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► ILO Flagship Report

► World Social Protection Report 2024-26

Regional companion report
for Asia and the Pacific



 **World
Social
Protection
Report
2024-26**

**Regional
companion
report for Asia
and the Pacific**

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foreword

This Asia and the Pacific regional companion report complements the ILO's *World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition*. The first part of the regional companion report gives a 'Global Perspective' that is taken from the main report. The second part highlights key developments, challenges and priorities for social protection in Asia and the Pacific from a life-cycle perspective and takes a closer look at issues in social protection and climate action by taking into account specific circumstances in the region.

This report comes at a critical juncture, as the region grapples with the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the looming threat of climate change and the persistent challenges of informality and demographic shifts. It makes a clarion call for policymakers, stakeholders and communities to come together and forge a path towards a more equitable and sustainable future with social protection and climate action at the heart of efforts.

The report provides comprehensive analysis of the coverage, expenditure and emerging challenges of the current social protection systems in the region. It underscores the urgent need to extend social protection to those in the informal economy, develop robust social protection floors and ensure adequate benefits alongside coverage expansion. Crucially, this report recognizes the inextricable link between social protection and climate action. It outlines a vision for adapting social protection systems to enhance resilience, support climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, and facilitate a just transition to a low-carbon economy. By integrating climate risk assessments, promoting sustainable livelihoods and strengthening disaster response mechanisms, we can build social protection systems that are fit for purpose in the face of a changing climate.

The road ahead is not without challenges and this report offers key insights into how to overcome them. It calls for increased public expenditure on social protection, strengthened taxation systems and innovative financing solutions to expand fiscal space. It also emphasizes the importance of investing in the administration and management of schemes, ensuring quality services at the local level, and fostering global knowledge exchange and South-South collaboration.

As we embark on this journey, we must keep in mind the ultimate goal: to leave no one behind. By prioritizing social protection in national development strategies and accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, we can build a more equitable and resilient Asia and the Pacific region.



Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa
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Global perspective

chapter 1

For the first time, more than half of the world’s population are covered by some form of social protection. While this is welcome progress, the unvarnished reality is that 3.8 billion people are still entirely unprotected. The pressing need to make the human right to social security a reality for all is rendered even more urgent given the role social protection must play in addressing an even more substantial challenge: that is, the need for climate action and a just transition to address the triple planetary crisis – climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss – that imperils our world. With major tipping points on the verge of being crossed due to warming right now, the climate crisis represents the singular gravest threat to social justice.

A rapid move to a just transition is therefore urgently required as a response. Universal social protection systems have an important role to play to help realize climate ambitions and facilitate a just transition. With an especially sharp focus on the climate crisis and the exigency of a just transition, this report provides a global overview of progress made around the world since 2015 in extending social protection and building rights-based social protection systems. In doing so, it makes an essential contribution to the monitoring framework of the 2030 Agenda.¹ And it calls on policymakers, social partners and other stakeholders to accelerate their efforts to simultaneously close protection gaps and realize climate ambitions.

Five messages emerge from this report.

► **Social protection makes an important contribution to both climate change adaptation and mitigation.** Social protection is fundamental for climate change *adaptation*² as it tackles the root causes of vulnerability by preventing poverty and social exclusion and reducing inequality. It enhances people’s capacity to cope with climate-related shocks *ex ante* by providing an income floor and access to healthcare. It also contributes to raising adaptive capacities, including those of future generations through its positive impacts on human development, productive investment, and livelihood diversification.

Moreover, an inclusive and efficient loss and damage response at scale can leverage social protection systems, particularly when high levels of coverage and preparedness exist. Social protection systems are also key for compensating and cushioning people and enterprises from the potential adverse impacts of *mitigation*³ and other environmental policies. When combined with active labour market policies, they can help people transition to greener jobs and more sustainable economic practices. Social protection can also directly support mitigation efforts. The greening of public pension funds, the progressive conversion of fossil fuel subsidies into social protection benefits, and the provision of income support to disincentivize harmful activity to protect and restore crucial natural carbon sinks, are some of the options to support emission reductions.

- **Social protection is therefore an enabler of climate action and a catalyst for a just transition and greater social justice.** Social protection systems, as part of an integrated policy response, meet the imperatives of mitigation and adaptation in an equitable manner. Social protection helps to protect people’s incomes, health and jobs, as well as enterprises, from climate shocks and the adverse impacts of climate policies. Social protection encourages productive risk-taking and forward planning and thus can ensure that everyone – including the most vulnerable – can gain from climate change adaptation measures. It can enable job restructuring, protect living standards, maintain social cohesion, reduce vulnerability, and contribute to building fairer, more inclusive societies, and sustainable and productive economies. However, social protection cannot do this on its own. It needs to work in tandem with other policies to enable effective mitigation and adaptation policies, which are so utterly vital for a liveable planet.
- **Decisive policy action is required to strengthen social protection systems and adapt them to new realities, especially in the countries and territories most vulnerable to climate change, where coverage is the lowest.** Social protection

¹ Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Reports* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

² Climate change adaptation refers to the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

³ Climate change mitigation refers to actions that reduce the rate of climate change (for example, keeping fossil fuels in the ground) or enhancing and protecting the sinks of greenhouse gases that reduce their presence in the atmosphere (for example, forests, soils and oceans).

increases the resilience of people, economies and societies by providing a systematic policy response to mutually reinforcing life-cycle risks and climate-related risks (which look poised to become increasingly inseparable and indistinct with each decimal point of global warming). In this context, policymakers will have to achieve a double objective: implementing climate policies to support mitigation and adaptation efforts to contain the climate crisis, while at the same time strengthening social protection to address both ordinary life-cycle risks and climate risks. In the context of an evolving risk landscape, policymakers must ensure their social protection systems can deal with both types of risk.

- ▶ **However, the capacity of social protection systems to contribute to a just transition is held back by persistent gaps in social protection coverage, adequacy and financing.** These hinder the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Investing in reinforcing social protection systems is indispensable for a successful just transition. The costs of inaction are enormous, and it would be irrational and imprudent not to invest. The case for strengthening social protection systems is therefore as compelling as it is urgent. Without investment in universal protection systems, the climate crisis will

exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, poverty and inequalities, when precisely the opposite is needed. Moreover, for ambitious mitigation and environmental policies to be feasible, social protection will be needed to garner public support. Human rights instruments and international social security standards provide essential guidance for building universal social protection systems capable of responding to these challenges and realizing the human right to social security for all.

- ▶ **Social justice must inform climate action and a just transition, with human rights at the heart of the process.** Social protection can help ensure no one is left behind. It can contribute to rectifying long-standing global and domestic inequalities and inequities rendered more pronounced by the climate crisis. The climate crisis can only be overcome through common effort but with differentiated responsibility proportional to capacity. It needs to be recognized that special remedial responsibility lies with those primarily responsible for the crisis. This has major implications for financing social protection at the domestic level, and for the role of international financial support for countries with insufficient economic and fiscal capacities that have contributed least to the crisis but are bearing its brunt. This constitutes a key element of social justice.

