



**REGIONAL COOPERATION NEWSLETTER
SOUTH EAST ASIA & THE PACIFIC
December 2018**

This newsletter includes

Message from the Regional President

Updates in and around SEAP region

- **First Social Expo in Thailand August 2018**
- **ICSW SEAP Preparatory NGO Meeting and 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum November 2018**
- **The World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, International Labour Organization**
- **COSE highlights activities for older persons in 2018 (Philippines)**
 - **HOPE Worldwide-Pakistan: Empowering the marginalized (New Zealand)**

Thematic Papers

Upcoming Conferences & Important Dates



Message from the Regional President

It is with great pleasure to inform you that the South East Asia and the Pacific (SEAP) region has a new team of officers since July 2018. New officers for the SEAP region for 2018-2020 were elected in June 2018 during the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development in Dublin. ICSW members elected Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen (Thailand) as a Regional President; Ms. Nur Judy Binti Abdullah (Brunei Darussalam) as Regional Vice President; Mr. Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia) as Regional Treasurer; and Ms. Khatijah Sulaiman (Malaysia) as Regional Executive Committee.

ICSW SEAP currently has 12 members from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. In the coming years SEAP hopes to increase the number of ICSW members in the region and strengthen its engagement and collaboration with international organizations. Together with its ICSW members and other NGOs, SEAP will also seek to work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and build the capacity of NGOs through training programs on global social work and welfare.

This edition of the ICSW SEAP newsletter covers a range of topics, from the Social Expo in Thailand, the Preparatory NGO Meeting organized by ICSW SEAP and the 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum in Singapore, to the World Social Protection Report of the International Labour Organization, the work of the Coalition of Services of the Eldery (Philippines) and HOPE Worldwide-Pakistan (New Zealand). The newsletter also features relevant publications and updates on upcoming conferences and important dates related to social welfare issues.

Thank you for your support and for the work you have done in 2018.

*Chinchai Cheecharoen
Regional President
South East Asia and the Pacific*



Updates in and around SEAP region

First Social Expo in Thailand August 2018

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand, in collaboration with related ministries, initiated Thailand Social Expo 2018. From 3-5 August 2018, Thailand Social Expo 2018, under the theme "Brighter Future, Stronger People" was held for the first time in Thailand. The Social Expo offered social innovation including facility for the elder, OTOP ("One Tambon (sub-district) One Product") and Bangkok brand products, social services, and seminars from specialists.

ICSW SEAP's Regional President, Mr. Chinchai Cheechooen, participated in different panels including the opening ceremony and the second meeting for the network of Experts on Inclusive Entrepreneurship for ASEAN. He also acted as a speaker on the panel on Child Support Grant and Social Protection, Productive Welfare the Way Forward in Thai Society, and The Role of Third Sector in Thai Society and ASEAN.



ICSW SEAP Preparatory NGO Meeting and 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum November 2018

From 21-23 November 2018, the 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development, 14th SOMSWD, and 13th SOMSWD+3 took place in Singapore. The theme of this year's GO-NGO Forum was "Realising the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".

In the context of the GO-NGO Forum, ICSW SEAP organized a Preparatory NGO Meeting on 20 November. It brought together ICSW members to (i) discuss the work plan of SEAP for 2019, (ii) formulate recommendations for ASEAN, NGOs and disabled people's organizations (DPOs), and governments to be presented at the GO-NGO Forum, (iii) have an open discussion on social welfare and development issues and formulate recommendations for the agenda of the upcoming AMMSWD that will be hosted by Lao PDR in 2019 and the SOMSWD that will be hosted by the Philippines in 2020.



Recommendations for ASEAN, NGOs and DPOs, and governments, that were formulated during the Preparatory NGO Meeting, focused among others on engaging civil society and NGOs (in particular DPOs), building their capacity, and strengthening the implementation of the Enabling Masterplan. You can find the Recommendations in Annex A.

The open discussion touched upon a variety of topics such as capacity building of NGOs in general, laws and measures of governments to support NGOs, the work of NGOs to meet SDGs and ASEAN Vision.

On 21 November, the Regional President, Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen, participated in the GO-NGO Forum and presented the work of ICSW. He emphasized the importance of having the GO-NGO Forum which was set up by ICSW and ASEAN. The first GO-NGO Forum took place in 2006 in Bangkok, Thailand. He also presented the recommendations formulated by NGOs on 20 November. In the afternoon, there was a group discussion on children, working-age adults, and elderly with disabilities.

