STRATEGY 2030
SOCIAL PROTECTION
DIRECTIONAL GUIDE
DECEMBER 2022

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
Social Protection Directional Guide 2022–2030:
Toward Inclusive and Resilient Social Protection

Asian Development Bank
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PREFACE

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has long recognized social protection as one of the key strategic areas for promoting inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific region. ADB’s Strategy 2030 considers social protection as a fundamental area for support in pursuing the operational priority of addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities in the region.

The importance of strengthening social protection systems and service delivery has been further emphasized in the context of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response, where most countries deployed social protection measures as a critical pillar of their policy response, particularly to protect the most vulnerable population. The post-COVID-19 world has brought about new challenges, including anemic rates of economic growth, global inflation crisis that has been further exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, rising geopolitical tensions, and the elevated risk of social unrest. There is an ever more urgent need to address climate change and its impacts through appropriate adaptation and mitigation measures at country, regional, and global levels. All these factors further elevate the importance of building more inclusive and resilient social protection programs and systems globally and in ADB’s developing member countries (DMCs).

The purpose of this Social Protection Directional Guide 2022–2030 is to help ADB teams operationalize social protection under Operational Priority 1, with the focus on ensuring an inclusive recovery from pandemic shocks, strengthening resilience to existing and new risks, addressing remaining poverty, and reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific region. This guide builds on the earlier work done under the Social Protection Operational Plan, 2014–2020 and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals emphasis on the role of social protection as an enabler of development outcomes. It reflects the needs and challenges created by long-term structural trends as well as those exposed by the pandemic and new risks to provide direction for future ADB assistance to DMCs in social protection.

At the core of this guide is the vision of building more inclusive and resilient social protection policies and systems. This vision is realized through the achievement of the following key strategic objectives: (i) comprehensive social protection policies and programs, (ii) integrated solutions with amplified development impact, and (iii) adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. The realization of these objectives is envisioned through four key operational pillars: (i) strengthening social protection policies and systems, (ii) supporting integrated intersector initiatives, (iii) scaling up sustainable and catalytic financing, and (iv) building partnerships.

We hope that this directional guide will be a useful resource to ADB teams. It is a living document, which will go through a process of continual review to remain current and relevant, including aligning with ADB’s new operating model.

We thank the Social Protection Technical Working Group and everyone else who contributed to this document, and we look forward to further engagement with development practitioners, advocates, and decision-makers in our efforts to develop more inclusive and resilient social protection systems in the DMCs.
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>coronavirus disease</td>
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<td>CPRO</td>
<td>COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option</td>
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<td>CPS</td>
<td>country partnership strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMC</td>
<td>developing member country</td>
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<td>ERCD</td>
<td>Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMP</td>
<td>labor market program</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernment organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<td>SDTG</td>
<td>Social Development Thematic Group</td>
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<td>SPI</td>
<td>Social Protection Indicator</td>
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<td>SPOP</td>
<td>Social Protection Operational Plan, 2014–2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>technical assistance</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>technical and vocational education and training</td>
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### NOTE

In this report, “$” indicates United States dollars.
I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2019, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved Strategy 2030, which sets the course for ADB to respond effectively to the evolving needs of Asia and the Pacific. Under Strategy 2030, ADB will sustain its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and expand its vision to achieve a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific. These goals are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specific challenges faced by the region, as well as ADB strengths and comparative advantages.

2. The first operational priority of Strategy 2030 focuses on addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific. Operational Priority 1 is built around three interconnected pillars: (i) enhancing human capital and social protection for all; (ii) generating quality jobs; and (iii) reducing inequality in opportunities, thereby removing the barriers that people face in accessing quality infrastructure and services, especially for the poor and vulnerable. This operational priority aims to strengthen ADB’s role as a development partner in helping developing member countries (DMCs) achieve many of the SDGs and reduce multidimensional poverty and inequality in income and opportunities. Strategy 2030 places social protection at the center of its operations and development agenda for the next decade.

3. In early 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic struck the region, creating a shock very different from any other experienced in the past owing to the size of its impacts and its effects on population groups traditionally not considered poor. Countries went into lockdowns, travel was restricted, and economic and social life stalled. As across the world, governments across the region responded to the crisis with a combination of public health and fiscal and social protection measures to protect lives and livelihoods. This included the rapid expansion of social protection provisions to the most vulnerable groups, including the poor, children, women, older persons, and those employed in the informal sector and other critically hit industry sectors.

4. An average of 2.0% of gross domestic product (GDP) was spent on social protection response measures—in addition to the 5.2% of GDP already spent on existing social protection systems in the region. About two-thirds of the measures were newly introduced, while the other one-third expanded existing programs. About two-thirds of the response measures used social assistance programs, and the remaining one-third was equally distributed between social insurance and labor market programs (LMPs), predominantly wage subsidies. The response measures expanded either the benefit size or number of beneficiaries; a wide range of innovations were also developed to improve access to and effectiveness of these measures. Many innovations leveraged digital technology and were achieved through new partnerships with the private sector and various nongovernment organizations (NGOs).

5. This unprecedented response resulted in a significant increase in ADB operations and country engagement in social protection. Through a combination of instruments—including the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO)—ADB provided support to almost every DMC in

2 Social protection encompasses social assistance in support of the poor and vulnerable, social insurance to cover certain risks, and labor market programs (LMPs) to facilitate employment.
3 Disproportionate impacts were found in urban areas and among informal workers and migrant workers.
the region. This support has been critical in cushioning the shock and has provided the opportunity to strengthen social protection systems, expand coverage, and improve implementation.

6. Despite the expansion of support, preexisting challenges in coverage and delivery mechanisms persist. Key populations—such as the informal sector, which represents 70% of the labor force in the region, and migrant workers—largely remain without social protection. They are often described as the “missing middle,” as they are not covered by social insurance programs for formal sector workers nor by means-tested social assistance programs used to target the poor and vulnerable. Despite social protection coverage expansion during the COVID-19 crisis, the urban informal sector was hardest hit economically and still received only limited coverage.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, highlighted the enormous capacity to innovate and to address some major challenges in system strengthening. Areas of innovation have been at all levels and include digitalization, intersector cooperation, and partnerships. A key challenge and opportunity for ADB going forward is to sustain and to build on these new levels of engagement and innovation across DMCs and—through a combination of technical assistance (TA) and lending—develop effective approaches to strengthening social protection systems. The fiscal challenges to providing sustainable financing for social protection will be another major challenge going forward for all DMCs.

8. The pandemic has also emphasized the critical role that social protection plays in ensuring an inclusive and resilient post-pandemic recovery and future in Asia and the Pacific. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, it is estimated that an additional 75 million–80 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty (i.e., living on under $1.90 per day), while 162 million have fallen into poverty (i.e., living on under $3.20 per day). The region is additionally facing a range of structural changes and disruptions due to climate change and must prepare for future shocks. Developing inclusive, adaptive, and shock-responsive social protection systems is thus a priority.

9. The purpose of this social protection directional guide is to help ADB teams operationalize the social protection pillar under Operational Priority 1. The events of the last 2 years have made clear the importance of ADB engagement in the sector for achieving the goals of Strategy 2030, ensuring an inclusive recovery from pandemic shocks, and strengthening resilience in the region. This guide builds on the earlier work done under the Social Protection Operational Plan, 2014–2020 (SPOP) and aligns with the SDG emphasis on the role of social protection as an enabler of development outcomes. It reflects the needs and challenges faced by long-term trends as well as those exposed by the pandemic to provide direction for future ADB assistance to DMCs in social protection.

5 In 2020, 30 programs were created in immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis; in 2021, 6 programs were approved in support of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Note that the CPRO was established under the Countercyclical Support Facility as an exceptional instrument reserved for addressing the crisis triggered by COVID-19.


7 Climate change presents two fundamental challenges: an increased frequency of extreme weather events (e.g., floods and droughts), and more gradual changes in the natural environment (e.g., rising sea temperatures and desertification). Both challenges represent new hazards that affect livelihoods and increase vulnerability and the risk of poverty.

8 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for universal social protection in SDG 1 (no poverty) and outlines its role as an enabler in SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 8 (employment and decent work for all), and SDG 3 (good health and well-being) that includes target SDG 3.8 on achieving universal health coverage. United Nations. 2015. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York.
10. This directional guide will need to align with ADB’s new operating model through the organizational review led by President Masatsugu Asakawa since June 2021. The new operating model received the support of the Board of Directors on 28 October 2022 and is scheduled to be rolled out in the second quarter of 2023. Two of the key features of the new operating model are the creation of new ADB-wide sector and thematic groups to deliver client solutions. This aims to significantly reduce the fragmentation of sector and thematic expertise among different departments while increasing ADB’s flexibility and agility to deploy specialists. The proposed sector and thematic groupings align well with Strategy 2030’s seven operational priorities by assigning clear operational priority leadership roles to the sectors and themes. Cross-sector and thematic work will be key aspect of the new operating model. In order to facilitate such work and prevent new silos, all sectors will be consolidated into a single group—the Sectors Group—and all themes will be consolidated into a new department—the Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department (CCSDD)—all of which aims to provide coherent approaches to ADB’s crosscutting priorities. The Sectors Group and the CCSDD will work closely with the Regional Departments, the Private Sector Operations Department (PSOD), and the Office of Market Development and PPP (OMDP).

11. This directional guide intends to be a living document and will be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect the changing demands of DMCs, social protection trends, and priorities of ADB. The directional guide will need to align with ADB’s new operating model. It will go through a process of continual review to remain current and relevant. As the operating environments for development efforts in Asia and the Pacific region exhibit fluidity, ADB should be on top of the changes required to ensure effective development outcomes as articulated in Strategy 2030.

12. This guide is organized as follows. Part II provides the rationale for investing in social protection, its strategic role, and aspects of social protection that require enhancement; Part III outlines the strategic directions for future ADB social protection interventions; and Part IV covers implementation, including required resources, and interdepartmental cooperation and coordination.

9 The seven sectors are (i) agriculture, food, nature, and rural development; (ii) energy; (iii) finance; (iv) human and social development, covering health, education, and the social development agenda; (v) public sector management and governance; (vi) transport; and (vii) water and urban development. The five thematic areas are: (i) climate change and resilience, covering climate change, disaster risk management, and environmental sustainability; (ii) gender; (iii) transition states and engagement; (iv) digital technology for development; and (v) regional cooperation and integration (RCI) and trade.
II. WHERE WE ARE

A. Defining Social Protection in ADB

13. The ADB Social Protection Strategy defined social protection as a set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting labor market functioning, diminishing people’s exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and the interruption or loss of income. The strategy also underlined ADB’s commitment to internationally recognized core labor standards. The SPOP supported three categories of social protection: social insurance, social assistance, and LMPs; and this guide maintains the same categorization (Table 1).

