Economic Policies for an Inclusive Recovery and Development

Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2022

Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division
12 April 2022
Concerns about persisting inequalities have come to the fore in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic ... macroeconomic policies need to address these concerns.

Despite a reasonably strong economic rebound from the pandemic, people are left behind... this calls for more attention to inclusive policies.

The 2022 Survey goes beyond traditional macroeconomic thinking and provides new insights on how macroeconomic and structural policies can tackle inequality:

- **Fiscal policy:** spend smart and tax fair
- **Central banking:** inflation stability and beyond
- **Structural transformation:** pro-active policies to change market outcomes
Economic performance and Outlook
– a nascent recovery and uncertain outlook
Asia-Pacific region experienced a strong economic rebound in 2021

Source: ESCAP estimates and projections.
Asia-Pacific region experienced a strong economic rebound in 2021

- Rebound supported by robust external demand

Source: ESCAP based on CEIC, CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis
Asia-Pacific region experienced a strong economic rebound in 2021

- Rebound supported by robust external demand
- In turn, manufacturing and industrial production responded to strong external demand

Source: Based on CEIC data and CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis
Yet, the level of output is below the pre-pandemic path...

- Rebound supported by robust external demand
- In turn, manufacturing and industrial production responded to strong external demand
- Still, the level of output is about 2% below the pre-pandemic path

Total output loss in 2020-2022 is $2 trillion

Source: ESCAP estimates and projections.
...and recovery is still nascent and uneven between countries...

Quarterly real GDP growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Based on CEIC data.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Note: Subregional aggregates are the weighted average, based on 28 economies in Asia and the Pacific for which quarterly GDP data are available</td>
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</table>
...and within countries

Recovery in consumer-facing sectors is trailing behind

GDP by sectors

Change relative to pre-pandemic level

Source: Based on CEIC.
Note: Median of 13 developing Asia-Pacific countries for which data are available.
Inflation is on a rising trend **surpassing targets** in many countries

- Rising global commodity prices
- Soaring food price index
- High shipping costs
- Currency depreciation
- Pandemic related expansionary fiscal and monetary response

Source: Based on CEIC data (accessed 4 March 2022).
Note: Inflation and core inflation are for the latest month available between December 2021 and February 2022.
Outlook is riddled with uncertainty

- Recovery expected at a more moderate pace in 2022 and 2023

- Full resumption influenced by availability of vaccines, stringency of restrictions, labour market recovery

- The recent Russia-Ukraine conflict has cast a shadow on recovery prospects

- Inflation, along with interest rates, is expected to remain elevated in the near term

- Risks of long-lasting scars and macroeconomic stability are rising

GDP growth (%) in developing Asia and the Pacific

Source: ESCAP estimates and projections.
Policy Considerations

Co-exist with the pandemic

Avoid macroeconomic instability through prudent fiscal and monetary policies

Prioritize policies to reduce inequality and minimize scarring

Continue to build resilience into the system
Why should we care about inequality?
The K-shaped recovery has brought the issue of inequality to the fore, with vulnerable sections disproportionately affected...
...and 85 million people have been pushed back into extreme poverty, making the issue all the more pertinent.

Source: ESCAP estimates.
Addressing this gap and *building forward fairer* will require *coordinated government action*. 
Government’s role in reducing inequality
Fiscal policy matters...
Fiscal spending can **tackle inequality** ..... but **impact varies**...

**Impact of seemingly same category fiscal policies varies greatly** raising questions on effectiveness and targeting

Impact of fiscal policies on inequality, according to 1 per cent of GDP expenditure/revenue

Gini coefficient (0-100)

![Graph showing impact of fiscal policies on inequality](source: ESCAP estimates based on CEQ data.)
Fiscal spending can tackle inequality ..... but impact varies...

