



Steps to Inclusive Social Protection Systems



*The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.**

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Steps to Inclusive Social Protection Systems

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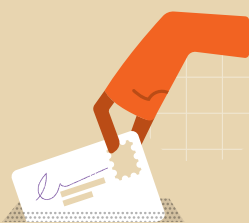
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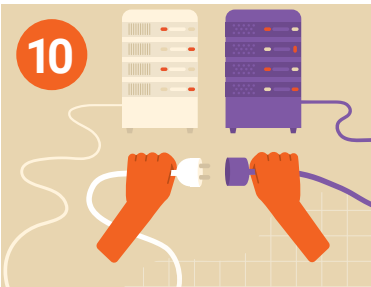
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Introduction

Governments have increasingly recognized social protection as a key policy instrument to build a more productive, protected and healthy population in Asia and the Pacific. In 2020, ESCAP member States endorsed the regional ESCAP Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP Action Plan), which serves as a shared vision, strategy and platform for promoting partnership and peer learning and identifying needs for capacity development. At the national level, the ESCAP Action Plan calls on countries to establish an intermediate target of social protection coverage by 2025, and then measure progress towards achieving universal coverage by 2030. To achieve this objective, the ESCAP Action Plan lays out 12 measures to be taken at the national level.

Social protection has been identified as an enabler for implementing the 2030 Agenda. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and deliver on the commitments contained therein, most countries in the region need to step up their efforts to build sustainable and reliable social protection systems. For this purpose, the ESCAP Action Plan and its national actions will be helpful for countries in furthering their inclusive social protection agenda.

To support member States in the implementation of this first ever regional Action Plan, ESCAP has been mandated to develop a regional platform to facilitate peer learning and enhance the knowledge and awareness of member States to implement the ESCAP Action Plan.

The Steps to Inclusive Social Protection Systems sets out 12 milestones for developing an integrated and sustainable social protection system, aligned with the ESCAP Action Plan,¹ that has the buy-in of key actors, guarantees the right to social protection for all, addresses gaps in current social protection systems, identifies solutions to support sustainable financing, removes inefficiencies and fragmentation in delivery and administration, and responds to shocks more efficiently and effectively.

¹ For the purpose of this guide, social protection, as defined by the ESCAP Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific, refers to nationally defined policies and schemes that provide equitable access to all people and protect them throughout their lives against poverty and risks to their livelihoods and wellbeing. This protection can be provided through a range of mechanisms, including cash or in-kind benefits, contributory or non-contributory schemes to enhance human capital, productive assets and access to jobs. It includes, but is not limited to, child benefits; benefits and support for people of working age in case of maternity, disability, work injury or unemployment; and old-age pensions.

Define a clear vision for social protection



What and why

Governments in Asia and the Pacific should agree on national visions for social protection that make medium- and long-term ambitions clear to all. Without a clear vision across government ministries, key actors and the public, social protection systems risk becoming fragmented and insufficiently funded, with significant coverage gaps and too low benefit levels as a result. At the regional level, ESCAP member States adopted the *ESCAP Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, which serves as a shared vision and platform for the region to achieve inclusive, comprehensive and adequate social protection for all.

How

When creating a vision for social protection, the process is vital. From the outset, it is essential to seize the process as an opportunity to **generate public support and political will**. With clear incentives and a shared understanding of the impacts of social protection, governments will be better positioned to **assess what is in place** and then **agree on a way forward**. Responsibility for this process should be located at the Prime Minister's or Coordination Ministry's Office and consult representation from diverse groups to ensure that needs and views are reflected in the vision.

GENERATE PUBLIC SUPPORT AND POLITICAL WILL

Policymakers have long viewed social protection as a policy tool for poverty reduction. Reducing its utility to this one important function will leave governments short-handed when it comes to the larger purpose and impact of social protection, including the broad public support it can achieve. Policymakers can most effectively generate public support for social protection when it is upheld as a human right for all ([Milestone 2](#)) and designed as an individual entitlement that everyone can access and benefit from throughout their lives ([Milestone 3](#)).

Political will can be generated through a shared understanding of the benefits social protection has on society through its potential to achieve diverse development goals. Unleashing this potential will require allies across government, academia and civil society to understand social protection as:

FIGURE 1-1 Virtuous circle of investing in good quality public services, leading to a strong social contract



Source: Development Pathways.

- **An indispensable key to unlock the many benefits of a strong social contract.** When delivered in a fair and equitable manner, social protection can make major contributions to strengthening the social contract between citizens and the State, which is essential for State-building. When women and men receive tangible support from their government, they are more likely to trust their government. They are also more likely to fulfill mutual obligations and contribute back to their governments through, for example, taxes. The equitable redistribution of national wealth also contributes to building solidarity within communities and more peaceful societies. This, in turn, builds a State that is trusted and better positioned to provide quality public services (see Figure 1-1).ⁱ
- **A pillar for equitable economic growth and decent work creation.** Inclusive social protection supports access to nutrition, educationⁱⁱ and healthcare for all throughout people's lives. It is an investment in human capital and is essential for building a skilled and productive labour force that is competitive in a globalized economy. Social protection also stimulates demand and consumption,² creating markets for small enterprises, with a multiplier effect for cash entering local economies.³ It also provides women and men with a foundation to invest in new sources of income and contributes to greater economic stability that attracts markets for local and foreign investors. Furthermore, contributory schemes boost decent work opportunities.

2 For example, in Cambodia a universal child benefit for all children up to their 18th birthday, valued at only 4 per cent of GDP per capita, and cost only 1.5 per cent of GDP, would increase consumption by 2 per cent on average, and by 5 per cent among households in the lowest wealth decile. Source: author's own calculation using <https://www.socialprotection-toolbox.org/simulator>.

3 In 2009 when the Government of the United States of America implemented a stimulus package that included investing in social protection, expanding food stamps resulted in a multiplier effect of 1.7 while the extension of unemployment benefits had a multiplier effect of 1.6. Source: Zandi, M. 2009. The Economic Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. https://www.economy.com/mark-zandi/documents/Economic_Stimulus_House_Plan_012109.pdf Alderman, H. and Yemtsov, R. (2012). Productive Role of Safety Nets [Discussion Paper]. No. 1203, Social Protection & Labor Series. The World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/13551/676090NWP012030Box367885B00PUBLIC0.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- **A strong foundation to respond to different shocks.** Through directly supporting aggregate demand, social protection acts as an economic stabilizer, cushioning the impact of various shocks. Having inclusive social protection systems in place prior to a crisis leaves governments with more options and better prepared to respond quickly by scaling up what is already in place.ⁱⁱⁱ It also helps people to recover faster from a shock by protecting them from losing productive assets or falling into negative coping mechanisms.
- **An automatic stabilizer to life disruptions.** When comprehensive contributory and non-contributory schemes are in place, they automatically provide income or in-kind support to individuals that suddenly fall sick, have an injury or disability, lose a job, or simply have a child or become old. Schemes for these and other life situations protect households from the insecurity and vulnerability that could otherwise force families to sell assets or take children out of school. By providing a predictable and regular source of income, social protection also allows households and individuals to take more risks to grow and expand their livelihoods.
- **An effective tool to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and gender equality.** When inclusive in design, social protection reduces poverty by putting cash directly in people's pockets. When provided as an entitlement on an inclusive basis, social protection promotes social cohesion^{iv} and the inclusion and empowerment of women^v, single parents, as well as minorities and people who face diverse and persistent forms of exclusion or discrimination, including migrants,^{vi} ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and refugees.

ASSESS WHAT IS IN PLACE

With a shared understanding of the benefits that social protection can bring to society to achieve diverse Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), governments will be in a position to more consultatively and comprehensively identify challenges that address and articulate new policies.

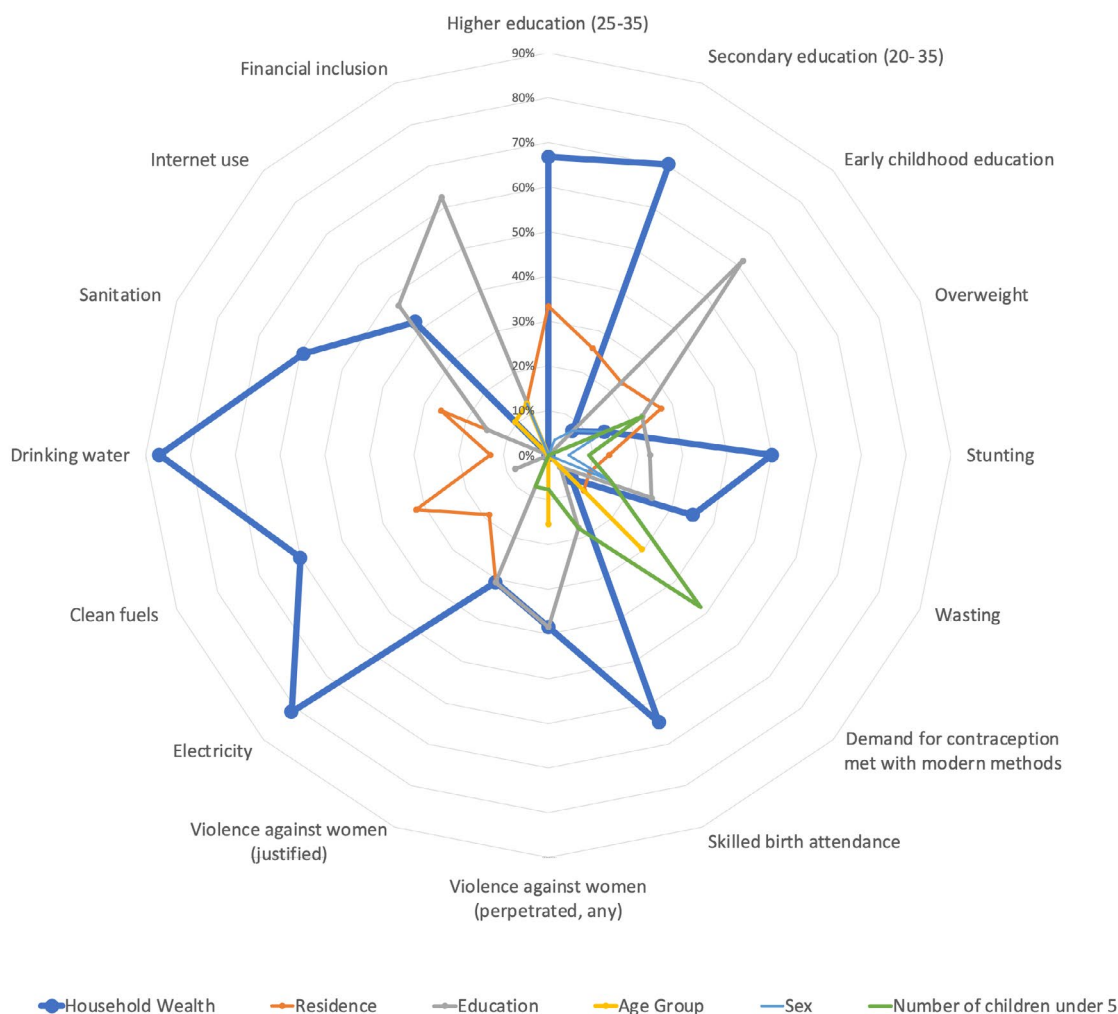
Address key challenges. This requires governments to review national development plans and progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Having a clear understanding of social protection as a multifaceted policy tool requires policymakers to look broadly at the types of challenges social protection can help address, beyond poverty reduction. As such, governments should engage in broad consultation with relevant line ministries and civil society to take stock of the status of the identified challenges and how these interact with the unique needs and circumstances of people.

