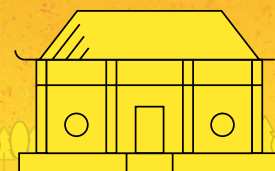


# Social protection and child benefits in Asia and the Pacific



## A springboard to opportunity

**Child poverty remains an urgent challenge in Asia and the Pacific.** Two thirds of world’s children afflicted by extreme poverty live in our region, where children are more likely to be poor than adults. In South Asia, 20 per cent of children live in poverty, a third of the global share. This deprivation has lifelong consequences. Poor nutrition and insufficient health care thwart cognitive development, educational achievement and employment prospects. The deleterious impact on human capital, societies and economies is considerable and durable.

**Building child-sensitive social protection schemes could significantly improve the life chances of millions of children in our region.** It would be an investment in a more equitable and prosperous future: a bulwark against poverty, a springboard to opportunity.

## A mix of existing schemes

**Different schemes currently support children in our region.** These include cash benefits for families and children; in-kind benefits such as school meals, childcare and health-care services; tax rebates; and paid parental leave. School meals are the most common scheme and have a good track record supporting children’s nutrition and education. Parental leave and childcare services reduce the burden of unpaid work, overwhelmingly shouldered by women. Other social protection schemes, such as old age pensions, unemployment benefits and health care, also demonstrably contribute to children’s wellbeing in the region.

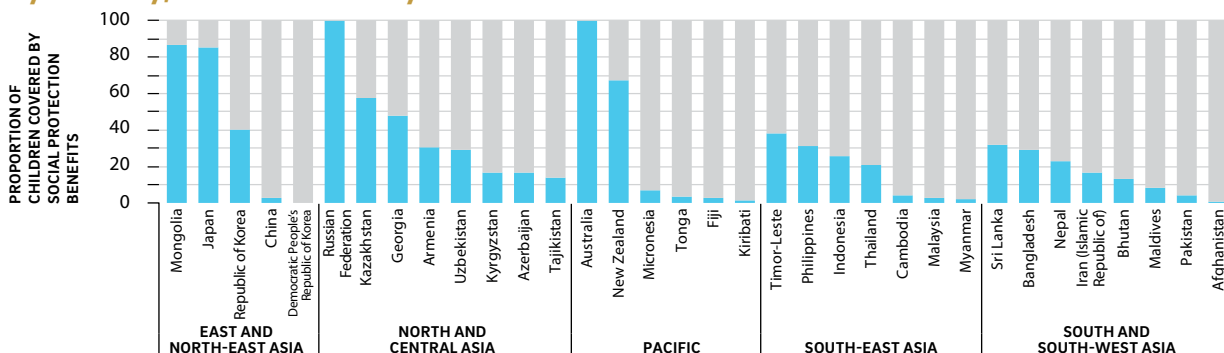
### — Three main types of cash benefits are extended to children and families in our region

- Contributory social insurance schemes** sometimes pay benefits to members who have dependent children. In Thailand, benefits are paid for children under 6 to contributory scheme members.
- Non-contributory benefits** are sometimes provided universally but usually they are targeted at the poorest households. In Mongolia, The Child Money Programme reaches 90 per cent of children under the age of 18, in all but the wealthiest households. The Child Grant Programme in Nepal targets children in the poorest districts and from marginalized Dalit families. It reaches a fifth of children aged 0–4 in Nepal.
- Non-contributory benefits for households** often reach families with children. In Georgia, the means-tested household programme, the Targeted Social Assistance, covers 40 per cent of children under the poverty line. In the Philippines, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme provides a conditional cash transfer to households with children under 18 and covers 20 per cent of households.

## Universal approach needed

**Most children are denied social protection in Asia and the Pacific.** Fewer than one in five children receive child or family benefits. Only in Australia, Kazakhstan, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation do more than half of all children receive such benefits. In many countries, coverage is lower than 10 per cent. The absence of schemes, narrow targeting and limited access to contributory schemes explain this low coverage.