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- **1** - Education
- **2** - Health
- **3** - Direct transfers
- **4** - Indirect subsidies
- **5** - Total direct taxes
- **6** - VAT
- **7** - Total indirect taxes

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Source: ESCAP estimates based on CEQ data.
However, fiscal space has dwindled

Fiscal indicators
Asia-Pacific developing countries, as a percentage of GDP
Percentage

Source: ESCAP estimates based on IMF data.
However, fiscal space has dwindled, debt is up,
However, fiscal space has dwindled, debt is up, and consolidations are expected.

Fiscal indicators
Asia-Pacific developing countries, as a percentage of GDP
Percentage

Fiscal balance
Asia-Pacific developing countries, as a percentage of GDP
Percentage

f – forecasts, shaded
Source: ESCAP estimates based on IMF data.
….which are likely to **increase inequalities and reduce output.**
Hence, need to maintain expenditures in healthcare, education and social protection.

which are likely to get cut first....

...but matter the most for recovery and inequality reduction.
Level of spending on **healthcare** is already low...

Health expenditures remain much below world and high-income countries averages...

Current health expenditure, percentage of GDP.

Source: World Bank data.
...same is the case with spending on education...

Expenditure on education in Asia and the Pacific remains below the global target

Spending on education in the Asia-Pacific region, percentage of GDP.

Source: ESCAP estimates based on IMF data.
... and social protection coverage remains low and varies across countries in the region.

Social protection coverage rates vary considerably across Asia-Pacific subregions.

Source: ESCAP and ILO, 2020
Policy recommendations – Bigger bang-for-the-buck

Health care
- Provide universal health coverage

Education
- Strengthen early age education for all

Social protection
- Provide universal basic social protection
Policy recommendations – Bigger bang-for-the-buck

**Health care**
- Provide universal health coverage
- Reduce wasteful and inefficient spending

**Education**
- Strengthen early age education for all
- Eliminate socio-economic barriers at all levels of education

**Social protection**
- Provide universal basic social protection
- Improve efficiency via digital technologies
Policy recommendations – Bigger bang-for-the-buck

Health care
- Provide universal health coverage
- Reduce wasteful and inefficient spending
- Deploy digital health technologies

Education
- Strengthen early age education for all
- Eliminate socio-economic barriers at all levels of education
- Close the digital divide

Social protection
- Provide universal basic social protection
- Improve efficiency via digital technologies
Alongside targeted fiscal spending, revenues need to be increased as tax collection remains low in the region.

Source: OECD (2021a)
...due to tax avoidance and informality

**tax avoidance is high**

7.6 per cent of the tax revenue in the Asia-Pacific region was estimated to be lost due to misinvoicing in 2016.

**informality is ubiquitous**

68 per cent of workers being employed in informal economy across Asia-Pacific and up to 90 per cent in some countries like India.

Source: Kravchenko, 2018.
Policy recommendations – increase revenues

Pay fair share
- Ensure all individuals and companies comply with existing regulations
- Close loopholes
- Fight illicit financial flows

Expand tax base
- Formalize business activities
- Expand taxation of digital economy

Shift tax burden
- Take tax burden off from the lowest income households
- Make corporate and personal income taxes more progressive
Government’s role in reducing inequality
Addressing the root cause through structural policies...
Taxes and transfers play an important role in addressing the symptoms of inequality in advanced countries...

Source: ESCAP, based on the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) 9.1 (accessed on 26 November 2021)
...but their equalizing impact is still highly limited in developing countries

Source: ESCAP, based on the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) 9.1 (accessed on 26 November 2021).
Meanwhile, more could be done by ensuring market would generate fairer outcomes in the first place.

Source: ESCAP, based on the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) 9.1
These findings suggest that:

To build forward fairer, policy effort would also be needed to proactively shape structural and market forces that determine inequality levels and trends in the first place.