Table 1: Social Protection Categories and Programs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Social Assistance</th>
<th>Social Insurance</th>
<th>Labor Market Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Publicly funded transfers and services for the most vulnerable groups with no other means of adequate support</td>
<td>Contributory schemes to cushion the risks associated with old age, health, disability, work injury, and unemployment</td>
<td>Policies and programs designed to facilitate employment and to promote the efficient operation of labor markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Welfare assistance (e.g., cash or in-kind transfers and social care services)</td>
<td>Pensions</td>
<td>Skills development and training</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social pensions, child grants, and other universal programs</td>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>Public works programs (e.g., cash-for-work or food-for-work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health assistance</td>
<td>Other social insurance (e.g., unemployment and disability insurance, maternity benefits, benefits from provident funds)</td>
<td>Core labor standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disability benefits</td>
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14. Social protection safeguards against risks across the life cycle. It reduces poverty and vulnerability and supports consumption smoothing from periods of high income during employment to periods of low income during retirement. It enables human capital development and can help address gender and other disparities in access to opportunities. Through intersector connections, social protection can enable access to health care and other essential services. It can also be a vehicle for adaptation and strengthening resilience to more frequent shocks and stresses due to climate change. The integration of social protection systems with climate and disaster risk management helps develop complementarities, prepare for shocks, and respond more quickly and efficiently if disasters strike. Moreover, social protection is key in supporting the

“just transition” through the reskilling of the labor force in the shift from coal to green energy and overall low-carbon economies.\textsuperscript{11}

B. \textbf{Structural Changes, Disruptions, and Opportunities}

15. As evidenced by the COVID-19 crisis, many social protection systems in Asia and the Pacific are poorly equipped to respond adequately to structural changes and disruptions, which include climate change, drastic demographic changes, rapid urbanization, increased migration, and digitalization. All of these are interrelated and can be viewed as potential causes for poverty and inequality, calling for a growing role for social protection across the life cycle. At the same time, these challenges also provide opportunities to reduce poverty and inequality.

16. \textbf{COVID-19 pandemic}. The global COVID-19 crisis has not only reversed the region’s steady decline in poverty rates but has also increased the high social and economic inequality and escalated various fiscal challenges. As already noted, it is estimated that an additional 162 million people were pushed into poverty and an additional 75 million–80 million people fell into extreme poverty during the crisis.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, the equivalent of nearly 125 million full-time jobs were lost because of the pandemic.\textsuperscript{13} The public health measures employed to address the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns) emphasized the vulnerability of those in the informal sector, who often witnessed their livelihoods disappear overnight.

17. Indeed, the economic consequences of these measures slowed economic growth, and budget constraints are now impeding future fiscal responses. For example, in Southeast Asia, fiscal resources for social protection responses declined in 2021 to an average of 4.9% of GDP from 7.7% in 2020, even as the epidemiological shock intensified and economies continued to operate below their potential.\textsuperscript{14}

18. \textbf{Demographic change}. Rising life expectancy in Asia and the Pacific—along with falling birth rates—means that many DMCs are undergoing a demographic transition to aging societies. While some will soon face shrinking working-age populations, in others, the workforce numbers will continue to grow, necessitating investment in human capital development to increase long-term labor productivity and labor force participation.

19. Over the past few years, progress has been made in expanding pension coverage, with 74% of the region’s population above the statutory retirement age receiving old-age pensions, although the adequacy of these pensions in the region is lower than in other regions. There are stark regional variations in coverage—such as an only 40% coverage rate in South Asia—as well as important and persistent gender disparities over the life cycle, resulting in greater vulnerability for women in old age, which underscores the need to expand both the value and coverage of

\textsuperscript{11} The Paris Agreement on climate change recognizes this risk and commits parties to “taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities.” A just transition recognizes the importance of the impact on people of the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies and ensures that no one is left behind, environmental integrity is preserved, and rights of vulnerable populations are protected, with particular attention to vulnerable group issues including sex, indigenous peoples, and future generations. United Nations. 2015. \textit{Adoption of the Paris Agreement.} \url{https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf}.


noncontributory social pension schemes and for affordable health insurance. Across the region, only one-third of the working-age population contributes to their pensions, highlighting the urgent need to expand social insurance and other contributory schemes to promote adequate savings to ensure income security in old age as well as long-term economic sustainability.\(^{15}\)

20. The region is also facing a growing demand to develop appropriate social care services (e.g., for older persons, persons with disabilities, and children), which protect vulnerable persons from risks, promote human capital development, and enable labor force participation, especially female labor.\(^{16}\) Much of the care in the region is performed by women in the home. Beyond targeted social welfare services, services must be developed that are affordable, effective, accessible to the majority of the population, and fiscally sustainable. This requires cross-sector collaboration, policy and program development, incentivization of the private sector and civil society organizations, and a strong focus on capacity building and workforce development.

21. **Urbanization.** While rapid urbanization has made Asia and the Pacific home to some of the world’s most populous megacities (e.g., Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Tokyo), the region’s secondary cities are growing even faster.\(^{17}\) This increases their vulnerability to shocks like COVID-19, with urban congestion and poor living conditions heightening pandemic risk. The informal sector is concentrated in urban slums, and informal workers often lack access to social protection benefits and essential services. Urbanization and the persistent vulnerabilities of the urban informal sector increase the need for inclusive social protection instruments.

22. The COVID-19 crisis has underscored these challenges and provided some solutions, like self-registration in Thailand that allowed for rapidly expanded social protection coverage of informal sector workers. It has also highlighted the need for cross-sector collaboration among the urban, health, education, transport, water, rural development, and energy sectors, and a better understanding of the role that social protection can play as an enabler of broader development.

23. **Migration.** Globally, 84 million migrants originate from Asia and the Pacific, more than from any other region.\(^{18}\) In 2019, Asia and the Pacific was the largest remittance-receiving region in the world, with about $325 billion in formal remittances, or 45% of global flow.\(^{19}\) Migrants possess specific vulnerabilities—including greater exposure to precarious employment—and often lack access to social protection benefits because of their migrant status. Internal migration in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and India is also huge and poses specific challenges for the portability of social protection rights.\(^{20}\) Moreover, the increasing importance of regional and global labor mobility poses challenges for contributory social protection schemes; highlights the vital role of shock-responsive instruments in the face of widespread crises; and underscores the need for international and regional coordination of policies, programs, and systems.


\(^{16}\) Asia and the Pacific region is home to around 70% of the global population of people with disabilities, or around 690 million people. This is expected to increase because of the rise of noncommunicable diseases and an aging population. ADB. 2022. *Strengthening Disability-Inclusive Development: 2021–2025 Road Map.* Manila.


\(^{19}\) ADB. 2021. *Harnessing Digitization for Remittances in Asia and the Pacific.* Manila.

24. **Digitalization.** The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly accelerated a long-term trend toward increased reliance on digital technologies, driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution’s more powerful and affordable computers and smart devices. Public health responses imposed physical mobility restrictions and encouraged people to trust, adopt, and use virtual work-from-home arrangements, online education, telehealth, e-commerce, e-government, and other electronic tools. Digital platforms had already been replacing in-person socioeconomic activities for decades, but intensified risks to public health during the pandemic created further momentum. These changes will likely continue to transform how people work, learn, socialize, and access services well into the future.\(^{21}\)

25. This transformation offers both enormous potential and considerable risk, particularly for the most vulnerable people in Asia and the Pacific. Inclusive digital technologies can facilitate access for the connected—or create greater barriers for the marginalized. Such technologies generate opportunities for social and productive inclusion but also dangers from unscrupulous operators that abuse new, and often poorly understood, technologies to exploit the most vulnerable. Improving digital access and literacy are thus increasingly important. Similarly, employment in the “gig” economy, with part-time, on-call, and temporary jobs, reduces job security and increases the need for access to social protection.

26. Innovations in digitalization and the use of data emerged as critical mechanisms for the rapid expansion and urgent delivery of social protection provisions through the pandemic period. The crisis shaped opportunities for fortifying social protection systems going forward by strengthening identification, enrollment, and payment systems; analyzing big data; reaching unreachable populations; monitoring impacts; and partnering with new stakeholders such as the private sector and NGOs. In the future, ensuring cross-sector linkages and partnerships, enhancing interoperability of data systems, and designing inclusive data policies are key opportunities for ADB support to DMCs.

C. **Current Status of Social Protection in the Region**

27. A progress report on the SDGs recently published by ADB, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that the region is not on track to meet several SDG targets related to social protection by 2030—including no poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), ensuring decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10)—unless significant additional efforts are made.\(^{22}\) SDG target 1.3—to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030, to achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable—is a particular challenge for reaching no-poverty SDG 1. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the world’s population covered by at least one social protection program (excluding health) is only 46%, compared to 44% for Asia and the Pacific.\(^{23}\)

28. Social protection expenditure and coverage have gradually expanded over the past decade in the region, however. According to the Social Protection Indicator (SPI), these

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\(^{22}\) Asia-Pacific SDG Partnership. [https://sdgasiapacific.net/sdg-data/sdg-progress](https://sdgasiapacific.net/sdg-data/sdg-progress).

investments rose from 3.4% of GDP per capita in 2009 to 4.1% in 2018.\textsuperscript{24} This was mainly because of increases in social insurance expenditure, as well as the expansion of social protection coverage, with a marked increase from 42.9% of intended beneficiaries in 2009 to 67.0% in 2018, primarily driven by the expansion of health insurance programs. Yet, the expansion mostly benefitted the nonpoor, as expenditure and coverage of social assistance stagnated over time.

29. Significant progress in women’s access to social protection was also made from 2009 to 2018. The expansion of social insurance coverage, including pensions and health insurance, has likely contributed to the greater inclusion of women. This growth, however, builds on a low base, as the average Social Protection Indicator (SPI) for women in the region in 2018 was 2.0% of GDP.

30. Indeed, social protection systems remain underdeveloped in the region, given the low coverage and challenges in resources and administration (footnote 23). Limited social protection coverage in the labor market is the result of a high level of informality and the related challenge of the missing middle. In addition, many social protection implementation systems are underdeveloped, lacking adequate infrastructure and implementation capacity.

31. The region’s response to the COVID-19 crisis temporarily addressed the progress deficit in social assistance specifically. Governments responded to the global shock with an unprecedentedly rapid and consistent set of—largely temporary—social assistance measures that substantially expanded coverage, particularly for informal sector workers. Nevertheless, responses varied considerably across countries and regions, with coverage and benefit increases in East Asia and the Pacific on average two to three times the size of those in Central and West Asia, which in turn were greater than those in South Asia.

