

WHAT

Social protection refers to a set of policies to help women, men and children reach or maintain an adequate standard of living and good health throughout their lives.

In its most basic form social protection should comprise of the following:



Essential **health care** for all including maternity care



Basic income security for **children** and access to nutrition, education and care



Basic income security for persons of **working age** and the provision of sufficient income, in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability



Basic income security for **older persons** and long-term care

Through the provision of essential health care and income security along the life course, social protection plays a critical role in reducing and preventing poverty and levelling out inequalities. Countries also invest in social protection to support human development, enhance social cohesion, strengthen their labour force and stimulate economic growth.



EXTENDING SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



WHY

- ✓ Social protection is a basic human right, grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- ✓ Social protection is an investment in sustainable and inclusive development
- ✓ Social protection provides a solid foundation for the realization of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

WHO

At least 1.2 billion people live on less than US\$3.20 a day in Asia and the Pacific. Approximately six in ten people in the region do not have access to adequate social protection, which contributes to high levels of poverty, lower productivity and social exclusion.



Despite increasing investment in social protection, expenditures in the region remain relatively low at 7.9 per cent of GDP, compared to the global average of 10.2 per cent.



Only 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific have a comprehensive legal framework on social protection.



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**

Social protection and the SDGs

Social protection is fundamental to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets forth 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 1 calls on all countries to provide social security to all to end poverty. SDG 3 calls for health care that is universal, affordable and of adequate quality for all. SDG 5 calls for social protection policies that promote shared responsibility within households to achieve gender equality, and SDG 10 calls on all countries to adopt fiscal, wage and social protection policies to reduce inequality. Social protection is also key to achieving many other SDGs.

Social protection floors

The social protection floor framework corresponds to a set of essential social services and income security measures that all persons everywhere should enjoy throughout the lifecycle – as children, working-age adults, older persons and in access to health care.

See also: International Labour Organization Recommendation 202 concerning National Social Protection Floors.

Health care

At least four out of ten women, men and children in Asia and the Pacific do not have any health care coverage at all. For many more, unexpected and reoccurring health care expenses can cause financial catastrophe. Without financial protection, illness, injury or even a child birth can push families into debt that is difficult to recover from.

Bhutan, Iran and Thailand all offer universal health care schemes, ensuring that all citizens have access to essential health care services.

Children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States to provide effective access to sufficient nutrition and compulsory primary education for all boys and girls. In 2015 more than 17 million children and youth were out of school in Asia and the Pacific. Many of the 7,000 children under the age of five who die every day, mainly from preventable causes, could be saved through adequate social protection.

Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and New Zealand all offer universal child allowances, upholding the rights of all children to income security.

Working-age adults

All working-age adults should have income security in cases of unemployment, sickness, injury, maternity and disability. Yet, it is estimated that only one in five working age adults in Asia and the Pacific receive unemployment benefits and only three out of ten mothers with new-borns receive maternity benefits.

Australia, Japan and South Korea offer comprehensive protection to working-age adults, including maternity benefits.

Older persons

Just over half of all older persons in the region receive an old age pension and less than one third of the labour force is actively contributing to a pension scheme. This leaves large groups of older persons with no choice but to continue working as long as they can, often for low pay and under hazardous conditions.

Georgia, Nepal and the Maldives all offer universal pension schemes, therefore taking the steps needed to guaranteeing income security for all older persons.