▶ Progress, yes, but billions are left languishing and unprepared for the life-cycle and climate shocks ahead

Since the last edition of the *World Social Protection Report*, social protection coverage has surpassed an important milestone globally. For the first time, more than half of the world's population (52.4 per cent) are covered by at least one social protection benefit (SDG indicator 1.3.1), increasing from 42.8 per cent in 2015 (see figure ES.1). This is welcome progress.

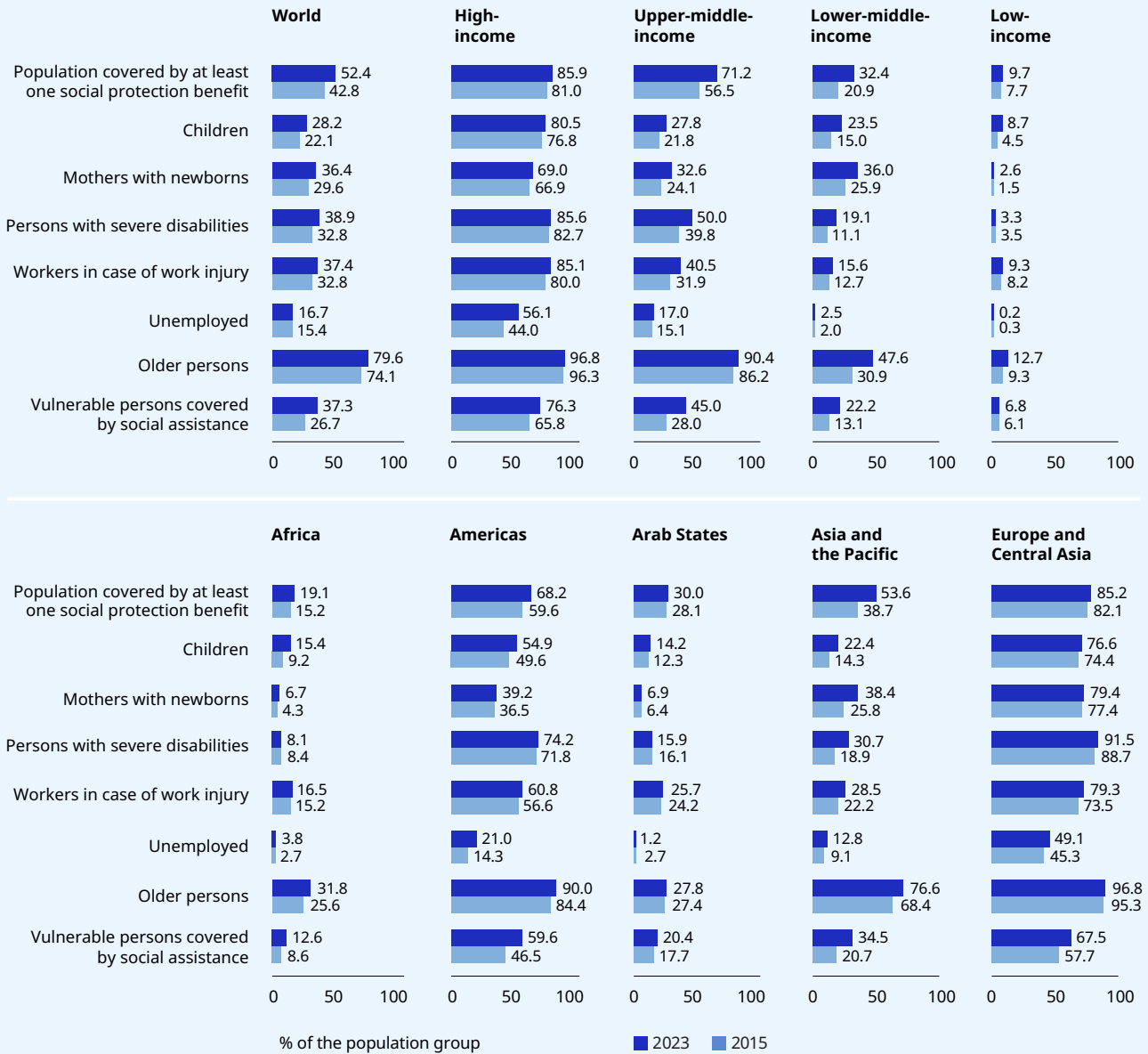
If progress were to continue at this rate at the global level, it would take another 49 years – until 2073 – for everyone to be covered by at least one social protection benefit. This pace to close protection gaps is too slow.

Moreover, the world is currently on two very different and divergent social protection trajectories: high-income countries (85.9 per cent)

are edging closer to enjoying universal coverage; and upper-middle-income countries (71.2 per cent) and lower-middle-income countries (32.4 per cent) are making large strides in closing protection gaps. At the same time, low-income countries' coverage rates (9.7 per cent) have hardly increased since 2015, which are unacceptably low.

Gender gaps in global legal and effective coverage remain substantial. Women's effective coverage, for at least one social protection benefit, lags behind men's (50.1 and 54.6 per cent, respectively). For comprehensive legal coverage, a similar inequality is observed. Only 33.8 per cent of the working-age population are legally covered by comprehensive social security systems. However, when this figure is disaggregated, it reveals a pronounced gender gap, with a coverage rate

► **Figure ES.1. SDG indicator 1.3.1: Effective social protection coverage, global, regional and income-level estimates, by population group, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)**



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation. Global and regional and income-level aggregates are weighted by population group. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); [ISSA Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

of 39.3 per cent for men and 28.2 per cent for women – an 11.1 percentage point difference. Social protection systems must become more

gender-responsive as part of a larger set of policies to address inequalities in labour markets, employment and society.

For people not covered through social insurance, it is important to note that, in its absence, social assistance or other non-contributory cash benefits play an essential role in ensuring at least a basic level of social security. Globally, coverage has increased from 26.7 per cent to 37.3 per cent of vulnerable persons since 2015. This increase is explained, in part, by the temporary policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However,