On 22 November, Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen participated in the 14th SOMSWD meeting where results from the GO-NGO Forum were discussed. During this meeting Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen urged SOMSWD to acknowledge the recommendations formulated by NGOs on 20 November.



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WELFARE

A World Organisation Promoting Social Development



The World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, International Labour Organization

The World Social Protection Report gives an overview of current trends in social protection systems around the world.

Key messages – Asia and the Pacific

In the Asia and the Pacific region, recent years have seen a significant acceleration of the extension of social protection coverage, contributing to strengthening social protection systems and building social protection floors. So far, though, only 38.9 per cent of the population in the region is covered by at least one social protection cash benefit. Wide coverage gaps exist with regard to child and family benefits, except in Australia and Mongolia, which have achieved universal coverage. Progress has been made in the extension of maternity benefits, yet only one-third of mothers with newborns (33.4 per cent) receive cash maternity benefits. Similarly, for unemployment benefits, despite recent policy reforms in Viet Nam and other countries, only 22.5 per cent of the region's unemployed persons receive unemployment benefits. Only a small minority of persons with severe disabilities (9.4 per cent) receive disability benefits, pointing to a need to attach greater attention to this area. Significant progress has been made regarding old-age pensions, particularly through the introduction of non-contributory and partially contributory schemes leading to universal coverage in China, Japan, Maldives, Mongolia, New Zealand and Timor-Leste; as a result, the majority (55.2 per cent) of older persons in the region now receive a pension, although adequacy of benefits remains a concern.

The full Report can be downloaded [here](#). The Executive Summary of the Report can be downloaded [here](#).

You can find a summary of section 6.4. Monitoring progress in social protection: Regional trends – Asia and the Pacific in Annex B.

COSE highlights activities for older persons in 2018 (Philippines)

The year 2018 has brought many opportunities, partnerships and development works for the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), a non-government organization working with older persons in the Philippines. As the year is about to end, we look back on what have been done.

Two of the highlights of COSE activities in 2018 were the two creative and peaceful mobilizations held to push for the passage of Universal Social Pension in the 17th Congress: in February at the House of Representatives, and in October at the Senate of the Philippines. The mobilizations led to increased number of co-authorships and support of



Representatives and Senators on bills for Universal Social Pension, giving more hope for older persons, particularly those who are not enjoying any pension. We are aiming that the bill will be passed into a law before this Congress ends in May 2019, which can benefit two-thirds of the older population who are poor and middle-income earners.

We also concluded the two-year disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation project in July 2018 that strengthened older persons organizations and their communities in eight municipalities on inclusive community-based disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response. The project has resulted in increased participation and representation of older persons in local government councils, planning, and related activities. Many older persons expressed that through this project, they have learned both their capacities and vulnerabilities in disasters, and have improved the capacities not only in disaster-related but also organizationally.





On 07 October, as part of the Elderly Filipino Week celebration and in support of the International Day of Older Persons' global theme campaign, COSE held its annual Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda (SUN) Awards or Ten Outstanding Older Persons. The awarding this year honored 10 older persons who have been rights champions in their chosen field like urban poor, environment, cultural preservation, among others.

A lot has been done in one year but the organization believes that there is so much more to look forward to and prepare for the coming years to contribute in achieving its mission for the Filipino older persons.

HOPE Worldwide-Pakistan: Empowering the marginalized (New Zealand)

HOPE's mission is to promote empowerment, social justice and protect the fundamental human rights of vulnerable groups by advocating against human rights abuses, supporting, educating and building their capacity.

In April 2018, HOPE launched a new project entitled "Empowering Refugees through Craft". In this program HOPE's team uses craft and other art tools to improve people's wellbeing and increase their self-sufficiency. The project is designed to empower urban refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand. In this program we specifically focus on women and young girls to empower and educate them, so they could become self-sufficient. These women and girls have been given opportunities to learn new skills used to generate an income and therefore to sustain a healthy livelihood.



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This project aims to educate and empower stranded asylum seekers and refugees by providing possible resources and alternative ways to earn an income. It gives adequate training to women and girls to make different crafts products such as beaded purses, handbags, keychains, oven gloves, door mats, socks and caps. In this project HOPE's team is keen to advertise and sell these products at local markets and communities in Thailand and New Zealand to help refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok.

