection policymaking in the country since the colonial era.

The evolution of social protection in Côte d'Ivoire can be divided into four main phases. During the **French Colonial Era (pre-1960)**, social protection was limited and primarily served European settlers and a small group of African civil servants. Pension schemes and workplace injury compensation were introduced, but these remained highly exclusionary. The early **Independence Era (1960-1980s)** saw expansion under President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, with significant state-led investments in education, health care, housing and employment benefits, including the creation of the National Social Insurance Fund (Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale, CNPS) to support workers. **The Economic Crisis and Structural Adjustment (1980s-1990s)** led to austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions. Social spending was cut, public services deteriorated and poverty increased as the government reduced its role in welfare provision. Civil wars in 2004 and 2010-2011 disrupted the state's social protection functions further. The **Modern Reform Phase (2011-present)** has, however, witnessed intensified efforts to expand social protection, including the introduction of universal health insurance (Couverture Maladie Universelle, CMU), targeted social safety nets (Social Safety Net Programme / Programme de Filets Sociaux Productifs, PFSP) and social insurance schemes aimed at informal workers (Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants, RSTI).

The analysis of colonial influence points to three distinct legacies that continue to shape social protection arrangements in the country. First, the French colonial administration created long-lasting **economic dependencies** that limit Côte d'Ivoire's economic autonomy up until today. This is notably because of France's involvement in the West African CFA franc monetary zone and structuring of local economic structures with priority on raw materials exports. These factors affect the fiscal space for domestic investments in social protection. Additionally, the adopted governance approach favoured the inclusion of some ethnic groups in the economic activities while excluding others, creating significant ethnic disparities and rivalries. Second, the **institutional and legislative arrangements** introduced by the French colonial powers remain partly in place today, structuring the legal framings and administration of social protection and limiting the possibilities for re-imagining a social protection system rooted in local values, practices and norms of solidarity. Third, the **model of social protection provision** designed during colonial rule continues to drive insurance-based forms of social protection in the country, whereas its impacts in other social protection domains (e.g. the health system) were less prominent.

The study findings show that diverse postcolonial influences remain important in understanding shifts in social protection policymaking, notably since the 1980s. Shifting **ideologies at the global level** have impacted national policymaking around social protection, from socialist influences during the Cold War era to neoliberal hegemony in the 1980s, and more recent paradigms around universalism in social protection. Today, diverse external actors engage in **development cooperation across different social protection domains** or sub-categories, with the lead of the World Bank (especially given its financier role), United Nations institutions and the International Labour Organization (with influence through international soft law). These development partners deploy a range of **policy-transfer tactics** to further their preferred policy prescriptions and approaches, including funding modalities, strategic use of political structures, and the export of ideas and knowledge.



The collected evidence highlights the role of domestic factors in mediating external influences and driving policy processes internally. The historical and current connections between France and the Ivorian elite have facilitated and maintained France's economic and policy influence in the country, which has not adopted a strong development ideology, unlike some other countries in the region. The domestic elite is largely driven by a developmental model rooted in economic growth and trickle-down economics, and there is no holistic, overall social policy vision guiding the government. Government collaboration with development partners on building national social protection strategies and interventions is open and amiable, and **domestic resistance to external influence** is not prominent. The government's negotiation power is associated with its relatively healthy economic situation (compared to other countries in the region), rather than ideological stance. Although external actors are key in driving the cash transfer programme and strengthening social insurance, the government's pet projects include the CMU and the RSTI, which have involved less direction from external partners. **Civil society movements and workers' associations** constitute another significant domestic actor group that has promoted social protection expansion, with varying degrees of involvement across the decades.

The findings of this study point to several ways forward:

- Developing a holistic social policy and development vision with strong domestic leadership: Stakeholders highlighted the need for a strong domestic vision that aligns with local social and cultural realities (with a focus on communities), moving beyond European models. Crucially, this vision should be holistic with a clear understanding of synergies between different social protection domains, as well as social and economic policies more broadly. It should be developed in collaboration with civil society organisations that currently have limited voice in policymaking processes.
- Strengthening domestic financing capacity: Reconsidering economic structures (including monetary policy) and increasing domestic resource mobilisation are essential for a domestically led expansion of social protection coverage that does not rely on external debt. This requires both global-level action (to limit capital flight from the country and rearrange structures and instruments for the global financing of social protection) and domestically driven resource mobilisation.
- Leveraging South-South cooperation: Regional cooperation within ECOWAS and WAEMU already plays a growing role in regional social protection initiatives, though Côte d'Ivoire's global policy engagement remains limited. Leveraging knowledge exchange and regional social protection agreements (e.g. regarding benefit portability or for resource pooling) can support the development of sustainable social protection systems that respond to needs and reflect the social and economic structures on the ground. Strong regional organisation can also offer alternative platforms for devising social protection agendas, currently largely designed by actors in the Global North.

# 1 Introduction

Social protection arrangements – defined here as formal, government-organised, non-contributory and contributory interventions (e.g. social assistance, social care, social insurance, health insurance and labour market interventions; see Carter, Roelen, Enfield, & Avis, 2019) – differ significantly across African countries. As Devereux (2013, p. 13) highlights, specific arrangements within a particular country-context are oftentimes the outcome of an interplay of “complex and diverse pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories”. The existing literature has long highlighted the extensive engagement of external actors in these “histories”. Social protection policymaking in Africa is often described as one of co-production with (e.g. Alou, 2009), imposition by (e.g. Kpessa-Whyte, 2021) or monocropping from (e.g. Mkandawire, 2009) Western donor agencies and international organisations. Others have highlighted the role of domestic elites and ideologies in shaping the direction of adopted social policies (e.g. Lavers & Hickey, 2016).

The case of Côte d’Ivoire provides a particularly interesting case for exploring such histories and dynamics, given its role as an economically and geopolitically strategic colony and now partner of France (Boisbouvier, 2011), the country’s domestic political instabilities including periods of internal conflict (see e.g. Boone, 2024), and more recent efforts to expand social protection. This study explores the evolution and current dynamics of social protection arrangements in Côte d’Ivoire, with the aim of better understanding the particular external influences and domestic factors shaping social protection. It draws on literature searches as well as qualitative interviews with key stakeholders to capture views and experiences on the ground.

The history of formal social protection in sub-Saharan Africa dates back to colonial times. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 marked a pivotal moment in the European “scramble for Africa”. This event was crucial for the partitioning of Africa among European powers and formalised the competition for colonies. France, already active in West Africa, sought to expand its control over the region, motivated by economic gains and gaining geopolitical advantages (Pakenham, 1991). In 1893, Côte d’Ivoire formally became a French colony. Unlike the British administration, which governed colonies through indirect rule, the French pursued a centralised governance approach of assimilation. Although France introduced some of the first formal public social protection arrangements in the country – albeit on largely discriminatory basis (e.g. Olié, Delpy, & Ballet, 2024) – the early independence era (1960-1970s), led by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, came with renewed efforts and ideas. The French “example” was now competing with other political and ideological models that influenced domestic policy, including Cold War communism. In addition, the landscape of external actors in the country rapidly expanded with new influences and pressures from international monetary institutions, United Nations (UN) organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and a range of bilateral donors. Yet, Côte d’Ivoire has continued to experience France’s strong economic, political and military presence during its six decades of independence. It is against this background that this study explores the following questions:

1. What is the colonial legacy in social protection, that is, the institutional, legal and policy arrangements that were put in place during colonial times, that were maintained post-independence and that are still in place – in part or in full – at present?
2. What are the postcolonial influences in social protection, that is, the continued patterns of power imbalances that shape social protection arrangements in Côte d’Ivoire, even decades after independence?
3. What are the political, economic and social factors at the domestic level that play into country-level social protection arrangements?
4. What are ways forward to support countries such as Côte d’Ivoire in shaping social protection arrangements in line with their own priorities?

The Discussion Paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the methods of data collection and analysis adopted in this study, while describing the overall data and the context of data collection. Section 3 provides an overview of social protection trajectories in Côte d'Ivoire, from the colonial era up until the current day. This section also sheds light on the institutional organisation of social protection governance today. Section 4 presents the results of our investigation of the Ivorian social protection systems, highlighting how – and the extent to which – colonial path dependencies, postcolonial dynamics and domestic factors have shaped social protection arrangements in the country. Section 5 discusses potential ways forward for Côte d'Ivoire to strengthen its social protection system. The paper closes, in Section 6, by summarising key findings and their implications for future research and policy practice.

This paper is part of the project “Overcoming colonial continuities in the area of social protection: Learning from the past”, funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and conducted between May 2024 and January 2025 by an international team of researchers based at the Open University (UK), CERAP (Côte d'Ivoire) and the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). This Côte d'Ivoire country case study was led by Dr Roosa Lambin (Open University) and Dr Arsene Brice Bado (CERAP).

## **2 Methods**

This paper presents the results of our qualitative study of the social protection policymaking trajectory in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>1</sup> It draws on a documentary analysis and interviews with international and domestic stakeholders in the country. More specifically, the documentary analysis involved the review and analysis of peer-reviewed academic publications, working and policy papers by research and development organisations, government policy documents and legislation, as well as government website information and official statistics.

### **2.1 Study data and analysis**

This paper draws on primary data collected in 13 semi-structured interviews with experts in the area of social protection. Ten of the interviews were conducted with stakeholders based in Côte d'Ivoire (see Table 1; identifiers starting with IC). An additional three interviews were conducted with international experts on the topic who have a particular familiarity with the Ivorian country context.

Interviewees include domestic social protection experts (e.g. representatives from government and trade unions), civil society representatives, development partners (multi- and bilateral donors and international organisations) and international social protection experts with expertise in the Ivorian country context. Interviewee selection was made on the basis of knowledge and experience of social protection needs and approaches in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as their familiarity with processes of policy-making and design around social protection. In addition, the recruitment process sought to purposefully select stakeholders with experience across different areas of social protection (e.g. social assistance, social insurance, health sector), and representation from different types of domestic and development partner organisations. Interviewees were identified through online searches and existing networks of team members.

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1 This research was undertaken with a favourable opinion of the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), reference number 2024-0494-2. No separate ethics approval was required for research in Côte d'Ivoire.

**Table 1: Summary of study participants**

No.	Organisation type	Level of seniority	Level of governance	Identifier
1	International organisation	Senior social protection officer	International	INT-2
2	International organisation	Senior social protection officer	International	IC-6
3	International organisation	Senior social protection officer	International/regional	IC-7
4	Regional social protection Initiative	Programme director (gender)	Regional	IC-8
5	Bilateral donor agency	Senior director	International	BIL-5
6	Bilateral donor agency	Programme director (health)	International	IC-5
7	International NGO/political organisation	Senior advisor	International	IC-2
8	Trade union	Senior director	National	IC-3
9	Trade union	Senior director	National	IC-1
10	Civil society organisation	Senior labour rights expert	National	IC-4
11	Government	Senior director	National	IC-9
12	Academic institution in Europe	Academic	International	EXP-5
13	International trade union	Senior director	Regional	CSO-1

Source: Authors

All interviews were transcribed (English or French) with the aid of transcription software. We analysed all interviews in their original language using NVivo software, adopting a thematic analysis approach, combining inductive and deductive reasoning. Initially, a coding framework drawing on the first 15 interviews under the overall project was developed collaboratively by the project team. This framework guided the coding and analysis of transcripts – during which new themes emerged.

Our thematic interview data analysis was complemented by an analysis of relevant academic works and broader literature in order to triangulate data and advance the explanatory power of the analysis. The overall analysis was a shared effort between different team members and the country collaborator, strengthening the validity of the findings. The interview citations in this text are, on occasion, translations from the original transcripts in French.

## 2.2 Context of data collection

The interview recruitment process in Côte d'Ivoire proved uniquely challenging, highlighting the contentious but also timely topic of coloniality. In order to understand the particular policy environment in which the study was conducted, it is pertinent to highlight the ongoing debates and policy developments regarding French influence within Francophone West African countries. Some of these, such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – driven by an anti-French sentiment – have actively pursued political detachment from their former colonial masters (see

Koungou, 2024). This has been facilitated, to an increasing extent, by Russian support (see e.g. Caprile & Pichon, 2024). Other countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, have pursued much more stable relationships with France.

Given the political atmosphere in the country, the study title, which included the term “coloniality”, was frequently met with caution. Several potential interviewees explicitly attacked the framing of the study, asserting that addressing issues related to coloniality has no place in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire. Some potential participants that we approached even questioned whether research leaders had Russian connections, which illustrates the current geopolitical tensions in the region. The research team exhausted all possible ways of connecting with relevant interviewees, including the use of personal connections, contacts from previous collaborations and social media channels (i.e. LinkedIn). Multiple formal letters were sent (as necessitated by local customs) to domestic institutions – including social insurance institutions and relevant ministries – but despite follow-up calls, many of the pursued lines of recruitment led to a dead end. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that the data remains skewed with a higher number of stakeholders from external agencies (even if some were of Ivorian origin), which constitutes one limitation of the study.

It is also noteworthy that, compared to the Tanzania case study conducted under the same umbrella project, information on government policies and governance models are less readily available for public use online. Consequently, the triangulation of interviewee insights with other data sources – and the collation of detailed information on certain policy events and structures – proved difficult on occasion. Despite this, 13 people were interviewed. Some study participants had substantial previous work experience, including in the Ivorian government, which allowed them to speak from different perspectives and experiences.