Identify ways to close social protection gaps. This requires governments to identify population groups being left behind and why. ESCAP analysis uses data from Demographic Household Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) to identify which groups are left furthest behind with regard to accessing a range of basic opportunities outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Data from 27 countries reveal that household wealth is either the most, or one of the most, important circumstance among groups left furthest behind in almost all opportunities (see Figure 1-2). Though household wealth, a proxy for income, is an overshadowing circumstance, the data also highlight the interlinkages with other circumstances across the life cycle, such as educational attainment, or the number of children in a household. This shows the importance social protection can play for a wider range of basic services and opportunities, in addition to normal income-related challenges. Interventions therefore should not focus on poverty alleviation alone, but on addressing vulnerability across the life cycle. Governments should also identify inclusion and exclusion errors in existing benefit schemes to gauge their effectiveness in providing adequate support, while responding to international human rights obligations ([Milestone 2](#)).

AGREE ON THE WAY FORWARD

Once the above challenges and gaps have been identified, governments must reach agreements on prioritized interventions and a vision to incrementally build sustainable social protection systems. This vision should be integrated into national development strategies and social protection sectoral plans across government, to ensure policy coherence and coordination.

FIGURE 1-2 Identifying dominant circumstances of those left furthest behind in accessing 16 key opportunities



Source: ESCAP calculations, using data from the latest DHS and MICS surveys for 27 countries and 16 indicators in Asia and the Pacific.
 Note: The percentage rate shown in this radar graph indicates the share of times that this specific circumstance (e.g., household wealth) contributed the most to inequality (splits in CART analysis), based on a calculated measure of variable importance of the model. The higher the share, the more times this specific circumstance is responsible for the gaps in access to an opportunity/prevalence of a barrier, across the 27 countries studied.

Many countries tend to first focus on providing regular, predictable, and reliable entitlements to older persons and persons with disabilities following the life cycle approach outlined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). Building a multi-tiered social protection system with a mix of contributory and non-contributory schemes often increases coverage, benefit adequacy and sustainable financing (Milestone 4).

Ensuring accountability for the shared vision requires governments to document phased actions in measurable steps that can be monitored over time. These steps should be linked to achievable national targets that are based on country contexts within the indicator framework of SDG 1.3, with a focus on achieving full social protection coverage of the entire population by 2030. For this purpose, ESCAP member States adopted this ambition through Action (h) of the ESCAP Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific.



Uphold the right to social protection for all

What and why

As laid out in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, governments should ensure the right to social protection for all without discrimination, including by adopting necessary legislative, regulatory, administrative, and other measures to this end. As such, governments should enshrine and clearly define social protection in national legal frameworks. Specific legal provisions should ensure the right of all to social protection through clearly defining effective and adequate protection from life cycle risks and contingencies. A comprehensive legal framework is the basis for realizing the right to social protection for all, as articulated in numerous international human rights instruments – most prominently in Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).⁴

How

EMBED RIGHTS IN CONSTITUTION

Governments should embed the right to social protection for all in their national constitutions to provide an enabling environment for future expansion of coverage. Constitutional provisions should clearly outline and define the commitment, responsibility and duty by the State to provide social protection to all, as well as the right of all individuals to social protection. By grounding social protection in the constitution, individuals have recourse to legal enforcement.^{vii} It also provides a clear framework to establish, replace and amend specific schemes.

PROVIDE A CLEAR INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

National legal frameworks should provide a clear institutional structure of the schemes, including governance and obligations of all involved actors. Defining various roles and responsibilities of all actors is particularly important for contributory schemes that require representatives of workers, employers and government organizations to agree on the size of their respective contributions.^{viii} Commitments to provide adequate resources to social protection that are cemented by law safeguard them from internal and external political whims and changes. Legislation governing social protection schemes should also provide specific provisions on, for example, eligibility, benefit levels, indexation, grievance and redressal mechanisms, as well as on their administration and governance.^{ix}

PROMOTE A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

National legal frameworks based on human rights considerations ensure more inclusive design and implementation. Legislation should be drafted to ensure **equality and non-discrimination** of the right to social protection for all, for example, by stipulating communication with the public and including minority languages. Legal provisions should ensure that social protection systems are delivered in a **transparent and accountable** manner. This can include stipulating the right of individuals and organizations to seek, receive and impart information about the social protection scheme in a simple, accessible and rapid manner. Legislation should also support the establishment of robust and accessible complaints procedures and appeal mechanisms to ensure the accountability of all duty bearers.^{x, xi}

⁴ The right to social security is also enshrined in the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Article 11; the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 26; The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 28; and the Convention for the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families (CMW), Article 27. It also appears in sub-regional human rights instruments (the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Article 30), and in several Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), in particular Convention No. 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security.

Design inclusive social protection schemes for all throughout life



What and why

The ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific* calls on governments to progressively design and realize comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems for all that enable every person to access social protection at adequate benefit levels. As such, governments should design inclusive systems that use one integrated system rather than separate, disconnected components.

How

ESTABLISH A SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOOR

Establish a social protection floor tailored to national circumstances and level of development that reflects the country's vision for social protection (see [Milestone 1](#)).^{xii} A social protection floor is a nationally defined set of basic income security schemes that prevent people from experiencing poverty, vulnerability and loss of income, as a result of normal life contingencies.⁵

ENSURE THE SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOOR TAKES A LIFE CYCLE APPROACH

At the core of the social protection floor is the concept of inclusive life cycle social protection systems for all. Building a social protection floor requires governments to provide income security throughout the life cycle, with a focus on:

- Basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services, with support to cover additional expenses of life for children with disabilities;
- Basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, particularly in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity/paternity, work injury, chronic illness and disability; and
- Basic income security for older persons, with support to cover additional expenses of life for older persons with disabilities.

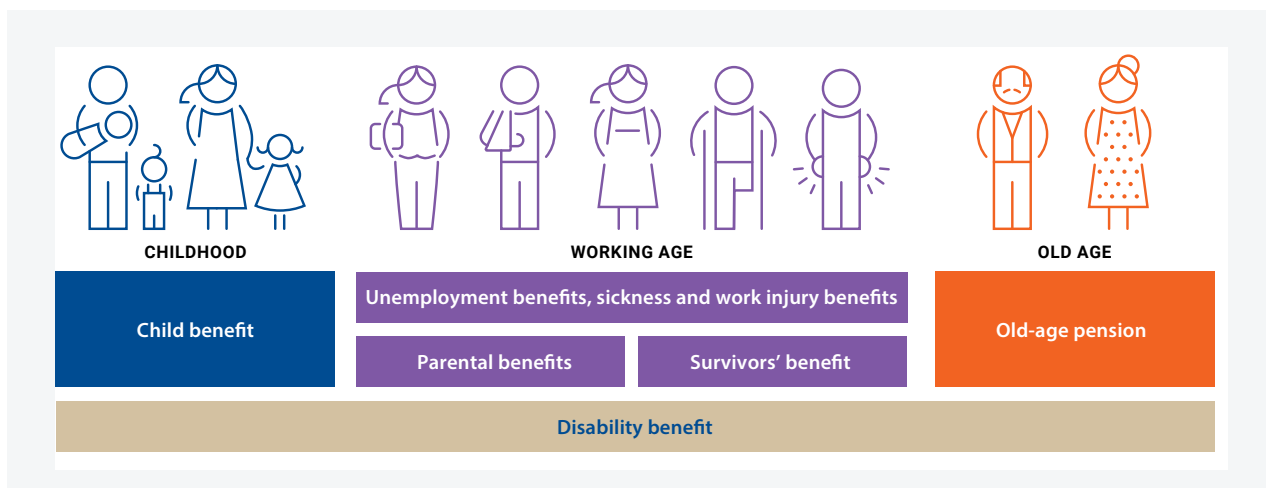
A system of carefully designed schemes that address key risks throughout the life cycle can keep people out of poverty throughout their life if coverage is universal and benefit levels are adequate.

5 The concept of the "social protection floor" is enshrined in the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation of 2012 (No. 202).

ENSURE UNIVERSAL COVERAGE BY DESIGN

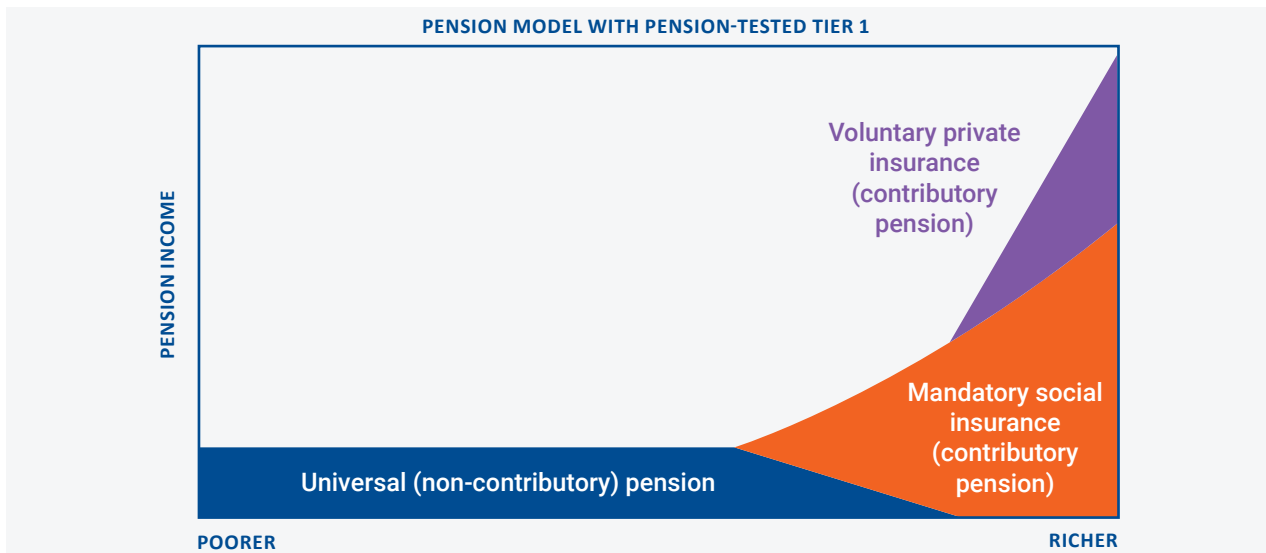
A system of life cycle schemes (see Figure 3-1), including universal child benefits, parental benefits, unemployment benefits, disability benefits, work injury and old age pensions can adequately ensure protection for all women, men, girls, and boys throughout their life.

FIGURE 3-1 **Ideal and inclusive life cycle social protection system**



Through this life cycle approach, each scheme forms an important piece of a universal social protection system that will eventually cover all risks and contingencies throughout life. This is best achieved through a combination of non-contributory (often financed through general tax revenues) and contributory (often financed through direct contributions from employees and employers) schemes that together ensure universal coverage by design. Most modern, comprehensive systems exhibit this two-pronged design. In high- or middle-income countries, non-contributory schemes often consist of child, maternity, disability and old-age benefits, complemented by a range of contributory schemes for working age adults, such as unemployment, parental and sickness benefits, work injury and old age pensions, which together achieve universal coverage.^{xiii} For example, old-age pension systems can ensure that those who were unable to work, or worked in the informal sector, have access to a minimum non-contributory pension once they reach old age, while workers in the formal sector who contribute a portion of their income to a social insurance pension scheme can receive a higher pension benefit based on their contribution once they retire. To maintain incentives for enrolment in a contributory scheme, benefits should exceed those from the non-contributory pension. This may be achieved using a benefit-tested approach in which the non-contributory pension is tapered (see Figure 3-2).