32. Reflecting diverse social and policy contexts, the types of responses also differed across the region. In East Asia, Mongolia substantially expanded its Child Money Program, which is a flagship social assistance program providing benefits to all households with children. In Southeast Asia, governments introduced labor market interventions, expanded both the number of recipients and values of existing cash transfers (e.g., Indonesia topped up benefits for its Program Keluarga Harapan conditional cash transfer and increased the number of beneficiaries from 9.2 million to 10.0 million households); introduced new programs (e.g., Thailand initiated a new scheme for informal workers, enrolling 16 million); and achieved near-universal coverage (e.g., Singapore put in place cash benefits for all citizens ages 21 years and older). In Central and West Asia, countries relied more heavily on social insurance interventions. In South Asia, countries introduced expansive social assistance initiatives (e.g., India directed a new benefit to 35 million beneficiaries of noncontributory schemes for older people, widows, and people with disabilities). In the Pacific, countries adopted a heterogeneous mix of social assistance, social insurance, and labor market responses.\textsuperscript{25}


D. **ADB Engagement in Social Protection**

33. ADB’s work in social protection has contributed to the development of the sector in the region by supporting DMCs’ efforts in strengthening and expanding their social protection programs. Work began in the early 1990s and accelerated during the Asian financial crisis and again during the global economic crisis, during which support focused on immediate social assistance support and social care services to those most affected. Indeed, from 1996 to 2012, social protection loans, grants, and TA represented only 2.3% of the ADB portfolio. ADB social protection operations during this time were primarily crisis-driven and did not seek deeper engagement to develop and to strengthen national social protection systems. The low priority given to social protection by ADB and its DMCs resulted in a small and scattered social protection portfolio.

34. The SPOP, approved in 2013, aligned the ADB Social Protection Strategy with Strategy 2020 and drew on the findings of the 2012 evaluation of this strategy by the Independent Evaluation Department. It called for continued development of social protection projects and the active identification of opportunities to integrate social protection into sectors and projects, particularly in education, finance, health, and public sector management. Thus, between 2014 and 2019, 6–10 social protection projects were approved each year, representing around 5% of the total number of ADB projects.

35. ADB developed large investments supporting flagship social assistance programs in Pakistan and the Philippines and, more broadly, social protection in Mongolia. These programs have been supporting the expansion of coverage by providing institutional strengthening and capacity building. In these DMCs, ADB is deeply engaged in policy dialogue with governments, resulting in a continuous stream of support, either through projects or programs, supplemented with TA. This support has made these social protection systems stronger and better able to respond quickly and effectively to crises. The continuous engagement, for over 1 decade, has also allowed ADB to be well positioned to provide and scale up support in times of crisis.

36. In various DMCs, education initiatives include several technical and vocational education and training (TVET) projects (i.e., 2–6 interventions per year), with an increasing shift toward skills building, employment services, and job facilitation. Health initiatives include health sector support, disability and social care assistance, and programs for aged care services delivery, which is a new area that developed following initial TA to build capacity and knowledge. Further, several policy-based loans have social protection components, supporting pension policy reforms, social assistance programs, or social spending through countercyclical support facilities (Figure 1).

Policy-based lending is typically accompanied by TA in support of policy reforms.

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28 If the investment is made to support general social protection objectives or social protection initiatives in sectors other than finance, education, or health, it is registered under the subsector for social protection initiatives of the public sector management sector. ADB. 2014. Project Classification System. Manila.
29 These programs are usually classified under finance or public sector management.
37. Social protection initiatives also support meeting corporate targets on gender mainstreaming and are increasingly contributing to climate financing. About 86% of all social protection initiatives from 2014 to 2024 support either a gender equity theme or effective gender mainstreaming (Figure 2). Moreover, from 2018 to 2024, $104 million is earmarked for climate mitigation and $373 million for climate adaptation (Figure 3).
**Figure 2: Social Protection and Gender, 2014–2024**

(\% of projects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>EGM</th>
<th>GEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EGM = effective gender mainstreaming, GEM = gender equity theme.


**Figure 3: Social Protection and Climate Finance, 2018–2024**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mitigation</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>14.07</td>
<td>54.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>55.97</td>
<td>79.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>106.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>25.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2024</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>106.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 crisis, the number of social protection interventions peaked at 35, representing 20% of total projects. Most interventions are policy-based loans with social protection components using the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPR0) financing. Many of these were in countries where ADB had not worked in social protection before. Additional support was also provided to the flagship social assistance programs in Mongolia, Pakistan, and the Philippines, allowing the governments there to quickly expand social protection coverage. This support includes both strengthening infrastructure and temporary top-ups of cash transfers. ADB support was tapped multiple times through programming beyond the CPR0.

39. In 2021, the number of newly approved social protection interventions dropped to 10, equal to 8% of the total number of projects. This is substantially lower than during the beginning of the crisis but considerably higher than before the start of the pandemic. The majority of the interventions approved in 2021 support pandemic recovery.

40. In the 2022–2024 pipeline, ADB has committed to supporting the strengthening of social protection systems in more DMCs. The growing importance of social protection is also illustrated in recent country partnership strategies (CPSs), such as for Bangladesh, and the Pacific Approach, covering 12 small Pacific DMCs, in which social protection is listed as a priority area. A key challenge going forward across all DMCs is to build on the expanded social protection engagement that emerged during the pandemic, develop stronger relationships with stakeholders at the country level, and provide targeted TA to identify key areas for further support. An overview of the portfolio and pipeline by region is attached in Appendix 1.

41. TA plays a key role in strengthening social protection systems, diagnostic support, and capacity building. TA funding is being used to support social protection administrative functions, such as targeting, household registration, compliance verification, payment management, beneficiary updates, grievance redress, and monitoring and evaluation. These administrative functions are often supported at the program level. TA funding is also used to support national policy dialogues and pilot initiatives in areas such as digital social protection, the graduation approach, and community-based long-term care services, which in turn increase the awareness of governments on social protection. ADB has, for instance, been supporting social protection policy development in the PRC through a series of TA interventions advising on social assistance and pension reform, workforce development, and aged care and social care services. ADB research, analyses, and stocktaking work are also essential for addressing knowledge gaps, stimulating policy discussions, and informing policy choices and direction. More work is needed on costing social protection and identifying sources of financing.

42. Since 2005, ADB’s SPI has been a long-term endeavor to support social protection monitoring in DMCs and to provide a useful entry point for understanding the degree of development in social protection across DMCs. It focuses on assessing both the coverage and expenditure of social protection benefits across DMCs. The SPI tracks progress and identifies deficits. Country reports, regional reports, and all data are accessible on the ADB website, providing open access to DMCs, researchers, and others. The SPI is a unique data collection activity of ADB and a valuable resource for the region. The most recent regional reports include

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31 The graduation approach is a comprehensive, timebound, integrated, and sequenced set of interventions that builds on a foundation of social assistance and enables poor households to achieve socioeconomic resilience and progress out of extreme poverty. ADB. 2020. Testing the Graduation Approach in the Philippines. Manila.
chapters assessing social protection COVID-19 responses and benefits that address the needs of persons with disabilities. Going forward, collaboration with the ILO on data collection and regional capacity building toward social protection is being explored.

43. Other knowledge products and events have been an important part of ADB support for social protection in the region. They have helped develop operations, effective capacity building, and implementation support. Most importantly, knowledge products track developments in the region and open new areas of engagement for ADB with DMCs. These areas include the development of operations in aged care in the PRC, migrants’ access to social protection in Southeast Asia, and impact evaluations (e.g., the conditional cash transfer and graduation approach in the Philippines, and social assistance programs in Mongolia). Knowledge products are developed in the regional departments; across units in the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC) (e.g., finance and governance thematic groups, and health and education sector groups); in the Economic Research and Regional Cooperation Department (ERCD); and through the ADB Institute. The Social Development Thematic Group (SDTG) Secretariat has led the production of a wide range of knowledge products. Since 2016, ADB has twice held the Asia Pacific Social Protection Week, a flagship event bringing together social protection policy makers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to share regional and global knowledge on the subject.

44. Social protection must be an integral part of the ADB corporate strategy to help address poverty reduction, improve human capital, and promote inclusive growth in the region. Social protection systems should not only be supported during crisis periods—providing a one-off response—but need to be built up during noncrisis periods to strengthen capacity, effectiveness, and resilience (footnote 27). ADB support to social protection system strengthening requires sustained engagement at the country level through CPSs; broader dialogues on macroeconomic and fiscal reforms; as well as continued development of knowledge, effective partnerships to support operations, and cofinancing. Country-level knowledge gaps must be addressed, and the capacity and number of ADB staff to assist DMCs and to build the social protection portfolio must be increased (footnote 27). A follow-on 2020 paper on lessons from ADB engagement in social assistance underscored many of the 2012 evaluation findings and highlighted the role of social assistance in human capital development and importance of digitalization to support the efficiency and effectiveness of social protection programs.33

III. WHERE WE ARE GOING: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND OPERATIONAL PILLARS

45. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the key role of social protection in supporting lives and livelihoods was demonstrated, as well as its role in countercyclical support. The pandemic also demonstrated that DMCs with more mature, shock-responsive social protection systems were better equipped to address the challenges brought by the crisis. Social protection systems will continue to be crucial during pandemic recovery and to act as a stabilizer and as a source of human capital development to address various structural changes (e.g., technological advances, demographic changes, and migration) and disruptions triggered by climate change.

A. Vision and Approach

46. This guide aims to detail more inclusive and resilient social protection policies and programs achieved through three strategic objectives and four operational pillars (see Figure 4). The theory of change—providing an overview of the sequence of results from operational inputs to outputs, outcomes, and impacts—can be found in Appendix 2.

![Figure 4: ADB Social Protection Vision and Approach](image)

B. **Strategic Objective 1: Comprehensive Social Protection Policies and Systems**

47. Given the limited social protection coverage and spending in Asia and the Pacific, comprehensive social protection systems are needed to fill existing gaps in the current design of many social protection programs while improving implementation systems (Table 2). As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, social assistance support is an effective tool to protect the poor and vulnerable during a crisis and as a countercyclical measure. Moreover, design features of these programs can be employed to maximize women’s empowerment as another fundamental channel of inclusion, which is often neglected in programs across the region. The support to gender can take into account capacity building for poor women in their access to subsidized financing (e.g., financial assistance provided in social protection programs under the “graduation” component) as well as capacity building for poor women to use digital social protection devices (e.g., e-payment systems and e-health registration and monitoring systems). Finally, while other donors tend to focus on fragile and lower middle-income countries, ADB can also support upper middle-income countries in addressing remaining poverty pockets, where policy reforms, program strengthening, and innovative pilots can provide lessons for other DMCs.