### **3 Overview of social protection trajectories in Côte d'Ivoire**

Existing historical evidence shows that French colonial rule matters significantly with respect to the timing of the first formal social protection measures, as well as the type of policy interventions introduced. Given France's drive to fully assimilate its colonies as part of a “Greater France”, colonial policymaking was highly centralised and relied on direct rule (Devereux & Lund, 2010). As a result, in the 1940s, Metropolitan France introduced some of its social protection instruments (such as family allowances) in its colonies, notably in North Africa. This trend was also the result of social uprisings, such as the Senegalese strike in 1946, which advocated for social rights and work conditions equal to those in France (Luiz, 2013).

The French colonial administration had a significant impact on the early formation of social protection systems in Côte d'Ivoire as well. However, the colonial period constitutes only one “phase” in the historical evolution of social protection systems in the country, followed by several others. This section “tells the story” of evolving social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire, together with the current institutional configurations in the sector.

#### **3.1 Historical evolution of social protection**

Table 2 provides a timeline that maps historical phases and key developments in social protection. In this section, each of these phases are discussed in turn, including the periods of civil war in the 2000s.

**Table 2: Timeline of key events**

<b>Eras and legislation</b>	<b>Social insurance schemes and funds</b>	<b>Social assistance schemes and services</b>
<b>Colonial era</b>		
<b>1893-1960</b>	<b>1916 – Provident funds</b> established for local farmers	<b>Circa 1950</b> – Social services created, followed by the establishment of the first <b>social centres</b> (centres sociaux)
<b>1928 – Workmen’s Compensation Act (Fr)</b>	<b>1923</b> – Fonds d’Investissements pour le Développement Économique et Sociale (social services designed for French expatriates)	
<b>1952 – “Code du Travail” (French Overseas Labour Code)</b>	<b>1952</b> – Caisse des Retraites pour les Travailleurs Indigènes ( <b>retirement fund</b> for indigenous workers)	<b>1955</b> – Caisse de Compensation des Prestations Familiales ( <b>family allowances</b> and the related management fund)
	<b>1957</b> – Régime des Risques Professionnels ( <b>occupational risk protection</b> and the related management fund)	
<b>Houphouët-Boigny era</b>		
	<b>1964 – Mutual Fund of Government Employees</b>	Investments in health services provision
<b>1961-1980s</b>	<b>1965</b> – Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale (CNPS) ( <b>National Social Insurance Fund</b> )	Investments in education
<b>1972 – General Pension Scheme Act for Civil Servants</b>		State-led housing programmes
<b>Structural adjustments</b>		
<b>1970s-1990s</b>	<b>1973</b> – Mutual insurance company for government employees	Introduction of user fees for public health services
<b>Millennium- and Sustainable Development Goals</b>		
<b>2000s</b>	<b>2019/2020</b> – Couverture Maladie Universee (CMU) ( <b>universal health insurance</b> )	<b>2015</b> – Filets Sociaux Productifs ( <b>cash transfer scheme</b> )
	<b>2020</b> – Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants (RSTI) ( <b>informal sector workers’ insurance</b> scheme)	<b>2023</b> – Projet National d’Assistance aux Personnes Âgées (PNAPA) ( <b>social assistance scheme for the elderly</b> )

Source: Authors

### 3.1.1 Social protection during the French colonial era

Before French colonisation, Côte d'Ivoire was home to a variety of ethnic groups and empires, including the Baoulé, Senufo and the Muslim Kong Empire, each with distinct social, political and economic structures. These groups engaged in agriculture, gold mining and long-distance trade, connecting the region to broader West African and trans-Saharan networks. The coastal regions played a particularly important role in the exchange of goods such as ivory, gold and slaves with North African and European traders, who had been active in the area since the 15th century (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1969). The region's political diversity and economic vibrancy set the stage for European interest in exploiting its resources. The signing of the 1843 Treaty of Bassam with coastal chiefs – decades before the Berlin Conference – was one of the first agreements that established French influence in what would later become Côte d'Ivoire (Yates, 1996). French explorers such as Louis-Gustave Binger were dispatched to map the interior parts of the country and assert French claims over the region's resources. By the 1880s, these efforts had laid the groundwork for the expansion of French rule (Mamdani, 1996/2018). In 1893, Côte d'Ivoire was officially declared a French colony, and the imposition of colonial rule began in earnest. French military campaigns targeted resistant groups, particularly the powerful Baoulé, who fiercely opposed colonial encroachment (Amin, 1974).

During the colonial period, Côte d'Ivoire was granted several legal statuses. In 1904, the country became one of the eight departments of French West Africa (Afrique-Occidentale Française),<sup>2</sup> and under the French colonial approach of assimilation, the local populations were now able to *become* French citizens, or “*évolué(e)s*”.<sup>3</sup> In 1956, Côte d'Ivoire became a French overseas territory, and subsequently an “autonomous republic” in 1958 within the framework of the Franco-African Community. During this colonial era, social protection in Côte d'Ivoire was significantly shaped by social reforms in France, notably the establishment of a state-organised welfare system in the early 20th century. Metropolitan France subsidised social services in the colonies directly through the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development (Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Sociale, FIDES) as early as 1928 (Yimam, 1990). The provisions were limited to expatriates and a minority of African workers employed by the administration or large colonial companies (Devereux, 2001).

The disparity in providing only limited provisions to local “elites” in formal employment within the colonial machinery mirrored a colonial rule strategy, namely, to use social protection as a means of co-optation of the educated upper-middle-class rather than furthering the wellbeing of the local populace (Mamdani, 1996/2018). At the same time, indigenous workers were seen as essential for maintaining colonial enterprises, and the French colonial administration introduced embryonic forms of social protection, also for them to guarantee their productivity and to appease the local population, whose social (and political) rights were neglected at the expense of economic interests – despite their new “French citizenship” (Cooper, 1996; Dimier, 2004; Suret-Canale, 1968). Health and welfare services were partially extended to the local labour force, which was required for colonial economic activities such as agriculture, mining and public infrastructure projects. These services were often rudimentary, focusing on preventing diseases that might threaten the colonial economy or spread to Europeans (Dimier, 2004).

As colonial resistance movements and anti-colonial sentiments grew, especially after the Second World War, reforms were introduced in French colonial territories. Some of these were, in part, in response to labour strikes and political mobilisation in the colonies and sought to

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2 The other colonies were Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea and Mauritania.

3 The term “*évolué(e)s*” was used in French colonial contexts, particularly in Africa and Indochina, to describe indigenous people who had adopted European cultural norms, education and lifestyles, and were considered “civilised” by colonial authorities. The “*évolué(e)s*” were often granted certain privileges, such as access to better employment, limited political rights and exemptions from some colonial laws, though they were still subject to racial discrimination (e.g. Cooper, 2005).

prevent revolts (Cooper, 1996). Reforms such as improved health care and education that were slowly extended to indigenous populations were designed to pacify nationalist movements. However, these public welfare investments were largely a mere facade of modernisation while maintaining the economic and political interests of the colonisers (Dimier, 2004).

Some of the key policy interventions introduced during the colonial period are discussed below.

Provident funds for farmers: Early on in the colonial period, the French colonial regime sought to replace informal social protection arrangements (notably “tontines”, i.e. rotating savings and credit associations, ROSCAs) among the rural populations, as these were perceived to be prone to embezzlement (see French National Archives 1911 in MacLean, 2002a). In 1916, provident funds, funded by the French, were established in Côte d'Ivoire to provide local farmers with tools, boost seed reserve storage practices, and provide support in instances of illness, accidents or natural disasters. Subscription to provident funds was made mandatory for all “indigenous farmers and herders” and considered to be successful only under the leadership of colonial administrators – mandated to suspend and exclude members if they misbehaved (see Ivoirian National Archives 1915 in MacLean, 2002a). Unsurprisingly, this led to calls by locals to dissolve the provident funds soon after their introduction, reflecting “the struggle involved in the construction of state institutions for social welfare based on the hegemonic normative framework of the French” (MacLean, 2002a, p. 73).

Social insurance and labour rights: Legislation such as the 1928 Workmen’s Compensation Act in France guided colonial policies, albeit in a restricted scope (Devereux, 2001). For instance, workers’ compensation insurance, launched in the 1930s in Côte d'Ivoire, covered only a small segment of workers and was managed by private companies under colonial administration oversight. The establishment of social protection systems in France, particularly the social security law of 1945, aimed to provide health insurance, pensions and unemployment benefits to workers. The colonial administration sought to implement similar structures in its colonies, now considered a part of France, though these systems primarily served urban workers and civil servants (Eckert, 2013). Retirement initiatives such as the Loi Lamine Guèye (1946), the Retirement Fund for Indigenous Workers (Caisse des Retraites pour les Travailleurs Indigènes) of 1952 and the Framework Law (Loi Cadre Defferre) of 1956, on the other hand, were even more limited, involving only colonial civil servants and a handful of private-sector employees.

There were a significant number of labour laws introduced in France – particularly those concerning working hours, safety regulations and the right to organise – in early to mid-20th century. These labour rights were partially transferred to the colonies, but they were selectively applied, mainly benefiting workers in the formal economy (Cumming, 2015). The majority of the labour force, particularly in the agriculture and informal sectors, did not enjoy these rights (Dembélé, 2014). This reflected the inferior legal status of local populations in colonial systems.

In 1952, French colonies were introduced with the first general social protection provisions, following the introduction of the French Overseas Labour Code (Code du Travail) (Luiz, 2013). This laid the early foundations for the subsequent, incremental institutionalisation of social protection for formal sector workers. In Côte d'Ivoire, the social protection policies embedded in the Overseas Labour Code (Code du Travail) included notably family allowances and the related management fund (Caisses de Compensation des Prestations Familiales, 1955) that offered family and household benefits, including sickness and maternity benefits for colony workers; and protection against occupational risk under the 1957 management fund (Régime des Risques Professionnels) (Olié et al., 2024). It is also noteworthy that Côte d'Ivoire represents the first of the French colonies in which social services were coordinated under a purpose-made government department in 1950.

Social welfare initiatives by private and third-sector actors: In parallel to the colonial administration, a number of other actors engaged in providing forms of social protection. Large colonial companies, particularly in the cocoa and coffee sectors, sometimes offered forms of insurance against work-related accidents as part of the management of their workforce. In the cocoa



industry, companies established policies that covered medical expenses for injured workers and compensation for temporary disability (Schmitt, 2015). However, these insurance schemes were often inadequate, with limited coverage and complicated claim processes. Many workers were unaware of their rights or faced bureaucratic hurdles when seeking compensation, and many initiatives benefited only the most qualified employees or those close to the administration (Mamdani, 1996/2018).

Colonial companies were also active in providing basic services as well as establishing dispensaries and clinics to provide basic medical care to their workers (e.g. vaccinations, treatment for common ailments and maternity care) and implementing sanitation initiatives and education about hygiene to reduce the disease incidence within the workforce (Schmitt, 2015). Also, religious organisations, particularly the Catholic Church, provided essential social services for the largely neglected local populations, such as education, health care and welfare support, especially in rural areas, where the colonial government had a minimal presence (Mamdani, 1996/2018).

In her comparative analysis of British-ruled Ghana and French-ruled Côte d'Ivoire, MacLean (2002a) notes that the French social protection system was more developed and more reliant on the colonial administration than the Ghanaian system, where private-sector providers had a more important role (MacLean, 2002a). However, Dembélé (2014) notes that colonial social protection policies were largely focused on covering the urban labour market, resulting in stark disparities in access. In the late 1950s, around 10 per cent of the working population in Côte d'Ivoire was employed in the formal sector, mainly in cities (Eckert, 2013). Crucially, more than 85 per cent of the population had no form of pension or financial security after retirement age (Olié, 2009). Around 80 per cent of workplace accidents were recorded in the formal sector, while informal workers had no access to any form of compensation, underlining the vulnerability of this majority (Dembélé, 2014). Inequalities in social coverage have been perpetuated over time, and although reforms were undertaken after independence, there is a marked divide between rural and urban areas (Cumming, 2015).

### 3.1.2 Social protection during the early independence era

Felix Houphouët-Boigny led the country in the early independence era (ruling from 1960 to 1993). The early government was not explicitly guided by a strict ideological framework. Instead, it adopted a pragmatic, development-oriented approach that was heavily influenced by a pro-Western orientation and a blend of economic liberalism with state intervention (see Boone, 2024). From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Côte d'Ivoire's developmental approach was one of "an open-door philosophy regarding foreign investment and the theory of comparative advantage" (Bamba, 2020, p. 275). This meant that domestic development relied on agribusiness and cash cropping, with incremental industrialisation – with a significant French presence in the country's economic and political structures. Local critiques (contrasting with praise from Global North capitalists) drew attention to the persistent poverty among peasants that was driving the agriculture-based growth and the wealth generation benefitting France, in particular (see Bamba, 2020).