FIGURE 3-2 **Blended universal old-age pension**



Source: Development Pathways depiction.

EXPAND SCHEMES INCREMENTALLY TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL COVERAGE

A universal life cycle social protection system can be built incrementally to achieve full coverage and adequate benefit levels. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific, and indeed elsewhere in the world, have chosen to build core life cycle social protection schemes incrementally, often starting with an old-age pension.^{xiv} Over time, governments often continue with additional schemes. For example, while an ideal child benefit option should provide all families with children aged 0-18 with a child benefit, governments can start with children 0-5 years of age, covering the initial years of life when access to nutrition is of highest importance. Eligibility can then easily be shifted to higher ages through keeping children on the scheme as they age.⁶ Increasing the age of eligibility or benefit levels are simple design tweaks that do not require any changes to targeting methodology, or other implementation processes.

DEFINE THE BENEFIT LEVEL AND KEEP IT ADEQUATE

Benefit levels from contributory schemes will depend on the size and duration of the contributions as well as the accrual rates. When defining benefit levels for a specific non-contributory scheme, however, governments should consider the following:

- Nationally defined minimum levels of income can correspond to the monetary value of a set of necessary goods and services, national poverty lines, income,^{xv} or other comparable thresholds established by national law or practice.⁷
- Benefit levels will also vary depending on the life cycle contingency being addressed. For example, the level of a child benefit should be designed to ensure access to nutrition, education and care.
- The level of benefit is also a political decision that factors in the allocation of existing government resources and the political economy of the design of social protection schemes.
- To ensure that benefit levels do not lose their value and relevance over time, a common practice is to index benefits, for example, to the Consumer Price Index, or similar well-established parameters. The level of benefits should be regularly reviewed through a **transparent** monitoring procedure that is established by national laws.^{xvi} Governments should also establish feedback mechanisms, including grievances mechanisms (**Milestone 8**) to inform decisions on benefit level adjustments.

As initial levels of investment in social protection schemes can be limited, it is often important to incrementally expand benefit levels over time, or when additional resources become available.

6 Source: K Kidd, S., Athias, D., and Tran, A. (2021). Universal Child Benefits: Transforming the lives of children across South Asia [Working Paper]. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UNICEF-South-Asia-Paper-2021.pdf>

7 Source: Social Protection Floors Recommendation (R202) (2012).

Mobilize resources for social protection



What and why

As noted in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, governments should allocate sufficient public funds, and increase these levels where required, towards the realization of social protection for all. Methods for mobilizing resources may include more effective tax collection and reprioritization of public expenditures, but also identification of new revenue bases. Finding fiscal space for sufficient investment is a government's responsibility to ensure the right to social protection is upheld.⁸ Without an effective financing framework, investments are likely to remain low, resulting in poor availability and low benefit levels.

How

Finding fiscal space for social protection is a matter of **political will** rather than resources. It is often argued that social protection is not affordable or that government expenditure cuts are needed when facing fiscal constraints. However, evidence shows that this is not the case. When there is political will, sufficient budget will also be made available, even in low-income countries. In Asia and the Pacific, there is no strong link between a country's wealth and its level of investment in social protection.^{xvii} ESCAP and Development Pathways have developed a social protection simulation tool (<https://spot.unescap.org/simulator>) that gives governments a better understanding of the required investment and impact of different benefit designs. Generally, introducing universal old-age, child and disability benefits for a country in the region would have a substantial impact on reducing poverty, boosting consumption and decreasing inequality, and would only require an investment of 2 to 6 per cent of GDP.

REPRIORITIZE PUBLIC SPENDING

Governments should explore options to reprioritize existing public spending in favour of social protection. One approach is to identify and replace high-cost and low-impact investments with investments on social protection. Another option is to reprioritize spending within the social protection sector. For example, small, fragmented schemes that often overlap should be replaced with inclusive life cycle social protection schemes that generate greater socioeconomic impact. This also reduces high administrative costs, often associated with, for example, poverty targeting.

8 See [Milestone 1](#) for a discussion on social protection as a vital investment for establishing and maintaining a strong social contract.

Reprioritization of existing public expenditure can also include the **removal of subsidies** on, for example, fuel, agricultural inputs, or food, many of which disproportionately benefit the more affluent who consume more subsidized goods. Replacing subsidies with inclusive life cycle social protection systems that benefit everyone will not only strengthen solidarity across generations and socioeconomic groups, but would also build trust in the government. This generates wider public support and, in turn, increases political will.

EXPLORE OPTIONS TO INCREASE PUBLIC REVENUE

Governments should also explore strategies to increase tax revenues. Tax policy offers governments many options to increase revenues while also reducing inequality. Implementing a progressive tax policy, that increases marginal income tax rates according to additional income, alongside effective income tax collection can increase revenues and position the government to increase investment in social protection. This can be complemented through taxing wealth, property and capital gains to more effectively address inequality. Such progressive tax policies are considered pro-poor in approach as compared to consumption taxes, such as VAT, which is regressive in approach as low-income families spent a higher share of earnings on basic goods. Governments should also ensure businesses pay their fair share through the effective enforcement and collection of corporate taxes.

Another innovative way for governments to finance social protection is by **tackling illicit financial flows (IFFs)**. Curtailing capital that is illegally earned, transferred, or used has the potential to generate considerable additional resources for socioeconomic investments, including social protection. This may involve traded goods that are mispriced to avoid higher tariffs, wealth funnelled to offshore accounts to evade income taxes and unreported movements of cash.

DESIGN SCHEMES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Contributory social protection schemes, such as social insurance pensions, unemployment benefits and workplace injury benefits, provide an option to finance social protection partially through contributions from current or future beneficiaries. Several types of financing mechanisms exist for contributory schemes, often financed through either: a) a Pay-As-You-Go approach, where benefits are paid from the contributions of current contributors; or b) a funded approach, where contributions are invested to increase the value of the overall fund.

Make entitlements easy to understand



What and why

Governments need to put strategic plans in place to ensure operational functions are supported by strong communications and outreach. Clear communication is critical to ensure the public is aware of existing social protection schemes, understand eligibility criteria, what they may receive and how to engage in the application process. Without effective and accessible communication, the full potential of the scheme will not be realized.

How

Effective communication ensures that a scheme reaches its potential so that those who are eligible become aware of the scheme and how to apply for it. It is equally important that those who are not eligible for the entitlement understand why. Getting communication right also improves operational efficiency, cultural sensitivity and coordination with a range of actors, as illustrated in Figure 5-1.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Managing the expectations of a scheme is essential to avoid mistrust and misunderstandings that lead to complaints and grievances, which negatively impact the social contract. Expectations can be managed most effectively when eligibility is kept as simple as possible and linked to the objectives of the scheme. This includes clear communication with beneficiaries about what they should expect to receive, and when. This is of particular importance for contributory benefits for which benefit levels are based on shared responsibilities between the government, employers and workers. For example, ensuring that future beneficiaries of an old-age pension understand the impact of decisions to retire early, late or defer entitlements is key to manage expectations while also helping people to plan for their future.^{xviii}

COMMUNICATE CLEAR OBJECTIVES

All key actors involved in the development and implementation of a social protection scheme should have the same understanding of its objectives. These objectives should be clearly captured in a communications strategy and shared also with civil society organizations and representatives of diverse communities. A clear and shared understanding of scheme objectives will ensure all parties convey the same messaging on entitlements and service delivery.

DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Defining clear roles and responsibilities within a communications strategy contributes to increased accountability and better coordination and implementation. The communications strategy should be owned by the relevant communications focal point at the lead line ministry or implementing agency. All actors involved in registration, appeals and complaints, information management systems where beneficiary information must be kept up to date (Milestone 10), and payment systems (Milestone 7) will need to clearly understand their role in the communications strategy.

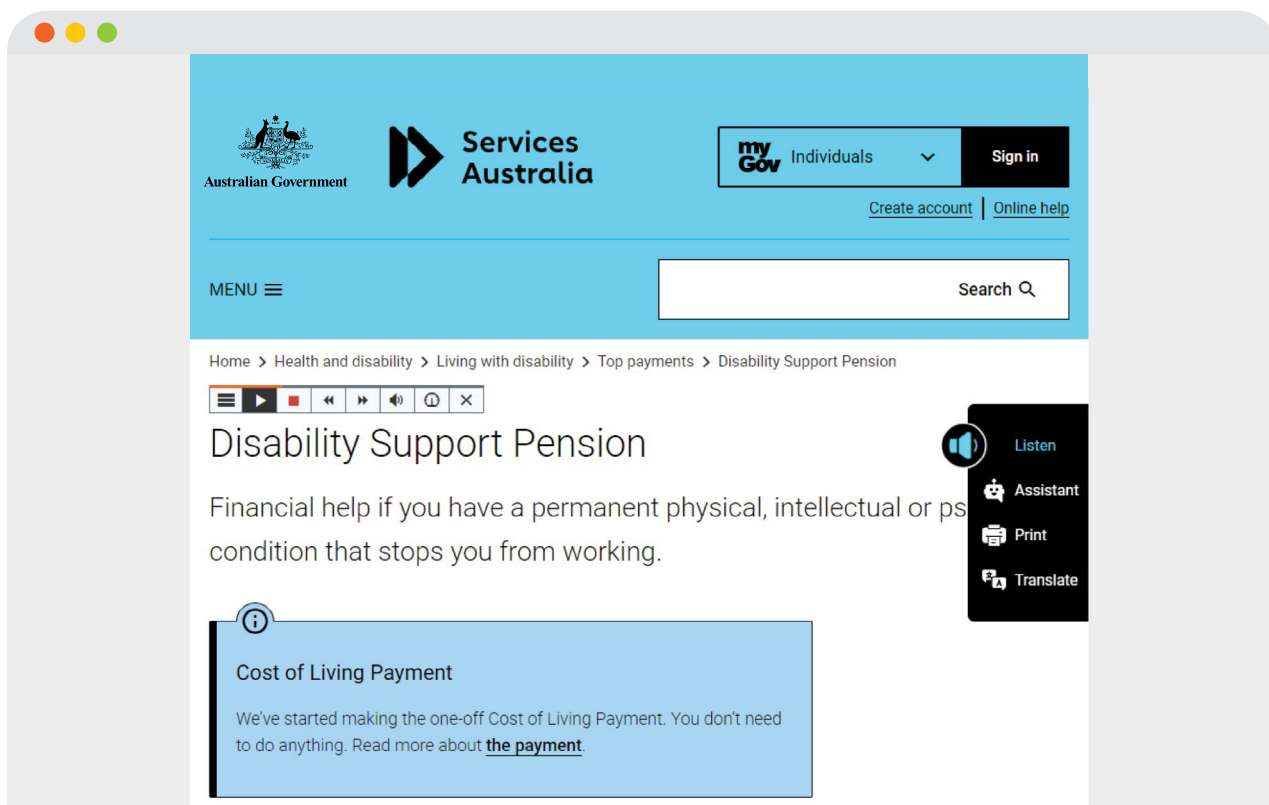
UNDERSTAND THE USERS

For communication strategies to be effective, they need to understand who the users of their information will be. This needs to go beyond those who are eligible to also include agencies and organizations, including civil society organizations, that engage with the intended users. Ensuring that the scheme’s implementers, partners and intended users receive tailored dissemination throughout the operational process is required to support efficiency.