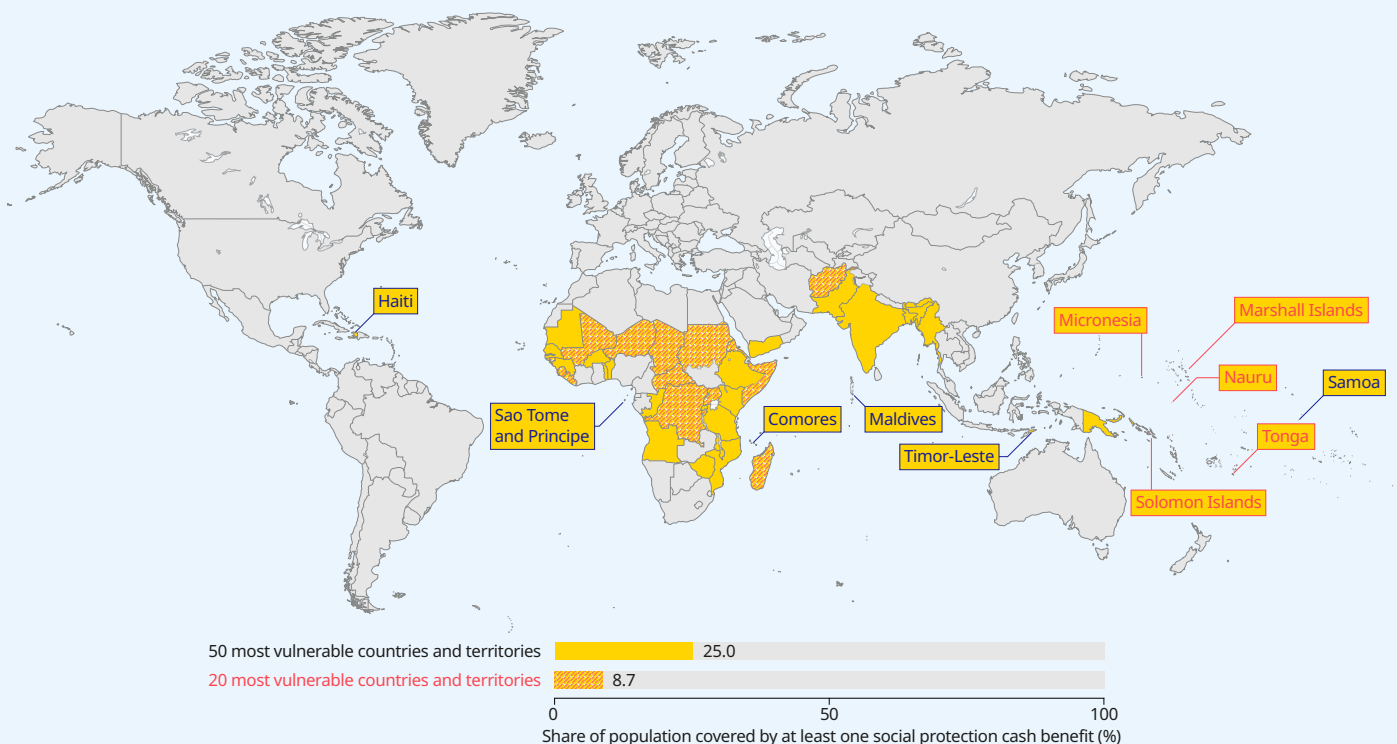
higher coverage may also stem from increased needs due to increasing poverty, vulnerability and decent work deficits. Irrespective of the explanation, greater efforts are needed to facilitate transitions from social assistance into decent employment (including self-employment) covered by social insurance, which provides higher levels of protection and relieves pressure on government budgets.

► A daunting prospect: Countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis are woefully ill-prepared

Populations in countries at the frontline of the climate crisis and most susceptible to climate hazards remain woefully unprepared. In the 20 countries most vulnerable to the climate

crisis, just a mere 8.7 per cent of the population is covered by some form of social protection, leaving 364 million people wholly unprotected (figure ES.2). And some 25 per cent of the

► **Figure ES.2. The 20 and 50 countries most vulnerable to climate change and their weighted average effective coverage by at least one social protection cash benefit, 2023 (percentage)**



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation. Global and regional aggregates are weighted by population.

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Sources: ILO estimates, [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); ILOSTAT; national sources and [Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index](#).

population in the 50 most climate-vulnerable countries are effectively covered. For the latter, this translates to 2.1 billion people currently facing the ravages of climate breakdown with no protection, relying on their own wits and kin to cope.

This is no way to proceed in the context of a more volatile climate future. And the abject plight of these people is made even bleaker by the large financing gap that impedes having at least a social protection

floor. The annual financing gap in the 20 most vulnerable countries equates to US\$200.1 billion (equivalent to 69.1 per cent of their GDP) and, in the 50 most vulnerable, it is US\$644 billion (equivalent to 10.5 per cent of their GDP). Filling these financing gaps is not insurmountable if domestic capacities are built up, but this will require concerted international support, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

► **Protection gaps are largely associated with significant underinvestment in social protection**

Financing gaps in social protection are still large. To guarantee at least a basic level of social security through a social protection floor, low- and middle-income countries require an additional US\$1.4 trillion or 3.3 per cent of the aggregate GDP (2024) of these countries per annum, composed by 2.0 per cent of GDP or US\$833.4 billion for essential healthcare and 1.3 per cent of GDP or US\$552.3 billion for five social protection cash benefits. More specifically, low-income countries would need to invest an additional US\$308.5 billion per year, equivalent to 52.3 per cent of their GDP, which is unfeasible in the short term without international support.

Ambitions to close gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection systems are stymied by significant underinvestment in social protection. On average, countries spend 12.9 per cent of their GDP on social protection (excluding health), but this figure masks staggering variations between countries. High-income countries spend 16.2 per cent; upper-middle-income countries, 8.5 per cent; lower-middle-income countries, only 4.2 per cent; and low-income countries, a paltry 0.8 per cent.

Increasing the adequacy of social protection is paramount too. Persistent adequacy gaps inhibit the potential of social protection to prevent and reduce poverty, and enable a dignified life. Ensuring adequate benefits across people's lives is key to guaranteeing a social protection floor and striving towards higher benefit levels. The climate crisis will most likely lead to increased needs, including due to higher prices, which will result in a commensurable increase in public expectations for adequate benefits.

For social protection systems to fulfil their potential in addressing life-cycle risks and responding to climate change, they must be further reinforced. Additional efforts are therefore needed to ensure universal, comprehensive and adequate protection, while ensuring that social protection systems are equitably and sustainably financed. The cost of inaction on investing in social protection is enormous, comprising lost productivity and prosperity, heightened social cohesion risks, squandered human capabilities, unnecessary pain, morbidity and early death and many more socio-economic negativities.

► **Social protection continues to be elusive for 1.8 billion children**

Highlights

► Social protection remains elusive for the vast majority of children. For children aged 0 to 18 globally, 23.9 per cent receive a family or child benefit, meaning 1.8 billion children are not

covered. For children aged 0 to 15, 28.2 per cent of children are covered, up by 6.1 percentage points since 2015. This equates to 1.4 billion children missing out.

► Fewer than one in ten (7.6 per cent) children aged 0 to 18 in low-income countries receive a child or family cash benefit, leaving millions

vulnerable to missed education, poor nutrition, poverty and inequality, and exposing them to long-lasting impacts. Children, especially those in poverty, are bearing the brunt of the climate crisis.

- ▶ The climate crisis has been described as structural violence against children, which compromises their well-being and prospects. This underscores the importance of making social protection systems more inclusive

and resilient so that they continue to achieve their core objectives and support children's additional needs due to climate change.

- ▶ Public expenditure on social protection for children needs to increase. On average, 0.7 per cent of GDP is spent on child benefits globally. Again, large regional disparities exist; the proportion ranging from 0.2 per cent in low-income countries to 1.0 per cent in high-income countries.

▶ Pronounced protection gaps remain for persons of working age

Highlights

- ▶ Global coverage trends between 2015 and 2023 (including SDG indicator 1.3.1) show some, yet still insufficient, progress for persons of working age, leaving many millions unprotected or inadequately protected. These protection gaps will be further aggravated by climate hazards and climate mitigation and adaptation policies.

- ▶ *Maternity protection*: 36.4 per cent of women with newborns worldwide receive a cash maternity benefit, up by 6.8 percentage points. This equates to 85 million women with newborns not covered. In addition, inequalities in access to reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health persist and exposure to climate change hazards has consequences for maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality.