Even for fiscal policies, greater attention should be devoted to using taxes and spending to tilt such structural and market forces in favor of inclusive development.
Traditional hypothesis of Kuznets postulates an initial increase in inequality before a subsequent decline, following an inverted U-shape...
… but diversity in national pathways suggests **space for policies to have an impact**

Source: UN-ESCAP based on SWIID & WDI.
Policy tips from an analysis of Asia-Pacific cases

**Conducive factors**

- Fast & sustained creation of productive jobs (especially through manufacturing)
- Universal access to primary & secondary education
- Equalized access to infrastructure & essential public services
- A fairer starting point & rural development

**Harmful factors**

- Employment concentration in informal & low-productivity sectors
- A youth bulge
- Job market segmentation & geographic fragmentation

FOR INCLUSIVE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION
However, the digital-robotic-AI revolution may upend the older thinking...

Modern services are catching up in contribution to economic and employment growth

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<th>Contribution to non-agricultural employment growth</th>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, 1990-2007</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern services, 1990-2007</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, 2007-2018</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern services, 2007-2018</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
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Source: UN-ESCAP based on UNU-WIDER UNU-WIDER Economic Transformation Database
... which requires action on **three fronts** for more equal market outcomes

**Guide**  
*Structural transformation towards a job-rich path*
- Mobilize support for strategic sectors
- Leverage public R&D investment
- Establish correct market signals for private sector technological choices

**Shape**  
*Income-distribution outcomes of the market*
- Strengthen labor’s position in the job market
- Empower labor in corporate decision-making processes
- Prioritize equal access in education policies

**Manage**  
*The socioeconomic disruptions of technological revolution*
- Preserve progresses made in broad-based social protection as a first line of defense
- Strengthen support for on-the-job training, lifelong learning and vocational education
- Keep technological changes at a more manageable pace
Monetary policy affects inclusive development, which in turn influences monetary policy effectiveness.

Monetary policy conduct

- Monetary Easing
  - Lower marginal propensity to consume
  - Limited interest rate pass-through

Income and wealth inequality

- (+) Borrowers
- (+) Asset holders
- (-) Retirees

- Wealth concentration
- Large informal sector
Central banks should and can promote inclusive development.
Central banks *should* and *can* promote inclusive development.
Promote inequality-mindful monetary policy

- Communicate the distributional impacts to the public
- Consider income/wealth distribution when making monetary policy decisions
- Allocate part of asset purchases to social bonds
Central banks should and can promote inclusive development.
Invest official reserves with social gains

Safety & liquidity

Reserve allocations with social gains

• Analyze how this shift affects portfolio performance
• Set up investment committee to make allocation decisions
• Use excess reserve as seed capital for local social projects
Central banks should and can promote inclusive development.
Foster financial inclusion through **CBDC**

Adequate cash in circulation

**Central bank digital currency (CBDC)** for financial inclusion

- Choose design features that help financial access
- Identify associated risks and mitigation measures
- Improve digital and financial literacy
Central banks should and can promote inclusive development

- Monetary Policy Conduct
- Official Reserve Management
- Currency Issuance
- Financial Regulation
Support innovative social-oriented financial instruments

- Robust financial sector

**Innovative, social-oriented financial instruments**

- Increase understanding among market players
- Develop/harmonize taxonomies for pro-social financial instruments
- Grant financial support to cover high verification cost
In essence…

1. Central banks should not shy away from what they can do:
   - Promote financial access, education and consumer protection
   - Move existing bank deposits to banks with better ESG rating

2. Legal amendments and technical capacity are needed
   - To invest official reserves in social bonds
   - To issue CBDC

3. Central banks cannot act alone
   - Government ministries working on fiscal policy, digital connectivity, national ID
   - Financial supervisory agencies for social bond market
Key Takeaways

Inclusion should be at the center of economic policies.

Focus on efficiency and impact of fiscal policy.

Expand domestic revenues, shifting the burden away from low-income households.

Target market outcomes – promote job-rich transformation and empower the labor.

Inclusive central banking is possible.

Redesign monetary policy, reserve management, innovative finance, and digital currencies for inclusive development.
Thank you!