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

Communication activities need to be designed to ensure that people in vulnerable situations can fully access information. This may require accessible and easy-to-understand information for persons with disabilities, while making sure that information is also broadcasted through television, radio, print media and direct engagement with civil society organizations.^{xix} For example, oral messaging through radio and television can better reach those who are visually impaired or cannot read, while using print media and message boards can better target those who are hearing impaired. Visual messaging that limits text, using pictures and symbols to communicate messages can also reduce accessibility barriers for those who might not read. Radio and television messaging can also better reach those with physical disabilities that limit their movement. Ensuring agreed key messages are adapted to local culture and languages, including minority languages, is paramount to ensure that all people are made aware of the scheme.^{xx}

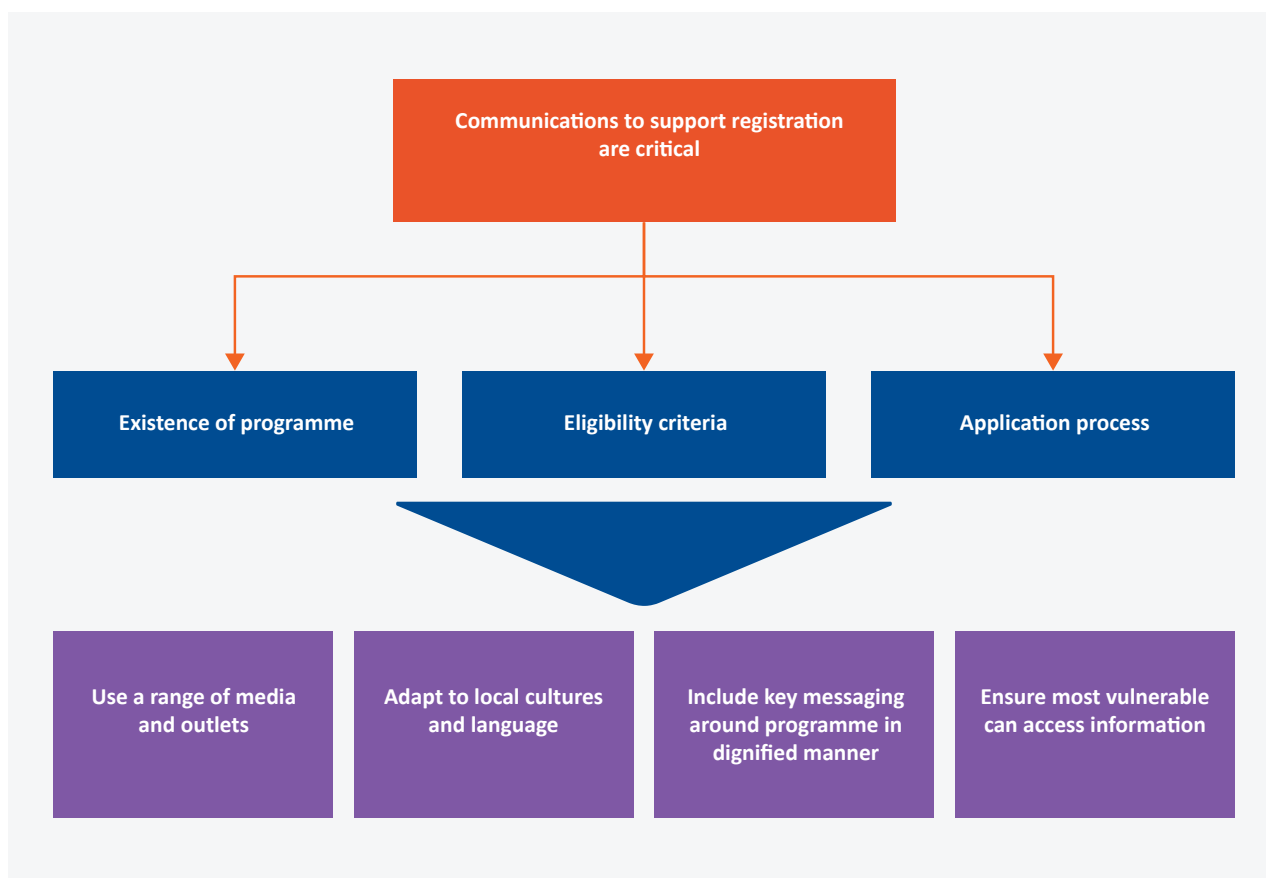
FIGURE 5-1 Ensuring accessible information online



Source: Commonwealth of Australia, represented by Services Australia (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/>), licensed by Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence.

An example from the Government of Australia demonstrates one effort to provide information on the disability support pension in an accessible manner, highlighting the importance of making online information accessible to persons with disabilities.^{xxi}

FIGURE 5-2 **Communications to support registration**



Make registration accessible to all



What and why

Governments should take concrete steps to establish a comprehensive and inclusive registration and application process where all potential beneficiaries are able to submit their personal data and information, or have this collected, without facing barriers or discrimination. This requires simplified registration processes, such as online digital registration platforms that reduce physical barriers. Where physical registration is required, one-stop shops that allow applicants to submit and complete all required documents in one place at one time reduce both time and physical barriers. A robust registration process that collects the right personal data from applicants, verifies its accuracy and then assesses compliance with eligibility is key to ensure resources for social protection are used as intended. When governments can quickly and effectively collect and process key information about potential beneficiaries, they can ensure resources are directed to the right people at the right time.

How

ENSURE THE CORRECT INFORMATION IS COLLECTED AND PROTECTED

The type of personal information required and how it is obtained depends on the scheme selection criteria. For example, when information on income is not available through tax registries, schemes with **poverty-based selection criteria** require governments to initiate the collection of information on household consumption through regular household income and expenditure surveys. Schemes with **lifecycle-based selection criteria** linked to age, residency, birth or death, may require those eligible to submit one or two pieces of personal identification to confirm their age, residency, or other life events. Where civil registries and vital statistics are robust, the information required for life cycle schemes may be collected automatically. Schemes with **disability-based selection criteria** often require prospective beneficiaries to participate in a disability assessment through which the government collects information on work capacity and level of disability. Finally, contributory schemes that **require employment in the formal sector** often complete registration through employers when employment is supported with a formal contract.

ENSURE ACCESSIBLE, ROBUST, TRANSPARENT AND AUDITABLE REGISTRATION PROCESSES

Regardless of the type of scheme, governments should ensure that registration processes are accessible, robust, transparent and auditable as described above. Ways forward to achieve this include:

- Using appropriate technologies and data fields to authenticate and protect personal identity. For example, as they are unique to individuals, biometric identifiers can be used to verify personal identity, thereby guarding against identity theft and fraudulent use of identity documents to obtain social protection benefits.^{xxii}
- Making registration available online to limit costs associated with travel and administration.
- Ensuring that physical registration points remain available to reach those who do not have or wish to use the Internet. Physical registration points must be near applicants and supported with quality infrastructure to meet the diverse accessibility needs of persons with disability.
- Establishing both electronic and physical one-stop shops, or single windows, where applicants can complete all documents required for registration.^{xxiii} This requires various institutions and ministries to collaborate at the local level and should be tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities and minority language groups.

During registration, governments should ensure that the information collected can be used to promote inclusion. For example, gender-specific and disaggregated information on care obligations, access to services (e.g., health, family planning), mobility, credential requirements and pregnancy should be collected, whilst taking into account gender-sensitive issues such as men controlling women's identification documents. The initial identification of disability should capture the diversity of challenges faced by persons with disabilities, rather than focusing on functional limitations. Specific attention should also be paid to children with disabilities and be disaggregated by gender. While gender and disability may not form part of eligibility requirements, governments will need this information for subsequent analysis, monitoring of impact, and to inform additional inclusive programming or responses.

Governments must safeguard collected personal information. As such, governments need to ensure that data protection policies are in place and enforced. Prospective beneficiaries must be informed of how their personal data will be used.

PUT IN PLACE AN OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY

It is critical that governments put in place clear standards and guidelines to ensure personal data and supporting documentation are verified through an **objective assessment process**. Where possible, governments should invest in digitizing this process through approaches that may include:

- **E-citizen interfaces** and mobile applications that allow prospective beneficiaries to upload required documentation and follow the result of the selection process.
- **Electronic queuing** management systems to reduce congestion and create order, acknowledging factors of exclusion, such as gender and disability, and prioritizing people experiencing vulnerability.
- **Automatic notifications** to beneficiaries upon enrolment, using SMS and e-mails.
- **Built-in privacy functions** such as electronic signatures for informed consent to support enrolment processes, which may require sharing information with a third party, such as a payment provider.

DESIGN ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT PROCESSES THAT ARE SIMPLE AND ACCURATE

Assessing eligibility for **universal child or old-age benefit schemes** is relatively simple and limited to, for example, verification of the age and residency of the applicant. Beneficiaries can then remain enrolled in the scheme until a given age, or other life event as determined by the eligibility criteria. **Poverty targeted schemes**, such as those using proxy means tests, require a verification of household-level information on estimated consumption. The validity of this assessment depends on the accuracy of the information collected and how much time has passed since its collection.

Determining eligibility for a **disability benefit** often requires an in-person assessment. During such assessment, it is important that governments move away from assessing disability solely based on the degree of impairment or domain of functional limitation. Instead, governments should ensure they assess the extent to which social and environmental factors affect the individual's ability to carry out their daily activities, irrespective of their impairment. This approach is also aligned with the definition of disability in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). Box 6-1 describes good practices in the implementation of disability assessments.

BOX 6-1 Good practices in the implementation of disability assessments

- Provide continuous training to assessors and adequate remuneration to attract the high-quality capacity necessary to conduct effective and accurate assessments.
- Ensure medical records are verified and make them available to medical assessors, with consent from the applicant.
- Ensure accessibility through on-demand assessment mechanisms, thereby enabling persons with a disability to access them at any time.
- Conduct assessments near applicants' residence to reduce costs in accessing the system.
- Assessments should be well-coordinated to reduce the number of journeys required to complete assessments, through combining social, physical and medical assessments.
- Ensure assessment centres are physically accessible to everyone with an impairment. Similarly, provide other services such as interpretation, including for those with hearing impairments.
- Always treat applicants with dignity and respect their right to privacy. They should actively participate in the assessment.
- Provide high quality and disability-sensitive communications about the disability assessment process, in order to build awareness of the existence of the mechanism. Clear communication will also manage expectations and may deter those who are not eligible from participating in assessments.
- Closely monitor the decisions of assessors to ensure processes are followed objectively and transparently.
- Establish an accessible grievance mechanism to allow people to appeal the results of assessments.
- Ensure that applicants can be directed towards receiving further support that may be identified during the assessment, for example through social work, social care or health systems.