HOPE's Social Integration and Support Program will allow refugees to get through the currently hugely challenging process of settlement more comfortably and definitively. As an organization, HOPE has worked on various projects and is now working with qualified counsellors, social workers and educators who have extensive experience in working with vulnerable groups. HOPE will provide a training course for volunteers on how to support families and individuals effectively.



HOPE's team has been actively involved in enhancing an educational standard and building a stronger community. HOPE has been promoting and protecting the fundamental human rights in Pakistan. In order to promote volunteerism HOPE is recruiting more volunteers in Pakistan.

Our current programs are:

Healthy Lifestyle Workshops

Home based Education

Empowering the Marginalized

Human Rights Education

Capacity Building Program



Thematic Papers

- [Project fact sheet: Establishing and enhancing an overall occupational safety and health framework in Myanmar and Lao PDR](#), International Labour Organization, 2018

The project fact sheet for Establishing and enhancing an overall occupational safety and health framework in Myanmar and Lao PDR outlines the objectives, strategy and components of this technical cooperation initiative.

- [Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India 2018. Fostering Growth Through Digitalisation](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018

The Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India is a bi-annual publication on regional economic growth, development and regional integration in Emerging Asia. It focuses on the economic conditions of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. It also addresses relevant economic issues in China and India to fully reflect economic developments in the region. Each edition of the Outlook comprises four main parts, each highlighting a particular dimension of recent economic developments in the region. The first part presents the regional economic monitor, depicting the economic outlook and macroeconomic challenges in the region. The second part takes stock of recent progress made in key aspects of regional integration. The third part consists of a special thematic chapter addressing a major issue facing the region. The 2018 edition focuses on fostering growth through digitalisation. And the fourth part includes structural policy country notes offering country-specific reviews and recommendations.

- [National Social Protection Fund: The Multi-Pillar Pension Fund](#), Mario Arturo Ruiz Estrada, Evangelos Koutronas, Donghyun Park, Norma Mansor, SSRC Working Paper Series No. 2018-1, January 2018

This paper formulates a comprehensive pension fund framework for enhancing system capacity to manage economic and social risks. The National Social Protection Fund (NSPF) attempts to quantify informal sector, incorporated under a unified national protection scheme. The new protection mechanism consists of two sub funds: the National Integral Social Security Fund (NISSF) and the National Education Fund (NEF). NISSF encompasses all economically active Malaysian population, including the informal workforce, whereas the NEF captures the economically inactive young population. Simulation findings indicate that education, health and income redistribution can improve the livelihood of the vulnerable population groups in Malaysia.

- [World Bank East Asia And Pacific Economic Update April 2018: Enhancing Potential](#), World Bank Group, April 2018

Developing EAP grew slightly faster than anticipated in 2017. The growth of regional GDP excluding China is forecast to remain stable in 2018, while China's GDP growth is expected to moderate as the economy keeps rebalancing. Major downside risks include volatility associated with faster than expected monetary policy tightening in advanced economies and a rising threat of trade restrictions. Developing EAP countries would need to get ready to respond to increasing interest rates and find ways to raise potential growth in the medium run. Specifically, amid the rising risk of protectionism and changes in the global manufacturing landscape, countries should continue to enhance trade facilitation and integration, increase the effectiveness of schools and education systems, and upgrade capabilities to ensure that workers and managers have necessary skills. To provide economic security to the population, policies should focus on strengthening social assistance and insurance programs, and increasing resilience to systemic shocks.

- [Implementing Emergency Cash Transfers: The Philippine Experience in Response to the 2016/17 Disasters](#), Pablo Acosta, Pam Palma, Joedie Perez, Rashiel Velarde, World Bank Social Protection Policy Note; no. 15, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, May 2018

Around the globe, there is an unending cycle of producing innovative policies that are relevant and responsive to today's complex problems of disaster risk reduction and mitigation. A lot of evidence is pointing to the shifting paradigm in responding to emergencies. Foremost among them is

the growing acceptance of cash transfers as a response tool to disasters. The Philippines is not oblivious to this developing paradigm. The Philippines is considered to have one of the most advanced social protection (SP) systems in the East Asia Pacific region. These SP systems are designed to help poor households manage risk and shocks. Currently, there are different types of cash transfers being used by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) programs. These include: (1) the Pantawid Pamilya conditional cash transfer (CCT) program; (2) the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) using cash-for-work; and, (3) the National Community Driven Development program (NCDD). These programs use various modalities and mechanism for cash transfers in different stages of the post-disaster timeline. However, the SP element of DSWD's disaster risk management and response interventions can be significantly improved especially if to be used as a response tool during disasters.