The country had inherited the "narrow" colonial social protection system, which was primarily designed to offer social insurance for civil servants. To some extent, this approach to social insurance was replicated during the early independence era. As early as 1965, the National Social Insurance Fund (Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale, CNPS), a contributory social insurance scheme, was created to protect formal employees in the private sector. This system was intended to cover retirement, work-related accidents and health, but it only concerned a fraction of the working population. The General Pension Scheme Act was also passed for civil servants in 1972. It guaranteed a retirement pension for state employees, but informal workers remained outside this framework (Chocorell, 2016). Informal workers in Côte d'Ivoire were excluded from the pension scheme, as they were not considered to be "wage workers",

according to the 1952 French Overseas Labour Code, which had been adopted in Côte d'Ivoire (Grünewald, 2022a, 2022b).

As a result of highly restricted access to social protection, informal solidarity systems, such as “tontines” (i.e. ROSCAs) and village cooperatives, flourished in response to the shortcomings of formal systems. These practices continue to play a crucial role in the social protection of rural populations (Chafar, 2020). Mutual health insurance schemes, although they emerged after independence, have their roots in informal solidarity practices that have existed since colonial times. They offer health care coverage, but access is often limited and unequal (Dembélé, 2014). Specific funds were created for civil servants. The Mutual Fund of Government Employees created in 1964 covered a share of expenses related to dental and eye care, as well as pharmaceuticals. A mutual insurance company for government employees was also established in 1973 to assist with health care costs (MacLean, 2002a).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Houphouët-Boigny government made important investments into broader social policies that extended beyond social insurance. Health care services were provided free of charge to all citizens up until the mid-1970s, after which minimal fees were introduced, and the country had one of the best public hospital systems in West Africa at the time (MacLean, 2002b). It has been reported that government expenditure – as a share of its total public budget for the health and education sectors combined – grew from 28.4 per cent in 1965 to 30.2 per cent in 1970, and to 33.4 per cent in 1975. This provided an important incentive for the rise of primary and secondary school enrolment, while the newly established University of Abidjan saw an equally exponential increase in student numbers (from fewer than 1,000 students in 1959 to 6,000 students in mid 1970s) (Kpessa, Béland, & Lecours, 2011). These increases in school attendance were further supported with free accommodation and generous scholarships provided by the government (MacLean, 2002a).

Overall, the early decades of independent Côte d'Ivoire were characterised by an important expansion of social protection. Although the social insurance system benefited exclusively formal and government employees, these schemes were more advanced than those in neighbouring Ghana, for instance. At the same time, important resources and efforts were invested in developing the provision of public health and education services. These social policy investments helped the country to stand out when compared to its neighbours. As MacLean stresses, “the government of Côte d'Ivoire was able to provide a more generalized public social service system that consistently functioned at a much higher level of quality and accessibility than that in Ghana” (MacLean, 2002a, p. 75).

### 3.1.3 From Structural Adjustment Programmes to civil wars

In the 1970s, Côte d'Ivoire experienced rapid economic growth under state-led capitalism, what has become to be known as the “Ivorian economic miracle” (Bakayoko, 2024). However, the country's growth model, which was centred on the export of cocoa, coffee and banana, did not survive the looming global economic crisis, which resulted in the collapse in global prices of the cash crops it relied upon. Faced with economic difficulty, Côte d'Ivoire, like many other countries across the Global South, adopted a series of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1990s. They were prescribed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to encourage privatisation of social service delivery and a reduction in government spending as conditions for loans (see Bado, 2022).

The adoption and implementation of the SAPs led to a significant reduction in social spending in the country, particularly in the areas of health and education. This reversed many of the hard-earned gains in social development and restricted access to welfare services, notably for the poorest populations (e.g. Galant, 2014). At the same time, the Ivorian state increasingly disengaged from its responsibility to provide social services, significantly worsening the poverty situation in the country (Direction Générale des Statistiques de Côte d'Ivoire, 1991). The National Office of Statistics reported that the introduced public austerity measures resulted in a

reduction in public spending in the social sector from 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1980 to 1.5 per cent in 1990, while the liquidation of public companies led to the dismissal of more than 10,000 people (Kouadio Béné, 1987). In fact, while most people were in employment in 1980, the unemployment rate increased to 15 per cent in 1985 (20 per cent in Abidjan) (Jarret & François-Régis, 1991), affecting particularly the country's youth.

The introduction of SAPs also marked the beginning of a new era in Côte d'Ivoire's economic performance and social relations: "[F]rom the late 1970s until the late 1990s, the country fell into a phase marked by declining economic growth as well as rising social unrest and insecurity" (Bado & Kendhammer, 2022, p. 11). In addition, the local CFA franc currency was devaluated by 50 per cent in January 1994,<sup>4</sup> which drastically reduced the purchasing power of the population (Collange & Plane, 1994). This led to social demands and strikes organised by civil servants' unions and students (Bado & Zapata, 2019). As the state was no longer able to assume its former role as a provider of welfare, it lost the confidence of its people (Lipchitz & Pouch, 2008).

The situation escalated further in the early 2000s. Economic crises and notably economic disparities between ethnic groups – first created during colonialism and subsequently exacerbated by domestic political processes (see Shipilov, 2022) – led to civil wars from 2002 to 2004 and in 2011. These periods of conflict inflicted important damage to the Ivorian social fabric, government institutions and the livelihoods of those affected by the war. In March 2011, the International Organization for Migration reported that nearly half a million people were displaced because of the conflict (IOM, 2011). During the civil wars, public social service provision was largely disrupted (Piccolino, 2024), while international organisations and humanitarian NGOs provided emergency relief and social assistance. It was only at the end of the war in 2011 – and with the resumption of economic growth a few years later – that the Ivorian state reignited investments in social protection and social service delivery more broadly.

### 3.1.4 Current social protection landscape

The Sustainable Development Goals era has spurred increasing investments in social protection across Africa, including in Côte d'Ivoire, which has effectively emerged from its war-ridden years (see e.g. World Bank, 2022). It is after the conflict in 2011 that the government developed its first National Social Protection Strategy (Stratégie Nationale de Protection Sociale, SNPS), launched in 2013. The strategy is aligned with international policy agendas, including the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 (Food and Agriculture Organization, s.a.), and it laid the foundations for the introduction of the World Bank-driven Social Safety Net Programme (Programme de Filets Sociaux Productifs, PFSP) in 2015 (IC-9). Despite this, a World Bank assessment of the SNPS implementation during the period 2016 to 2018 highlights that programmatic spending on social protection and labour amounted to only 1.66 per cent of GDP, and that most of this spending was spent on pension schemes for the non-poor, stating that "the distribution of SPL financing in Côte d'Ivoire shows that most of the expenditure does not benefit the poorest households" (World Bank, 2019, pp. xiii-xiv).

Over the past years, Côte d'Ivoire has witnessed an intensified expansion and commitment to social protection policies. This is demonstrated by the government's second SNPS for 2024-2028 (Gouv.ci, 2023). The strategy's key objectives include:

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4 The fixed parity to the French franc had made the economy uncompetitive, particularly as global commodity prices dropped. France, as guarantor of the currency under the Franc Zone agreement, played a key role in the decision, alongside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which pushed for devaluation as part of broader structural adjustment programmes. The move aimed to boost exports and reduce fiscal deficits but led to significant social and economic hardships.

- poverty reduction (from 39.4 per cent in 2018 to 28.6 by 2028);
- increasing the number of social programme beneficiaries (from 30 per cent in 2023 to 65 per cent in 2028);
- extending social centre service utilisation among vulnerable populations (from 3 per cent in 2019 to 14.2 per cent by 2028);
- by 2024, achieving 100 per cent coverage of vulnerable populations under the universal health insurance scheme (Couverture Maladie Universelle, CMU) and government subsidies for poor and vulnerable populations (Medical Assistance Plan / Régime d'assistance médicale, RAM) launched in 2019, and;
- extending the enrolment of rural and informal sector workers in the social insurance scheme for informal workers (Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants, RSTI – launched in 2020) from 2.5 per cent in 2022 to 75 per cent in 2028 – while simultaneously driving gender equality and child nutrition.

In addition, the government has made efforts to expand access to health care and education, including through investments in infrastructure, reflecting a commitment to improving social protection for all citizens (see e.g. World Bank, 2022). The National Youth Employment Agency (Agence Nationale de l'Emploi des Jeunes), launched in 2015, is also a key initiative aimed at reducing youth unemployment and promoting skills development, further contributing to the social protection landscape in Côte d'Ivoire (Gouvernement de la Côte d'Ivoire, 2018). Below, we present an overview of the different arrangements across the different social protection components:

#### Social insurance:

- Formal sector employees are covered through the mandatory enrolment in the National Social Security Fund (Caisse nationale de prévoyance sociale, CNPS). The benefits package includes health insurance, maternity benefits, family allowances, work accidents and work-related illnesses, and old age, handicap and survivor's pensions (CLEISS, 2025).
- As of 2020, an informal worker social insurance scheme (Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants, RSTI) has been run by the CNPS, providing insurance against accidents, maternity benefits and pensions (see GouvActu, 2023). As of April 2024, there were 457,157 informal workers (out of a total of 6.6 million) enrolled under RSTI as of April 2024 (CNPS, s.a.).

#### Social assistance / cash transfers:

- The PFSP was introduced in 2015 and primarily targets impoverished families, particularly those in rural areas, focusing on improving food security, education and access to health care. Beneficiaries receive cash transfers and are encouraged to participate in activities that promote economic resilience and social inclusion. Initially launched as a pilot programme with support from the World Bank and other development partners, the PFSP has since been expanded nationwide, focusing on regions with high poverty rates across rural and peri-urban communities. Although the coverage has remained relatively low – as the programme has benefitted around 402,000 households between 2017 and 2024 (Gouv.ci, 2024), in a country with a population of around 31 million in 2023 (World Bank, s.a.) – the government has now increased its commitments towards funding the programme in pursuit of further expansion.
- During COVID-19, the government introduced emergency cash transfers to vulnerable households under the Productive Cash Transfer Programme (Programme de Transferts

Monétaires Productifs, PTMP). The PTMP targets households below the poverty line and provides transfers to 227,000 households (14 per cent of households in the country), over a three-year enrolment period. The government seeks to expand the programme with the aid of the World Bank to include 100,000 additional households on a yearly basis in the 2022-2026 period.

- The social assistance scheme for the elderly (Projet National d'Assistance aux Personnes Âgées, PNAPA), introduced in 2023, provides social assistance to the elderly through social centres and is funded through the government's budget allocations. There are ongoing plans to expand the programme, however the coverage and reach of the programme may be limited due to a lack of resources and logistical constraints.
- NGO and private-sector-driven social protection measures, such as the Nestlé Income Accelerator Programme (World Economic Forum, 2024) aimed at cocoa farmers, add to the government-operated schemes. The programme launched as a pilot project in 2022 and aims to “reach an estimated 160,000 cocoa-farming families in our [read: Nestlé's] supply chain by 2030” across Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (Nestlé, 2022). In practice, the programme provides farming families with financial incentives to drive behavioural change across four areas: school enrolment, good agricultural practices, agroforestry activities and diversified incomes. Over the first two years, families can earn up to 500 Swiss francs annually (ca. US\$570), and half of this thereafter (Nestlé, 2022).

#### Non-contributory pensions:

Côte d'Ivoire has no non-contributory social pensions, and existing arrangements are incorporated under contributory insurance systems (including for informal workers).

#### Social health insurance:

- Implemented as of December 2019 and mandatory as of 2022, the CMU is run by the Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Maladie. The CMU covers 70 per cent of the costs related to health services and medicine, while patients have to provide 30 per cent of the cost as a co-payment. Beneficiaries in the informal sector pay a premium of around 1,500 to 3,000 CFA francs per month (about US\$2.50 to US\$5), facilitating access to preventive and essential health services. Utilisation rates have increased by approximately 50 per cent, although disparities persist, especially for vulnerable populations in the informal economy, which constitutes a significant portion of the labour force (International Labour Organization, 2021). Despite improvements, challenges such as administrative barriers and limited awareness remain (UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire, 2022). Financing of the CMU is arranged through general member contributions (Régime général de base) and government subsidies for poor and vulnerable populations (RAM). The current coverage of the CMU is estimated at around 27.5 per cent of the total population (Psgouv.ci, s.a.).

The Ivorian social protection landscape is undergoing an expansion, driven by an amalgamation of government ministries, external donors and private-sector actors (such as Nestlé). Nevertheless, the inherited situation concerning formal and informal workers remains a major challenge, as informal sector workers continue to face difficulties in accessing contributory insurance schemes and targeted cash transfer programmes. At the same time, the elite and middle classes often supplement CNPS provisions with private health insurance, life insurance, or private pension plans offered by local or international companies (e.g. Allianz, NSIA, Saham). Such schemes provide faster access to quality health care (e.g. via private clinics), more extensive coverage, and investment-linked savings or retirement benefits – exacerbating unequal access to social services.