Ensure regular and predictable payments



What and why

Once beneficiaries are registered, they need to be enrolled and provided with a token of identification to facilitate the receipt of payments. Ideally, the process for enrolment and payment should be accessible, reliable, accurate, and put the beneficiary first. This may be achieved by optimizing digital solutions and often through outsourcing to service providers or private companies and supporting such agreements with strong data protection legislation. Without administrative systems that ensure that the right benefit is distributed to the right person at the right time, trust in government could be eroded.

How

ENSURE ACCESSIBLE BENEFIT PAYMENTS

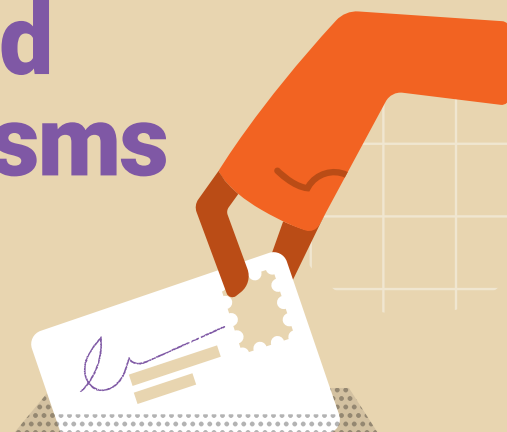
Governments need to put in place a clear process that ensures that the right people receive the right benefit, at the right time. To successfully do so, providers should consider:

- **Establishing a viable payment mechanism.** Completing enrolment requires governments to first engage a payment service provider through an agreement that outlines the form and process of payments. It should clearly define any prerequisites for beneficiaries to receive payments, such as holding a bank account, mobile money account, or other account of personal data, in their own name. Beneficiary enrolment is often led by the payment service provider and may require collection of additional information from beneficiaries, to verify their bank account, mobile money wallet or assist them to set one up.
- **Providing a token of identification.** Once applicants are enrolled to receive payment, depending on the systems in place in the country, governments or service providers may use tokens, such as smart cards supported by biometric data for authentication of payments. Where governments need to rely on manual payments, or for those not able to receive electronic payments, a programme identification card bearing the recipient's name and a photograph may be required.

ENSURE REGULAR AND RELIABLE BENEFIT PAYMENTS

Payment delivery must put the recipient first. This means ensuring that the payment process respects the rights of individuals. Of particular importance is that the payment delivery does not incur any cost on the beneficiary. For example, long queues at manual payment points can result in lost income. Requiring recipients to travel long distances to receive their benefits, not only increases the cost, but also poses significant obstacles for persons with disabilities and those with care-giving responsibilities. It is therefore important that payment service providers deliver payments efficiently and in a location convenient to recipients. The payment process must also respect the privacy of individuals, particularly when physical cash transfers are required.

Establish appeals and complaints mechanisms that support accountability



What and why

As noted in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, governments should ensure that appeal and complaint mechanisms are institutionalized as part of the delivery process. This means that complaints and response mechanisms are in place to identify and address delivery and administrative issues. Without robust complaints mechanisms, accountability and quality may be compromised.

How

ESTABLISH FORMAL PROCEDURES TO RAISE GRIEVANCES

Governments need to ensure that formal procedures are in place to enable people enrolled in or registering for a benefit, to raise concerns regarding the registration, assessment, and benefit payment process. The two most common types of grievance are: appeals against exclusion during registration, assessment, and enrolment; and complaints about, for example, delays of payments, administrative errors, excessive distance to access payments, or fraud at pay points.

This requires the establishment of a grievance mechanism to uphold objectivity and identify systemic weaknesses that could undermine the effectiveness and reputation of the scheme and of the government. Access to, and information on, grievance mechanisms should be made publicly available to ensure that beneficiaries are aware of the appeal and complaint process. Governments can also use digital platforms, through online complaints mechanisms, or anonymous phone hotlines to increase availability and accessibility.

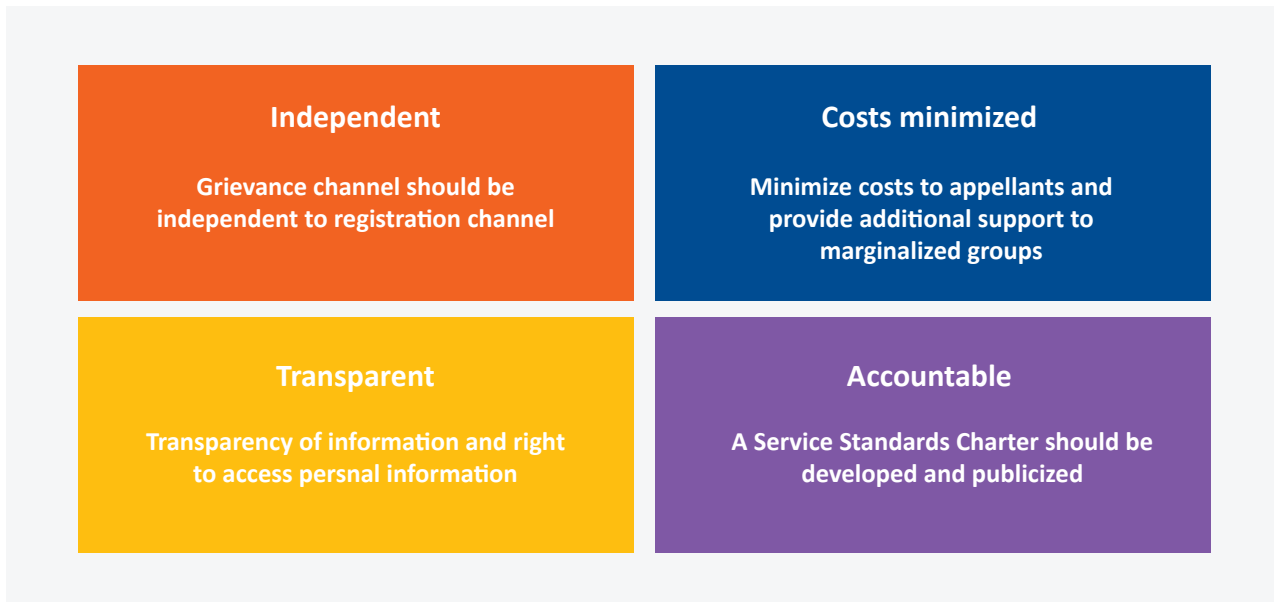
ESTABLISH CLEAR PROCEDURES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Grievance mechanisms with clear procedures, roles and responsibilities can be established by employing three tiers:

- **The first tier should be operated by the frontline payment service provider, independent of the registration process**, and deal with issues such as a lost scheme identification card or malfunctioning payment tokens.
- **The second tier should be operated by the administrators of the social protection scheme** and provide accessible channels to receive complaints of processes.
- **The third tier should comprise an independent authority** to act as a last resort, such as a Human Rights Commission, or an Ombudsman.

In each tier, governments must ensure that complaint and appeal procedures have been made public, are impartial, transparent, effective, simple, rapid, and accessible. To ensure fair and effective grievance mechanisms, those handling the appeal or complaint should not be those responsible for scheme or payment delivery. Information obtained on applicants at each tier must also be kept confidential to respect privacy, but can be anonymized and made available to applicants, beneficiaries, or others upon request to facilitate their own appeals or investigations. Principles to be achieved across the tiers are illustrated in Figure 8-1.

FIGURE 8-1 Grievance and complaint mechanisms: good practice and principles



No fees should be charged at any tier in the process. ILO Recommendation 202 (R202) on Social Protection Floors states that complaint and appeal procedures should be free of charge to the applicant.

Appeals against exclusion are easiest to handle when eligibility criteria are clear, but more complicated to manage for targeted schemes when criteria are complex, such as with proxy means tests, or when beneficiaries are required to fulfil certain conditions to receive payments.

Streamline institutional delivery functions



What and why

Strong governance and administration facilitate streamlining and complementarity across the social protection system and avoid disconnection and competition among actors. Governments should establish clear lines of responsibility for the core system under one ministry and identify one delivery agency responsible for all schemes, with a clear division of labour and lines for coordination. Well-governed social protection systems benefit from strong accountability structures, active participation of diverse groups, transparency of operations and viable access to information.

How

SIMPLIFY INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Simplified institutional arrangements are key to achieve a streamlined governance and administration. In doing so, one line ministry or agency should be responsible for all oversight and coordination. This ministry needs to have strong convening power, which is typically linked with budgetary responsibility for the delivery. Moving away from fragmentation and toward more consolidated streamlining of authority and resources facilitates coverage expansion, effectiveness and visibility needed. Centralized oversight also ensures that the agreed vision for social protection (Milestone 1) is implemented with a higher degree of accountability, contributing to more effective sector wide planning, and in line with agreed monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

CENTRALIZE AUTHORITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

While there is no single solution for overcoming fragmentation, it is essential to centralize authority and administrative responsibility. Governments setting out to move away from fragmentation may consider:

- Merging the functions of Ministries of Labour with Ministries of Social Affairs on social protection.^{xxiv}
- Consolidating administrative functions through establishing a unified social protection agency with coordination authority.^{xxv}
- Centralizing the collection of contributions and payments under one full-service social insurance institution.^{xxvi}
- Delivering contributory and non-contributory benefits through central administrative structures.^{xxvii}

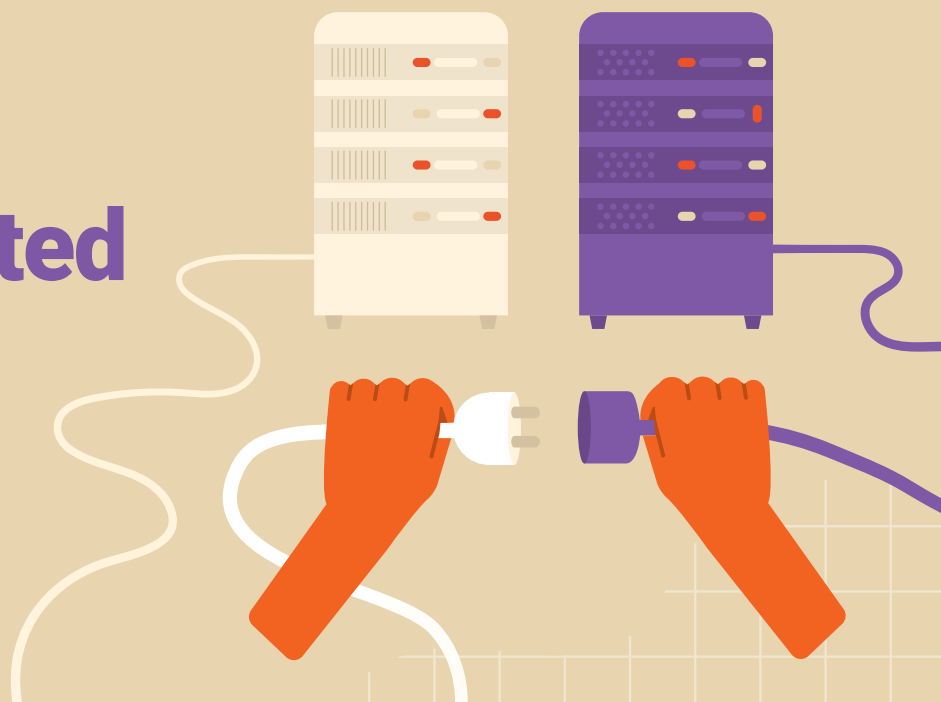
Indeed, countries with lower resources and capacity will be better served with less costly and more simplified institutional arrangements. Such arrangements will also position governments to have full oversight on coordination by:

- Putting in place formal structures for cross-sectoral coordination that are required to report to a higher authority, such as relevant oversight committees within the executive or legislative branch.
- Setting up formal structures to support strong coordination between central and local levels to support scheme implementation.