**Table 2: Strategic Interventions for Comprehensive Social Protection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Assistance</th>
<th>Social Insurance</th>
<th>Labor Market Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand coverage of cash to poor and vulnerable groups, including interaction between cash and social care services, while streamlining programs, avoiding duplication of benefit payments.</td>
<td>Promote policy-based reforms for old-age pensions with the aim of increasing coverage by promoting contributory pensions for informal workers, while ensuring financial sustainability.</td>
<td>Support the development of active labor market programs with skills training and job matching and the linkages between these services and social assistance programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop affordable and accessible social care services (e.g., child care, and care and support services for persons with disabilities and older persons) and cash and service support to caregivers.</td>
<td>Continue to support the development of health insurance coverage.</td>
<td>Provide technical support for the development of unemployment benefits and other reforms of passive measures (e.g., severance pay).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop interventions to reach informal and migrant workers, including interaction of cash transfers with active labor market programs.</td>
<td>Develop policy-based reforms and technical assistance that increase the comprehensiveness of social insurance for risks associated with sickness, disability, and parental leave.</td>
<td>Expand coverage toward the informal sector with a combination of contributions and government support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance design features that promote gender equality.</td>
<td>Support technical assistance to develop portability of social insurance rights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build on a foundation of social assistance with a holistic set of poverty reduction interventions through the graduation approach for sustainable livelihoods.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48. ADB combines program lending with technical support for governments to expand and to reform their social insurance systems. It should continue to do so to address both existing gaps and new challenges. Rapid aging in the region requires supporting older people when they are no longer able to work, supporting reforms that link pension age with life expectancy, finding ways to fund pensions, and ensuring participation in these pensions. The reform of state-owned enterprises requires the strengthening of national social insurance systems, taking on cradle-to-grave protection. Further, the pandemic triggered an interest in establishing unemployment insurance and closing existing gaps in health insurance coverage and family leave provision. Comprehensive social protection also means that coverage must be expanded to the missing middle, either by governments funding premiums or tapering social insurance contributions, with both workers and governments making contribution payments. This is already happening in DMCs that are working toward expanding health insurance for universal health care.

49. The funding of passive and active labor market programs (LMPs) must be increased as well as better analysis of what works. Governments across Asia and the Pacific currently commit only minimal resources to active LMPs, 0.1% of GDP in Asia and 0.6% in the Pacific in 2018 (footnote 4). These programs are important in supporting changing labor markets and strengthening gender equality and economic empowerment. They, however, remain an untapped opportunity in the region; employment opportunities should be linked to labor market information systems, job matching, skilling, and reskilling. Active LMPs are playing a crucial role in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and in adaptation to climate change; ADB has a substantial track record in supporting TVET. There is also scope to link cash transfers for youth and adults to active LMPs, as demonstrated by Indonesia’s Program Kartu Prakerja. Linking temporary social assistance with skills development and job facilitation is crucial for realizing the employment-generating potential of social protection programs, including for allowing women, youth, and people with disabilities access to employment.

C. Strategic Objective 2: Integrated Solutions with Amplified Development Impacts

50. Social protection measures can be used to improve access to basic services (Appendix 3 provides a list of possible linkages). In 2001, the Social Protection Strategy identified a comparative advantage in an “integrated planning” approach, recognizing that social protection has the potential to work with other sectors to promote social inclusion.34 The Social Protection Operational Plan, 2014–2020 (SPOP) interpreted this as an opportunity “to integrate social protection components into other sector operations.” 35 This guide outlines strengthening interactions with different sectors and themes in ADB operations (Table 3). These integrated solutions are familiar for the health and education sector. For example, health insurance and assistance are crucial in ensuring universal health coverage, resulting in positive health outcomes. Student assistance, such as scholarships, and conditional cash transfers promote enrollment in education for the poor and disadvantaged groups. These interactions become developmental, because they strengthen the benefits of cash transfers and provide the opportunity to escape poverty. There is also a strong connection among youth employment, education, and social protection. On the supply side, interventions include skills training,

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subsidized employment, and career counseling. On the demand side, they involve youth-inclusive policies and measures and job facilitation to better match supply and demand.\textsuperscript{36}

### Table 3: Strategic Interventions for Integrated Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Assistance</th>
<th>Social Insurance</th>
<th>Labor Market Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link social assistance programs with sector interventions to improve access to health (e.g., conditional cash transfers to preventive health measures), education (e.g., school-feeding programs), agriculture and nutrition (e.g., food stamps), and energy/infrastructure as well as with gender equality outcomes that could be achieved through integrated approaches.</td>
<td>Encourage comprehensive health insurance to increase health access.</td>
<td>Link active labor market programs and technical and vocational education and training, and integration between skills development and labor market demands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


51. While some of these linkages are well understood, the links between social protection and infrastructure are lagging. New infrastructure—energy, transport, water, and sanitation—may charge user fees that prevent access for the poor and disadvantaged. Without targeted social protection to reduce inequalities in accessing such services, it may be difficult to ensure access for everyone. This task becomes easier when a link can be established between existing social protection programs and these new investments, so that support for the poor and vulnerable groups is provided through an already functioning program. Targeted social protection support is preferred over the use of tariffs and subsidies that need to strike conflicting policy objectives, such as ensuring payments to maintain infrastructure, using resources responsibility, and ensuring equity of access. Directional guidelines for other sectors are recognizing the need for inclusive infrastructure investment, such as last-mile electricity connections, affordable and accessible urban public transport, inclusive and livable cities, and access to uninterrupted water flow systems. The effective integration of these inclusive measures requires dedicated upfront work based on poverty and social analyses undertaken during project processing.

52. Integrated solutions can also be enhanced in the administration and implementation of social protection programs. This is discussed within the first operational pillar; it involves investment in comprehensive systems (e.g., social registries that move beyond a narrow focus on the extreme poor), connections with other systems (e.g., health IDs and national IDs), and inclusion of features that ensure everyone’s access, including appropriate use of digital technologies.

**D. Strategic Objective 3: Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection**

53. The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the importance of having social protection systems prepared for large shocks. Poor and vulnerable groups are disproportionately impacted by shocks and stresses and require a range of measures to help manage risk and strengthen their adaptive

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capacity. This does not only include strategies for responding to direct shocks but to also preempt the medium- to long-term consequences and reduce the future likelihood of the shocks and stresses. Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems strengthen resilience to these complex crises, which may be triggered by climate change and natural hazards as well as conflicts and economic downturns.

54. Adaptive and shock-responsive social protection focuses on the integration of social protection with disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. Shock-responsive social protection is the use of social protection systems and programs to respond to, prepare for, or mitigate the impacts of covariate (i.e., large shocks that affect entire communities) shocks. Adaptive social protection helps build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households by investing in their capacity to prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shocks, protecting their well-being and ensuring that they do not fall into or become trapped in poverty as a result.

55. Shock-responsive social protection complements disaster response. It involves the development of social protection policies and programs and requires adjustments to their administration, ensuring that social protection can be quickly and effectively deployed. Toward horizontal and vertical expansion of social protection in the aftermath of disasters, systems and processes must be in place to identify affected people under existing programs as well as additional recipients in need of support. The linkage between social protection registries with early warning systems fits into this approach. It also necessitates plans in place and, if relevant, financing instruments for scaling up.

56. Synergies between social protection programs and interventions that support climate risk and disaster responses require solutions to reduce the current and future vulnerabilities of the poor and other vulnerable groups to strengthen their adaptive capacity. Social protection programs should be informed by national or regional adaptations and disaster risk management issues, based on robust climate and disaster risk assessments of targeted systems. Resilience-building measures should also be promoted to address the structural causes of vulnerability. The interaction between social protection and climate change actions comes in addressing risks and responses to climate shocks as well as in adapting livelihoods to reduce vulnerability to climate change, building resilient skills, and raising awareness on climate risk and adaptation solutions (Table 4).

57. Social protection is also key to the social dimension of the just transition toward a carbon-neutral and green economy. The transition, informed by national or regional adaptations and disaster risk management, will affect every aspect of how the world produces goods, provides

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39 While an early concept of adaptive social protection was primarily focused on reducing vulnerability to climate change and natural hazards, more recent definitions of adaptive social protection have included shock-responsive social protection. In this guide, references to both shock-responsive and adaptive social protection are made since both terms are currently in use in many countries. T. Bowen, et al. 2020. Adaptive Social Protection: Building Resilience to Shocks. Washington, DC: World Bank.
40 Parametric insurance linked to recurrent events with some government incentives could also be an instrument to reduce the impact of large shocks.
services, moves around, and consumes. It will inevitably come with formidable challenges to existing livelihoods, required skills, and jobs. Active LMPs can support transitions into new economic activities and help address disparities in access for women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. Specific programs can help mitigation efforts, such as public work programs that build flood defenses.

**Table 4: Strategic Interventions for Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Assistance</th>
<th>Social Insurance</th>
<th>Labor Market Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop flexible eligibility systems and rules for social assistance programs that account for shocks and disasters to provide quick assistance when shocks occur to the population more likely to be affected.</td>
<td>Develop social insurance systems to better manage shocks (e.g., the option to introduce a temporary waiver for contribution payments during a crisis period, while maintaining benefits).</td>
<td>Support skills training that helps deal with climate change, especially for livelihood activities sensitive to climate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop social assistance programs that support the ability to respond to shocks and to enhance climate and disaster resilience (e.g., transfer of productive assets, drought-resistant seeds, raising awareness of disaster risk management and climate change).</td>
<td>Create complementary insurance related to climate change (e.g., crop and livestock insurance related to weather events).</td>
<td>Synergize active labor market programs with climate change interventions, supporting the shift from coal to low-carbon economies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create cash transfers and compensation schemes supporting people affected by closure of businesses as a result of climate change interventions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide community-level infrastructure for strengthening resilience and improve natural resources management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise awareness on climate change and disaster risk management through family development sessions conducted by conditional cash transfer programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support livelihoods through guaranteed wages for building public assets that can contribute to strengthening resilience for both households and the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide community-level social infrastructure and inclusive programs and services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**E. Operational Pillars**

Implementation of the three strategic objectives requires investment in four operational pillars: strengthening social protection systems, building partnerships, supporting integrated intersector initiatives, and scaling up sustainable and catalytic financing. This section maps out ADB’s role in these areas.

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1. Strengthening Social Protection Systems

Social protection systems include three elements: policy framework (i.e., strategy, legislation, and institutional setup); programs; and administration. Therefore, strengthening social protection involves not only policy and program reform under the three strategic objectives but also improvement of administration.