**Table 3: Current social protection landscape in Côte d'Ivoire**

Category	Programme/policy name	Eligibility	Coverage/benefits	Funding mechanism
Social insurance mechanisms	CNPS (Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale)	Formal sector employees	Health insurance, maternity benefits, family allowances, work accidents and pensions (old age, disability, survivor)	Employee and employer contributions
	RSTI (Régime Social des Travailleurs Indépendants)	Informal sector workers	Insurance against accidents, maternity benefits, pensions	Employee contributions (amount defined by professional category), government oversight
	CMU (Couverture Maladie Universelle)	Mandatory for all citizens	Partial costs covered for health services and medicine	Member contributions
Social assistance (cash transfers, excluding services provided by social centres)	PFSP (Programme de Filets Sociaux Productifs)	Vulnerable households (below poverty line)	Cash transfers for basic needs	Government and external donors
	PNAPA (Projet National d'Assistance aux Personnes Âgées)	Elderly citizens	Social assistance focused on supporting elderly individuals	Government budget allocations
	PTMP (Programme de Transferts Monétaires Productifs)	Vulnerable households (227,000 households targeted)	Cash transfers to households during COVID-19; targets those below poverty line, aims for yearly expansion to cover 100,000 more households from 2022 to 2026	World Bank assistance and government contributions
	Nestlé Income Accelerator Programme	Cocoa farmers	"Aiming to close the living income gap and reduce child labor risks" (Nestlé, 2022); focus on women's empowerment	Nestlé

Source: Authors

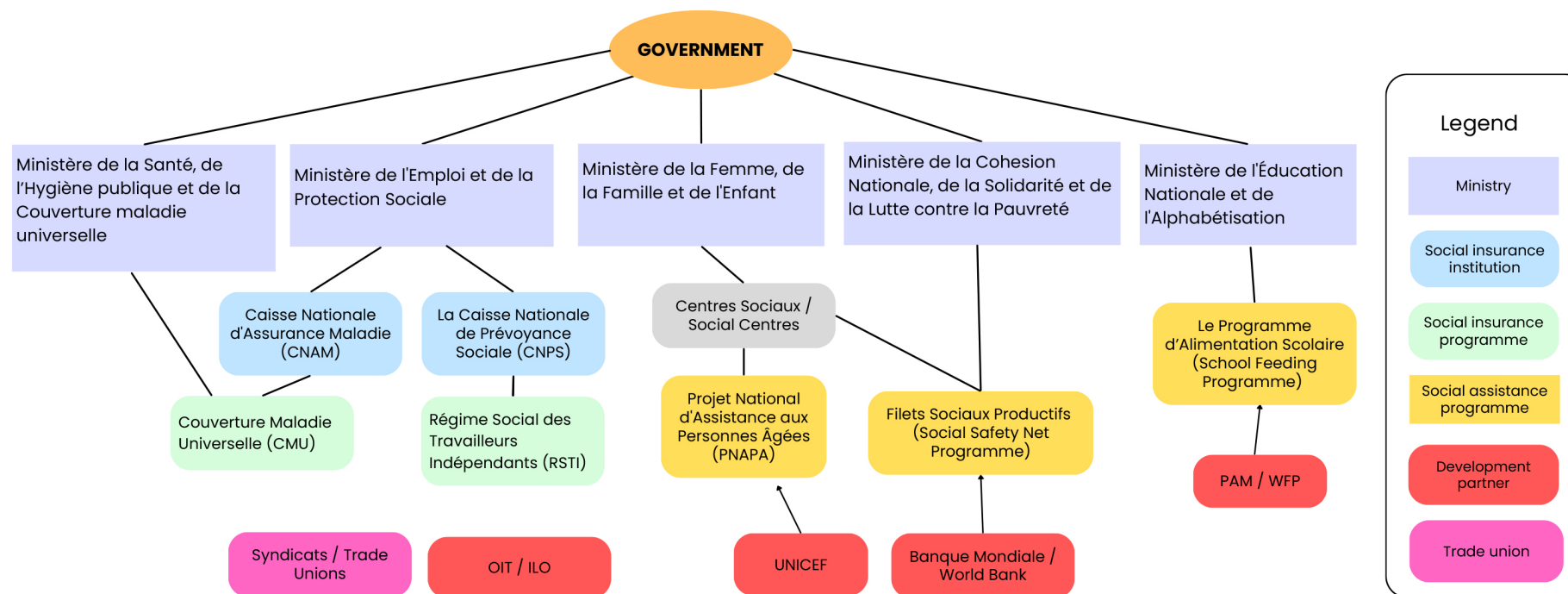
### **3.2 Structures of social protection governance and development cooperation**

In today's Côte d'Ivoire, social protection matters are effectively managed by three key ministries: (i) Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Protection Sociale), (ii) Ministry of Family, Women and Children (Ministère de la Femme, de la famille et de l'enfant) and (iii) Ministry of National Cohesion, Solidarity and the Fight Against Poverty (Ministère de la Solidarité et de la Lutte contre la Pauvreté). These ministries collaborate to address various aspects of social welfare, including child protection, gender equality, employment support and assistance for vulnerable populations. The National Council for Social Protection (Conseil National de Protection Sociale) serves as a critical platform for integrating social policies and ensuring coherence among various government initiatives. The principal mandate of the Council is to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders to enhance social safety nets and welfare programmes (Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Protection Sociale, 2016). Additionally, the National Institute of Statistics (Institut National de la Statistique) plays a vital role in data collection and analysis, providing evidence to inform policy decisions and monitor the impact of social programmes.

Interviews conducted with stakeholders on the ground reveal that different international actors also hold important functions within the overall institutional architecture governing social protection programmes in the country. For instance, the ILO was recognised to hold a key role as a “guardian of norms” regarding workers' rights and decent work (IC-6). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was equally acknowledged as working closely with the Ministry of Family, Women and Children in the context of policy and strategy development (INT-2), while also driving discussions and collaboration among different development partners in the area of social protection (IC-6). Moreover, the World Bank was seen to drive work at the Ministry of National Cohesion, Solidarity and the Fight Against Poverty, notably in the context of the PFSP (IC-9, IC-7). The World Food Programme was also frequently mentioned by interviewees (IC-9), albeit to a more limited extent and more specifically in the context of school feeding programmes, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Literacy (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation).

Other relevant actors on the ground include trade unions, civil society organisations (CSOs), humanitarian NGOs and international development NGOs. Figure 1 is a drawing on interview data and web searches and illustrates the overall organisation of social protection activities and governance across the different ministries, excluding social assistance projects run by international development NGOs or private-sector actors (e.g. Nestlé). The figure is not exhaustive and excludes a range of donors supporting the CMU, including global health funds, the World Health Organization and a range of bilateral donors.

**Figure 1: Organigram of social protection in Côte d'Ivoire**



Note: Social centres constitute an important point of social service provision in Côte d'Ivoire, and there are currently 136 centres run by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, and 56 centres run by the Ministry of Family, Women and Children. Their roles include responding to the needs of vulnerable families, special education for children with disabilities, a pre-school/nursery service (involving a small fee), as well as services for the elderly (under social centres managed by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection).

Source: Authors



## 4 Analysis of social protection

The previous section provided an overview of the evolution of social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire, highlighting how social protection policymaking over time was affected by changes in governments, shifts in ideology, as well as domestic and global events. In this section, we analyse social protection trajectories and the concomitant policymaking processes through the lens of coloniality and postcolonial dynamics (for definitions, see Box 1). In particular, we investigate the extent to which today's social protection schemes are the product of colonial path-dependency; how postcolonial influences and policy processes have shaped social protection arrangements since independence, and; what the role of domestic factors – including negotiations and potential pushback – is in shaping the social protection landscape in Côte d'Ivoire.

Although terms “coloniality” and “postcolonial influence” were not utilised in stakeholder discussions – but were oftentimes proactively rejected by interlocutors – the evolution of social protection arrangements and diverse influences were the central focus of the interviews. However, these concepts bear important theoretical and practical value and guide the analysis in this section.

### Box 1: Glossary of definitions as adopted in this paper

**Coloniality:** The long-term patterns of power and oppression that resulted from colonialism and continue to exist long after the dissolution of colonial administrations.<sup>5</sup>

**Colonialism:** Direct political and economic domination of a colony by an empire.<sup>6</sup>

**Postcolonialism:** The “creation of new transcultural forms (cultural, political and linguistic) within zones of contact produced by colonialism”,<sup>7</sup> or the enduring economic, social, cultural and political consequences of colonialism and imperialism.

**Decolonialism:** “Ceasing to be subject to the rules and hierarchies imposed by a colonising entity in the face of a country from which inferior behaviour is demanded.”<sup>8</sup>

**Colonial legacy:** Colonial legacy refers to the institutional, legal and policy arrangements that were put in place during colonial times, that were maintained post-independence and that are still in place – in part or in full – at present.<sup>9</sup>

**Postcolonial influence:** Continued patterns of power imbalances that shape social protection arrangements in countries in Africa and across the Global South, even decades after independence.<sup>10</sup>

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5 Based on Maldonado-Torres (2007).

6 Based on Kohn and Reddy (2024).

7 AI-generated definition based on International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (2020).

8 AI-generated definition based on Reference Module in Social Sciences (2024).

9 Based on MacLean (2002, 2017), Mlambo, Masuku and Mthembu (2024).

10 Based on Plange and Mumtaz (2023).

## 4.1 Colonial legacy

As described earlier, French colonial rule introduced the first forms of formal social protection in Côte d'Ivoire. In this sub-section, we examine France's colonial legacy in social protection in Côte d'Ivoire, that is, the institutional, legal and policy arrangements that were put in place during colonial times, maintained post-independence and are still in place – in part or in full – today.

### 4.1.1 Economic dependency and (ethnic) inequalities

During the colonial period, Côte d'Ivoire was a colony of exploitation, not a settlement. The colonial administration focused on exploiting natural resources, primarily through forced labour, to grow cash crops such as coffee and cocoa – the first cocoa plantations were created as early as 1910. Other cash crops such as coffee, bananas, pineapples, oil palm, cotton and rubber trees were also promoted during the colonial period. Cash crop plantations required an abundant workforce, which the French colonial administration brought from neighbouring colonies, mainly from Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). These crops became critical for the French economy, transforming the Ivorian agricultural landscape (Zolberg, 1964). These structures of the colonial economy continue to determine the Ivorian economy today. Firstly, cash crops introduced during the colonial era continue to be leading export products for the country today, alongside gold and refined petroleum (Observatory of Economic Complexity, s.a.). However, while constituting the world's biggest producer of cocoa (Our World in Data, s.a.), Côte d'Ivoire has primarily continued to produce cocoa beans, rather than higher-value processed produce (i.e. cocoa paste, cocoa butter and chocolate). As a result, the country – like many other economies in Africa (and contrarily to other emerging markets such as Brazil and Indonesia) – continues to grapple with a low positioning in global value chains (e.g. Tsowu & Ajambo, 2020).

Secondly, France has remained one of the (if not *the*) most important trading partners to Côte d'Ivoire. Despite the nationalist cry by critical social scientists in the early decades of the independent country, by the 1970s, French companies constituted the most dynamic group of economic actors<sup>11</sup> in the modern economy (Bamba, 2020). These dynamics are relevant today. In 2022, France was the third most important import partner for Côte d'Ivoire (after China and Nigeria; Statista, s.a.), and the fifth most important export partner.

The industrial and trade structures inherited from the colonial system shape the fiscal space for domestic investment in social protection in Côte d'Ivoire, and elsewhere. As an exporter of raw materials rather than of high-end products, the country remains dependent on foreign exchange (to import high-end products), and its exports are low value, mobilising limited financial resources. At the same time, the economic benefits continue to be unequally distributed because of the preferential treatment of selected ethnic groups by the colonial authorities – leading to social stratification that exists up until today:

African economies are still heavily dependent on the export of raw materials, and this limited resources available for social protection. So if we have that economic dependency on the Global North, it undermines the capacity of our economies to generate sufficient revenue for people – right to finance social protection, for example. [...] Inequality and social stratification has always been a big, big legacy. So you have the colonial policies of that industrialisation, which is based on ethnicity and class. Those inequalities persist post-independence. (CSO-1)

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11 “[I]n 1971 there were more French firms in Côte d'Ivoire's industrial sector (129 companies out of 183) than any other nationality. [...] The French manufacturers pocketed about 72 percent of the entire revenue produced by the industries operating in Côte d'Ivoire” (see Bamba, 2020).

In a similar vein, the existing literature describes the legacy of French colonial favouritism in Côte d'Ivoire as one that privileged southern Akan/Baoulé elites through investments in education, cash crop economies and administration, creating enduring ethnic and regional inequalities. These disparities significantly influenced the political economy of the independent Côte d'Ivoire: a key feature of Houphouët-Boigny's rule was the use of political tribalism to reinforce state control (see Boone, 2005). His administration heavily favoured the Baoulé ethnic group, in continuation of colonial-era ethnic categorisation. Western Ivorian ethnic groups, particularly the Bété and the Krou, often found themselves politically and economically sidelined, sowing long-term ethnic divisions (Bado, 2022). The described ethnic divisions have been perpetuated through elite monopolisation of resources, political exclusion of northern groups and identity-based conflicts, culminating in civil wars and entrenched economic disparities that persist today (e.g. Chauveau & Dozon, 1988).<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the particularly heavy influence of France in shaping the economic order of past French colonies was highlighted by multiple interviewees. A significant – and still relevant – vehicle of French influence in western Francophone Africa is the creation of the CFA franc and the related CFA franc zone, also referred to as “*FrançAfrique*”.<sup>13</sup> The CFA franc was initially established across the French colonies in 1945 and “pegged” to the French franc, enabling France's access to cheap raw materials while making exports to other countries more expensive. The Ivorian leader Felix Houphouët-Boigny backed the institutionalisation of the monetary agreements in the independence era, which further cemented the unique market space occupied by French businesses operating without the need to use foreign exchange (see Bamba, 2020).