- [The Philippines Sustainable Livelihood Program: Providing and expanding access to employment and livelihood opportunities](#), Pablo A. Acosta and Jorge Avalos, World Bank Social Protection Policy Note; no. 13, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, May 2018

The Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development has taken the lead in providing opportunities for income generating activities/livelihood development through the implementation of the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) since 2011, with the objective to reduce poverty and inequality by generating employment among poor households and by moving highly vulnerable households into sustainable livelihoods and toward economic stability. This note describes the design and core processes of the SLP and reflects on the opportunities that the program has to improve and complement other Social Protection programs to make an impact on households' welfare, and provides recommendations to maximize its impact.

Upcoming Conferences & Important Dates

- [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#): 3 December 2018
The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992, by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3. It aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

This year's theme focuses on empowering persons with disabilities for an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda pledges to "leave



no one behind". Persons with disabilities, as both beneficiaries and agents of change, can fast track the process towards inclusive and sustainable development and promote resilient society for all, including in the context of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, and urban development.

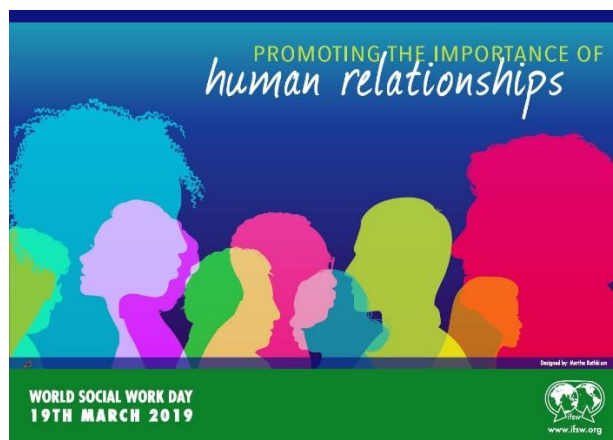
- [Human Rights Day](#): 10 December 2018
Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December – the day the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year, Human Rights Day marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a milestone document that proclaimed the inalienable rights which everyone is inherently entitled to as a human being -- regardless of race, color, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. It is the most translated document in the world, available in more than 500 languages.
- [World Day of Social Justice](#): 20 February 2019
Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.

For the United Nations, the pursuit of social justice for all is at the core of our global mission to promote development and human dignity. The adoption by the International Labour Organization of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization is just one recent example of the UN system's commitment to social justice. The Declaration focuses on guaranteeing fair outcomes for all through employment, social protection, social dialogue, and fundamental principles and rights at work.

- [World Social Work Day](#): 19 March 2019
The 2019 world social work day highlights 'Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships'. World Social Work Day is on the 19th March 2019. It is the key day in the year that social workers worldwide stand together to celebrate the achievements of the profession and take the theme message into their communities, workplaces and to their governments to raise awareness of the social work contributions and need for further action.

This year's theme focuses on the social relationships between people's essential relationships with each other, their environments and their futures.

The UN offices in New York and Geneva, as well as UNESCAP in Bangkok will host events in the context of the World Social Work day. You can find more information [here](#).



- [World Day against Trafficking in Persons](#): 30 July 2019
Human trafficking is a crime that exploits women, children and men for numerous purposes including forced labor and sex. The International Labour Organization estimates that 21 million people are victims of forced labor globally. This estimate also includes victims of human trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation. While it is not known how many of these victims were trafficked, the estimate implies that currently, there are millions of trafficking in persons victims in the world.

In September 2015, the world adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and embraced goals and targets on trafficking in persons. These goals call for an end to trafficking and violence against children; as well as the need for measures against human trafficking, and they strive for the elimination of all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls.

Another important development is the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which produced the groundbreaking New York Declaration. Of the nineteen commitments adopted by countries in the Declaration, three are dedicated to concrete action against the crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

- The [2019 Asia-Pacific Regional Social Work Conference](#): Social Work Partnerships Towards An Equal Society: September 18, 2019 - September 20, 2019

The 25th Asia-Pacific Joint Regional Social Work Conference (2019) will be held at Bengaluru, Karnataka State, India, between 18th and 20th of September 2019. A pre-conference seminar will also be held on 17th September.