- ▶ *Sickness benefits (legal coverage)*: 56.1 per cent of the labour force in the world, representing 34.4 per cent of the working-age population, is legally entitled to sickness benefits. This means 4.1 billion working-age persons are not legally protected. Even when covered, limited adequacy, duration and eligibility criteria may create protection gaps. Climate change creates new challenges for productivity and sickness protection owing to the spread of existing and new diseases.

- ▶ *Employment injury protection*: 37.4 per cent of workers enjoy employment injury protection

for work-related injuries and occupational disease, up by 4.6 percentage points. This leaves 2.3 billion workers totally uncovered. Adverse labour market structures and weak enforcement of schemes, especially in lower-income countries, perpetuate these gaps. Climate hazards like extreme heat will increase employment injury risks, and occupational safety and health needs.

- ▶ *Disability benefits*: 38.9 per cent of people with severe disabilities receive a disability benefit, up by 6.1 percentage points. This results in 146 million persons with severe disability not covered. The additional services which persons with disabilities need are often insufficient to meet their diverse needs. Climate change further increases the vulnerability of persons with disabilities.

- ▶ *Unemployment protection*: 16.7 per cent of unemployed people receive unemployment cash benefits, up by 1.3 percentage points. This translates to 157 million unemployed persons not being covered. Youth, self-employed workers, workers on digital platforms, agricultural and migrant workers often lack unemployment protection. And many existing schemes are not prepared to tackle climate-related challenges nor facilitate the decarbonization of carbon-intensive sectors.

- ▶ *Expenditure estimates* show that, worldwide, 4.8 per cent of GDP is allocated to non-health public social protection expenditure for people of working age. To a large extent, limited expenditure explains protection gaps for working-age persons.

► Older persons still face coverage and adequacy challenges

Highlights

- Pensions are the most prevalent form of social protection globally. Worldwide, 79.6 per cent of people above retirement age receive a pension, up by 5.5 percentage points since 2015. Nonetheless, more than 165 million individuals above the statutory retirement age do not receive a pension.
- Ensuring adequate protection in old age remains a challenge, particularly for women, workers with low earnings, those engaged in precarious employment, workers on digital platforms, and migrant workers. These challenges are likely to be exacerbated by climate change, in the form of involuntary migration, fragmented careers or general climate-induced economic pressure.
- In many countries, especially those with widespread informal employment, the expansion of coverage of contributory pensions has not been fast enough to

guarantee adequate income security in old age. The introduction of tax-financed pensions provides an important source of income for older persons with insufficient entitlements to contributory pensions. Yet, in some countries, benefit levels are insufficient to guarantee a social protection floor for older persons.

- Globally, public expenditure on pensions and other non-health benefits for older people averages 7.6 per cent of GDP. However, substantial regional variations still exist, with expenditure levels ranging from 10.5 per cent of GDP in Europe and Central Asia to 1.7 per cent in Africa.
- The climate crisis threatens the financial sustainability and adequacy of pension schemes. Consequently, pension schemes must adapt to contend with climate-related risks to ensure long-term sustainability and protect the quality of life of beneficiaries. Pension funds can also help combat the climate crisis through strategic investment in sustainable and low-carbon assets.

► Social health protection: an essential contribution to universal health coverage

Highlights

- The right to social health protection is not yet a universal reality. While more than four fifths (83.7 per cent) of the global population is covered by law, only 60.1 per cent of the global population are effectively protected by a health protection scheme. This means 3.3 billion people do not enjoy protection. Coverage has stalled since 2020, showing important implementation gaps. In addition to extending health protection, investing in the availability of quality healthcare services is crucial.
- Barriers to healthcare access remain in the form of out-of-pocket health expenditure incurred by households, physical distance, limitations in the range, quality and acceptability of health services, long waiting times linked to shortages and unequal distribution of health and care

workers, and opportunity costs such as lost working time and earnings.

- Out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare is increasing globally and pushed 1.3 billion people into poverty in 2019. Collective financing, broad risk pooling and rights-based entitlements are key conditions to support effective healthcare access for all in a shock-responsive manner.
- Stronger linkages and better coordination between access to healthcare and income security are urgently needed to address key determinants of health. The climate crisis is directly impacting people's health, while also exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities, which act as powerful determinants of health equity. Health and well-being should not be the privilege of the few, and the inequalities triggered by the climate crisis call for urgent investment.

► Time to up the ante: Towards a greener, economically secure and socially just future

Time is quickly running out for arresting runaway global heating and achieving universal social protection, with less than six years remaining to the key milestone of 2030. It is time to up the ante, accelerate progress in social protection and make a just transition. This is essential for current and future generations. It requires significant investment, determination and political will from both national policymakers and international actors. Safeguarding the planet – while also protecting people’s health, incomes, jobs and livelihoods, as well as enterprises – and maintaining a liveable planet should provide ample impetus for policymakers to build social protection systems. To this end, several priorities can be identified:

- **Mitigating the climate crisis and achieving a just transition requires giving sufficient attention to building rights-based universal social protection systems.** Countries must intensify their efforts to address the existential threat of the climate crisis. Social protection is among the most powerful policy tools that governments can deploy to manage this challenge fairly by ensuring that everyone is adequately protected. This must be part of an integrated policy response. This can help secure the political legitimacy of climate policies. Rectifying inequities intrinsic in the climate crisis demands global justice, including solidarity in financing.
- **By reinforcing social protection systems, States can demonstrate that they intend to protect their people through a reinvigorated social contract.** This is essential for promoting well-being, social cohesion and the pursuit of social justice. Strong social protection fosters state-society trust, can guarantee that all members of society are well protected, and engenders a willingness to go along with climate policies.
- **Keeping alive the promise of leaving no one behind remains paramount.** This means a) pivoting from reducing poverty to preventing

poverty and moving away from flimsy social safety nets towards solid social protection floors, and progressively reaching higher, more adequate levels of protection; b) ensuring that social protection systems are gender-responsive; c) facilitating access to quality care and other services; d) making health and well-being a more central focus of our economies.

- **Preparedness for climate shocks and just transition policies requires comprehensive social protection systems to be in place ex ante.** This means getting the basics right and formulating and implementing national social protection strategies and policies through social dialogue now rather than later. Systems can contribute to preventing, containing and softening the impacts of crises, promoting swift recovery and building people’s capacity to cope with shocks as well as everyday risks. In humanitarian crises, this requires working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, using existing health and social protection systems to the extent possible, and systematically reinforcing them.
- **Further investment is essential to achieve universal and robust social protection systems.** Domestic resource mobilization is critically important for addressing both life-cycle and climate risks in a sustainable and equitable way. Countries with limited fiscal capacities, many of which are also highly vulnerable to the climate crisis, need international financial support to enable them to fill financing gaps and build their social protection systems.

There are enormous gains to be had if universal social protection is accorded its due policy priority in climate action and a just transition. As part of an integrated policy framework, social protection can ensure that everyone can reap the benefits of a new greener prosperity, a reinvigorated social contract and a rejuvenated planet more hospitable to life and future generations. The opportunity is there if policymakers want to take it.