Since 1999, when France introduced the euro in lieu of the franc, the CFA franc has been pegged to the euro and is guaranteed for unlimited convertibility of the French Treasury currencies. In return for this guarantee, central banks in African countries, including in Côte d'Ivoire, centralise their foreign exchange reserves and deposit at least half of these assets with the French Treasury. The Banque de France actively participates in the governance of the CFA franc zone and works closely with finance ministers of the countries (Banque de France, 2015). In practice, all international trade by Côte d'Ivoire is mediated by the French Treasury, and the mobilisation of domestic resources for development purposes is restricted through limits to money creation. Gebremariam (2025) asserts that the CFA zone economies “have a perpetual negative trade balance and extremely constrained production capacity”, leading to exploitation, deprivation and inequalities – in perfect alignment with the colonial logic of sustaining “structural dependence”. Indeed, the CFA franc is considered by many as “Africa's last colonial currency” with growing calls for monetary decolonisation (Pigeaud & Sylla, 2021).

Multiple interviewees pointed to this colonial legacy as a significant factor hindering Côte d'Ivoire's economic autonomy and limiting its fiscal space, with adverse effects on full domestic ownership and leadership of social protection arrangements:

France can determine everything that happens in almost 13 or 14 African countries because of the colonial currency that still continues to shape, determine every aspect of the country's economy. Their fiscal economy, their monetary policy is serving the interests of the eurozone. You know, the 14 African countries whose economy is controlled by the French financial minister is also controlled by Europe. [...] It is a long-standing relationship of an equal power relation at the global scale, which affects what

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12 France has also remained one of the most interventionist countries in the African region, and its military presence was palpable in its operations in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011.

13 “Three economic regions make up the CFA franc zone in Africa, each with its own currency: the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), where the CFA franc (Communauté Financière Africaine, XOF) is used by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Guinea Bissau” (Banque de France, 2015).

can be invested in education, health, whatever aspect of social policy, industrial policy, public policy. (EXP-5)

You are talking about what are some of those colonial dependencies that are still going on today? And so if the French Treasury holds a significant portion of the foreign exchange reserves of the CFA franc zone, what is left for these economies? What liberty do they have [...] on their own economies? [...] You don't manage your own national budgets. You can't, because your currency is being held by the French Treasury. (CSO-1)

Overall, the findings of this study clearly point to important colonial legacies in the economic sphere that continue to restrict domestic independence and the ability to drive social policies by national means.

#### 4.1.2 Institutional and legislative arrangements

A second legacy of French colonialism in Côte d'Ivoire that shapes social protection programming relates to the institutions and legislative arrangements that were put into place during colonial rule and have a long-lasting impact on how the Ivorian state operates. Hereby, Côte d'Ivoire is not unique. Contemporary African countries continue to represent, by and large, governmental entities originally instituted by colonial powers – from the drafting of country borders and dictating what constitutes a “country”, to introducing European-style rule of order and structures of governance, policing and other “organisational” elements. In the French colonies, substantial borrowing of legal frameworks from France occurred from the very outset of independence. One notable example is the modelling of the first Ivorian National Constitution in 1960 on the 1958 Constitution of the French Fifth Republic (of President Charles de Gaulle). Among other things, this furthered an “imperial presidency” without effective checks on the executive power (see Kimenyi & Mukum Mbaku, 2011). Indeed, Houphouët-Boigny ruled under an authoritarian single-party system dominated by the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), which became the sole legal party from 1960 to 1990, ensuring Houphouët-Boigny's undisputed control over political and economic affairs (Bado, 2022).

The existing literature shows that also the civil, commercial, criminal and administrative laws codified in 1964 were by and large derivatives of the colonial French codes (Salacuse, 1969). It is therefore unsurprising that interviewees brought up the colonial legacies of institutional structures (including administration, INT-2) and legislative arrangements, originally instituted by the French colonial administration.

Firstly, interviewees suggested that Côte d'Ivoire has inherited a “strong welfare state” framing – originating from France – that continues to drive a culture of welfare dependency on the big, central state operated by an army of civil servants (*“fonctionnaires”*). This was seen to hinder community-driven, bottom-up welfare initiatives as well as entrepreneurship – which were associated with the English-speaking neighbouring countries:

It remains dependent on its colonial past and the colonial orientation given by its powers. [...] In our country, the influence is that the Ivorian is made to be a bit as if the civil service was privileged to the detriment of entrepreneurship. And this means that around an individual gravitates an entire population that lives and survives around the salary of a single worker. And I think that this is linked to our colonisation system that has made us civil servants. And around a single official, we have to gravitate [...]. I think that means that [...] there is the structural system that we have just described, but another ontological, cultural system, which is linked to solidarity, isn't it? This is what we call the social economy. (IC-1)

Secondly, interviewees made direct references to social protection legislation being heavily influenced by the French system:

Our social protection, like even our legal arsenal, is copied from France. It's copied from France. Only with [...] we remain within the framework, but in the implementation tools, we integrate the documents, the tools used in the English-speaking systems, otherwise we copy on France. (IC-8)

Crucially, the inherited structures were seen to hinder free thinking around alternative forms of organising activities and priorities, including those connected to traditional values and forms of solidarity in Africa.

And all of our systems are kind of captured, modelled on this way. So, it is difficult to think more deeply about our traditional systems of solidarity, which exist, in order to perhaps feel something more specific. (IC-1)

Nevertheless, the interview data also reveals that the Ivorian legislation around social protection is currently being updated and reviewed to better focus on vulnerable populations, such as children – placing the country among those more advanced on legislation to protect vulnerable populations. As noted in the citation below, this process has equally been actively driven by development partners.

Compared to other countries, Côte d'Ivoire is ahead in this area because it has confronted, I think that it is the support with bilateral and multilateral funding, which has led them to move forward with texts that they have developed so that the penal code, for example, is more explicit in terms of sanctions, in terms of the very description of violence and the sanctions that must be taken as well as the accompaniment. (IC-8)

Finally, it is noteworthy that interviews highlight the fragmentation and hierarchical organisation of governance structures around social protection as a colonial legacy. This was largely perceived as a major hindrance for a coherent, harmonised and holistic social protection system (see below), although some suggested that the existing policy strategies help in overcoming issues of fragmentation (IC-9).

In terms of social protection, in French-speaking countries and especially in Côte d'Ivoire, you have the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, where there is a very large gap between the social insurance part and the social assistance part. You have the Ministry of Family, Women and Children, which is going to provide more social assistance. You have the Ministry of Solidarity, which also provides social assistance. And all of this, there is no coherence where someone is going to sit and then say I see holistically what a social protection system is. (IC-6)

The findings presented in this section point to important colonial legacies in the institutional frameworks within which social protection policies are implemented, while their boundaries restrict the “imagination” of alternative, and potentially more locally innovated social protection arrangements. Yet, social protection legislation does not remain fully static but continues to evolve under new needs and influences.

#### 4.1.3 Colonial social policy models

After independence in 1960, the Houphouët-Boigny government inherited social protection structures developed by the French colonial administration. Although it introduced reforms aimed at broadening social coverage, the persistence of inequalities between the formal and informal sector workers inherited from colonial era arrangements complicated these efforts. According to Cumming (2015), reforms during the early independence era mainly sought to maintain a system of social protection for formal workers – in a similar vein to colonial approaches.

The social insurance system – rooted in and operationalised by the National Social Insurance Fund, the CNPS – was inspired by French social insurance systems, which had been set up during the colonial period<sup>14</sup> (Olié et al., 2024). It is also noteworthy that France provided significant technical assistance to the newly independent Côte d'Ivoire, especially in the area of public administration, which strengthened further French influence on the first social protection model of the independent country (Mahieu, 1983). The particularly strong French influence notably on the Ivorian social insurance model – considered the strongest component of the domestic social protection system in terms of capacity – was also highlighted during interviews:

The system that we have is a system here of the coloniser. [...] First of all, what I can say in terms of social protection – it is the French system that we have copied at the level of Côte d'Ivoire. [...] It's true that over there, they have several funds. There is the pension fund, the health insurance fund, everything. For us, the only piece that manages all these systems is the private sector. There is another fund that will manage the public sector and the one fund that manages universal health insurance. (IC-3)

At the same time, some interviewees underscored that not all French social protection arrangements were adopted in Côte d'Ivoire, or Francophone African countries more generally. Instead, there are important differences beyond social insurance arrangements and across the different social protection “domains”. For instance, some interviewees pointed to the significantly different approach to health system arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire compared to France.

But you've seen that since independence, very few countries have followed a path that would lead them to mirror the French system. [...] Most countries, former French colonies did not develop a social health insurance on the model of France or European countries post-independence. Most countries, if not all countries [...] have chosen more of [a National Health Service] type system, in which health workers are public servants. Which is not at all the French system in which we have originally autonomous provision that is funded by a national health insurance institution [...] called The National Health Insurance Agency. (BIL-5)

While this is a pertinent point of difference, it is noteworthy that the French colonial powers did not introduce an extensive social protection model (including a “health system”) in Côte d'Ivoire in the first place. The logical conclusion thereof is that institutional legacies persist in areas where the colonial administration actively pursued social protection – while trajectories in many other areas are better explained by other (postcolonial) influences and domestic factors.

## 4.2 Postcolonial influence

In this section, we draw on the latest empirical evidence from stakeholder interviews on the ground to explore what are the continued patterns of power imbalances that shape social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire, even decades after independence, and what are their implications for decision-making processes and policies themselves? Additionally, the analysis identifies key “tactics” of influence deployed by development partners to further their preferred policy prescriptions and approaches, as experienced by stakeholders on the ground.

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14 In the 1940s, the colonial administration had established the Caisse de Sécurité Sociale with the aim of providing health, retirement and industrial accident benefits exclusively accessible to formal workers, often employed in the colonial administration or foreign companies (Eckert, 2013).



#### 4.2.1 Ideological and normative influences

The findings of this study point to several ideological paradigms that have influenced the normative (and consequently pragmatic) framings for social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire. To begin with, Côte d'Ivoire pursued the expansion of wide-scale social protection arrangements that were organised through government leadership and delivery during the early decades of independence. One interviewee pressed the fact that the broader welfare state model (extending beyond social insurance) pursued during this period was distinct from the one in France, in that all service provision (including in the health sector) was state-operated, explaining this in relation to potential Cold War and soviet-era influences (see below). At the same time, it is noteworthy that from the 1950 to the 1970s, "Third World" thinking and solidarity also emerged as an alternative international epistemic space.<sup>15</sup>

It was really built around the idea of a very strong state that would be the provider and financier of all services. That was the post-colonial model. (BIL-5)

However, as discussed earlier, the SAPs introduced by the IMF and the World Bank put a stop to the Ivorian social protection expansionism. Backed by aid conditionalities during the global economic crisis and elaborate scientific justifications as well as the turn to neoliberalism among leading Western governments (United States and the United Kingdom), SAPs constituted a powerful tool to promote tangible policy reforms as well as normative framings for social policy (see Babb, 2013). The influence of SAPs was lamented by study participants, who also noted the changing tide in policy prescriptions by international financial institutions:

And in the days of the IMF, in the years 80, 90 to 95 [...] it was necessary to reduce social services under the pretext of development. But hey, we have reviewed all the subsidies in terms of health and education. And on a social level, we saw what happened. And today, these same Bretton Woods actors are going back to say that the development indicator is that health, social issues and education must be taken into account. [...] Thank God, because they realised they were wrong. (IC-2)

The SAPs meant that the initial broad-based provisioning was halted, and new priorities and conceptualisations gained traction. One interviewee in particular highlighted that in the current context, government's understanding of social protection is largely limited to social insurance – and the synergies between the CMU and the broader social protection system have yet to be fully grasped (IC-6). This suggests that, over decades, the overall view on social policy drifted away from broader models with strong investments across different "social protection domains" and – by the 1990s – focused on siloed social protection and health insurance initiatives. This narrower view of social protection (with an emphasis on needs-based, targeted forms of social protection, rather than the transformative functions of holistic social protection) is also often associated with the World Bank's wide-scale promotion of social safety nets (see e.g. Adesina, 2011; Ouma, 2020), which were also adopted in Côte d'Ivoire in 2015.

Yet, interviewees shared that another, more recent wave of external ideas has emerged to promote new types of expansionism, albeit within the "confines" of the PFSP. The World Bank, in particular, was recognised to have promoted a new focus on adaptive social protection instruments amid increasing and intensifying climate shocks (BIL-5, IC-9). At the same time, the PFSP was seen to be under general expansion, both horizontally (population coverage) and vertically (benefits and interventions) – with increasing levels of integration with other social protection programmes, including the universal health insurance scheme, the CMU. This

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15 As demonstrated by numerous events and movements at the time, including the Bandung Conference in 1955, the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, the creation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964 and the New International Economic Order proposal adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1974.

suggests that the “narrow” social safety net has now become largely institutionalised and constitutes a key axis for social protection expansion under shifting understandings of needs – such as those related to climate change.