This is a biennial Joint Regional Conference of International Federation of Social Workers – Asia Pacific (IFAP) and Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE) and hosted by INPSWA – India Network of Professional Social Workers’ Associations in collaboration with the Dept. of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS, and Dept. of Social Work, Christ (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru.

The Asia-Pacific Joint Regional Social Work Conference is held every two years in Asia-Pacific countries and is recognized as the most significant international conference in the area of Social Work Education and Practice in the region. In 2019 more than 1000 professional Social Work educators, practitioners, policymakers, research scholars and students from around 30 countries in Asia-Pacific region and from around the world are expected to converge at Bengaluru, India, to exchange and share experiences, ideas, challenges, methods and successful innovative interventions during this Regional Joint Conference on Social Work.

- [International Day of Older Persons](#): 1 October 2019
Almost 700 million people are now over the age of 60. By 2050, 2 billion people, over 20 per cent of the world’s population, will be 60 or older. The increase in the number of older people will be the greatest and the most rapid in the developing world, with Asia as the region with the largest number of older persons, and Africa facing the largest proportionate growth. With this in mind, enhanced attention to the particular needs and challenges faced by many older people is clearly required. Just as important, however, is the essential contribution the majority of older men and women can continue to make to the functioning of society if adequate guarantees are in place. Human rights lie at the core of all efforts in this regard.

Living up to the Secretary-General’s guiding principle of “Leaving No-One Behind” necessitates the understanding that demography matters for sustainable development and that population dynamics will shape the key developmental challenges that the world is confronting in the 21st century. If our ambition is to “Build the Future We Want”, we must address the population over 60 which is expected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030.

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Please distribute this newsletter as widely as possible.

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ANNEX A: Recommendations of the Preparatory NGO Meeting of the 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum for Social Welfare and Development



**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREPARATORY NGO MEETING
OF THE 13TH ASEAN GO-NGO FORUM FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND
DEVELOPMENT**

“Realising the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025:
Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”

20 November 2018, Singapore

We, the participants of the Preparatory NGO Meeting of the 13th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum for Social Welfare and Development, organized by ICSW South East Asia and the Pacific and held in Singapore on 20th of November 2018, from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand;

Acknowledge the importance of the GO-NGO Forum which is aimed at strengthening and improving the collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and providing opportunities for dialogue on key regional social welfare and development issues;

Note the importance of NGOs contributing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and ASEAN Vision;

Acknowledge ASEAN’s commitment and work done to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities;

Note existing regional instruments advancing the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities such as the Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN community, the Mobilization Framework of the ASEAN Decade of Persons with Disabilities, ASEAN Community Vision 2025, and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025;

Welcome the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which brings together the three pillars of ASEAN and illustrates how these pillars work towards the same goal, and demonstrates ASEAN's continued commitment to the promotion of inclusion and mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities;

Acknowledge the contributions of and consultations with governments, organizations of persons with disabilities, other key stakeholders, and ASEAN sectoral bodies when developing the Enabling Masterplan;

Encourage continued engagement with these key stakeholders in the implementation and evaluation of the Enabling Masterplan;

Encourage engagement in particular with civil society and NGOs concerned with the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities;

Welcome the participation of civil society organizations, and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) specifically, in monitoring and evaluating the Enabling Masterplan to ensure effective implementation;

Welcome capacity-building activities for persons with disabilities, DPOs, government officials, civil society organizations and other stakeholders;

Agree on the need to further strengthen the implementation of the Enabling Masterplan through the following actions targeting (i) ASEAN, (ii) NGOs & DPOs, and (iii) governments:

ASEAN

1. Develop clear and specific targets and indicators for the actions points in the Enabling Masterplan in which persons with disabilities having access to services i.e. educational, medical, occupational, social;
2. Include civil society and NGOs, in particular DPOs, to follow up on the issues of mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities and any other engagements benefiting persons with disabilities;
3. Encourage AICHR to have persons with disabilities represented in its committees;
4. Encourage dialogue on international standards of disability classification;
5. Organize a meeting specifically for Civil Society Organizations: NGOs and DPOs concerned with the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, to encourage continued dialogue and active engagement on the promotion and protection of persons with disabilities.