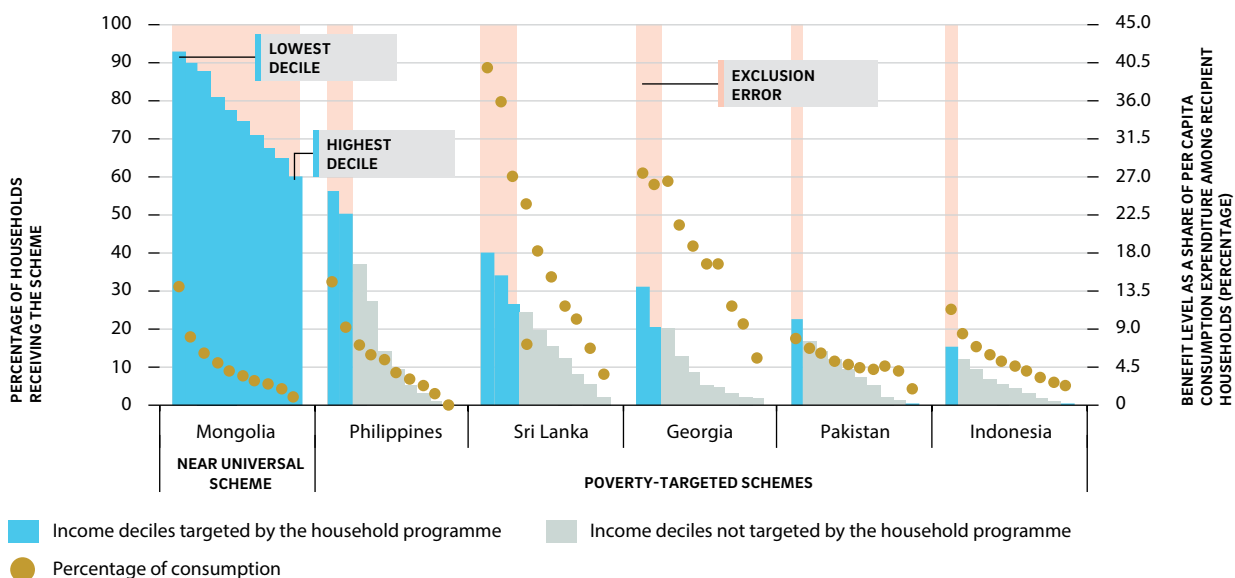
**FIGURE 1** Percentage of children and households receiving child and family benefits, by country, latest available year



Source: International Labour Organization, World Social Protection Database. Available at <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowTheme.action?id=10>.

**Poverty targeted schemes frequently fail to reach the poorest children.** In practice, identifying the poorest households in communities is costly and difficult. This leads to exclusion errors. In Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines targeted schemes reach between 15 and 56 per cent of the intended households.

**FIGURE 2 Coverage of child and family cash benefits by consumption decile, select countries, latest available year**



Source: Household Income and Expenditure Surveys; ESCAP Social Protection Simulation Tool. Available at [https://devpathways.shinyapps.io/escap\\_tool\\_p3/](https://devpathways.shinyapps.io/escap_tool_p3/).

**Benefit levels are also generally low and where conditions are attached, their impact is uncertain.** Benefit levels can often be less than 15 per cent of average per capita consumption in the poorest households. Behavioural conditions attached to the receipt of child benefits, such as school attendance, may be well intended but are often have negative consequences. They make it difficult to receive benefits and can reinforce gender inequalities. Women are the main recipients of conditional transfers and consequently have to ensure compliance. This is an additional burden and hinders women engaging in paid work.

**Child benefits have been expanded, based on universal principals, in several low and middle-income countries, but these efforts fall short of children's needs in our region.** More ambition is needed if we are to ensure children's life chances are never again thwarted from the outset. Moving away from costly targeted schemes with endemic exclusion errors towards universal schemes would guarantee the well-being of all children and provide a solid foundation for our region's future.