Initially, it was a project, a co-financed project, but since 2023 it has become a programme. So, it is well included in the government's priorities. It has a budget line dedicated to it [...]. And today, it is even a programme to support the social protection system. So, it is an integrated approach that the government is aiming for. It is no longer simply the monetary transfers, but a programme that is adopted. (IC-9)

Furthermore, the findings of this study also point to broader normative influences emanating from France. One such example shared by an interviewee relates to the adoption of a Western model of globalisation and capitalism, at the expense of more indigenous understandings of development:

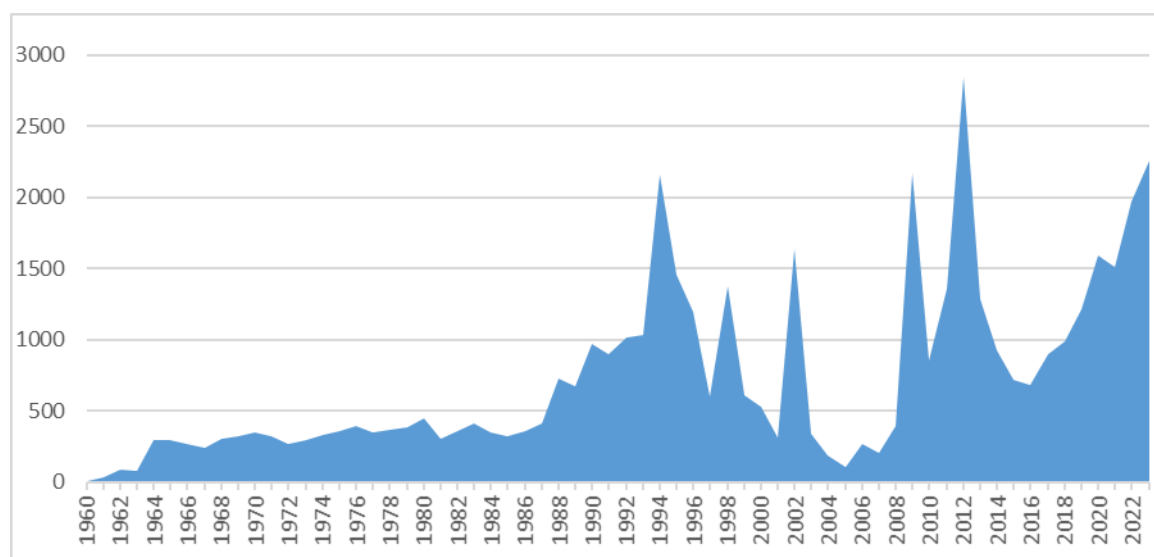
Everything is modelled on France and it's clear, it's not right. [...] I think it was copy and paste. There are some things that we have tried to adapt [...]. And unfortunately – this is my point of view – we are following, [...] with our eyes closed what others have done. It's a bit like copying and pasting this globalisation and shooting capitalism and bad capitalism. (IC-2)

The findings presented in this section highlight that shifts in thinking and dominant ideologies at the global level influence ideologies and norms locally, with tangible impacts on social protection arrangements.

#### 4.2.2 Development cooperation and social protection “domains”

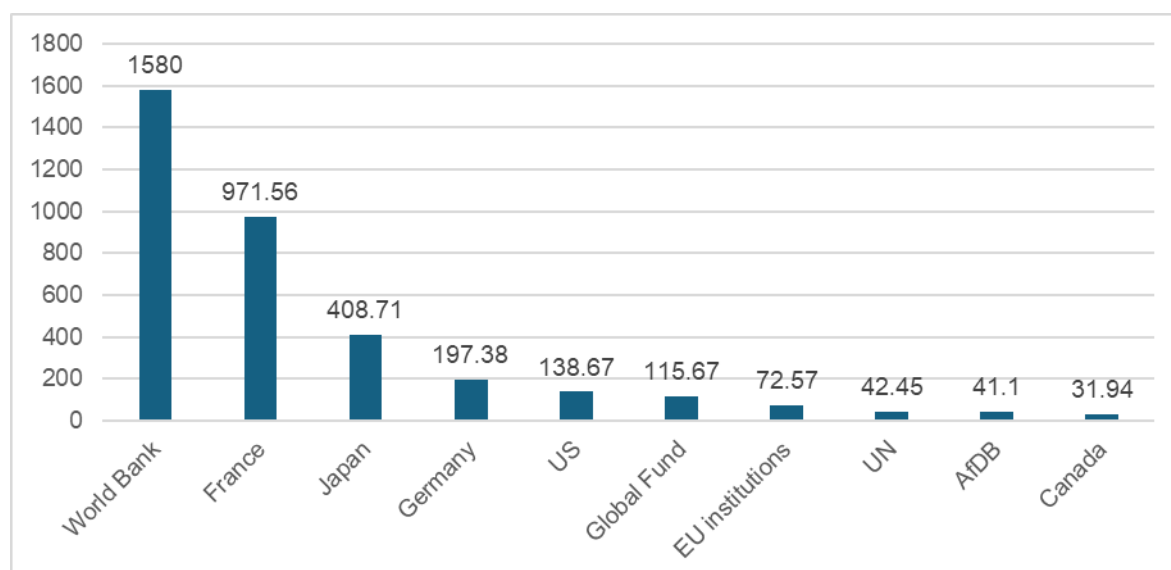
Aid flows to Côte d'Ivoire have peaked at different historical moments, including after the 2008 global financial crisis, and following the 2011 post-conflict reconstruction (see Figure 2 below). Overall, Côte d'Ivoire is moderately aid-dependent compared to other West African countries, and the French presence remains strong in the overall landscape of development cooperation. It constitutes by far the largest bilateral donor operating in the country (see Figure 3), and Côte d'Ivoire is also the second most important recipient of French development assistance (after Morocco, in 2022; Donor Tracker, s.a.). The most significant donor in the country is, however, the World Bank – which has also driven up the amount of external finance directed to social protection since the launch of the PFSP in 2015.

**Figure 2: Total ODA to Côte d'Ivoire (1960-2023, US\$ millions)**



Source: Authors, based on data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, s.a.-a)



**Figure 3: Top 10 donors to Côte d'Ivoire in 2022 (ODA commitments, US\$ millions)**

Source: Authors, based on data from OECD (s.a.-b)

However, donor engagement in the social protection sector is relatively low when considering the overall development landscape (infrastructure sector capturing an important share of official development assistance, ODA).<sup>16</sup> This was noted by one interviewee, who highlighted the general donor focus on productive activities:

You know, there is what we call the National Plan of Development, the country [...] that this is the priority of the international donors. A strategy like social protection – this is not a priority for the international partners. [...] We are ready to invest on the private sector, to create jobs, to create wealth, wealth, to create more interest, economic interest for the, the [small and medium-size enterprises] and so on. But the national protection, it is like, something to save vulnerable people and these vulnerable people are not considered as being productive. (IC-7)

Nevertheless, the findings of this study highlight the differing role among development partners across the different social protection “domains”. Study participants recognised the World Bank’s particular role in driving social assistance through the PFSP. The bank’s role and influence was also underscored, given its disproportionate resources in comparison to UN agencies or other bilateral actors (see below). This influence may be deemed to have deeply shaped the social protection landscape in the country, given that the government has now committed to the PFSP, which has become largely institutionalised with increasing levels of government commitment.

The other fundamental difference is in the funding of the various programmes. We usually do not have the financial capacity to do programmes on a very large scale. A partner like the World Bank has the possibility, as in Côte d'Ivoire, of injecting \$200 million into a cash transfer programme. It's the truth. (IC-6)

But on the cash transfer programme, we will say that the World Bank is further ahead [than other partners] through more substantial financing and [...] technical assistance. (IC-9)

16 Note: Details about sector allocation of ODA in the country are difficult to obtain.

In contrast, as described by interviewed stakeholders, national institutions were seen to be largely driving the work in the area of social insurance, with important support and “push” from the ILO:

The ILO is the government’s traditional partner on these [social insurance] issues. [...] It was associated with the dynamics. (IC-9)

I think that as a trade unionist and a mutual society, our first partner on the issue of social protection is [...] the International Labour Organization. And the ILO had given a mandate, an instruction to all its local partners, or even African partners at the national level, to fight to get out of the 80 per cent of people not covered by health coverage, to get out of poverty, through greater social protection, by setting up cooperative or mutual systems to help them. [...] I would even say that they are somewhat dictating to the States the political orientation at the social level. (IC-1)

The UN system was equally highlighted on multiple occasions as a key force in the sector, with UNICEF in a particular role in the area of non-contributory social assistance:

OK, I’m going to give the credit first to UNICEF [...]. In terms of creating the foundations of the non-contributory system, including the training of actors, this is something that was initiated at the grassroots level by UNICEF. The various national social protection strategies to date have all been made by UNICEF. So, capacity-building, national social protection system, the first discussions on cash transfers, it was UNICEF. (IC-6)

On a smaller scale, it was also noted that humanitarian NGOs continue to provide important support to social centres, which are responsible for providing key services to vulnerable families, children and the elderly (IC-8), while the World Food Programme engages in supporting school feeding programmes (IC-6, IC-9).

The above description highlights the importance of external actors across the different “domains” of the current social protection system in Côte d’Ivoire. Curiously, however, the particular role or influence of Agence française de développement (AFD) was not discussed in this regard. It is also important to note that interviewees highlighted development partners’ support towards national priorities, national policy plans and domestic budgets. Interviewees perceived collaboration with the government largely as a partnership, highlighting that the power dynamics cannot be interpreted as “colonialism” or the forceful influence on behalf of external actors.

In our project that we are leading, obviously, the project was designed based on the National Development Plan of the country, so where there are strategic axes on which the country itself wants all donors who want to work in Côte d’Ivoire to look into this theme to address them. (IC-8)

Typical, typical way we’re working at country level is to have a country dialogue. So we have offices, a country level, and we interact on a daily basis with governments. And we discuss about areas of policy, public policy development, and we work on the basis of requests from governments to help in specific areas. (BIL-5)

At the same time, the data highlights the differing priorities among donors and development partners – as well as the concomitant, siloed workstreams. Despite attempts to revive cross-partner collaboration, notably led by UNICEF, creating shared agendas was seen to be hindered by the commitment to different objectives. The views (see below) reflect those of Ballet et al. (2021), who posit that the Ivorian social protection model is constructed of “priority projects” driven by external donors. This has been viewed result in “a logic of competition between ministries to capture aid resources [...], to the detriment of constructing a unifying and coherent, logical framework for social protection” (Olié et al., 2024, p. 2620).

Each donor has its priorities that are coming from their own national development policies. (INT-2)

You will see that when it comes to discussions between development partners, there are very few people who speak. [...] People don't come at the given time either. Because everyone has an agenda that they don't want to change. (IC-6)

Overall, the findings show that different development partners occupy different social protection domains in Côte d'Ivoire, while the significant financier role of the World Bank gives it particular sway in social protection policymaking processes. At the same time, the partners' distinct focus areas and siloed ways of working appear to hinder effective harmonisation of approaches.

#### 4.2.3 Policy transfer "tactics"

Policy transfer literature offers growing evidence on the different strategies adopted by external development actors to further their preferred policy approaches in aid-receiving countries (e.g. Adesina, 2020; Devereux, 2022; Lambin & Surender, 2021; Montero, 2019). In the context of Côte d'Ivoire, France's deliberate efforts and policy transfer strategies date back to the colonial era. France pursued a continued political and economic influence in its ex-colonies through the establishment of bespoke development institutions as early as 1946. Launching the FIDES and the Caisse centrale de la France d'Outre-Mer (central fund for overseas France), France mobilised development finance to "modernise" (rather than to promote self-sufficiency) its colonies and overseas territories, with a focus on projects aligned with France's economic and political interests. This French aid bureaucracy operationalised its work through private contracting firms and autonomous public or semi-public organisations, amassing significant profits from their activities (Pacquement, 2015). French companies received the lion's share of development work procured in Côte d'Ivoire for several decades following independence (Verschave, 1998).

The findings of this study clearly show the notable impact of technical assistance in furthering the export of policy ideas and approaches, and that this assistance continues to be relevant. One specific example is the creation of the National Development Plan (Plan National de Développement, PND), which by definition should reflect domestic priorities, but is in fact largely co-created with development partners:

All these actors are also associated with the development of the [National Development Plan], the PND. So, this macro framework is defined with all the stakeholders. [...] And everyone gives where they can to support the government in carrying out the various public programmes in response to the priorities identified within the framework of this National Development Plan. So there's no ... we're in sync. The initiatives are convergent. And everyone is following the paths that the government has traced. So there is no antagonism. There are no difficulties at this level. (IC-9)

Then the new National Development Plan, for instance, is an opportunity for the partners to try and influence the, the priorities. [...] So those are sort of key moments because, as you know, what is in the National Development Plan is of course, a government priority for the next five years. And then what is not there may be more difficult to be discussed or addressed as a priority. So there are key moments and key documents that the partners are influencing. (INT-2)

The interviewed international development experts also mentioned the strategic referencing of accepted international standards and indicators. These were utilised to highlight the country's existing commitments and gaps in progress to advocate for social protection strategies and overall expansion among government officials (INT-2). Similarly, domestic interviewees pointed to the impact of the international soft law (e.g. the ILO's 2012 Social Protection Floors

Recommendation No. 202) in furthering insurance-based expansion of social protection in the country:

When we look at the new schemes, whether it is universal health coverage, the scheme for employees, the self-employed, all these schemes are prompted by the ILO. All these schemes are initiated by the ILO, because the ILO talks about social security coverage for all. [...] These are ILO recommendations. (IC-3)

Another more indirect form of technical assistance mentioned by several interviewees consists of training provided in France for social workers as well as trade union members and other social protection actors.

