

Social Protection



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The need for social protection

- ❑ Notwithstanding considerable poverty reduction and impressive economic growth rates in the Asia-Pacific region, significant and persistent development divides between and within countries remain.
- ❑ Over 950 million people in the Asia-Pacific region still live in poverty with many more living in conditions of vulnerability.
- ❑ With on average 4.8 per cent of GDP, countries in the Asia-Pacific region invest comparatively less than in other regions on social protection.
- ❑ An estimated 1.1 billion workers remain in vulnerable forms of employment. The proportion of women in vulnerable employment is much higher than men. A number of countries face chronic challenges of youth employment.
- ❑ The number of older persons is expected to increase from 438 million in 2010 to 1.26 billion by 2050, the majority of whom do not have adequate levels of financial support or access to health care and other essential services.
- ❑ Urbanization in the Asia-Pacific region is rapidly increasing, but there are gaps in urban services, infrastructure, and considerable inter-generational urban poverty.
- ❑ The region and its people are disproportionately vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental change. Most disaster-induced migration occurs in the Asia-Pacific region.

Benefits of social protection

- ❑ **Social protection helps build human capacities.** Evidence has shown that, for example, cash transfers directly to mothers and grandmothers improve child nutrition. Similarly, cash transfers when combined with direct health interventions bring a number of benefits, such as extending immunization, increasing consumption of micronutrients and boosting attendance for ante- and post-natal care.
- ❑ **Social protection offers an escape from poverty.** Basic social protection reduces both poverty and vulnerability and can lead to a change in decision-making of the poor. With a basic social protection package, poor families do not have to rely on child labour, there is less need to migrate in order to access services, or to sell livestock or other essential assets in periods of financial stress.
- ❑ **Social protection reduces income inequality.** Social protection systems can help redistribute income, benefitting low-income groups, and especially groups with specific risks and vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities.
- ❑ **Social protection broadens opportunity and deepens the quality of economic growth.** Transferring resources from rich to poorer households can stimulate demand for local goods and services. Improved health standards through social protection increases life expectancy and leads to a healthier and more productive workforce.
- ❑ **Social protection contributes to achieving social cohesion.** Well-designed schemes that are accepted by society as a whole build social cohesion and a sense of citizenship, as well as reduce conflict, and therefore contribute to an effective and secure State.



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Elements of a social protection system

- ❑ Social protection should take a 'life course' approach covering different stages of the life cycle and protecting against different risks and vulnerabilities.
- ❑ Social protection in Asia and the Pacific includes social insurance, social security and social safety-nets. They include both contributory and non-contributory schemes, and span both targeted programs and universal systems.
- ❑ Governments can design social protection systems according to national economic constraints, political dynamics and social aspirations.
- ❑ Social protection systems must have a 'gender lens': women must become direct beneficiaries because they often remain unprotected as secondary beneficiaries.
- ❑ The most excluded groups should be the primary recipients of social protection programmes. – but programmes also must provide pathways ('models of graduation') from dependence.
- ❑ Effective social protection systems require coordination across all levels of government, and should be inclusive of other key stakeholders such as civil society organisations.
- ❑ Social protection systems should build a social protection staircase consisting of basic entitlements to at least a minimum level of benefits for all with additional contributory benefits and higher levels of income security.

Examples of social protection in Asia and the Pacific

- ❑ **Extending services – e.g. health services:** For most households, the service with the greatest financial implications relates to health. A basic social protection floor should offer guarantees of treatment free at the point of use. Thailand, for example, has designed a comprehensive approach to health provision through the Universal Health Coverage Scheme.
- ❑ **Social transfers:** Some economies in the region have developed sophisticated and well targeted systems. Others target particular communities and needs through public works programmes. For example, India launched the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which offers 100 days of work per family in rural areas at the minimum wage for agriculture. Others, as for example Samoa, pay a universal pension equivalent to USD 40 a month to residents over the age of 65 – around 5 per cent of the population.
- ❑ **Contributory schemes:** For those with relatively secure formal employment, contributory schemes, typically funded by payments from employees and employers combined with funds from government tax revenues can offer social protection for a number of circumstances, such as health, unemployment and old age. However, contributory schemes require active labour market policies and ways to include those that are often excluded by contributory schemes.

Universal social protection is affordable and represents an economic as well as a social investment

- ❑ A basic level of social protection is affordable for much of the region as fiscal space for governments exists. ESCAP calculations show that for example an old age pension would not exceed 1 per cent of GDP in any country in the region and that most countries in the region could achieve essential coverage in health, education and pensions for under 3% of GDP.
- ❑ The more comprehensive social protection systems prove to be the most cost-effective. While targeted and short-term schemes may be politically popular in the short term, long term solutions are more evident in the development of universal and comprehensive systems.
- ❑ Social protection should be seen as an investment for the future, not as a cost. Through strengthening education, health care and pension systems, countries in the Asia-Pacific region can both broaden and deepen their growth patterns, and in so doing build resilience against external shocks.

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