**Social protection,
climate action and
a just transition in
Asia and the Pacific**

chapter 2

► 2.1 Regional trends and outlook

The unfolding global climate crisis represents a major threat in the Asia and the Pacific region. Home to major greenhouse gas emitters as well as countries with near-zero carbon footprints, the region also has some of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. The World Bank estimates that climate change could push as many as 35.7 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 in Asia and the Pacific (Jafino et al. 2020). This prompts great concern and shows that many countries in the region are unprepared and that large protection gaps need to be urgently closed. Intensified efforts are required to increase climate change mitigation and adaptation across the policy and development spectrum.

In addition, ILO estimates show that, by 2030, continued global warming will lead to the loss of 5.3 per cent of working hours due to heat stress, equivalent to 43 million full-time jobs in Southern Asia, and a 3.7 per cent loss, equivalent to 13 million full-time jobs, in South-Eastern Asia (ILO 2019). Three in four workers in Asia and the Pacific (74.7 per cent) are exposed to excessive heat at work (ILO 2024c). Climate impacts could exacerbate existing inequalities and decent work deficits, become an additional driver of displacement, and reverse gains made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Taking action to address climate change, protect the environment and transition towards a low-carbon economy could engender jobs losses in certain sectors. However, this could be offset by the creation of 100 million additional jobs by 2030.¹

In the region, high levels of economic growth over several decades have translated into increases in per capita income and have allowed millions of people to move out of poverty. Although growth is essential for improving the lives of people and reducing poverty, its benefits have not been shared evenly, and inequalities within and across countries have widened. Without concerted policy action, climate change may further exacerbate this

trend, as it disproportionately affects people who are already vulnerable, marginalized and without resources (IPCC 2022).

The latest estimates for 2022 show that 883 million people in the region still live below the poverty line of US\$3.65 per day, including 209 million living in extreme poverty (subsisting on less than US\$2.15 per day) (World Bank 2024). The ILO estimates that 72.5 million people were in extreme working poverty in 2023 (ILO 2024e).

Accelerating progress in eradicating poverty and fostering sustainable economic and social development will require further efforts to close coverage and adequacy gaps, and strengthen social protection systems. Despite significant progress, existing social protection systems in the region often provide limited coverage through mandatory contributory schemes frequently limited to specific categories of employees, and non-contributory schemes targeting the poor and most vulnerable groups. Those not covered by social protection against various life-cycle and socio-economic risks typically include workers in micro and small enterprises, self-employed workers, and migrant workers, as well as their families – many of whom find themselves in the informal economy (ILO 2021).

The financial and economic crises that have hit the region several times also highlight the crucial role of social protection in softening the adverse impacts of crises and protecting jobs and incomes. Recognizing the positive link between social protection and inclusive economic growth, more and more countries have committed to investing in building comprehensive and resilient social protection systems, as defined in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). In this regard, the low level of ratification of Convention No. 102 by the Member States in the region must be mentioned.²

¹ See <https://webapps.ilo.org/business-case/cases/just-transition>.

² In July 2024, Japan was the only ILO Member State in Asia and the Pacific to have ratified Convention No. 102 with respect to four benefit branches. It should be noted that several countries in the region are currently working towards ratification with support from the ILO. The new [Social Insurance Package Law adopted in 2023](#) in Mongolia has increased the level of unemployment insurance benefits in conformity with Convention No. 102.

2.1.1 Effective coverage

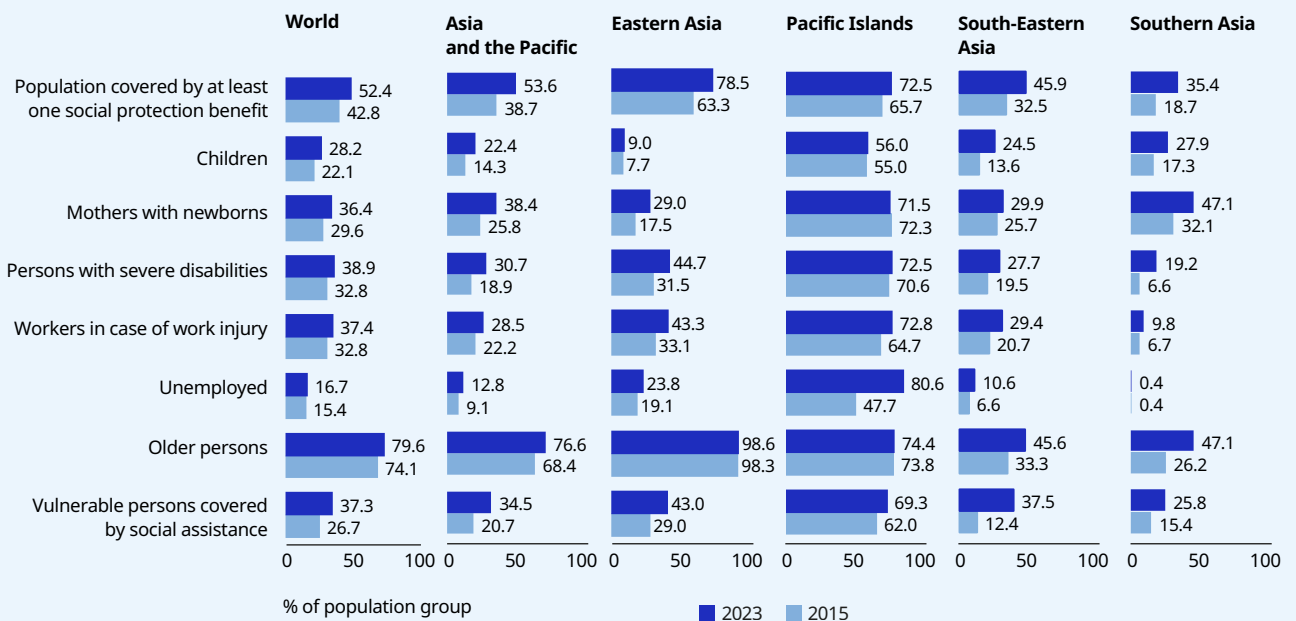
In 2023, the region achieved an important milestone: for the first time, over half its population (53.6 per cent) were covered by at least one social protection benefit. This figure not only exceeds the global effective coverage rate of 52.4 per cent, but also represents most significant increase in coverage of all regions, bringing Asia and the Pacific closer to Europe and Central Asia (85.2 per cent) and the Americas (68.2 per cent) (see ILO 2024f).

Across all sub-regions in Asia and the Pacific, there was a substantial increase in effective coverage rates between 2015 and 2023, although there are marked differences in the level of increase given the widely varying 2015 baselines. In Eastern Asia, the coverage rate increased from 63.3 per cent to 78.5 per cent – up by 15.2 percentage points; from 32.5 per cent to 45.9 per cent in South-Eastern Asia – up by 13.4 percentage points; from 18.7 per

cent to 35.4 per cent in Southern Asia – up by 16.7 percentage points; and from 65.7 per cent to 72.5 in the Pacific Islands – up by 6.8 percentage points.