But the first impact is that until today, we, the social security executives, have been trained in France. When they do the training here, they go to do the advanced training course for the last part of the training in France. (IC-3)

And this is very clearly because of the social workers. All our aspects have been trained in European countries. (IC-7)

The interviews also reveal that development partners seek leverage for their policy interventions through the strategic use of existing political structures and hierarchies on the ground. While this is a natural way of operating on the ground for any “policy entrepreneur” seeking to further a specific policy agenda and promote policy innovations (e.g. Cairney, 2018; Mintrom & Thomas, 2018), such approaches can also be problematic when national priorities and systems are not prioritised. More specifically, interviewees describe a thorough engagement across the levels of governance, aimed at creating an internal advocacy movement. For instance, it was mentioned that engagement is sought with relevant ministries in order to leverage their political influence in support of furthered social protection initiatives.

Generally, most projects, once again, we entrust the lead to a ministry so that it integrates it into its work and in such a way that with regard to the different areas in which the Ministry intervenes, we say to ourselves that it provides considerable support for advocacy, and so on, and to defend a little better the strategies that we want to develop and that we want to benefit the targets in the areas of intervention. But at the regional level too, we have to deal with the authorities who are there, who also have, what we call it, a force of power, an influence – not a power, but an influence on what we want to put in. (IC-8)

Furthermore, the deployment of aid conditionalities – as in the context of SAPs – and funding modalities more generally have been widely recognised as a key axis to pressure the local adoption of policies and approaches prioritised by donors (see e.g. Adesina, 2020; Dobbin, Simmons, & Garret 2007; Evans, 2010). In Côte d'Ivoire, domestic stakeholders (and notably trade union representatives) pointed out that directing resources for specific priorities was indeed an important tactic to promote policy adoption on the ground. It was also asserted that donors have occasionally deprived domestic actors of funding on the basis of differing views and norms – notably relating to sexual minorities. In this context, the organisation of conferences was mentioned as another avenue of influence, supporting the creation of epistemic communities that align with donor views and approaches.

It is said that the hand that gives is the hand that orders. Yes, it is the hand that orders. It's true that we're trade unionists, but if our first mission is to look for partners to support us financially, because support, often, the first thing we see in support, is finances. So, if the partner supports us financially [...] he gives us his vision. (IC-3)

The friction is linked to what they call diversity. For them [donors], diversity takes into account sexual orientations, the question of gender, you understand? And they think,

for example, that we should espouse their approach. You understand that the debate, for example, on LGBT is an issue that sometimes poses a problem on a cultural level. And often, you can be blocked from any external funding simply because you have not agreed to be a spokesperson for such a philosophy. (IC-1)

At the beginning of next month, I am also taking part in an international conference on the issue of diversity in the world of work, on the rights of those who have orientations, I would say, minorities, right? But it's financed by the West. It is a means of influence. (IC-1)

Another donor tactic emerging from the data relates to the co-option of domestic CSOs, including trade unions, by external development partners. Several interviewees posited that especially domestic development NGOs often promote agendas and implement interventions designed by large international NGOs as well as bilateral donors (see quotations below), rather than pursuing and advocating for social protection approaches prioritised by local communities at the grassroots level.

So already, CSOs, as soon as they ask us to meet, we are very open to meeting them, often because CSOs are funded [...] CSOs that are funded by AFD are financed via the CSO window in Paris. And so, the CSOs that generally operate in Côte d'Ivoire take the time, in fact, to ask us for appointments and we take the time to receive them. (IC-5)

When it comes to the practical implementation, these community interventions, the NGO partners, which are the national NGOs, who most of the time are co-opted by international NGOs, it's really going to do its job. So, we cannot talk about social protection, once again, without these actors. (IC-8)

These diverse tactics highlight the development partners' extensive engagement with diverse social protection actors and processes in Côte d'Ivoire. This engagement has been important in furthering the expansion of social protection arrangements in the country, but also partially tainted by pressures to adopt approaches and instruments prioritised by donors rather than domestic actors.

## 4.3 Domestic factors

Alongside colonial path dependencies and the continued postcolonial influence of external actors on social protection processes, domestic factors constitute an important explanatory axis for the ongoing evolution of social protection arrangements in aid-receiving countries. As highlighted by one interviewee:

The social protection systems are very different in the former colonies of France. So it's difficult to say that it [was] really shaped [by colonial powers] because if it were the case, then you would, all countries would have some kind of similar system. (BIL-5)

This section explores how different factors at the domestic level intersect with external influences and contribute towards the shaping of social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire.

### 4.3.1 Domestic ideology and role of elites

The ideological orientations of the dominant political parties and government leaders constitute an important domestic factor driving relations with external actors and development partners, as well as the implemented social protection arrangements (Hickey, Lavers, Niño-Zarazúa, & Seekings, 2019). Unlike radical decolonisation leaders in West Africa – such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sékou Touré (Guinea), Modibo Keita (Mali) and Thomas Sankara (Burkina

Faso) – Houphouët-Boigny advocated for a gradual, French-supported transition to independence (Bado, 2022). He endorsed the creation of the French Community in 1958, securing Côte d'Ivoire's continued integration into the *Françafrique* network. This alignment with France ensured economic privileges for the Ivorian elite while reinforcing dependency on the former colonial power. After gaining independence in 1960, Houphouët-Boigny's presidential rule relied on the continued presence of French technical advisers, military support and investment, which helped sustain the so-called Ivorian economic miracle (Amin, 1976). However, this economic model was inherently flawed, as it rested on an authoritarian regime, a corrupt bourgeoisie and an ethnically skewed patronage system (Amin, 1976; Bamba, 2016). The 1990s and 2000s marked the unravelling of his political legacy. While Ghana transitioned successfully to democracy, Côte d'Ivoire descended into crisis, facing ethnic divisions, economic stagnation, military coups and civil war (Amin, 1976; Bamba, 2016).

The absorption of domestic elites by France also in the contemporary context was specifically mentioned in the interviews (see quotation below). French interference in policy processes determining state leadership in the country as well as Francophone Africa has also been widely discussed in the existing literature (e.g. Shipilov, 2022).

Alassane Ouattara is installed by France. That means he can't, before being president, he is serving the IMF, before working for the IMF, he has been working in one of the central banks of the French economic zone. So the personality, the orientation, the perspective, the structure, everything is France-oriented and also European-oriented. (EXP-6)

Another important point made by several interviewees concerns the elite capture of domestic resources and development agendas. This has translated into a developmental vision prioritising economic growth led by the southern part of the country (and particularly the economic capital, Abidjan) at the expense of social protection for the vulnerable populations (especially in northern parts of the country), perceived to be less important in driving economic development. One interviewee pointed out also the important share of youth in the country, which may equally be driving the focus on economic growth and job creation as development priorities (IC-7).

This question of capture of public spending by the richest groups. Which is the huge issue in social protection. [...] You really have two countries, you have a prominent country in the south, and a low-income country in the north. But [the government] is of the strong view that they need to encourage the more privileged regions and groups to continue to grow the economy. And then by growing the economy, everybody would benefit. I think they're very strong believers in the economic growth model. [...] And they are often not convinced that protecting low-income groups and that giving opportunities to low-income groups will contribute [...] to the growth of this economy. (BIL-5)

But the national protection, it is like, something to save vulnerable people and this vulnerable people. Are not considered as being productive. And you see what I mean? They are not productive. They cannot produce any money. [...] We have the impression that the government does not want to waste the money, yes, investing in social protection. (IC-7)

In Côte d'Ivoire, young people constitute 70 per cent of the population. [...] This 70 per cent, they are very venerable. So a priority is given to the creation of decent jobs. (IC-7)

Nevertheless, the study data also draws attention to distinct actors among domestic elites, who are actively driving for different views regarding economic development. The Minister of Labour and Social Protection, in particular, was noted to hold a key role in promoting social protection:



The Minister of Labour and Social Protection [...], he is very active at the international level, concerned in decent jobs, but also social protection, social security and social welfare, because he is also the one in charge of universal health coverage. Yeah. So he is a very, very important minister for the country because people think that Côte d'Ivoire is economically going very far when it should not neglect the social aspect of economic growth. (IC-7)

Moreover, the analysis suggests that the government elites have two distinct pet projects – the CMU and the RSTI – to which they are more committed and exhibit a strong political will (see quotations below). An interviewed government representative explained the RSTI and CMU programmes as being largely originated and driven by the government, while also highlighting the increasing government commitments towards expanding the largely World Bank-driven PFSP (IC-9).

So I think in Côte d'Ivoire, clearly there is a government lead. Because particularly since the current president – President Alassane Ouattara – came to power. Universal health coverage was at the heart of his political platform. We put it as a priority and been working on it since then without much success, admittedly. But there's been leadership. (BIL-5)

I think the government is very serious about expanding social protection, especially with regard to contributory schemes and in particular the CMU. The RSTI too, they are very serious about the expansion of the RSTI. (IC-6)

And the President of the Republic, in his end-of-year speech, also announced the enrolment of 70,000 new households on behalf of the government this year. And so, the programme [PFSP] today is quite well established and is in a good place in the government's social policy. (IC-9)

One interviewee also noted that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection is currently building new social centres in the northern parts of the country, applauding an initiative that seems to exhibit an important commitment on behalf of the government to “increasing the coverage of social services in terms of social service workforce” (INT-2). Another mentioned the ongoing construction and updating of hospitals and health infrastructure to ensure adequate service delivery under the CMU (IC-1) (see also World Bank, 2022).

The insights discussed in this section highlight the ongoing connections between France and the Ivorian elite, as well as the penchant for a developmental model rooted in economic growth and trickle-down economics. Yet, as it may be expected under a government that lacks strong ideological anchoring, the government position is not fully uniform, and key actors at the ministerial level are promoting alternative views. Given that there is no holistic, overall social policy vision guiding the government, key programmes (CMU, RSTI, PFSP) are driven by elites across different government bodies in a largely siloed manner.

#### 4.3.2 Resistance to external policy influence

Existing evidence shows that even aid-receiving governments in an economically dire position can effectively resist donor priorities and reframe development cooperation along their preferred lines. Ethiopia and Rwanda represent such examples. However, such resistance and strategic negotiation is typically coupled with a strong political ideology and overall social policy vision (e.g. Hickey et al., 2019). The findings of this study suggest that, since the Ivorian government is not guided by a strong vision and ideology, some externally driven projects may pass without much consideration – especially when they originate from the country's largest development financier, the World Bank.

Politically talking, the government, of course, they have a very open national strategy. [...] They are not very, very, very strong. They are, they are open to any kind of support. But you have to take into account the situation [...], the social perception, the culture – the cultural beliefs. (IC-7)

If the World Bank said that they will give cash transfers, then the government does not refuse. [...] If tomorrow the World Bank said, no, it is not cash transfer, we will try to give to build gardens for children and mothers in all the villages. The government will say yes. (IC-7)

Nevertheless, some interviewees also asserted that given the ongoing economic growth in the country, it has a level of confidence and ability to push back on undesirable policy proposals from external actors, even if these come with funding. In the same line of reasoning, it was also highlighted that the government's negotiation power also depends on the economic positioning it finds itself in:

The Côte d'Ivoire has resources, domestic resources. They have a strong economy. They have their national priorities, and they invest their domestic resources to the national priorities, which means that the partners need to bring in an added value that you cannot usually. I mean, if you have a resource-poor government they are more keen on, you know, taking on the resources and maybe priorities suggested by external partners. But this is not the case, in Côte d'Ivoire, at least from, from my perspective. (INT-2)

Yes, I have seen discussions, including with very strong partners, where the government says that we are ready to lose the money that you are putting on the table, but what you are proposing, we do not think is the right thing to do [...] at least on certain elements, even if it's not a loan, it's a gift, they're ready to lose it. (IC-6)

It can happen that the government gives in depending on whether it is in a position of strength, in a position of weakness, or can push back [...]. If it is negotiating at the international level to, I would say, warm up a debt or something else, in that period, I think it is more receptive than when he comes out of there. (IC-1)

It is also noteworthy that most major social protection programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, even if externally funded, involve some level of Ivorian participation (from government agencies, local NGOs or community groups). The PFSP, for instance, is implemented with the support of the social centres that have existed in the country since early independence (IC-9). This may be seen to strengthen government's "grip" over the programme, while this was not explicitly articulated by the interviewees.

Overall, the views expressed on the government's resistance to external influence remained limited, as many interviewees highlighted the collaborative and largely aligned relationship between the government and development partners. When the issue was addressed, however, resistance was primarily associated with a relatively healthy economic situation in the country and the concomitant bargaining power, rather than a strong ideological stance.

#### 4.3.3 Civil society and workers' movements

Côte d'Ivoire has experienced different phases and processes of civil society activism resisting undue external influence and promoting social protection. During the colonial era, several protests and grassroots movements advocated for better treatment and the rights of local populations. One critical actor was Houphouët-Boigny himself, who established and led the African Agricultural Union (Syndicat Agricole Africain, SAA) from 1944 onwards. The SAA was the first quasi-political party in Côte d'Ivoire, aiming to protect African farmers' interests against European settlers. It grew a substantial member base and actively advocated for better working



conditions, higher wages and the abolition of forced labour (Aboussou, 2019). Upon gaining independence, however, Houphouët-Boigny's authoritarian government became the central actor in driving social protection policymaking, leaving limited space for civil society engagement.