NGOs/DPOs

1. Disseminate the Enabling Masterplan to other organizations, raise awareness and advocate the rights of persons with disabilities;
2. Ensure that work plans are in line with the Enabling Masterplan;
3. Prioritize action points of the Enabling Masterplan and develop a plan to implement those action points;
4. Participate in capacity-building activities to enhance knowledge, experience, skills and tools on social welfare and development;
5. Better synergy among DPOs to strengthen resources and capacities for the implementation of the Master Plan.

Governments

1. Include civil society, NGOs and DPOs in particular organizations of persons with disabilities, to follow up on mainstreaming persons with disabilities and any other engagements benefiting persons with disabilities;
2. Support NGOs and DPOs with capacity-building activities by providing funding and setting up support programs;
3. Outsource services to include persons with disabilities or organizations of persons with disabilities;
4. Adopt measures in areas such as education, occupation, social services, infrastructure which integrate persons with disabilities and those without disabilities.

ANNEX B: Summary of Section 6.4. Monitoring progress in social protection: Regional trends – Asia and the Pacific, the World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, International Labour Organization

6. Monitoring progress in social protection: Regional trends

6.4. Asia and the Pacific

6.4.1 Regional social protection challenges and priorities

Economic growth and poverty reduction have underscored recent decades in the Asia and Pacific region. The decades-long development model dominating the region prioritized economic growth at the expense of redistributive policies. This has reduced the fiscal space for social expenditure; consequently, a large share of the population was denied the right to social protection.

Social protection has gained momentum in the regional development agenda. There is an emerging consensus on the positive link between social protection and inclusive economic growth. Despite regional diversity, the general trend across the region is positive. The rapid extension of legal social protection coverage, especially to the self-employed and workers in the informal economy, together with the effective introduction of contributory and non-contributory schemes for these workers and their families, have been crucial features of this trend.

Growth is projected to reach 5.5 per cent in 2017 and 5.4 per cent in 2018 in the Asia and Pacific region. The longer-term challenge lies in sustaining rapid growth while ensuring greater inclusion, reducing precariousness of employment, increasing productivity and addressing the consequences of rapid population ageing.

Employment is becoming increasingly precarious, with a rise in non-standard forms of employment. Informal employment remains high. Informal economy workers have no or only very limited access to basic social security coverage. In many countries in Asia, social protection benefits accrue to those working in the formal sector who could contribute to social insurance, and to poor households that have some access to social assistance. A large number of households (the so-called missing middle) are covered by neither social insurance nor social assistance. This missing middle usually works in the informal economy, and is a vulnerable group in urgent need of social protection support.

Ageing has become a main issue in the region. Most countries in Asia and the Pacific are ageing before instating robust social protection systems. This puts additional pressure on families as well as additional financial strain on the pension systems. In several countries immigration already plays an important role in softening the impact of ageing.

Gender gaps in employment persist, as shown by the low participation rates for women compared to men. In addition, women are more represented in vulnerable forms of work, particularly unpaid family work.

Although several countries have made some progress in achieving a basic level of income security and medical care for all citizens, decision-makers face several crucial challenges, such as closing the coverage gap, improving

governance of social protection schemes, and creating the necessary fiscal space for social protection policies.

Migrant workers working in the formal sector are legally covered by existing national social security systems, but may face challenges in exercising their rights to benefits.

6.4.2 Effective social protection coverage: monitoring SDG indicator 1.3.1 in Asia and the Pacific

In Asia and the Pacific, 38.9 per cent of the total population has effective access to at least one area of social protection. One of the most notable characteristics of the region is a dispersion in the current state of social protection coverage. The region includes countries that are still in the early stages of building their social protection systems, and countries that already have comprehensive systems in place.

Child and family benefits

Social protection coverage for children in the region is relatively low. Some countries, such as Australia and Mongolia, stand out as offering universal social protection coverage. Other countries, such as Indonesia, Philippines and Timor Leste, have established conditional cash transfer programmes targeting families with children, but coverage levels are relatively low. Thailand combines a child allowance as part of social insurance. In countries such as Lao PDR or Cambodia, cash benefits for families with children are still limited to some small-scale pilots, despite their positive developmental impacts. Several countries in the region do not provide for any family or child benefits anchored in legislation.

Maternity protection

Social protection for maternity remains a challenge. On average, countries in the region cover only one-third of women giving birth for cash maternity benefits. More remarkably, some of the countries with high fertility rates face a significant gap to close by 2030. Low levels of coverage are found in countries where maternity protection is limited to workers in the formal economy. Some countries have been extending social protection coverage to women in the informal sector through cash transfers at the time of pregnancy and birth. In a number of countries, maternity protection remains the sole responsibility of employers, who finance maternity leave and health-care costs linked to the pregnancy and delivery. Paternity protection is expanding.