Countries in the region vary in their levels of social protection development, even within countries in the same income groups. It is therefore recommended that country-specific assessments be conducted. The SPI provides an excellent entry point, with SPI country reports documenting the social protection system in each country. In fact, through the SPI, there is engagement with almost every DMC, which provides the opportunity to assess the level of social protection development and a basis to identify priority areas in terms of reform.

The key building blocks of social protection delivery systems are the capacity to identify and enroll people, assess needs, and make payments or give support. These are complemented by supporting management information systems, monitoring mechanisms, and grievance and redress systems.

There is growing recognition of the opportunities facilitated by digital social protection and a strong push to strengthen them. In the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of existing identification by social registries or other administrative databases limited the capability of many DMCs to rapidly scale up their social protection programs. Moreover, those with social registries were not always able to use such information, as lists of vulnerable populations were outdated or did not reflect the new needs induced by the pandemic. Many faced challenges in delivering fast and safe payments because of underdeveloped digital infrastructure and the inability to execute mobile payments. On the other hand, countries with existing strong digital mechanisms such as digital identity documents, robust social registries, strong data management mechanisms, digital payment mechanisms, and digital transactional capabilities were able to respond much faster to deliver timely protective measures through the pandemic period.

The main interventions to strengthen administration in social protection systems include the following:

(i) invest in social registries and interoperability of administrative databases, with the inclusion of informal workers, and systems that are more flexible and capable of disaggregating data to adapt to new demands (i.e., shock-responsive systems);

(ii) upgrade payment systems, and strengthen public–private partnerships to enhance government–person payments and digital technology for social protection;

(iii) build capacity within the relevant ministries and social protection agencies, for instance, to adapt to changing demand and technology, or to conduct economic analyses on the impact of shocks on various socioeconomic groups; and

(iv) build capacity within the social care workforce to ensure links between cash transfers and social care services, and within employment offices.

2. Building Partnerships

A wide web of collaborative partnerships supports governments to further develop country-specific social protection systems and to establish the intersector synergies required for adaptive and shock-responsive social protection. These involve partnerships, first within DMCs across national institutions, and then with development partners, academic institutions, the private
sector, and civil society organizations. Based on an assessment of the social protection system in each country, partnerships also help identify the scope and cross-sector impact of ADB engagement.

65. While strengthening social protection systems is a priority, it is equally important to connect social protection systems to other available mechanisms to achieve impacts beyond cash transfers or social care services. The alignment and interoperability of a social registry with early warning systems, for instance, allow for timely responses in case of disasters. Further linkages with disaster risk financing allow funding to be quickly released in the aftermath of disasters. Connections to financial inclusion initiatives can strengthen livelihood programs.

66. ADB’s commitment to ensure an Asia and Pacific free of poverty fosters an openness to NGOs and civil society organizations that can amplify the voices of the poor and vulnerable. ADB appreciates that NGOs and civil society organizations in many countries serve to expand national capacity to deliver social protection programs. They bring unique expertise, skills, and knowledge and often are the best institutions to innovate important advances in social protection. They can successfully promote inclusive participation and support a wide range of advocacy efforts that strengthen social protection systems and cast an equity lens on appropriate design and effective leadership.

67. Partnerships involve mutual commitments. Thus, this guide embeds ADB’s global commitments, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, SDGs, Incheon Strategy, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Indeed, ADB announced a commitment to fully align its sovereign operations with the goals of the Paris Agreement by 1 July 2023 and has set climate finance targets at $100 billion by 2030. Developing adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems to support adaptation and resilience in the region and to address the social dimensions of a just transition is critical for this agenda.

68. Partnerships harness social protection’s capacity to both build climate change and disaster resilience. They can offer opportunities to

(i) prepare customized country-specific approaches based on upfront diagnostics and consultations in preparation of CPSs and inclusive and sustainable growth assessments;

(ii) foster collective actions and regional cooperation to enhance social protection at the regional and/or subregional levels, including peer learning among countries; and

(iii) build comprehensive, adaptive, and shock-responsive social protection systems, supported by national strategies and action plans.

3. Supporting Integrated Intersector Initiatives

69. Social protection has a role to play as an enabler, providing access for all, especially the poor and vulnerable, to services through integrated intersector initiatives, resulting in amplified development impacts. While these intersector linkages are fairly established in health and education, they are less obvious with other sectors. One of the guiding principles in Strategy 2030 is delivering integrated solutions, across sectors and themes, suited to the specific needs on the ground. These integrated initiatives are further illustrated in Appendix 3.

70. ADB collaboratively implements social protection to support a broad range of intersector initiatives. Therefore, it is important to ensure potential linkages with other ADB interventions in
relevant sectors, such as education, health, energy, transport, water and sanitation, and urban and rural development.

71. Partnerships can help strengthen interthematic synergies that better support gender equality, economic equity, and development. By applying a gender lens to social protection design and implementation, this guide aims to ensure that the activities strengthen gender equality and empowerment. It recognizes that this will require a strong partnership with those working on gender in ADB and DMCs. Similarly, the focus on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection allows for significant partnerships in disaster risk management, such as in integrating parametric disaster insurance into shock-responsive social protection.

72. Integrated intersector initiatives can offer opportunities to support governments to build interconnected programs across national institutions, and strengthen the inclusiveness of project design through upfront consultations and analysis.

4. Scaling Up Sustainable and Catalytic Financing

73. Asia and the Pacific invests a relatively low share of GDP in social protection; financing must thus be scaled up to promote and to sustain social protection systems across the region. This requires working with ministries of finance to assess various options for domestic resource mobilization through taxation, revenue, and subsidies; and develop action plans for sustainable financing of social protection. Sustainable and catalytic financing is the principal intersection between the social protection agenda and the Asia Pacific Tax Hub. The Tax Hub will be instrumental in strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilization and International Tax Cooperation and supporting DMCs’ efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.43

74. Developing action plans for sustainable financing of social protection offers opportunities for synergies when building complete tax-benefit systems that integrate domestic resource mobilization with social protection programs. Domestic resource mobilization can be linked to a fiscal contract,44 potentially leading to more social inclusion. By linking social and revenue policies through a fiscal contract, better social cohesion can be achieved. Improvement of social protection policies may alter the perception of the benefits and increase beneficiaries’ willingness to pay taxes and fees. 17.Climate change financing to support fragile, conflict-affected situations and small island developing states may also be tapped to design and to support adaptive and shock-responsive social protection.

75. ADB’s role in sustainable financing can offer opportunities to
(i) build capacity in DMCs to prepare budgets for sustainable financing of social protection implementation and expansion;
(ii) support policy dialogue and knowledge development to enhance the understanding of the available fiscal space and trade-offs of social protection investment; and
(iii) access innovative financing mechanisms for adaptive and shock-responsive social protection.

44 This refers to the common understanding in a society of how much its members can expect to benefit from state action and how much they expect to contribute to it through paying revenue.
IV. WHAT WE WILL DO

A. ADB’s Social Protection Portfolio

76. Achieving the vision of this guide will require a focused approach to developing the ADB portfolio in social protection. Improving coverage, effectiveness, and sustainability of social protection in the region will play a fundamental role in ensuring Strategy 2030’s goals of a prosperous, inclusive, green, and resilient future in Asia and the Pacific as well as meeting the SDGs. To strengthen and to expand ADB’s social protection operations, the following actions are required.

77. **Build on the engagement with DMC’s during the COVID-19 pandemic response, and further develop social protection as a critical pillar in recovery strategies.** Social protection is an instrument for immediate crisis response and, in the longer term, to ensure inclusive, sustainable, and people-centric development. The recent CPRO-funded support in response to the COVID-19 crisis in almost every DMC provides an opportunity for follow-on support and deeper engagement. The CPRO engagement has helped develop a better understanding of weaknesses, gaps, and impacts in social protection systems; several monitoring systems and initiatives are providing valuable evidence on impacts. This information can be used to help identify value addition and ensure well-targeted and evidence-based interventions and pipeline development.

78. A major challenge for recovery strategies is ensure that they do “build back better” and address existing drivers of poverty and inequality and new challenges to both, particularly for those population groups that have been hardest hit. Under Strategy 2030, a guiding principle is delivering integrated solutions, combining expertise across a range of sectors and themes. Social protection has a key role as an enabler for inclusive interventions, providing the mechanism to allow the poor and vulnerable to access essential services. Skills projects that ensure a strong link with labor markets are highly suitable to support the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These projects help, in particular, youth—one of the most affected populations by the pandemic—enter and reenter the labor market. Integrating these approaches into other sector interventions will be important strategies for ensuring sustainability.

79. **Strengthen upstream engagement and social protection diagnostics at the country level to support new country social protection strategies and development of differentiated approaches.** ADB is physically present in most DMCs through its resident missions and can interact directly with government counterparts. It is thus important to develop the capacity of resident mission staff, maintain the policy dialogue, and align knowledge work and TA with country-specific needs. In DMCs where the preparations for the next CPS are ongoing, undertaking ex-ante diagnostic work will help strengthen and identify specific areas for engagement in line with ADB strategic objectives in social protection. This will require conducting poverty and vulnerability analyses as part of inclusive and sustainable growth assessments.

80. ADB support for social protection responds to diverse contexts across and within regions and within DMCs. Strategy 2030 posits that “given the significant diversity across countries, ADB will apply differentiated approaches to various groups of countries, including the DMCs in fragile and conflict-affected situations” (footnote 1). For example, Mongolia’s universal Child Money Program reflects a very different social and policy context than that of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in the Philippines. With an active in-country presence and close connections to
DMCs, ADB demonstrates a comparative advantage by responding to specific circumstances and national priorities for social protection.

81. **Expand the contribution of social protection to climate resilience.** Given ADB’s commitment to climate action, further development of adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems is needed to support climate adaptation and resilience in the region. This will make a difference at the individual and household levels and help mitigate risks at the country level. Building capacity in social protection systems and ministries to support a just transition will be increasingly important. Tapping into new sources of funding such as the Community Resilience Partnership Program to develop shock-responsive and adaptive social protection programs and systems represents a new opportunity within ADB to significantly support such work and engage with other sectors. This can also be initiated by undertaking climate diagnostics at the CPS stage and ensuring dialogues with various ministries that cover climate issues.

82. **Establish and maintain strategic partnerships and cofinancing support.** Strategic partnerships can help strengthen ADB capacity, impact, and sustainability of interventions. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Social Development Thematic Group (SDTG), for example, have established a cofinancing partnership on digital social protection to support systems strengthening and innovation in DMCs. Such approaches—which support operations and knowledge development, capacity in DMCs, and collaboration in the field—can be explored as a model for future partnerships. Besides establishing new partnerships, existing relationships, such as that with the ILO, World Food Program, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and others, will be strengthened. Country-level engagement on analysis, policy and program development, capacity development, and identification of support areas will be a priority. Developing a network of social protection specialists, research institutions, and DMC practitioners through a partnership with Socialprotection.org will also be a priority.