ENGAGE AND COORDINATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

When considering these structures, the government should lead cross-sectoral coordination and involve representatives from the key actors and institutions, including ministries, partners, civil society organizations and development organizations. Coordination between central and local levels must be supported by clearly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure empowerment of local level authorities, strong information management that supports efficient service delivery, and effective implementation of policy decisions.

Use integrated information systems



What and why

As captured in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific* governments should develop and strengthen national data management systems and processes to facilitate the collection, management and analysis of social protection data that are accurate, relevant and timely. It is important for governments to keep beneficiary information up to date to ensure that resources are directed to those who are eligible. Achieving this will require investments in building robust and digitized Management Information Systems (MIS)⁹ for each social protection scheme and make sure that these are integrated through single registries that provide an overview at the social protection system level. An integrated approach allows administrators to manage data related to registration, enrolment, payment, beneficiary updates and grievance. Well-designed MISs also play an important role in facilitating and supporting the monitoring of schemes by providing management reports and alerts on key operational processes. Without an integrated MIS, databases may be fragmented within and across ministries limiting efficiency and overall understanding of system level coverage, interoperability, and impact.

How

BUILD LINKAGES WITHIN SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM AND NATIONAL LEVEL DATABASES

Building a robust information management system that promotes inclusion, efficiency, effectiveness and accuracy is largely a policy issue that requires political commitment to achieve integration within and between ministries, backed by sufficient financial resources. To ensure linkages within the social protection system and national level databases, governments will also need to consider:

- **The structure, capacities and functions of the current social protection information system.** At the outset it is key to map out the current structure and flow of information through existing information management systems. An understanding of the key gaps and challenges from both a policy and operational lens, including those related to hardware and software, is essential to create a shared vision to achieve reform.
- **The state of national identification (ID) systems and civil registries.** When national ID systems are robust with a unique identifier and high levels of uptake, they can serve as a backbone for integrating data across different schemes. If the national ID system is paper based, its unique identifiers can still serve as a foundation for integration across schemes. This unique identifier for individuals is needed to link registry information and beneficiaries with other systems and schemes. If the ID system is already digitized with electronic and biometric features it can also be used to increase accuracy and efficiency.

⁹ Management Information System (MIS): Information systems through which individual social protection programmes perform functions such as identification of beneficiaries, compliance with conditions, grievance redress, and generating payment lists.

- **The national e-governance and hardware infrastructure.** Where Internet infrastructure is limited, connectivity and networks may be less reliable, which can disrupt the flow of information. This may require physical information transfer processes that slow down systems.
- **The funding landscape and capacity to maintain and update systems.** Information management systems require high levels of investment to ensure they remain up to date. Data requirements also impact on these costs. For example, complex data collection to determine eligibility adds to the costs and have the risk of targeting errors. Governments also need to ensure that sufficient funds are made available to ensure continuous training of staff working on data management systems to stay up to date with technology and system changes.
- **Legislative frameworks for data protection and security.** Information management systems require the smooth and secure transfer of information within different geographic locations within the country, also within and between government entities. Ensuring legislation, protocols and systems are in place to ensure data security and protect personal information along the way is crucial to avoid data breaches that could jeopardize scheme delivery and erode trust in government.^{xxviii}

With these considerations explored at the outset, governments can design MISs to enable the flow and management of information and enhance delivery at the **scheme level**. Policymakers will need to engage appropriate capacity, specifically information technology expertise, to ensure MISs are designed to support **data collection and beneficiary registration (Milestone 6)**. This can be achieved through standardizing and digitizing the data collection process and designing online application platforms to facilitate applications.

Once beneficiary information is collected, MISs then provide the platform to analyse and share data to **assess needs and conditions for eligibility** and potential enrolment (**Milestone 7**). This requires sufficient hardware and software to adequately store and process personal data. During this step, integration between databases is required to determine eligibility, for example where information on other benefits received is required. The MIS then plays a key function in supporting **manual or e-payments** through the generation of beneficiary lists and reconciliation to ensure payments have been made in the right amount to the right beneficiary (**Milestone 7**). MISs are essential to support strong **grievances mechanisms (Milestone 8)**, a MIS can support the digital management of feedback and complaints.

KEEP INFORMATION ON BENEFICIARIES UP TO DATE

Governments must ensure that personal information stored is regularly or automatically updated to reflect changes in the lives of beneficiaries such as age or estimated consumption, or life events such as birth and death. The ease and accuracy with which beneficiary information can be kept up to date depends largely on scheme design.

Beneficiary management is most demanding for schemes that are **poverty targeted**. Such schemes require governments to make regular and substantial investments of time and budget in the frequent collection of information to keep databases up to date. As household incomes and consumption regularly change, the information held in these databases becomes increasingly inaccurate as the months after data collection pass by. In addition, schemes that require beneficiaries to meet conditions, such as attending meetings, health check-ups or sending a child to school, require governments to implement a significantly more complicated information management process, which increases programme costs.

UNIFY REGISTRIES TO SUPPORT INTEGRATION AND OVERSIGHT

With scheme level MISs in place, governments should then link these together through a **single registry**,¹⁰ providing oversight at the social protection system level. A single registry serves governments as a data warehouse that collects information from all types of social protection schemes.^{xxix} Single registries are therefore important in providing interlinkages between individual scheme MISs and other broader government databases that can be used during registration, including income tax, civil registration and, if applicable, disability databases. It is important to ensure that single registries store: a) the number and characteristics of beneficiaries across each scheme as well as the total number; b) the value and frequency of transfers sent to beneficiaries, disaggregated by relevant categories; and c) expenditure on social protection schemes. Designing and building a single registry therefore enables governments to track and monitor the social protection system, its reach, and its impacts. It is important for governments to consider the amount of information to be stored in the single registry as each additional piece of information increases complexity in terms of maintenance and monitoring.

Single registries must not be confused with **social registries**,¹¹ which are designed to perform much more limited functions. Linked solely to poverty targeted schemes, social registries attempt to rank households according to their estimated level of consumption in an effort to select the poorest.

ENSURE REGISTRIES ARE READY FOR ACTION

The increasing frequency and severity of disasters, climate, economic and health shocks, like the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate the need for governments to ensure that information management systems are designed to **respond to crises** (Milestone 12). Keeping information up to date is key to put governments in a position to respond correctly and effectively. Digitized platforms and systems that support dynamic and real-time data and information exchange can help governments to reduce errors while simplifying and speeding up processes. Digitized processes will also ensure that data can be more quickly transformed into the information needed to make higher-level decisions. Governments that currently rely on social registries, which face many challenges in keeping information up to date, may consider investing in building single registries to support more efficient and effective responses.

10 Single Registry: Information systems that integrate the data analytics function across the national social protection system. It provides a consolidated overview of 'who receives what' benefits to support co-ordination, planning and monitoring. It helps to assess gaps and duplications across multiple programmes and supports the consolidation of other functions along the delivery chain.

11 Social Registry: information systems that integrate the functions of outreach, registration and assessment of needs and conditions across several poverty-targeted programmes. They collect and compile household level data on the socio-economic conditions of potential beneficiaries to assess demand for poverty-targeted programmes.

Establish a monitoring and evaluation system



What and why

As captured in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, governments should consider setting achievable national targets, including intermediate targets, based on country contexts within the indicator frameworks of SDG 1.3. To achieve this, governments should establish effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms for accountable, transparent, and efficient service delivery. An effective M&E system should be participatory and facilitate the regular collection, disaggregation, compilation and analysis of data to be shared with public to support transparency. Feedback and evidence on whether schemes are working can support governments to consistently improve their social protection schemes and allow for a comparison of different schemes as well as a better understanding of what works, why and for whom.

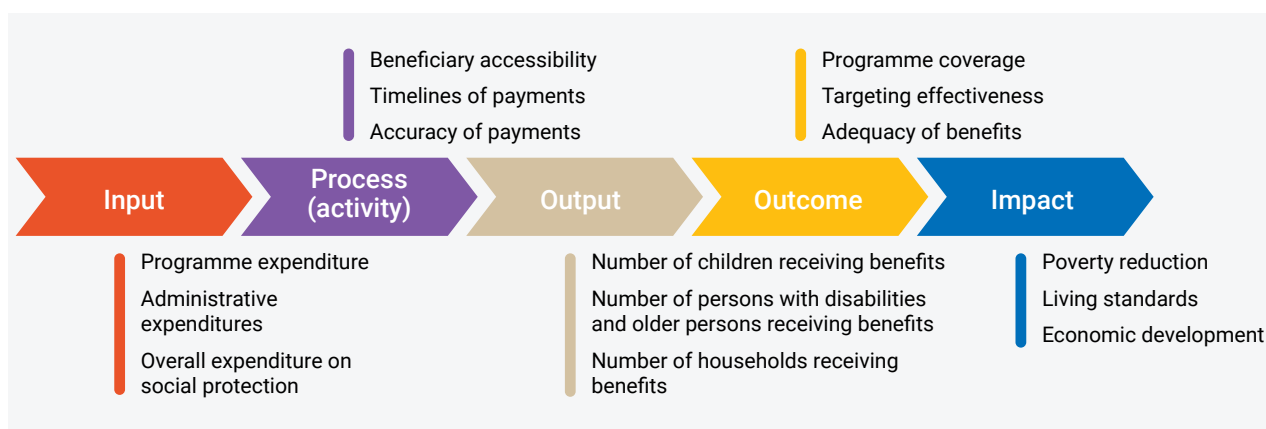
How

Governments should establish concrete mechanisms to monitor how social protection schemes are achieving their unique objectives and targets. This is key to **track the performance of the scheme, linked to measurable inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts** (see Figure 11-1). Monitoring performance is essential to ensure that governments continue to learn from their own experiences and make improvements.

LAY OUT THE M&E PROCESS IN A CLEARLY DEFINED WORK PLAN

Governments must ensure that the M&E process is laid out in a clearly defined work plan, supported by agreed performance indicators and targets with roles and responsibilities attached to each of them. Targets may be linked to track overall scheme design, such as the proportion of children between a defined age group who receive benefits; or, they may be linked to processes, such as the proportion of payments received within a defined timeframe. To track indicators, governments can apply a variety of tools and approaches, including check-list-based quality benchmarks and apply these during special investigations and spot checks, as well as internal and external audits. Closely monitoring the administration of schemes, and cross-checking this with complaints and appeals (Milestone 8), will allow governments to better isolate and address any issues or inaccuracies in delivery.

FIGURE 11-1 **Social protection sector results frame**



DEVELOP A SYSTEM FOR REGULAR MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE

Governments should ensure regular production of internal reports and analysis of scheme and system performance to ensure continuous learning and support for improvements. An effective management information system (MIS) and a single registry should generate regular monitoring reports for a wide range of scheme performance indicators (see [Milestone 10](#)).¹² This could, for example, help monitor the number of people who receive a benefit within the entire system, compared to the extent of coverage stipulated in national legislation.¹³ Such a mechanism can also provide the information required to quantify impacts on poverty and inequality, living standards and local economies, when analysed together with household and economic survey data. Assessments can be made as to the quality, value, effectiveness and importance of schemes and systems based on the evidence provided. This should inform decisions on their design, direction, continuation, as well as resource allocation, which should ultimately lead to their improvement. Detailed performance reports that link delivery to measurable results can also be used to secure budget allocations.

