

ONLINE

SOCIAL PROTECTION

# EXTENDING SOCIAL HEALTH PROTECTION IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION TOWARDS UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

## REGIONAL CONFERENCE

7 AND 9 DECEMBER 2021 • 1 MARCH 2022

*Information Note*



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## BACKGROUND

Access to quality health care without hardship is a central guarantee of a social protection floor, a steppingstone to realize the human rights to health and social security and a necessary condition to achieve the sustainable development goals, especially universal social protection and universal health coverage. Over the past decades, **many countries in Asia and the Pacific have rapidly expanded social health protection coverage.** Despite laudable progress, the effective realization of the human rights to health and social security is not yet a reality for all. Inequalities in coverage and access to healthcare services still exist across and within countries. Gaps in coverage affect disproportionately the most vulnerable and jeopardize inclusiveness of social health protection systems.

Amidst the on-going **Covid-19 pandemic**, social demand for adequate social health protection systems is high globally and the Asia Pacific region is not an exception. In addition, some of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world can be found in Asia and the Pacific region, causing a shift in the narrative of the region's growth prospects. Population growth and changing population age structure influence economic growth, gender and generational equity, public finances, social and human capital development.

In this context, the financial sustainability of pension, long-term care and health-care services needs to be considered. Enabling physical and social environments to accommodate the flexible empowered choices of older persons who live by themselves should be created, including the elimination of ageism and promotion of age-friendly environments to support their rights.

The **ESCAP Resolution 77/1**, adopted at the last ESCAP Commission Session, re-emphasizes the need to make progress towards universal social protection, including health, as part of the Covid-19 recovery in Asia and the Pacific. The Resolution has been adopted at a time where high-level commitment of countries of the region is particularly crucial to transform the emergency responses taken to tackle the Covid-19 crisis, into sustainable, comprehensive, adequate and universal social protection systems. Those priorities were further echoed by the **International Labour Conference (ILC)** held in June this year and the **United Nations General Assembly** in September.

The **Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) on Empowerment and Inclusion**<sup>1</sup> helps to realize synergies among different Regional UN entities, including on social protection, to bring the value-added of the regional UNDS to Resident Coordinators and UN Country teams in the operationalization of the Framework for “Empowering people for a more inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific” (ESCAP, February 2019). The Platform agreed that the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups are essential to reduce inequality and accelerate progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) across the Region and at Country level.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The UN Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) is composed of the following entities: UNESCO, UNHCR, UNAIDS, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNV, FAO, UNDRR, UNESCAP, WFP, ILO, UNICEF.

<sup>2</sup> Across the Region many countries, with the support of the UN and other development partners, are working with marginalised and vulnerable groups to articulate their needs and identify solutions for their better protection and increased access to services.

As part of its annual work plan, the IBC has included a specific work stream on “*Social health protection: Towards universal health coverage*” and has planned to organize a **regional conference** documenting strategies and progress towards the extension of Social Health Protection in the Asia Pacific Region, in collaboration with CONNECT.

**CONNECT**<sup>3</sup> is a pioneering multi-stakeholder network of public institutions and non-for profit organizations in the Asia Pacific region, working together to bridge the gaps in Social Health Protection. Its mandate is to strengthen the capacity of countries in the region to develop and implement strong, sustainable and comprehensive Social Health Protection policies, strategies and systems to reach Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

As a regional centre of excellence, it aims to provide joint research opportunities, deliver short and long-term training and support advocacy and awareness-raising efforts in the region. To increase regional capacity and knowledge on social health protection, the network promotes South-South cooperation initiatives as a complement to on-going national efforts and in support to existing national policies.

This conference will be the opportunity to **launch the ILO Regional Publication of Social Health Protection**. The publication provides an analysis of countries’ trajectories in extending Social Health Protection (SHP) coverage both in terms of scope (population coverage) and adequacy of benefits (services covered, level of financial protection). The content of the publication is divided in two parts:

- the first part is a comparative analysis, focused on key challenges and opportunities to extend coverage in light of social health protection principles promoted by international social protection standards.
- the second part has been developed as an ILO-CONNECT collaboration and features the experience of 21 countries<sup>4</sup> documenting their SHP system design, strategies and progress towards the expansion of social health protection in Asia and the Pacific.

## OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the IBC-CONNECT virtual event is to foster exchanges and promote mutual learning among countries in the Asia Pacific region on strategies, progress and remaining challenges the extension of Social Health Protection.

The specific objectives of the virtual events are:

- Exchange experiences among countries in the Asia Pacific region on strategies and paths towards extension of Social Health Protection
- Enhance knowledge and awareness among policy makers in Asia-Pacific member States on options to move towards universal health coverage
- Launch the ILO regional publication on extension of Social Health Protection in Asia Pacific

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<sup>3</sup> <https://connectshp.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Twenty-one countries: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines (the), Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam.

- Introduce the generational economy perspective using National Transfer Account evidence to support engagement of policy planners on addressing demographic diversity and dividends, gender and population ageing in the region
- Promote CONNECT, the regional network on Social Health Protection, and more institutions to join the network as a long-term strategy to foster South-South cooperation in the region.

## FORMAT AND CONTENT

- Three 2h30 webinar sessions
- A virtual workspace where support documents and relevant documentation will be made available. This space will be available between section with technical forums organized to cover specific topics among participants
- Date: **7 and 9 December 2021 • 1 March 2022**
- Simultaneous interpretation into selected languages.

## PARTICIPANTS

### Speakers:

- Policy makers from the Asia Pacific region
- Academia
- Workers and Employers representatives
- INGOs/NGO
- UN: Members of the IBC and other institutions
- Other agencies working on health financing.

### Audience:

- Everyone who is interested can register through the ad-hoc website and follow the webinar.

## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

The event will take place exclusively online. The programme and registration links will be made available through [the dedicated website](#).

Three sessions:

1. Social Health Protection: where are we in Asia and the Pacific? Launch of the ILO regional compendium [High-level segment] (led by the ILO)
2. Strategies to sustainably expand coverage and adequacy of protection (led by the ILO)
3. Ageing and Long-Term Care with a focus on National Transfer Accounts for intergenerational policy advancement (led by UNFPA)

**The event is open to the public upon registration.**

# INFO

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
PLEASE CONTACT**

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