83. **Create a consolidated knowledge management plan to strengthen policy dialogue, identify potential pipeline, design operations, and disseminate solutions and lessons learned.** Given the scope of social protection and intersections with the work of other sectors, planning, keeping track of, and utilizing the full capacity of ADB knowledge support need to be strengthened. This will facilitate sharing of lessons learned, innovations, and knowledge needs. Currently, there is little discussion and alignment of knowledge development on social protection across ADB. Collaborating with key institutional peer-to-peer knowledge and learning exchange programs—such as the Southeast Asia Development Solutions Knowledge and Innovation Platform in the Southeast Asia department, the Regional Knowledge Sharing Initiative in the East Asia department, and the ADB Institute on design and outreach of social protection events—will also serve to consolidate and strengthen the institutional voice of ADB for broader audiences.

84. **Leverage innovative and sustainable financing to address limits in fiscal space and expansion needs.** Increased financing is needed to promote and to sustain social protection systems across the region. Achieving this requires working internally with governance and finance teams and externally with ministries of finance to assess various options for domestic resource mobilization through taxation, revenue, and subsidies; developing action plans for sustainable financing of social protection; and leveraging access to climate finance to support development of adaptive and shock-responsive systems.

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45 [Socialprotection.org](http://Socialprotection.org).
85. **Strengthen ADB staffing and capacity on social protection through a combination of recruitment, strategic placement, collaboration, and training.** Building up internal capacity will remain a strong focus. Strengthening a core team of specialists to work and develop programs that reach across the regional departments, developing a broader range of capacities and skills among wider staff members in sectors that integrate social protection, and developing partnerships with key training institutions are important strategies to achieve this objective. A focus on developing and accessing strategic training programs (both internally and externally) that strengthen fundamental knowledge and explore emerging issues will be supported.

86. **Conduct impact evaluations.** To date, few impact evaluations have been conducted on ADB social protection programs. Building capacity and a stronger culture of evidence-based program design and implementation will help strengthen the social protection portfolio, including assessing the gender impacts of programs where evaluations could investigate complex social norm issues such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health rights. Such evaluations are being carried out by development partners; and it is critical that ADB expand its expertise and range of examples to better tailor social protection responses, particularly in the context of pandemics, and other shocks.

87. **Strengthen DMC technical capacity.** Capacity development is a pivotal part of system strengthening and connecting to other sectors. There is a growing need for the development of the social protection workforce, such as social workers who support implementation of programs and service delivery for older persons, persons with disabilities, and children. Governments need capacity building on financing social protection, digitalization, impact evaluation, and other areas that are critical to systems development as well. More technical capacity and knowledge work are required to support the strengthening and expansion of social protection. Strategies include utilizing events like the Asia Pacific Social Protection Week to deliver dedicated short programs for policy makers and practitioners, regional TA to support peer-to-peer learning, and country-specific programs and partnerships with entities like the International Training Centre of the ILO. Social Protection Indicator (SPI) data collection and monitoring of social protection will continue, with an enhanced focus on strengthening the national data systems of DMCs.

**B. Technical Support**

88. ADB must identify and provide the necessary technical support for social protection to DMCs at the policy, program, and administration levels. In line with DMC needs and priorities, extra focus will be given to supporting digital social protection, food security, and financial inclusion. Technical support will also be provided to some newer areas of operations, such as economic inclusion and the graduation approach, disability-inclusive development, cross-sector initiatives with a social protection component, and just transition. Technical support from regional departments requires close coordination with regional specialists and experts.

89. ADB will support innovative knowledge solutions and provide capacity support to further strengthen social protection systems, including digital social protection. It will support the strengthening of social protection policies and programs, including the further development of labor market programs (LMPs) in support of pandemic recovery in the short term and in improving climate resilience in the longer term. The SDCC will support diagnostic work on the adaptive and shock-responsiveness of national social protection systems to exogenous shocks.

90. ADB will also support the analytical work of social protection systems at the country level in preparation of CPSs. It will support intersector initiatives toward the integrated and comprehensive role of social protection, including the social dimension of a just transition and
graduation approach. Finally, given the low level of investment in social protection in Asia and the Pacific region, ADB will support research on the affordability of social protection and its financing sources, including domestic resource mobilization.

91. The SDTG Secretariat will develop a roster of experts in the different fields of expertise, and finance part of these positions with its TA resources.

C. Strategic Partnerships and Coordination

92. ADB has developed important global and regional partnerships to support social protection knowledge and operational work, financing, and coordination, and will continue to maintain and expand these partnerships. Strengthening engagement and collaboration with development partners and other implementing partners at the regional and/or subregional, country, and project levels is also a request from on the ground. Partnerships include

(i) United Nations agencies and other development partners. The SDTG Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of the memorandum of agreement with the ILO and holds regular meetings to align operational support. Other partners include UNICEF and World Food Program.

(ii) Bilateral organizations. Regular meetings are held with stakeholders such as Agence Française de Développement (AFD); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia); Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (United Kingdom); and GIZ. They have been important partners for supporting innovation and cofinancing selected operations.

(iii) International nongovernment organizations. These include BRAC on the graduation approach; and Nutrition International, Plan International, and Global Disability Innovation Hub to develop new areas, provide expert TA, and partner on regional and global events and knowledge products.

(iv) Private sector collaboration and partnerships. These include Mastercard and Gates Foundation on financial inclusion, Netflix on the creative economy, Google on poverty mapping, and research partnerships with academia and organizations like Harvard Evidence for Policy Design.

(v) International forums on social protection. These include Universal Social Protection 2030 (USP2030), Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board, and Socialprotection.org. These link the SDTG and social protection practitioners within ADB to global forums, organizations, specialist networks, new knowledge, and dissemination opportunities. Through these networks, staff members are participating in selected working groups on digital social protection, economic migration, and disability inclusion.

D. Knowledge Products

93. ADB aims to develop knowledge products that will be forward looking, identifying future trends and possible responses. It will develop a social protection knowledge plan for the SDTG, in collaboration with regional departments, ERCD, and ADB Institute. In turn, the SDTG will

(i) continue to undertake and refine the SPI in Asia and the Pacific as a knowledge product and as a monitoring and evaluation tool; the country reports can be used as the basis for more in-depth sector assessments;

(ii) consolidate lessons and experience from ADB engagement in social protection across Asia and the Pacific, including those emerging from the COVID-19 crisis,
What We Will Do

to improve programming; inform policy options; and showcase ADB experience during policy dialogues with governments, country programming missions, CPS development, and project preparation and implementation;

(iii) lead the development of tool kits to support integration of targeted social protection support in sector projects, and prepare social protection sector assessments by country and region, as part of the SPI, to support country strategic planning; and

(iv) in collaboration with regional departments, ERCD, and the ADB Institute, continue organizing knowledge events, such as the Asia Pacific Social Protection Week, sharing knowledge, and promoting networking across Asia and the Pacific.

E. Staffing

94. Dedicated social protection expertise within ADB is limited. At the same time, expertise can be found across social sectors and public finance divisions and among some staff members working as social development specialists. A limited number of staff members in regional offices have experience in social protection; they often play a critical role in generating and sustaining policy and program discussions. As the scope of social protection grows into areas like just transition and services development, an even wider range of staff—cutting across health, education, finance, governance, urban, climate change, and other areas—are involved in developing operations. Given the growing interest and demand in social protection support by governments in the region, the number of ADB staff members with social protection expertise must be increased. Initially, additional staff members need to be added to the SDTG Secretariat with expertise in social assistance and inclusive social care services, social insurance, and LMPs to provide knowledge and operational support to regional departments. Social protection experts in the SDTG Secretariat will dedicate at least 50% of their time to technical support for the regional departments.

95. Staffing also needs to be urgently increased in regional departments and resident missions. Their role is to develop the social protection portfolio and pipeline, support the preparation and implementation of operations, and undertake sustained dialogue with governments and development partners. In the longer term, as the social protection portfolio and pipeline grows, more staff members with a wider range of expertise will be needed in operational departments.

96. Staffing also needs to be supplemented by identification of high-quality consulting services and secondees, and through partnerships with key institutions. The SDTG will develop an external reference group to help provide guidance for the implementation of this guide and facilitate tapping into professional networks as well as a consultant roster to facilitate access to high-quality consulting services.

F. Capacity Building

97. Given both the limited number of existing social protection specialists, and the relatively larger number of ADB staff members working on and needing literacy and skills in social protection, regular social protection capacity development programs are needed at different levels as well as short programs for country and sector directors and interested staff members and longer, certified programs for technical staff working on social protection and related sectors. It is important to ensure that these training programs also reach resident mission staff members. Strategies to build capacity include utilizing the expert pool positions to develop new areas and to build staff skills, developing in-house basic training programs, commissioning bespoke
programs such as the Economic Policy Research Institute’s training on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, and accessing external training programs with partners such as the International Training Centre of the ILO.

98. With the growing intersector role of social protection and the need to integrate social protection components in projects, training will also be required in the use of analytical tools, such as microsimulations and labor market assessments for country programming, and for staff involved in poverty and social analyses at the project level. Such support will be provided in close collaboration with other sector and thematic groups, and, where possible, through institutions, like universities, to ensure a systematic approach to capacity building.

G. Monitoring and Reporting

99. Indicators are listed in the operational results framework to monitor the effectiveness and strategic focus of ADB support to social protection. The results framework (Appendix 4) links the operational pillars with relevant indicators from the ADB corporate results framework and SDG indicators. Progress toward results framework indicators will be monitored and reported in ADB’s annual development effectiveness review.
Appendix 1: Social Protection Projects by Region

1. Before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, 6–10 social protection projects were approved at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) each year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of social protection projects increased substantially—to 35 projects in 2020, of which 30 projects were in immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis (Figure A1.1). In 2021, the number of social protection projects dropped to 10, equal to 8% of total lending. Besides two COVID-19 response programs, six were programs approved in 2021 in support of pandemic recovery. This trend remains for the coming years, with 9–14 projects in the pipeline, an increase of about 50%.

![Figure A1.1: ADB Social Protection Projects by Region, 2014–2024](no. of projects)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>EARD</th>
<th>PARD</th>
<th>SARD</th>
<th>SERD</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

ADB = Asian Development Bank, CWRD = Central and West Asia Department, EARD = East Asia Department, PARD = Pacific Department, SARD = South Asia Department, SERD = Southeast Asia Department.