ENSURE THE M&E SYSTEM IS PARTICIPATORY AND SUPPORTED BY REGULAR NATIONAL CONSULTATION

ILO Recommendation 202 stipulates that this consultative approach should monitor progress through the regular collection, compilation and analysis of data to be published disaggregated by gender on a regular basis.¹⁴ This should be achieved through the regular convening of national consultations that bring government, civil society and the private sector together to assess progress and discuss policies for the further extension of social security. This can be complemented by further consultations through nationally defined mechanisms, including expert group meetings, interviews, questionnaires and surveys designed to facilitate further feedback and contribute to accountability.

DISSEMINATE INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS WIDELY

Reporting on scheme performance, expenditure and feedback from beneficiaries and other actors should be disseminated widely. This is key for knowledge sharing and regional monitoring of social protection¹⁵ as well as for transparency purposes, accountability and building public trust. Regular financial reports, including budget and expenditure tracking, conducted regularly using comparable and consistent methods can also help to build confidence in the financial viability of the scheme. Results may be published as performance reports (progress and evaluation reports with findings, lessons learned and recommendations), sector reviews¹⁶ or other publicly available documents.

12 Single registries refer to electronic warehouses that store information from all types of social protection schemes so that government officials can access comprehensive information across the entire social protection system on a wide range of performance indicators. In addition, a single registry acts as a nexus of information, providing interlinkages between MISs of individual schemes and other external databases used during registration, such as the income tax and civil registration.

13 Source: ESCAP. (2018). How to Implement Inclusive Social Protection Schemes [Policy Guide]. Social Development Division, ESCAP. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Social_Protection_module_3_English.pdf

14 Source: Social Protection Floors Recommendation (R202), (2012).

15 The Asian Development Bank developed a social protection indicator database (and published an index report in 2013) that comprises data collected from national sources across Asia and the Pacific. Available: <https://spi.adb.org/spidmz/>. Key indicators include: social protection coverage as a percentage of GDP, horizontal coverage (percentage of beneficiaries actually reached) and vertical coverage (expenditures per recipient as a percentage of the poverty line and GDP per capita).

16 Such as the Social Protection System Reviews of Cambodia (2017), Kyrgyzstan (2018) and Indonesia (2019) conducted by the OECD Development Centre. Source: <https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/Social-Protection-Systems-Programme-Research.htm>.

Make social protection schemes adaptable and responsive to external shocks



What and why

As noted in the ESCAP *Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific*, governments should ensure that social protection is shock responsive. Governments can achieve this by building inclusive social protection systems that provide a strong foundation to support all people through shocks. The increasing frequency and severity of disasters throughout Asia and the Pacific, coupled with the risk of climate change, economic and health related shocks, call for coordinated and comprehensive responses. People everywhere need permanent protection and preparedness. Without sufficient planning, governments may find themselves unable to use their important investments in social protection to respond to shocks efficiently and adequately, leaving community members and their economies at risk.

How

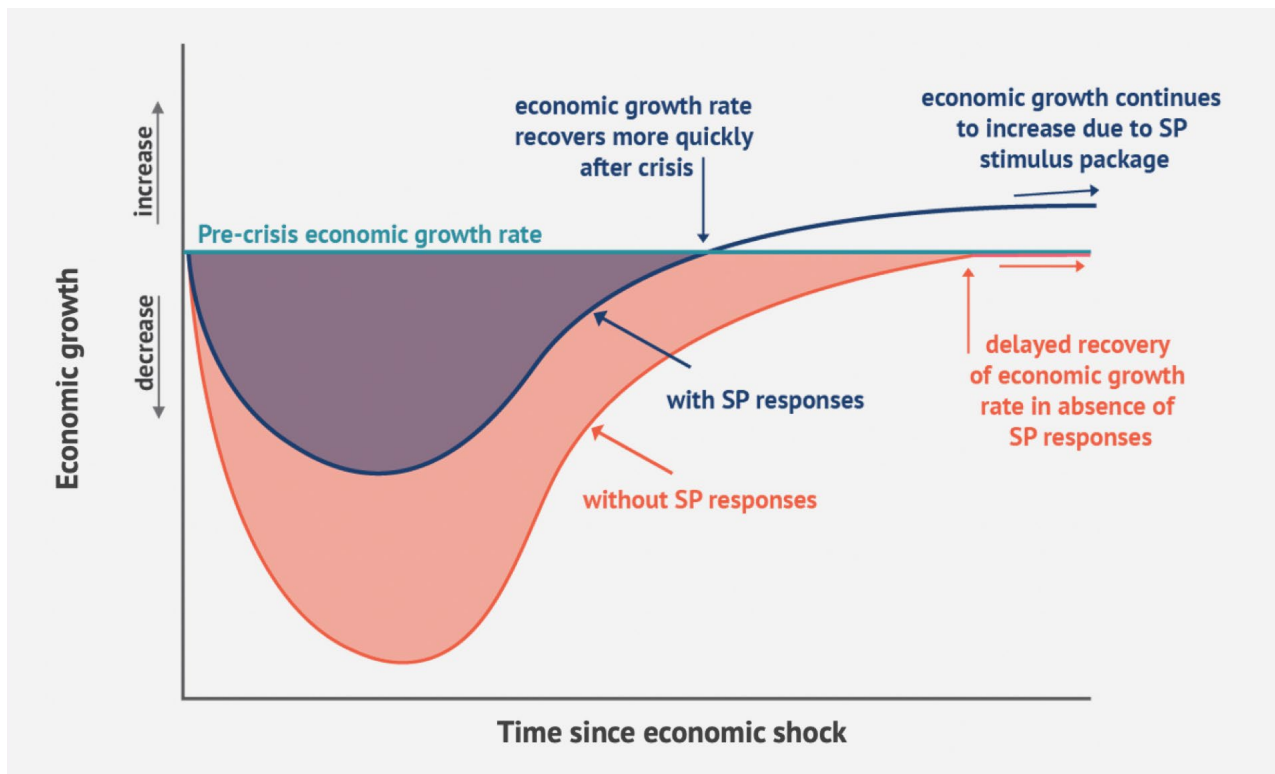
GROUND RESPONSES IN SOLID SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

Effective and efficient responses require governments to build a foundation that positions them to be constantly prepared for diverse shocks that may arise. Key to this foundation is the level of social protection coverage. The higher the coverage, the more people the government reaches. Universal social protection systems provide a foundation that reduces the severity of shocks, promotes quicker recovery and is always ready for scale up, as illustrated in Figure 12-1.

With this foundation in place, governments will also need to ensure that:

- **Financial planning and flexible financial instruments are in place to quickly mobilize and absorb additional funds.** Planning ahead will enable governments to identify and develop the instruments and processes required to sufficiently finance scale-up.
- **Integrated information management systems have accurate data on the population.** A unified single registry that provides oversight across schemes will enable governments to respond effectively. Registries that exclude the majority of households and use of out-of-date information will leave governments unable to respond to those who need the support the most.
- **Automated deposit or e-payment systems are in place.** Putting in place contactless payment systems that directly deposit funds in recipient bank accounts, or through digital payment systems, including mobile wallets, will position governments to disburse funds quickly during crises.
- **Early warning indicators and systems are tailored to the nature of shocks and supported by strong monitoring mechanisms.** Agreeing on early warning indicators that are simple and easy to monitor is key to ensure sufficient information can be gathered. Involving a variety of representatives in systematically collecting and regularly reporting real-time data will position governments to make informed decisions.

FIGURE 12-1 **Inclusive social protection and the impact of an economic shock**



- **Simple thresholds, supported by a clearly defined activation process, are in place.** It is important that thresholds for activating a response are clear and supported by an objective activation process with clear timelines, roles and responsibilities for government and other actors. With clearly defined thresholds and processes, activation should ideally occur objectively and automatically. This is also sometimes referred to as a 'triggering' process.

ESTABLISH CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AT ALL LEVELS AND ACROSS ALL ACTORS

While the overall process for shock response must be led by the government, establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the government at the central and local levels, and across actors, including community and humanitarian actors, is key to ensure both division of labour and authority. While the decision to activate should be objective and well informed, including with real-time data, the final decision-making authority to scale up social protection schemes must be clearly defined.

Governments can also use the administrative system of existing schemes, such as registries and distribution mechanisms, to provide other goods or resources communities and families may need to endure shocks, including hygiene materials and vaccinations.