The regional and subregional averages of social protection coverage hide significant geographical disparities among countries. Lower coverage reflects a range of factors including substantial differences in levels of GDP and institutional capacity, vastly different population sizes, and humanitarian challenges. For instance, in the Cook Islands, Iran, New Zealand and Singapore, 100 per cent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, whereas in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Tuvalu, only 7.5 per cent, 6.3 per cent and 4.5 per cent of their respective populations are covered (see figure 2). Furthermore, the five most populous countries – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan – have quite different coverage rates, with 22.0 per cent, 75.6 per cent, 48.4 per cent, 54.3 per cent and 20.2 per cent, respectively.

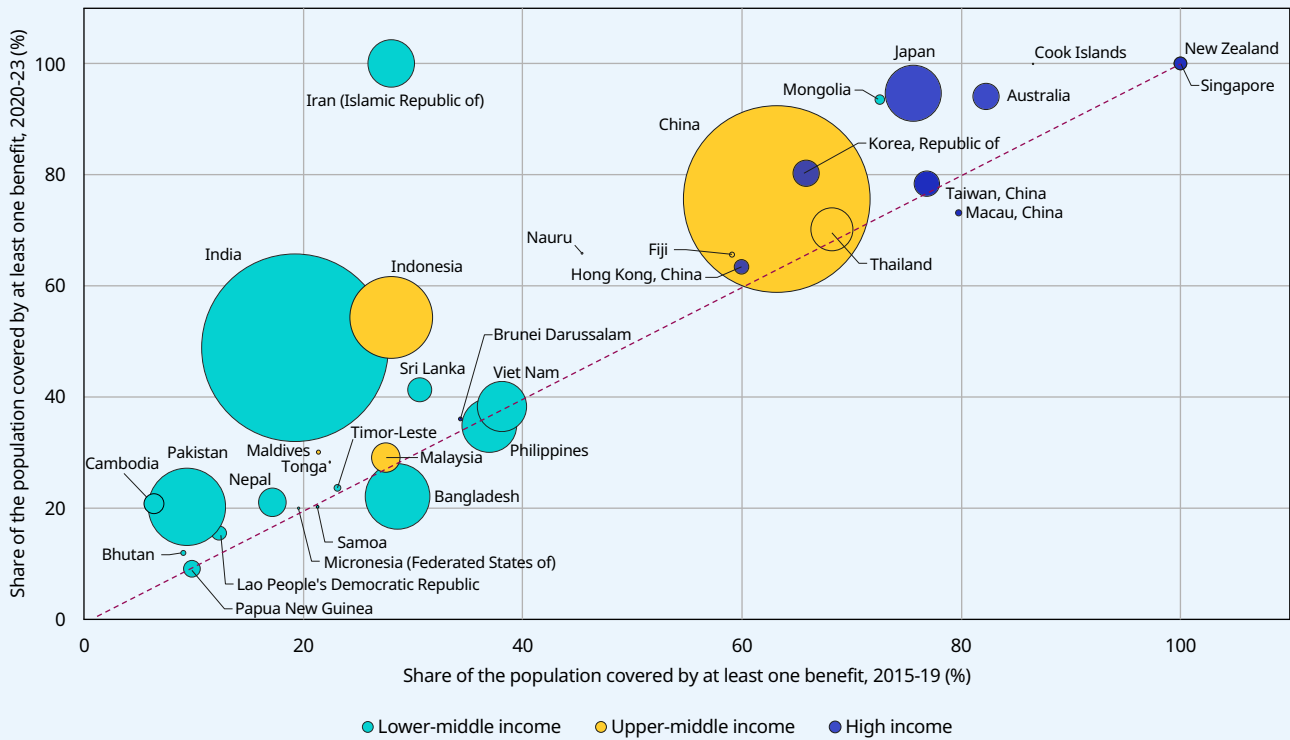
► **Figure 1** SDG indicator 1.3.1: Effective social protection coverage, regional and subregional estimates, by population group, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population group. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

► **Figure 2** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective social protection coverage: Comparison of share of population covered by at least one cash benefit, 2015-19 and 2020-23, by population size and income level



Notes: Size of the bubble reflects the population size of the country or territory. Afghanistan, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Myanmar, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu do not appear on this graph, as effective coverage trend data for these countries is not available. See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population group. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO estimates; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

As figure 2 shows, countries in the region have achieved, in diverse ways, significant progress in expanding social protection coverage during the last decade. The countries above the red line all experienced an increase in their effective coverage from 2015-19 to 2023. Several countries have created new contributory and non-contributory schemes, improved the level of the benefits, and extended the coverage of existing schemes, especially to the self-employed and workers in the informal economy and their families.

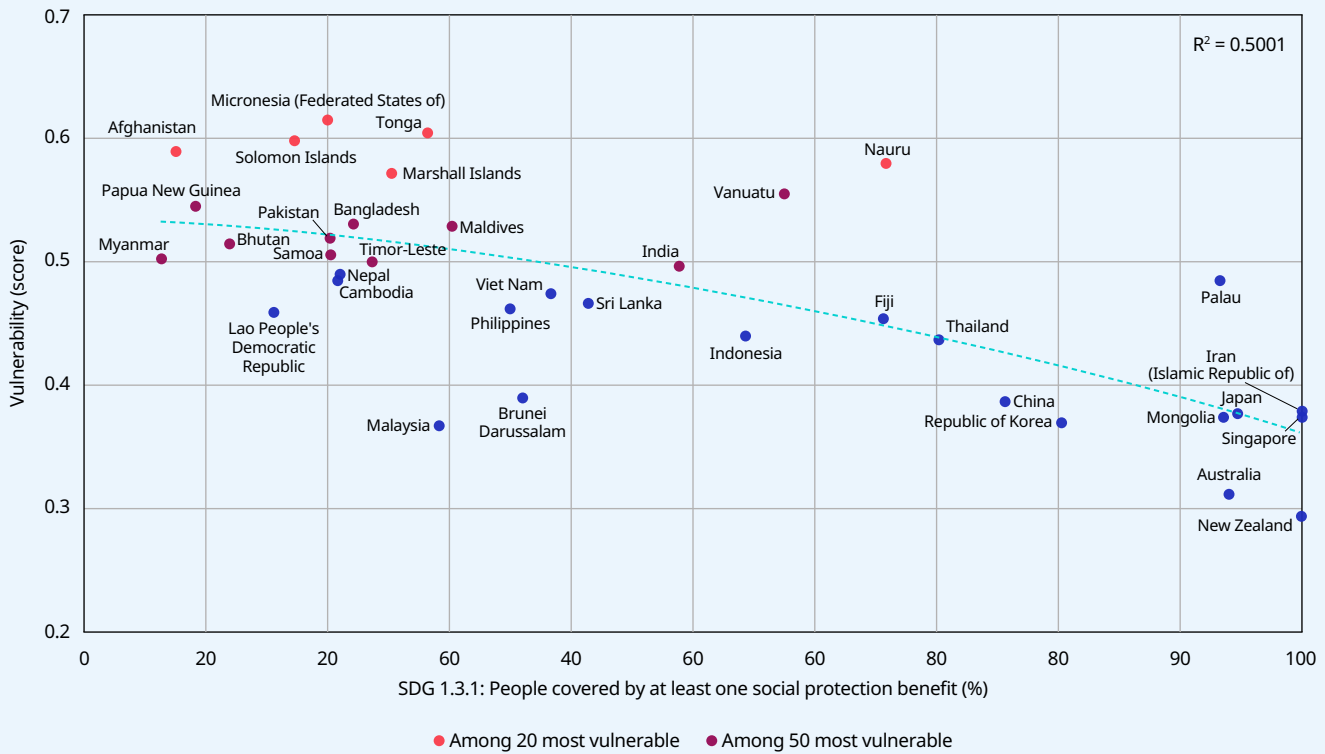
Despite these positive trends, large protection gaps remain; almost half the region’s population, equivalent to 2.1 billion people, are unprotected.