2. In Central and West Asia, the main social protection focus is on the strengthening of the Benazir Income Support Programme in Pakistan. The first project dates from 2013, with three more interventions in 2020 and 2021. In the past, social protection projects were processed by the Public Management, Financial Sector, and Trade Division. During the COVID-19 crisis, most countries in the region requested the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option (CPRO) support. While this is an opportunity for further social protection interventions, the main focus will be on domestic resource mobilization and climate finance. There are still opportunities in pension and
labor market reform, including state-owned enterprise transformation, countercyclical support, and support to address the social and economic impact of the Russian Federation–Ukraine war. It is expected that in 2022 and 2023, 15 policy-based loans (amounting to around $2 billion) will contain social protection elements or policy actions, illustrating the increasing alignment between the public sector management and social sector development areas of work. The Social Sector Division, Central and West Asia Department (CWRD), has a few health and skills projects in the pipeline. Note that social protection in Central and West Asia is traditionally covered by the World Bank and European Union. Figure A1.2 presents ADB’s social protection projects in CWRD for the period 2014–2024.

Figure A1.2: ADB Social Protection Projects in the Central and West Asia Department, 2014–2024 (no. of projects)

ADB = Asian Development Bank, AFG = Afghanistan, AZE = Azerbaijan, CWRD = Central and West Asia Department, GEO = Georgia, KAZ = Kazakhstan, KGZ = Kyrgyz Republic, PAK = Pakistan, TAJ = Tajikistan, UZB = Uzbekistan.


2. The East Asia Department (EARD) has a solid portfolio of social protection lending and technical assistance in Mongolia, where ADB is the lead agency on social protection and has strong engagement in the education and health sectors. ADB has played a critical role in the development of the social protection sector through continuous engagement over the past 20 years utilizing project, sector, and policy-based lending modalities. Since 2008 and the food and fuel crisis, much of the support has gone to helping Mongolia address the impacts of shocks, while supporting reforms to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the sector. Lending programs in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are limited to skills development and services development through support to aged care, which cuts across issues of health, social protection, education, and urban and rural development. ADB has also provided a series of technical assistance projects on social protection in the PRC, such as for pensions, social assistance reform, aging and care, and human resources capacity.
4. While these have played an important role in policy development at the national and provincial levels, ADB support has contributed to the design of projects and its role as a knowledge bank. It has not resulted in specific lending support for social protection, however. In 2020 and 2021, two projects were approved, focusing on strengthening shock-responsive social protection in Mongolia, which will take 4–5 years for implementation, before new interventions will be processed. Engagement is also in the area of aging and care. There are opportunities in policy discussions on the role of social protection in recovery, disaster and emergency relief, and the graduation approach. Figure A1.3 presents ADB’s social protection projects in EARD for the period 2014–2024.

Figure A1.3: ADB Social Protection Projects in the East Asia Department, 2014–2024
(no. of projects)

5. Social protection systems in the Pacific are underdeveloped, but the COVID-19 pandemic has helped develop a new understanding of the need to strengthen existing programs and create systems. Before the pandemic, there was one emergency assistance program approved in the Pacific Department (PARD). During the crisis, CRPO programs were approved for six developing member countries (DMCs). There is a solid pipeline of social protection programs in five DMCs, focusing on recovery and strengthening social protection and integrated age care services. The main challenge is to build interest in support of social sectors. Most interest is in livelihoods development, programs focusing on youth employment, approaches to community-based resilience, and provision of services for older persons and people with disabilities. One of the priorities is to build capacity in the DMCs. There may be opportunities for economic inclusion by using the graduation approach as well. Figure A1.4 presents ADB’s social protection projects in PARD for the period 2014–2024.
6. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the South Asia Department (SARD) processed mainly technical and vocational education and training (TVET) projects. During the crisis, CPROs were prepared for five of the six DMCs in the region. For Bangladesh, this resulted in a pipeline of programs to strengthen its social protection system. The social protection systems in the region provide limited protection to the “missing middle,” which makes up the majority of the working population in the region; but so far, there is no demand for support in this area. There are some opportunities in skills development and in a just transition in India, where the government decided to close coal power plants and is seeking ways to redeploy the 5 million–6 million contractual workers. There is also some interest in developing social care services to support older persons and people with disabilities, as well as integrating the graduation approach in coastal towns to provide a comprehensive support mechanism to develop adaptive, diversified, and climate-resilient livelihoods. Figure A1.5 presents ADB’s social protection projects in SARD for the period 2014–2024.
7. The Southeast Asia Department (SERD) has a long-standing social protection portfolio with the Philippines. To date, ADB has provided four loans totaling $1.5 billion for the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, providing a portion of a cash grant for education and health to more than 4 million households nationwide, with implementation support to establish the national poverty targeting system, gender mainstreaming, family and youth development sessions, information technology reform, and graduation approach. Unconditional emergency cash assistance for 2 months was also provided to these households to help them cope with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, five programs were approved in support of the social assistance program.

8. Before the pandemic, initial discussions on strengthening social protection systems started with Cambodia and Indonesia, which in the meantime resulted in a more tangible pipeline of social protection interventions. Programmatic support is being provided to strengthen labor market programs to facilitate the school-to-work transition, which will be continued with further employment recovery support. There is interest in the region to connect social protection with climate resilience. Disaster resilience improvement is being supported using contingent disaster financing, which can be closely linked to social protection. Figure A1.6 presents ADB’s social protection projects in SERD for the period 2014–2024.
Figure A1.6: ADB Social Protection Projects in the Southeast Asia Department, 2014–2024
(no. of projects)

ADB = Asian Development Bank, CAM = Cambodia, INO = Indonesia, LAO = Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MYA = Myanmar, PHI = Philippines, SERD = Southeast Asia Department, THA = Thailand, VIE = Viet Nam.

Appendix 2: Theory of Change

1. An overview of the sequence of results, from operational inputs to outputs, outcomes, and impact, is depicted in Figure A2.

   ![Figure A2: Theory of Change of Social Protection Interventions](image)


2. **Guiding principles.** ADB’s strategic direction in social protection identifies four guiding principles:
   
   (i) **Strengthen social protection systems.** Social protection systems are a combination of policies, programs, and administration of social protection systems. Therefore, strengthening systems requires an assessment of the current status, needs, and opportunities in each developing member country (DMC) before engaging in the specific actions required. Regarding administration, aside from the extent of coordination and coverage, an emerging theme is the development of digital technology, which can play a pivotal role in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of existing approaches. Monitoring and evaluation are also fundamental to improve program implementation and learning.

   (ii) **Build partnerships.** Partnerships are essential to achieve an expansion of social protection, including those between the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and DMCs, and within countries between social protection administrations and other
government agencies. It also includes partnerships across different sectors and themes in ADB, other development partners, private sector employers and entrepreneurs, and civil society and nongovernment organizations.

(iii) **Support integrated intersector initiatives.** In the case of intersector initiatives, through partnerships across sectors and themes at the inception stage can the specific contribution by social protection as an “enabler” be understood to prepare inclusive interventions.

(iv) **Promote sustainable and catalytic financing.** Sustainable financing is key for the expansion of social protection. Given limited fiscal space and competing demands, it is important to assess the financing needs for social protection going forward and to identify the financing options for domestic resource mobilization. ADB support for fiscal space assessments can help identify ways to mobilize internal resources. Catalytic financing can be tapped to develop adaptive and shock-responsive social protection and to support just transition initiatives.

3. **Outputs.** These four pillars provide the inputs and activities to achieve expanded social protection coverage and adequacy in the main domains of social assistance, social insurance, and labor market policies. These outputs will ensure that immediate outcomes are inclusive (i.e., social protection floors exist, and complete social registries allow programs to be expanded if the need arises). Inclusivity is also ensured by linkages across programming areas within social protection (e.g., among cash assistance, livelihood programs, and social care services) and across sectors, which improves access for the poor, women, and other vulnerable groups to infrastructure services (e.g., energy, transport, water, and sanitation). In developing and expanding existing social protection systems, systems must be able to respond to large shocks. Programs need to be designed so that they can be rapidly scaled up and deployed in the event of a shock. Moreover, the long-term response to climate change requires transformative adaptations to ways of living, working, and economic activities. Social protection can play a critical role in these efforts.

4. **Intermediate outcomes.** The immediate outcomes will result in three intermediate outcomes: (i) comprehensive social protection policies and systems, with expanded coverage, scope, and adequacy; (ii) integrated solutions with social protection as an enabler; and (iii) adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, building the resilience of households to shocks and developing the social dimension of a just transition.

5. **Impact.** The impact of interventions is inclusive and resilient social protection policies and programs.
### Appendix 3: Intersector Linkages

1. Strategy 2030 adopts a multisector approach to seven operational priorities: (i) reducing poverty and inequality; (ii) accelerating progress in gender equality; (iii) tackling climate change, building climate and disaster resilience, and enhancing environmental sustainability; (iv) making cities more livable; (v) promoting rural development and food security; (vi) strengthening governance and institutional capacity; and (vii) fostering regional cooperation and integration.

2. Operational Priority 1 comprises three interconnected pillars: (i) enhance human capital and social protection for all, (ii) generate quality jobs, and (iii) reduce inequality in access to opportunities. Education, health, and social protection all contribute to the enhancement of human capital, but all sectors and themes can contribute to this objective. Likewise, generating quality jobs and reducing inequality in access to opportunities require significant contributions and engagement from all sector and thematic areas and the private sector.

3. While, traditionally, there have been strong connections among education, health, and social protection, the enabling role of social protection to provide access to services and equal opportunities is increasingly clear. Table A3 reports the key linkages with social protection for each relevant sector and thematic area. Linkages have been organized into three main groups, depending on their relevance for inclusion and/or improved access, transformational opportunity, new socioeconomic realities, and improved administration.