Endnotes

- i Sweden is viewed as one of the most successful countries in building trust between citizens and the government and is also ranked one of the happiest countries in the world, which – according to the Ministry of Finance of Sweden – can be attributed to the provision of universal social services. In particular, Sweden has made significant investments in social protection since the end of the Second World War, when its tax revenues were only 20 percent of GDP (similar to many developing countries today). Today, after decades of investment in social services, its tax revenues are equivalent to 50 percent of GDP. Sweden's strategy to build trust between the citizen and the state, strengthening the social contract, is feasible to replicate in other countries.
- Source: <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-Contract-paper-Nov242020.pdf>
- ii The stipend for schoolgirls in Pakistan increased the enrolment of girls in school by 32 per cent. In Indonesia, the *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* (Early Childhood Education and Development) programme increased the gross enrolment ratio for pre-primary education from 27.0 percent in 2004 to 58.2 percent in 2014.
- Source: OECD (2019), *Social Protection System Review of Indonesia*, OECD Development Pathways, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/788e9d71-en>
- iii In response to COVID-19, the Government of Mongolia topped-up the universal Child Money Programme, which reaches 97 percent of all children up to 18 years of age, in the country. This vertical top-up expanded the regular benefit of MNT 20,000 (US\$ 7), by five times, up to MNT 100,000 (US\$ 35), helping to smooth economic shocks brought on by COVID-19 containment measures. Source: <https://www.unicef.org/mongolia/stories/half-billion-us-dollars-leveraged-children-mongolia-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- iv Nepal's universal pension was established in 1997 and was delivered to areas controlled by Maoists during the civil war, with a view to providing some economic and social stability to Nepalese citizens. Following peace, Nepal massively expanded its social protection schemes as a peace dividend – a mechanism for social inclusion. Source: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/policy-guide-how-design-inclusive-social-protection-systems>
- v In Argentina, the government has expanded pensions to women undertaking care duties under Decree 475-2021 (which modifies Law 24-241 on the Integrated Retirement and Pension System). The Decree allows the recognition of women's contributions to care tasks when they retire, but do not have the necessary years of monetary contributions to receive a pension due to care responsibilities). In Mexico, a pilot “formalization” programme for including domestic workers in the social security system has been running since 2019. The pilot programme offers the same benefit guarantees that are provided by the *Régimen General Obligatorio* (General Social Security System), notably old-age and death benefits, sickness, maternity, disability, and work injury insurance as well as certain social family benefits and day care services for the insured's children. Sources: <https://efsur.org/jubilacion-por-tareas-de-cuidado-argentina-reconocio-aportes-para-madres-con-hijos-e-hijas/%20and%20https://www.anses.gob.ar/reconocimiento-de-aportes-por-tareas-de-cuidado%20and%20https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/capitalhumano/Nuevo-registro-de-trabajadoras-del-hogar-le-cerro-las-puertas-del-IMSS-a-muchas-20210627-0017.html>
- vi The Chinese government extended unemployment assistance under its flagship *Dibao* scheme (for those not eligible for unemployment social insurance benefits) to migrant workers in areas affected by COVID-19 restriction measures for up to 6 months. The government also offered a one-time cash payment of RMB 3,000 (US\$ 424) to struggling migrant workers in Wuhan, in addition to vocational training subsidies for migrants (in particular those from impoverished countries). Source: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/37186>
- vii Many constitutions commit to broadly protecting and promoting economic, social and cultural rights. Some – for example, Bangladesh (Art. 15), Bhutan (Art. 9), India (Art. 41), Pakistan (Art. 38) and Sri Lanka (Art. 27) – go a step further by featuring social protection as a policy principle (though not an enforceable right). Fewer, for example the Maldives (Art. 35) and Nepal (Art. 43) specify the right to social security as justiciable, and therefore enforceable. Source: Luca Lazzarini. Social protection legislative frameworks in South Asia from a children's rights perspective. 2020. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund
- viii The success of pension systems in countries such as Georgia is due, in part, to the existence of specific legal provisions ensuring the individual's right to social protection and defining the standards which regulate the involvement of all stakeholders. Georgia's Law on State Pensions (2012) governs the universal old-age pension, while the Law on Funded Pensions (2018) regulates the new mandatory accumulated (defined contribution) pension scheme (regulates the relations and activities for all those who pay into social insurance). Source: ILO and UN Women. (2020). *Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia [Final Report]*. <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ILO-Georgia.pdf>
- ix An adequate legal framework is one that lays out precise coverage parameters and eligibility requirements; exact worker, employer, and government contributions as a proportion of beneficiary income; clear stipulations for the management of pension funds and varying benefit calculations; consistent benefit levels or replacement rates for each scheme; well-defined conditions for compliance and enforcement; and, clear governance and administrative structures behind the scheme. For example, Nepal shows how programmes with clear and transparent eligibility criteria can work well and are amenable to social accountability. Source: Schjødt, R. (2017). *Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection: Nepal case study*. Development Pathways. <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Nepal-Case-Study-Final-Draft-Jan18-1.pdf>
- x Uzbekistan has an MIS for its Pension Fund which supports nearly all aspects of programme management, including a module for addressing complaints and grievances, that allows for direct linkages with the Office of the Prosecutor General. Source: Barca (2020) Chirchir, R. and Barca, V. *Building an integrated and digital social protection information system* [Technical paper]. GIZ and DFID (UK). https://socialprotection.org/sites/default/files/publications_files/GIZ_DFID_IIMS%20in%20social%20protection_long_02-2020.pdf
- xi Brazil's *Bolsa Família* programme (created by Provisionary Measure No. 132 of 20 October 2003, later converted into law through Law No. 10.836 of 9 January 2004) is governed by Decree No. 5.209 of 17 September 2004, which sets the parameters for community participation in controlling the programme's implementation at the municipal level. Good practices can also be found in Indonesia, which followed a consultative approach to drafting its National Social Security Law from 2001 (subsequently passed in 2004). A “Presidential Task Force for Social Security Reforms” was established by Presidential Decree (No. 29) in 2002 to prepare draft legislation and a supporting academic paper for a national social security system to provide more effective social security to all. Sources: ILO Subregional Office for South East Asia. (2008). *Indonesia: Implementation of the national social security law [Report]*. Social Security Extension Initiatives in South East Asia Series. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/Workingpapers/WCMS_SECSOC_6595/lang--en/index.htm and Thabrany, H. (2011). *Social security for all: A continuous challenge for workers in Indonesia [Perspective]*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Department for Global Policy and Development. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/08152.pdf>
- xii The Colombian Government, through *Colpensiones*, established a Social Protection Floor that has 3 functions: (1) it is part of the country's social security systems through the Periodic Financial Benefits (*Beneficios Económicos Periódicos*, or BEPS); (2) it is targeted at those individuals that earn less than the national minimum wage and are attached to the SISBEN health insurance; and (3) it includes all individuals that do not have a full-time employment, but are employed by an individual or employer. This programme is based on individual accounts, allows workers with low and irregular income to voluntarily save for retirement and provides affiliates with an incentive payment equal to 20 percent of their account balance once they reach the retirement age. Source: ISSA. (2021). *Extending and maintaining social security coverage – Americas [Analysis]*. International Social Security Association. <https://ww1.issa.int/analysis/extending-and-maintaining-social-security-coverage-americas>

GRIEVANCE AND COMPLAINT MECHANISMS: GOOD PRACTISE AND PRINCIPLES

- xiii Good practice can be found in New Zealand, for example, which has a private pension option – the “KiwiSaver” (a type of subsidized, defined contribution retirement savings plan offered by private-sector providers) – in addition to a universal public pension for all residents aged 65 years or older. Thailand also succeeded in expanding pensions for older persons through the implementation of a non-contributory old-age allowance for all persons aged 60 years and above, on top of its Old-Age Pension Scheme (a pay-as-you-go state pension scheme for the private sector workforce) and the Government Pension Fund (a defined contribution pension system exclusively for civil servants). Source: https://www.oecd.org/finance/private-pensions/42574991.pdf%20and%20https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_836733.pdf
- xiv In Nepal the old age pension was rolled out progressively with a higher age of eligibility, starting at 70 years of age, which has decreased over time to expand coverage. Source: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/policy-guide-how-design-inclusive-social-protection-systems>
- xv In Türkiye, eligibility for social assistance is based on minimum expenditure baskets (set monetary thresholds that are defined by the value of goods and services that households require to survive or to meet their basic needs) as well as a gap analysis (the gap between household income and the national minimum wage). Source: WFP. (2020). *Minimum Expenditure Baskets* [Guidance Note]. World Food Programme, Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000074198/download/?_ga=2.44958689.450836264.1639746954-205807054.1639746954
- xvi In Peru, the National Supervision and Transparency Committee – which is composed by representatives from the church, the private sector, local governments and NGOs – is in charge of ensuring transparency and access to information in the programme's actions and procedures and in the use of resources. Collective control or participatory mechanisms can play a critical role in socialising information about programmes. Source: Cecchini, S. and Martínez, R. (2012). *Inclusive social protection in Latin America: A comprehensive, rights-based approach*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). <https://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/2596>
- xvii There are low- and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region that invest more GDP in tax-financed schemes than wealthier countries in the region. For example, Nepal (a lower middle-income country) invests around 1.2 per cent of GDP in its Old-Age Allowance, while Brunei Darussalam (a high-income country) invests approximately 0.37 per cent in its Old-Age Pension. Source: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2009321
- xviii In an effort to streamline communications and manage both shared responsibilities and expectations, Sweden provides “orange envelopes” to citizens on an annual basis. These orange envelopes provide each citizen with a pension forecast, indicating their public pension, how much they have contributed and earned for their retirement, and how much they should expect to receive, depending on when they decide to retire. The orange envelope is an excellent example of providing citizens with clear and tailored communications that will help to manage their expectations and plan for their future.
- xix In Pakistan, consultations with rural workers on the accessibility of the *Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme* saw the government make SMS applications free of charge. They also recruited volunteers to teach applicants how to send an SMS. Source: <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/PB%20No.50%20Financing%20Social%20Protection.pdf>
- xx Local governments or community leaders identify eligible individuals for COVID-19 relief for a cash transfer program in Brazil. Individuals then receive SMS messages in the local language that directs them to open an account via WhatsApp or through a Facebook chat message. Source: Aadil & Jain (2020) “Addressing the weak link in COVID-19 relief: how improving strategic communications can boost the impact of social protection programs” <https://www.microsave.net/2020/10/20/addressing-the-weak-link-in-covid-19-relief-how-improving-strategic-communications-can-boost-the-impact-of-social-protection-programs/>
- xxi Please see <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/> for further information on web accessibility standards for persons with disabilities.
- xxii In India, the government has combined biometric technology with the use of unique identification numbers to facilitate cash transfers to almost 340 million people, including the poorest and most vulnerable, while achieving cost savings of approximately US\$7.51 billion over three years. Its digital identification programme, *Aadhaar*, launched nearly a decade ago and currently the world's largest, reaches 99 percent of Indian residents. Individuals registering for *Aadhaar* submit both biographic and biometric data, and are issued with a single, unique identification number which they can use as proof of their identity to access public and social services, including social protection schemes. The biometric data collected serve to protect their identity while the single, unique identification number enables residents to access and manage participation in social protection schemes in a simpler, more convenient way. Source: UNESCAP. (2018). *How to Implement Inclusive Social Protection Schemes* [Policy Guide]. Social Development Division, UNESCAP. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Social_Protection_module_3_English.pdf
- xxiii Some provinces in Indonesia have successfully established one-stop shops, which have significantly reduced barriers faced by applicants.
- xxiv Portugal, Spain and Norway have consolidated the functions of the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Social Affairs, which includes social protection. In Norway the Ministry of Social Affairs was merged with the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration. In Portugal a new Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity took on labour and employment functions as well as functions previously overseen by the Ministry of Social Security, Family and Children. In Spain, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was redesigned to integrate three secretariats – Social Security, Social Services Family and Disability, and Immigration and Emigration. (ILO, 2019, *Universal Social Protection for Human Dignity, Social Justice and Social Development: General Survey concerning the Social Protection Floors Recommendation*). Belgium, Spain, Sweden and Türkiye have also centralized administration under one unified social security agency.
- xxv Türkiye has followed this approach.
- xxvi China, Japan and Thailand have centralized the collection of contributions and payment of benefits under one institution. Source: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Global-overview_SP-Governance_June-2021.pdf
- xxvii Nordic countries, including Norway and Sweden tend to follow this approach. Source: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Global-overview_SP-Governance_June-2021.pdf
- xxviii The Chile *Solidario's* (now *Seguridades y Oportunidades*) legal framework safeguards an individual's data and dignity by not publicly publishing sensitive information such as name and amount of benefit received, but it does allow access to public institutions that oversee the programme's evaluation and that respect the confidentiality of the data. Violating confidentiality is legally sanctionable. Source: Carmona, M. S. (2018). *Is biometric technology in social protection programmes illegal or arbitrary? An analysis of privacy and data protection* [Working Paper]. No. 59, Extension of Social Security (ESS) Series. International Labour Office. <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDFaction?ressource.ressourceId=55133>
- xxix Uzbekistan has invested in building a comprehensive single registry that provides government with an overview of all scheme level MISs while also facilitating integration with broader government databases, such as the civil registry, land resources database, passport database, public works database and motor vehicles database. Uzbekistan's single registry links to the registration, eligibility, enrolment, payments and grievances management processes. In addition, it also links to case management mechanisms to facilitate follow-up and monitoring on child development and wellbeing. Source: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Global-overview_SP-Governance_June-2021.pdf



Steps to Inclusive Social Protection Systems

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and deliver on the commitments contained therein, most countries in the region need to step up their efforts to build sustainable and reliable social protection systems. For this purpose, the Guide on Steps to Inclusive Social Protection Systems sets out 12 milestones for developing an integrated and sustainable social protection system, aligned with the first ever regionally agreed Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific. The Guide recommends a social protection system that has the buy-in of key actors, guarantees the right to social protection for all, addresses gaps in current social protection systems, identifies solutions to support sustainable financing, removes inefficiencies and fragmentation in delivery and administration, and responds to shocks more efficiently and effectively.