Unemployment support

The percentage of the unemployed that benefit from unemployment cash benefits is still relatively low when compared to other contingencies. This situation can in part be explained by the fact that many countries in the region have not prioritized the launch of unemployment benefits.

Unemployment cash benefits are mostly limited to wage workers in the formal economy which, in a region with high predominance of informal employment, affects coverage levels. Some countries, particularly in Southern Asia, have opted to set up minimum employment guarantee schemes. Although unemployment benefits are one of the less established social security areas in

the region, the introduction of unemployment insurance schemes is gaining momentum.

Disability benefits

Effective coverage for disability benefits is highly diverse across the region, with Australia and Mongolia achieving 100 per cent coverage of persons with severe disabilities, New Zealand 80 per cent and Japan 56 per cent. However, in Cambodia, India, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam, fewer than one in ten persons with severe disabilities are covered.

Old-age pensions

Old age is one of the contingencies with higher coverage in the region, yet the numbers hide significant disparities between countries. There is a gradual but positive trend in the region in the implementation of social pensions. Even countries with less developed social protection systems are exploring the launch of tax-based universal pensions. Other elements that deserve to be highlighted are the solutions that some countries have put in place to integrate under the same scheme a contributory and tax-based approach, particularly when it comes to ensuring the income security of those in the rural and informal economy. With regard to contributory schemes, the region also displays heterogeneity. In general, defined benefit schemes prevail, but in a small number of countries the main component of the system is a form of defined contribution scheme organized under national provident funds, an old legacy from colonial times.

Social assistance

In view of the relatively limited social insurance coverage in many Asian countries, social assistance benefits potentially play an important role in protecting those who are not covered by contributory mechanisms and are therefore vulnerable to social risks. Yet social assistance coverage for vulnerable populations is uneven across the region. Australia delivers social assistance benefits to the largest proportion of vulnerable populations (53 per cent), followed by Mongolia (35 per cent). Bangladesh, with the lowest coverage (4 per cent), and the rest of the countries leave more than two-thirds of vulnerable populations without access to any social assistance benefits. Extending social protection floors is a critical priority for the region.

6.4.3 Trends in social protection expenditure excluding health

The level of social protection expenditure varies markedly between countries in the region. Although the mean social protection expenditure in Asia and the Pacific is still as low as 7.4 per cent of GDP, in general the regional trend in the recent past has been positive. Indeed, the growing interest in social protection observed in recent decades in several countries has resulted in greater public investment, with the majority of countries expanding the allocation of public resources to social protection. Thailand and China constitute global examples of quick expansion of social protection coverage. Other countries that have more than doubled their public expenditure in social protection in the last 20 years, are the Republic of Korea, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore and Western Samoa.

The opposite trend has been observed in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Pakistan, where the percentage of GDP allocated to social protection has been on a gradual decline since 2000.

The reduction of social subsidies and cuts/caps to the public sector wage bill dominate the list of austerity measures for Eastern Asia and Oceania. Subsidy reform is being considered in countries such as Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Timor Leste.

Traditionally, many Asian governments creatively identified new sources of fiscal space to extend social protection coverage and benefits.

While a significant part of the extension of social protection in Asia is likely to result from contributions, governments need to continue exploring new ways to finance social assistance. A number of countries in the region have significant reserves and still low levels of taxation, which should be explored together with other options to expand fiscal space. With regard to the composition of social protection expenditure, higher levels of expenditure are often associated with social protection for older persons.

6.4.4 Regional outlook

Looking at the existing regional social protection deficits and key challenges, it is clear that it will only be possible to reach the objectives defined under the SDGs if the countries in the Asia and the Pacific region intensify their efforts to extend social protection.

Some actions countries need to focus on are:

- Extend social protection to those in the informal economy by a mix of contributory and non-contributory schemes with a view to achieving universal coverage.
- Develop social protection floors for those who cannot work, such as children, mothers with newborns, persons with disabilities, older persons and those who are poor and out of work.
- Increase the aggregate level of public expenditure on social protection to extend social protection coverage.
- Strengthen taxation systems for financing social protection and explore innovative ways to expand fiscal space for social protection.