#### Table A3: Key Linkages with Social Protection to Sector and Thematic Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector and Thematic Area</th>
<th>Linkages with Social Protection</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Health (OP1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Improved inclusion:</strong></td>
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<td>• <strong>Health insurance and health assistance.</strong> As part of national social protection systems, move beyond employer-based health coverage to broader systems of inclusion toward universal health insurance.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Long-term care.</strong> Incorporate health-care needs of older persons and people with disabilities into long-term support systems, including long-term care insurance.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Inclusive policies.</strong> Consolidate public policy on education, health, social protection, and inclusive digital technology. Inclusive policies through integrated approaches are important for lagging populations (e.g., by improving access to education through vouchers, school meals, and preventive and protective health interventions).</td>
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<td><strong>Improved administration:</strong></td>
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<td>• <strong>Digital transformation.</strong> Support interoperability between government systems. Single registry management information systems for social protection resolves inclusion and exclusion errors for public health-care financing schemes.</td>
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<td>Sector and Thematic Area</td>
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| Education (OP1)          | **Improved inclusion:**  
                          | • Labor market programs and youth employment. The effective functioning of public employment services, placement services, and career coaching depends increasingly on integration with education and skills policies. TVET overlaps with education and social protection, where short-term technical training allows the development of skills needed in a changing labor market. On the demand side, it involves youth-inclusive policies. Job facilitation is equally required to better match supply and demand.  
                          | • Social assistance and social care services. Cash transfers improve access to education for the disadvantaged and support disability inclusion; school-feeding programs improve nutrition and play a role in supporting learning outcomes.  
                          | • Inclusive policies. Consolidate public policy on education, health, social protection, and inclusive digital technology. |
| Finance (OP1)            | **Improved inclusion:**  
                          | • Pension reform. Provide income security for older persons, and develop capital markets.  
                          | • Transformative, inclusive policies. Disaster risk financing complements the alignment of social protection beneficiary registry with early warning systems, enabling responses to disasters. |
| Digital Technology (OP1) | **Improved inclusion:**  
                          | • Quality jobs. New forms of employment (e.g., the gig economy) can boost labor market participation, but effective social protection will need to be ensured.  
                          | **Improved administration:**  
                          | • Social protection systems. Digital technologies have the potential to improve the coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of social protection systems (e.g., more efficient disbursement to beneficiaries through online or mobile payments, and reduced opportunities for fraud). The digitalization of national ID systems will help integrate all services and necessary information covering population and social care services, and enable access to education, health, and financial services. |
| NGO and Civil Society Center (OP1) | **Improved administration:**  
                          | • Social protection systems. The roles of NGOs and civil society organizations to expand government capacity must be encouraged, where they deliver human capital services, advocacy, and inclusive participation. |
| Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (OP1) | • Transformational opportunities. In case of conflict, there is a link between social protection and humanitarian aid, where both systems can strengthen each other.  
<pre><code>                      | • Social protection systems. Support the poor and vulnerable groups, and build demand for good governance in the long term. |
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| Gender (OP2)             | **Improved inclusion:**  
  *Program level.* Ensure a program is inclusive for women (e.g., support care for children and older persons to allow women to join the labor market).  
**Transformational opportunities:**  
*Empowering level.* Ensure a strong gender component. Decent and productive jobs for women can be supported through an enabling policy and legal framework with explicit attention to gender equality.  
*Transformative level.* Ensure an intervention shifts social norms, like gender-based violence. |
| Climate Change Adaptation (OP3) | **Improved inclusion:**  
  *Social protection systems.* Public works programs can provide opportunities to build resilience in the case of climate change (e.g., through ecosystem-based solutions), where the focus is on the work done and on the created asset. In the case of periodic drought and temporary rural–urban migration, public works in urban centers can help absorb the temporary inflow; public works can also support the poor living in coastal zones prone to flooding. Social assistance programs strengthen the resilience of beneficiaries through improved capacity and awareness of climate risk and through linkages with sustainable livelihoods.  
  *Transformational/enabling role.* Investments in social protection, using a diverse range of instruments (e.g., weather-indexed crop insurance, employment guarantee schemes, asset transfers, and cash transfers) provide opportunities to deliver targeted support to communities to strengthen resilience, including support in recovering from the impact of extreme weather events. |
<p>| Climate Change Mitigation (including Just Transition) (OP3) | <strong>Transformational/enabling role.</strong> In the transition away from coal and fossil fuel, major elements of the economy will shift. Social protection has a role to play to enable the transition in the reskilling of the labor force. |
| Disaster Risk Management (OP3) | <strong>Transformative, inclusive policies.</strong> Align social protection beneficiary registries with early warning systems to enable disaster responses by vertical or horizontal expansion, and, ideally, link to disaster risk financing. Financing through global climate finance should be explored with long-term, transformational initiatives. Disaster risk financing complements the alignment of social protection beneficiary registries with early warning systems, allowing disaster response. |</p>
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| **Urban (OP4)**          | • **Social protection systems.** COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in urban social protection coverage and the need to expand coverage to reach vulnerable people in cities, particularly informal sector workers.  
• **Inclusion.** Make cities more livable by addressing social dimensions of urbanization and critical issues of affordability, access, equity, and jobs; promote age-friendly planning, design, and disability inclusion through universal design; and ensure equity of access for all to affordable and reliable urban services.  
• **Quality jobs.** Develop employment opportunities in hinterlands, secondary cities, and small and medium-sized towns to limit migration; and create quality jobs in manufacturing and services, especially for the poor and vulnerable, by supporting the creation of enabling environments, conducive policies, and critical infrastructure.  
• **Transformational/enabling role.** Enable access to basic services, such as water supply, with social protection supporting social infrastructure. |
| **Agriculture and Nutrition (OP5)** | • **Social protection systems.** Off-farm employment opportunities allow the buildup of skills, become more shock-responsive, and limit seasonal rural–urban migration. As rural areas serve as safety nets during crises, strengthen rural livelihoods through cash-for-work programs. As school-feeding programs reduce urban child labor and support sustainable rural development, promote food security through social assistance programs, protect against food price shocks, and ensure access to land and/or improve conditions and rights for landless and contract farmers.  
• **Transformational/enabling role.** Following a disaster, there is a likely influx of the most vulnerable rural households into urban slums seeking services and support. This can be mitigated by linking social protection to other activities that enable sustainable livelihoods, combined with basic services (linked to green and inclusive recovery). This can be further strengthened with early warning systems and access to microfinance and be linked to disaster risk finance. |
| **Governance (OP6)** | • **Social protection financing.** Cost different options for financing social protection (domestic resource mobilization and social protection are mutually reinforcing, improving tax morality, as people benefiting from taxes are more willing to pay, which eventually leads to strengthening of the tax system); reform taxes to replace regressive energy subsidies by targeted social protection interventions; and monitor expenditures on social protection to ensure the allocated funds are spent on the right priorities. |
| **Regional Cooperation and Integration (OP7)** | • **Social protection systems.** Ensure portability of social protection benefits, and harmonization of social protection systems that enhance connectivity in the region and competitiveness of DMCs; better protect migrant workers and recognize their skills and qualifications.  
• **Quality jobs.** Support the regional dimensions of building of a professional health-care workforce. |
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| Energy                  | • **Social protection systems.** Provide last-mile access to the poor to modern and clean energy; power, light, clean cooking and heating; decentralized solar power that can be monthly cash grants for rural communities; and tariff structures that consider the needs of new consumers from the vulnerable groups, particularly customers from the poor, marginalized, and female-headed households for whom connection charges may be prohibitive.  
  • **Quality jobs.** Green and accessible energy reinforces and is reinforced by sustainable employment opportunities (i.e., last-mile electrification, microgrids, and solar rooftop systems) and provides a triple win—inclusive (providing universal access to vital energy resources), green energy (sustainability), with sustainable livelihoods (localized employment opportunities).  
  • **Social protection financing.** Target social protection to replace regressive energy subsidies.  
  • **Transformational/enabling role.** Develop capacity in communities, combining energy, education, and social protection; plan for a just transition to mitigate negative socioeconomic impacts and to increase opportunities associated with the transition, supporting affected workers and communities; and enhance access to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient livelihoods for all. |
| Transport               | • **Social protection systems.** Support inclusive and affordable transport systems.  
  • **Transformational/enabling role.** Support transitional adjustments required for the decarbonization of transport. |
| Water                   | • **Social protection systems.** Support the demand side by improving access to water and sanitation services for all through targeted support to the poor and vulnerable groups for water connections and payments, as well as complementary behaviors; use public works programs to generate job opportunities for workers in poor communities while supporting water projects and environmental assets that have positive water impacts; and ensure access to irrigation for the poorest households and remote areas (e.g., by supporting and strengthening water user groups and associations in charge of water distribution).  
  • **Transformational/enabling role.** Mitigate the impact of water-related shocks (e.g., floods, droughts, and storms). Social protection systems strengthen preventative measures and humanitarian assistance. The efficiency of the response can be improved, linking it to contingent financing and early warning systems. |
| Safeguards              | • **Social protection systems.** Use the graduation approach to restore livelihoods in the context of involuntary resettlements. Social protection supports national labor market policies on safety, health, and retrenchment beyond resettlement. |

COVID-19 = coronavirus disease, DMC = developing member country, NGO = nongovernment organization, OP = operational priority, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.

*a* Adaptive social protection systems can also contribute to disaster risk reduction (i.e., the text on climate change adaptation also applies).

### Appendix 4: Results Framework

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Guiding Principles</th>
<th>Linked SDGs</th>
<th>Operational Priorities</th>
<th>Outcome Indicators (CRF Reference)</th>
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</table>
| **Strengthening Social Protection Systems** | ![Linked SDGs] | ![Operational Priorities] | • People enrolled in improved education and/or training (1.1.1)  
• Health services established or improved (1.1.2)  
• Social protection schemes established or improved (1.1.3)  
• Enhanced labor policies or standards implemented (1.2.3)  
• Women enrolled in TVET and other jobs training (2.4.1)  
• Dedicated crisis-responding social assistance schemes for women and girls implemented or established (2.8.4) |
| **Building Partnerships** | ![Linked SDGs] | ![Operational Priorities] | • Measures for increased inclusiveness supported in implementation (1.3.3)  
• Community-based initiatives to build resilience of women and girls to external shocks implemented (2.5.1)  
• People with increased capacity in implementing mitigation and low-carbon development actions (3.9.2)  
• Regional or subregional mechanisms created or operationalized to enhance coordination and cooperation among DMCs on regional public goods (7.3.4) |
| **Supporting Integrated Intersector Initiatives** | ![Linked SDGs] | ![Operational Priorities] | • Measures for increased inclusiveness supported in implementation (1.3.3)  
• Women and girls benefiting from new or improved infrastructure (2.1.4)  
• Child and older person care services established or improved (2.7.2)  
• National and subnational disaster risk reduction and/or management plans supported in implementation (3.10.4)  
• Service providers with improved performance (4.1.1)  
• Health care, education, and financial services established or improved (5.1.3) |
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scaling Up Sustainable and Catalytic Financing</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>• New financial products and services made available to the poor and vulnerable (1.3.8)</td>
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<td>• Savings and insurance schemes for women implemented or established (2.8.4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Government officials with increased capacity to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate relevant measures (6.1.1)</td>
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<td>• Measures supported in implementation that promote resilience and responsiveness to economic shocks in a timely manner (6.1.3)</td>
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CRF = corporate results framework, DMC = developing member country, SDG = Sustainable Development Goal, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.