The SAPs implemented since the early 1980s were met, nevertheless, with important resistance from civil society. The General Workers Union in Ivory Coast (Union Générale des Travailleurs de Côte d'Ivoire) actively opposed SAP-induced policies that adversely affected workers. At the same time, organisations such as the Ivorian Human Rights League (Ligue Ivoirienne des Droits de l'Homme) engaged in advocacy and policy dialogue to promote alternative development strategies – although these efforts did not lead to drastic changes in policy direction.

Furthermore, a recent report analysing the transformation processes towards democracy in Côte d'Ivoire states that

the country lacks a tradition of constructive relationships between the state and interest groups [...]. Civil society, although formally represented in many state- or donor-led schemes, has generally not been able to shape public policies [...]. However, trade unions in the public sector remain quite strong and may mobilise heavily to defend their interests, such as in the case of pension system reforms. (BTI, 2024, p. 11)

In a similar vein, the interviewed stakeholders on the ground highlighted the role of trade unions in promoting social protection expansion, also in the contemporary context. However, they also stressed issues such as policy competition and frictions between the government and trade unions. It was revealed, for instance, that the government strategically associates or sidelines particular unions depending on the issue at stake to push through its preferred social protection options and reforms (IC-3). Other friction points were also mentioned – between workers' associations themselves, and the government and other stakeholders:

[...] because we are in an institution where there are up to three unions, and you know that it is not easy. We had real opposition internally. There have even been manoeuvres, really big manoeuvres to make our biggest project fail. (IC-3)

The evidence collected for the purposes of this study highlights the complex, contemporary policy environment in Côte d'Ivoire. Internal dynamics continue to matter alongside intricate relationships between external development partners and domestic actors, and they should not be neglected in understanding social protection policy processes.

## **5 Ways forward**

This Discussion Paper has, so far, explored the relationships between colonial legacies, postcolonial influences, domestic factors and social protection arrangements. Although interviewees did not explicitly mention the breaking of colonial path dependencies or re-configuring donor relationships as pressing priorities or needs at the domestic level, several gaps and areas for improvement were highlighted. This section explores stakeholder views on ways forward to enable Côte d'Ivoire to expand and strengthen social protection in line with national priorities.

### **5.1 Developing a strong domestic social protection vision**

Several interviewees noted the inadequacy of social protection systems regarding the social and cultural realities of the populations of Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, the laws, structures and social protection programmes implemented in Côte d'Ivoire are often a transposition of French or

European social protection systems and based on the “individual” rather than a “family” or a “community” as a unit. Although the re-imagining of social protection along such lines was seen as difficult in the context of locked-in institutions and approaches (IC-1), these insights call for a new, home-grown social protection vision reflecting the country’s community-oriented values.

At the same time, stakeholders highlighted the need for strong government leadership in developing a holistic social policy strategy that builds synergies across the currently siloed social protection “domains” (see quotation below). This strategy should operate in tandem with economic policy and be effectively integrated into the broader development vision for the country.

The vision, as I said, of someone who can have a holistic vision of social protection by not only saying that we are going to set up a contributory system that will generate money for us, but someone who is able to say: Here is the system in a holistic way, this is how I make the different pieces communicate and this is how I build a viable social protection system for Côte d’Ivoire, including its financing. (IC-6)

While not explicitly mentioned by the interviewed stakeholders, incorporating civil society and social movements into policy processes where such a re-imagining could happen represents a valuable opportunity to harness knowledge and experiences from the grassroots level. Greater involvement of diverse civil society actors in policy deliberations and as advocates is also crucial to holding political leaders accountable in the pursuit of domestically driven social protection expansion.

## 5.2 Bolstering domestic financing capacity

Interviewed domestic stakeholders cited several areas of need for the future expansion of social protection, including non-contributory social pensions, pensions for private-sector workers, social insurance expansion among the informal population, and ensuring that human resources and (health) services are able to respond to the increasing needs and pressures under the current priority programmes. The expansion of the PFSP was mentioned only by some. However, restricted domestic resources were raised as a key obstacle to expanding social protection investments.

Interviewees explicitly pointed to the need to strengthen the domestic fiscal space and increase domestic resource mobilisation for social protection purposes. Debt instruments, as a means of aid delivery, were questioned for their limited sustainability in the long term.

For countries like Côte d’Ivoire, for many of the Central and Western Africa regions and countries, it’s just having even monetary sovereignty, fiscal sovereignty, can be the very starting point. Because these countries cannot invest, you know, they always, the economy is attached to the financial and economic logic of the eurozone. Can you imagine? They can’t invest. The inflation has to be kept at minimum level because of, because the France economic finance minister controls 50 per cent of the national reserves. (EXP-5)

It’s good to start with a loan to the World Bank, but it’s better for the government to use its own sources and the government has the means to ensure that this kind of programme is terrible. (IC-6)

The perspectives above draw attention to the country’s position as an exporter of raw materials within global economic structures, the fiscal implications of the CFA currency (see Section 4.1) and rapidly growing debt reimbursement obligations that significantly restrict Côte d’Ivoire’s ability to finance social protection. The overall economic trajectories in the country have resulted

in a pressing debt crisis – current and projected debt levels being more than twice as high as in Tanzania, for instance. While the annual debt repayments incurred by Côte d'Ivoire were around US\$593.8 million in 2014, a decade later, in 2024, they reached US\$3.19 billion – mainly in private debt (One Data, s.a.). Ironically, the interviews reveal that, at the same time, debt has become part of the negotiations between France and the government in the context of funding social protection (BIL-5). However, although debt relief may be an effective incentive to bolster social protection expansion in indebted countries, it does not represent social protection that is independently and domestically innovated, financed and driven.

There is now a growing momentum to consider alternative global approaches to facilitate social protection financing in low- and middle-income countries. Suggestions range from a new global social protection fund and a global tax, debt relief and IMF special drawing rights to strengthening domestic resource mobilisation (see Idris, Lambin, & Yeates, 2024). In line with the stakeholder views, these avenues should be explored in the context of a holistic social protection and development vision, both at the global and local levels.

### **5.3 South-South cooperation**

The interviews revealed the existence of dynamic South-South cooperation, particularly between the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and those in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There are legal frameworks and policies that regulate and facilitate the social protection benefit portability between these countries. For example, a worker from Burkina Faso who has worked and retired in Côte d'Ivoire can return to Burkina Faso and receive his pension there without travelling to Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire was also perceived as an important country in the context of sub-regional cooperation, given its current political stability and advancement in certain areas. For instance, the country acts as a key location for regional social worker training:

An example that I can give is [...] it's called Superior Training Institute for Social Work, and it is a sort of reference centre in the subregion. So many of the neighbouring countries, many of the students come from the neighbouring countries to, to study in the, in that [...] Superior Training Institute for Social Work in Côte d'Ivoire. So it is really one of the [...] main training institutes in the subregions that serves also some of the neighbouring or countries in the subregion. [...] From what I know, [...] it's a purely domestic institute. (INT-2)

Collaboration was also noted to exist at the level of workers' associations – and considered important (IC-3).

Nevertheless, stakeholders did not elaborate on the benefits of South-South cooperation from the perspective of strengthening Southern policy voices in global policy agendas and debates. Rather, the conversations revolved around sub-regional collaboration, which was seen as particularly valuable, given the shared contextual factors.

We can also try to focus our strategy and our support to these subregional cooperations concerning social protection. That would be very important because in this southern region, West Africa, [...] we have the same culture. You have your same social priorities. We have the same kind of inner abilities. So it should be very important to have a subregional strategy, a roadmap for the 15 countries. (IC-7)

Overall, South-South cooperation offers opportunities for knowledge exchange among actors operating in similar contexts, as well as strengthening technical capacity at the domestic level. Regional cooperation was also seen to enable the locally driven development of policy

strategies, which may act as an important counterforce to global agendas largely dominated by actors from the Global North.

## 6 Conclusions

This country case study on Côte d'Ivoire has sought to generate new, empirically driven evidence and analysis on the role and implications of coloniality in the context of social protection. In doing so, it contributes towards policy debates and deliberations around development cooperation in the context of social protection at the national and global levels – and external influence more broadly.

The first aim of the study was to explore *what is the colonial legacy in social protection*. The findings of this study clearly show that in the Ivorian country context, the ongoing influence of the former colonial master, France, constitutes an important colonial legacy with important, broader, indirect impacts on the domestic ability to pursue social protection policies independently. These impacts are largely tied to the institutional foundations, technical expertise, and global linkages established during and after the colonial period.

Besides France's economic domination through the CFA community, it continues to also have important political influence over the ruling elite in the country – another key actor group shaping social protection and social policy directions more broadly. In addition, local stakeholders pointed to the perceived supremacy of the French, and Western capitalism on the ground, highlighting the ideational dominance of colonial actors that continues to shape the “minds” of many locals. These perspectives stressing the normative legacies of colonialism are also highlighted in a poignant critique by Phiri (2020):

Despite the sweeping demands of global decolonization [...], the Western capitalist ethos has defined the social and political relations of the formerly colonized societies. Contemporary African cultural conversations have been heavily influenced by perspectives of the Western capitalist empires as benign actors whose institutions and ambitions were pivotal for the improvement of human life, even among the “inferior peoples” that Europe came into contact through its mission civilisatrice. (Phiri, 2020, p. 66)

At the same time, the analysis indicates that, as decades have gone by, the influence of France on social protection arrangements more directly has diminished in comparison to other actors in the field. In areas such as the institutional arrangements for civil servant social insurance, colonial path dependencies that can be traced back to the colonial administration are tangible. Other, more recent policy initiatives, such as the PFSP, are evidently largely driven by contemporary international financial institutions, notably the World Bank. Some programmes (CMU, RSTI), in turn, have enjoyed significant government leadership – with advice and input from UN agencies and the ILO.

The second aim of this study was to examine the *continued patterns of power imbalances that shape social protection arrangements in Côte d'Ivoire*, even decades after independence. In the contemporary context, social protection engagement by external actors has both mushroomed and diversified, with different perspectives and priorities promoted between the World Bank, the ILO and UNICEF, for instance. A key finding emerging from this Côte d'Ivoire case study is that, unlike the acutely resource-poor Tanzania with a population three times the size of Côte d'Ivoire, development partners are not relying on financial contributions to further their preferred policy prescriptions. Instead, interviewees highlighted the context being one of an open dialogue between the government and donors, whereby strategic influence through the co-creation of policy plans and strategies constitutes one pivotal axis of influence. Simultaneously, the overall influence of diverse external actors clearly has long arms,

extending from ministry-level policy discussions to training social workers and trade unionists, the financing of local NGOs and much more.

This being said, it is noteworthy that particularly the World Bank was recognised to have uniquely large resources and, consequently, important political sway within the government. For other domestic actors, such as trade unions and CSOs, access to funds can be a defining factor driving engagement (and influence) with external actors.

The third objective of this study was to *elucidate factors at the domestic level that play into country-level social protection arrangements*. Domestic factors emerged clearly as a critical aspect in reckoning with the evolution and dynamics of social protection in Côte d'Ivoire. The interview data shows ample evidence of the government's leadership for its "pet projects", notably the CMU and the RSTI, embedded in the overall social insurance-oriented model, and the productivist ideology of the political elite. Social service expansion through social centres (including through the 2023 initiative to strengthen service provision for the elderly) was also noted as a domestically driven social protection expansion. The cash transfer programme financed and shaped by the World Bank, in turn, has been incrementally adopted by the government and increasingly integrated into its budget and policies.

Crucially, however, the findings also highlight the importance of elite capture in the area of social protection, and the close relationships between the Ivorian government elite and France. This has translated into priority being given to the social and economic development of the thriving southern parts of the country, while the northern inner lands represent nearly a wholly "different country". This inequality in investment – both geographically and vertically between income groups, given the domestic reluctance for "free cash transfers" – perpetuates important social stratification, the origins of which can be traced back to the colonial era.

Finally, this study sought to offer new perspectives and evidence on *the ways forward to support Côte d'Ivoire in shaping social protection arrangements in line with its own priorities*. Interestingly, interviews with stakeholders on the ground did not point to a pressing need to "gain back power" from development partners. Rather, it was suggested that because the country is in a relatively good position to negotiate over policy directions with donors, it is important that the government develops a coherent and holistic vision for social protection that it can effectively pursue and promote. Nevertheless, gaining increasing financial independence was considered key, and one notable recommendation emerging from data in this regard is reduced reliance on debt instruments. Finally, South-South cooperation was largely viewed as a positive opportunity for developing benefit portability between different social protection systems and countries at the regional level, as well as knowledge exchange and learning for actors in the field. However, as in the case of Tanzania, discussions did not address coordinated global-level action to promote alternative voices and views on dominant social protection agendas.

These findings call for increased attention to coloniality and its interplay with domestic factors in the context of development cooperation, the study of social policy reform and the political economy of social protection. This is necessary to move towards strengthened government leadership and mature social protection systems across the Global South.

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