While the progress made since 2015 in the region as a whole is promising, there is still a considerable way to go to attain universal coverage and to reach adequate and comprehensive protection. Coverage will need to be further accelerated to increase the region’s capacity to tackle challenges.

It is particularly concerning that many countries in Asia and the Pacific are experiencing a high vulnerability to climate change yet have low effective coverage, equating to limited preparedness. The region is home to 16 of the 50 countries most vulnerable to climate change (see figure 3).³ And six countries in the region – Afghanistan, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia,

³ See [Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index](#).

► **Figure 3 The relationship between a country’s vulnerability (score) to climate change and social protection coverage, 2023 (percentage)**



Note: A country’s [Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index](#) score is composed of a vulnerability score and a readiness score. For the purpose of this figure, the vulnerability score was used. Vulnerability measures a country’s exposure, sensitivity and ability to adapt to the negative impact of climate change. It takes into consideration six life-supporting sectors – food, water, health, ecosystem service, human habitat and infrastructure.

Source: [Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index](#) and ILO [World Social Protection Database](#).

Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Tonga – are among the 20 most vulnerable countries.⁴ With the exception of Nauru, which enjoys a relatively high coverage rate of 65.8 per cent, in the other countries, effective coverage rates are low ranging from 7.5 per cent to 28.2 per cent. Many countries in the region are unprepared and the vast majority of the most vulnerable populations on the front line of the climate crisis are woefully unprotected.

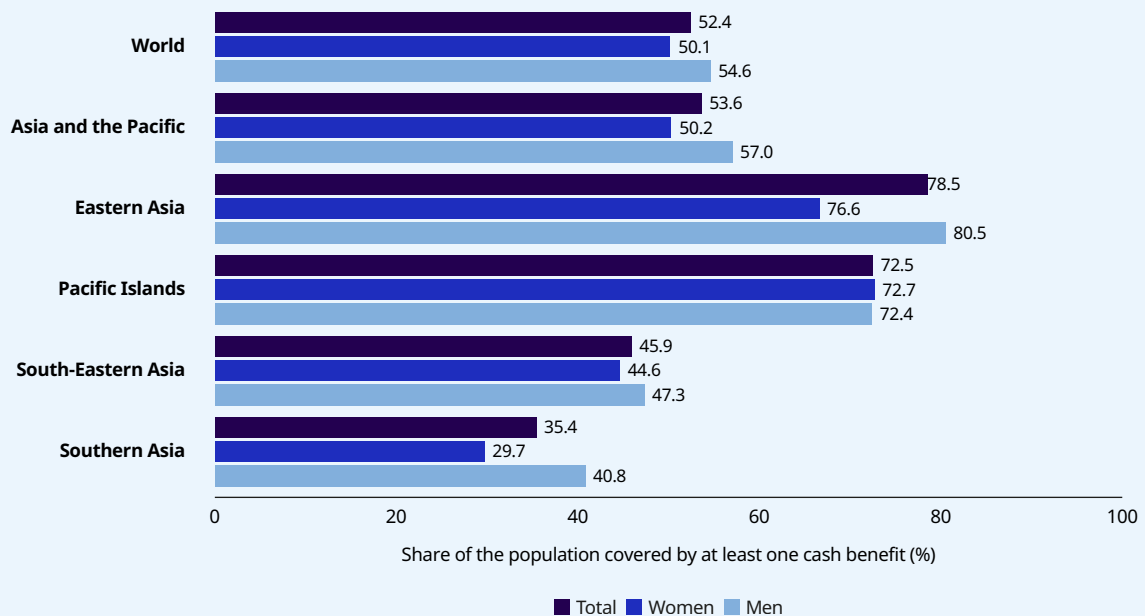
Furthermore, social protection coverage still shows significant gender inequalities, with the effective coverage of women by at least one cash social protection benefit lagging behind that of men by 6.8 percentage points (50.2 and 57.0 per cent, respectively) as shown in figure 4. Gender differences are particularly pronounced in

Southern Asia, where a 11.1 percentage-point gap exists (29.7 and 40.8 per cent, respectively). The discrepancies reflect women’s lower labour force participation rates and higher levels of informal employment (especially contributing family work), gender pay gaps and a disproportionately high share of unpaid care work, which national social protection strategies often fail to recognize. These factors are associated with persistent patterns of inequality, discrimination and structural disadvantage. Improving social protection provision for women remains a paramount challenge for this region.

Nevertheless, social protection policies hold great potential to enhance gender equality and help realize women’s rights, especially if they pay due

⁴ See footnote 2.

► **Figure 4** SDG indicator 1.3.1: Effective social protection coverage by at least one cash benefit, regional and subregional estimates, by sex, 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024–26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population group. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); ILOSTAT; national sources.

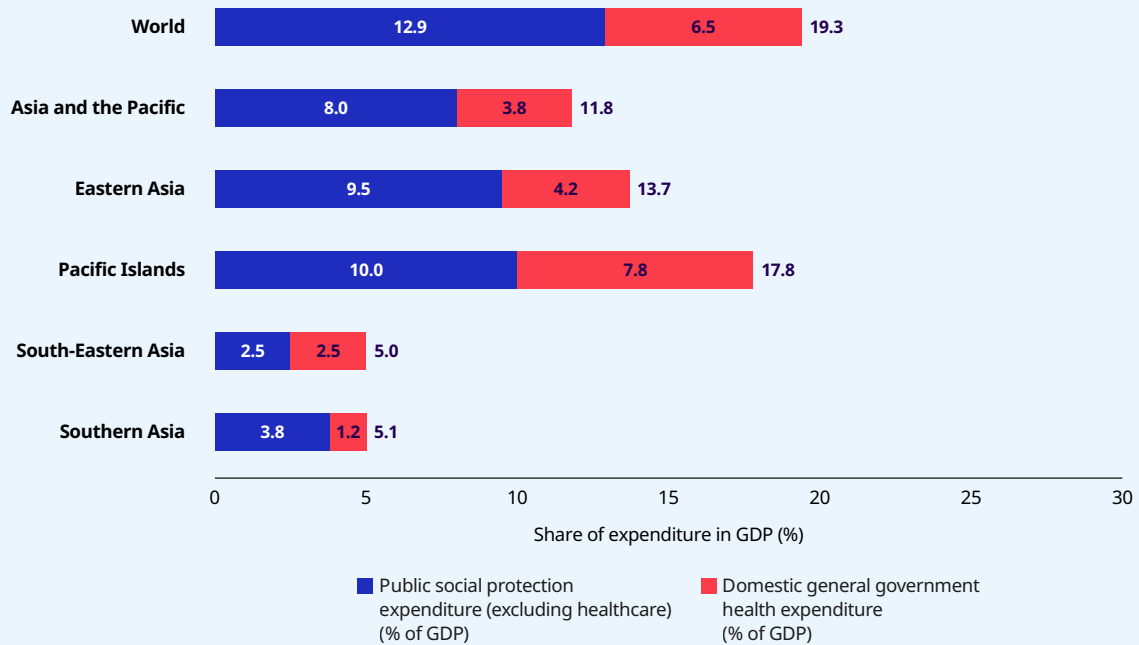
attention to gender-specific risks and challenges in relation to gender equality, namely gender-based inequalities in employment, the unequal division of unpaid care work, and gender-specific risks across the life cycle (Razavi et al., forthcoming).

