

ESCAP's input to the 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)

Over the past year, ESCAP has carried out a range of activities to support countries in their poverty reduction efforts and COVID-19 responses. Examples include an update of the [social protection toolbox](#) with hundreds of good practices on social protection, the [Simulation](#) tool that estimates the impact on household consumption, poverty and inequality as well as the cost implications of expanding social protection coverage and the LNOB [online database](#), which presents innovative statistical tools to measure inequality of opportunity and identify the furthest behind (using Classification and Regression Tree analysis). ESCAP has also produced two flagship publications in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for extending social protection, namely the unescap.org/publications/protection-we-want-social-outlook-asia-and-pacific and the unescap.org/kp/2021/beyond-pandemic-building-back-better-crises-asia-and-pacific.

Despite all collected efforts at regional, subregional and national levels, the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening to reverse hard-won social development gains and push millions of people back into poverty. ESCAP has estimated the potential impact the pandemic may have on poverty (see unescap.org/kp/2021/shrinking-asia-pacific-middle-class-trends-and-impact-covid-19-pandemic), using two scenarios of economic contraction of 5 and 10 per cent, following the methodology proposed by Sumner, Hoy and Ortiz-Juarez (2020).

Our findings show that, at the \$3.2 per day international poverty line, estimates indicate that at an economic contraction of 5 per cent, 93 million people in Asia and the Pacific could be pushed into poverty. The number of poor increases to some 200 million people if the economic contraction reaches 10 per cent. South and South-West Asia would be the most impacted subregion with around 70 per cent of all new poor, of which India would capture the majority. South-East Asia emerges as the second most hit region, accounting for around 14 per cent of the new poor under any of the two scenarios. The COVID-19 pandemic could, thus, reverse poverty reduction efforts by half a decade.

[Meanwhile, recent issues of ESCAP Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific also conducted new quantitative analyses on poverty reduction. The 2019 edition estimated that the region needs to spend about \\$350 billion per year to end poverty by 2030, primarily through providing cash transfers and a social protection floor. The 2021 edition proposed a policy package that aims to enhance access to social services, close the digital divide, and strengthen green climate and energy actions. Such a package could cut the number of poor by almost 180 million people by 2040.](#)

This new panorama calls for collective action to integrate social protection as a core strategy for social and economic development. Despite governments responses of, often, temporary ad hoc measures, many countries still need to increase commitment to build long term sustainable universal social protection systems that guarantee all people in the region a decent standard of living.

In this respect, the recently adopted “Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific” ([Action Plan](#)) is the region’s first-ever framework on social protection. The Action Plan was endorsed at the ESCAP 77th Commission session on 29 April 2021.

The objective of the Action Plan is to promote social protection for all as a facilitator for implementing the 2030 Agenda and to establish a shared vision for the region. The Action Plan includes some 15 national actions to be implemented by 2030, including: setting a national baseline of the population covered by social protection schemes and to share national experiences on progress of national social protection policies. It also includes 3 regional actions that ESCAP, together with ILO and other regional UN entities, will be responsible for, including the development of a regional online platform to facilitate peer learning and the sharing of good practices, but also to provide technical advice and capacity-building at the national level to support countries’ implementation of the Action Plan.

To foster greater inter-agency convergence and collaboration in sharing knowledge, promoting policy dialogue and providing technical assistance, ESCAP has collaborated with a number of Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) as well as UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in the Asia-Pacific region, primarily in their drafting of the CCAs. The main focus of these activities has been to strengthen the methodologies and identification of population groups in poverty or at highest risk of being left behind in access to a range of fundamental opportunities and thereby falling into poverty (using the LNOB tool, mentioned above). ESCAP has also supported the RCOs and UNCTs on the impact extending social protection would have on poverty (using the above-mentioned Simulation tool).

ESCAP has also been an active part in regional policy coordination and joint programming with the UN agencies, funds and programmes, through the issue-based coalition (IBC) on inclusion and empowerment. To this extent, the adopted Action Plan on social protection (mentioned above) is part of the IBC’s approved workplan.

This past year 2020 marks 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the five-year milestone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Asia-Pacific Beijing+25 Declaration recognizes women and girls as active agents of change for the region’s development and outlines key actions by Governments and stakeholders to close gender gaps, including in women’s economic and political participation. One of ESCAP’s key initiatives to support women’s economic empowerment is the Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship (CWE) programme (supported by the Government of Canada) and is being implemented in 6 countries in the Asia and the Pacific (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal, Samoa and Viet Nam). The programme follows a systems approach by identifying and addressing barriers that impact women entrepreneurs at various stages, including the impact of COVID 19- to start up and register a business, skills needed to manage businesses, access to finance and digital technology, as well as discriminatory laws and policies.

Considering that many of the region’s 690 million persons with disabilities live in poverty and have become more vulnerable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP conducted a range

of activities to support members and associate members in developing disability-inclusive COVID-19 responses in the past year. At the onset of the outbreak, in response to requests by member States and organizations of persons with disabilities, ESCAP developed a well-received [policy brief](#) and [advocacy video](#) on protecting and empowering persons with disabilities in the context of COVID-19. To support member States in developing disability-inclusive COVID-19 responses in a systematic way, ESCAP further launched a project to provide seed funding for five pilot initiatives in Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia and Thailand that seeks to promote an adequate standard of living in spite of COVID-19. ESCAP has also launched an [accessible website](#) containing a compendium of more than 250 disability-inclusive policy responses to COVID-19 by ESCAP members and associate members, as well as knowledge products on resources on disability inclusion and COVID-19.

ESCAP also facilitated knowledge sharing on precise and targeted poverty reduction, leveraging the latest policy experience from Asia-Pacific countries. It organized one side event on the subject in 2019 and is looking to produce additional country case studies in 2021.