2.1.2 Social protection expenditure

Ambitions to close gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection systems are determined by the level of investment in social protection. On the expenditure side, as shown in figure 5, the share of public social protection expenditure (including government health expenditure) was 11.8 per cent of GDP in 2023 or latest available year, which is still significantly below the world average (19.3 per cent).

Protection gaps are largely associated with the levels of investment in social protection. The Asia-Pacific region still has a large financing gap in social protection. To guarantee at least a basic level of social security through a social protection floor, the region as a whole would need to invest annually an additional 2 per cent of GDP (1.2 per cent on essential healthcare and 0.8 per cent on core social protection cash benefits), equivalent to US\$554.3 billion, to fill the financing gap (Cattaneo et al. 2024). In some countries in the region, the financing gap can be filled by domestic resources. However, countries in fragile situations (such as Afghanistan, where the financing gap represents 46.8 per cent of GDP) would require external support and a long-term strategy to mobilize both internal and external resources (Cattaneo et al. 2024).

► **Figure 5 Public social protection expenditure, 2023, domestic general government health expenditure, 2021, by region and subregion (percentage of GDP)**



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 2 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by GDP. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions. Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures.

Source: ILO estimates, [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ADB, GSW, IMF; OECD; UNECLAC; WHO, national sources

► 2.2 Regional challenges

The social protection systems in Asia-Pacific countries are facing recurrent and new transformative challenges, including significant and persistent informality, and non-standard forms of employment, such as platform work, globalized labour markets, rapid demographic ageing, technological development and emerging environmental challenges.

Climate change: The climate crisis and corresponding need for a just transition will require policymakers in the region to consider how to ensure their populations are protected from the impact of extreme weather events and slow-onset changes, and the possible unintended yet adverse impacts of much-needed climate policies. Climate change mitigation policies – that is, actions that reduce the rate of climate change (for example,

keeping fossil fuels in the ground) – will need to be supported and enabled by social protection, as they may negatively impact energy and food prices, or the employment and livelihoods of workers engaged in carbon-intensive industries or other environmentally unsustainable practices. If climate action and a just transition are to succeed and be politically supported in the long run, social protection must be reflected in national climate policies and assigned the requisite financing to perform its protective and transition-easing function (see section 4.1).

Social protection can also help people adapt to and cope with a changing climate by protecting their incomes, health and jobs, and by ensuring business continuity. As observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, social protection plays a

crucial role when unexpected shocks occur. Social protection schemes should be designed to be more shock-responsive and adaptive, including by considering climate risk in the design, financing and administration of the systems. For instance, the Philippines has long been a pacesetter in the region, with a social protection system primed for dealing with hydrological climate shocks (ILO 2024f, box 2.9).

Informality: A large and persistent informal economy in the region represents the most significant barrier to extending social protection coverage. The ILO estimates that 1.3 billion workers in Asia and the Pacific, equivalent to 66.0 per cent of all workers in the region, were in informal employment in 2023 (ILO 2024a). Policies to progressively extend coverage to workers in the informal economy, particularly through contributory schemes, are essential for fostering the transition of enterprises and workers from the informal to the formal economy. They should also adopt a flexible approach that considers the specific conditions of workers in the informal economy. This means taking into account that many (but not all) workers in the informal economy have weak contributory capacities due to low and irregular earnings and low levels of productivity, and often work in challenging employment conditions. Therefore, extension policies must be better adapted to the situation of such workers. This can be achieved by ensuring that benefits respond to priority needs (for example, by prioritizing medical care and short-term cash benefits), accommodating for limited contributory capacities through appropriate measures, including combining contribution and tax financing, and removing financial and administrative barriers for self-employed workers (ILO 2021).

Tackling informality requires integrated approaches to formalization, with the coordination of social protection policies with other key areas such as employment and tax policies, and concerted actions by all relevant stakeholders through inclusive social dialogue. Countries must take urgent action to address informality, such as by enhancing institutional capacity for law enforcement and leveraging innovative digital technologies to support formalization. It is also important to raise awareness of the advantages of formal employment and to promote the transition

to the formal economy, while also ensuring protection for workers who may not be able to formalize in the short term.

Demographic ageing: The region is confronted with the most rapid population ageing in the world. According to the latest UN population projection, the share of the population aged 65 years and over in the total population, currently at 10.1 per cent in 2024, is estimated to increase to 18.6 percent by 2050.⁵ Japan has already become a super-greying society, where 29.1 per cent of the population was 65 years and over in 2023. The Republic of Korea, where the share of the population aged 65 years and over was 17.5 per cent in 2022, is projected to overtake Japan by 2045. Other countries such as China, Thailand and Singapore are following the same path.⁶

Population ageing will lead to increased social protection expenditure, typically healthcare and old-age pensions, and put additional pressure on a relatively lower working-age population to finance the growing costs. A profound demographic transformation due to ageing will also create an additional need for social protection – notably, long-term care for older persons. A long regional tradition of extended families and communities caring for frail older persons has relied heavily on unpaid caregivers as well as domestic workers, mostly women (ILO 2024b). Such arrangements can no longer support the increasing number of older persons effectively. There is also a shortage of quality care services in the region, while a significant number of women work abroad as migrant care workers. Thus, there is a greater need for the public provision of quality long-term care and for financial policy to cover the rising costs.

Financing challenges: The effective achievement of universal social protection coverage crucially depends on whether governments can secure the necessary resources to sustainably and equitably finance adequate social protection for all. Rapid economic growth has enabled several countries in the region to mobilize resources for social protection by implementing contributory schemes and expanding tax-financed benefits and services. As some countries, particularly in South-Eastern and Southern Asia, currently apply relatively low contribution and/or tax rates, there is potential for securing additional domestic resources for social protection. However, countries are facing tighter fiscal constraints due to high debt

⁵ See [United Nations, World Population Prospects 2024: Medium variant for Asia region](#).

⁶ See [United Nations, World Population Prospects 2024: Medium variant for Asia region](#).

servicing costs and the anticipation of a global economic slowdown, in particular developing economies.⁷ This requires countries to have long-term perspectives and to establish a financing policy that ensures the long-term sustainability of schemes based on regular actuarial reviews.

International labour migration: In an increasingly globalized labour market, the growing number of migrant workers and more diverse forms of migration are creating new challenges; notably, a lack of access to social protection. Bilateral and multilateral social security agreements, based on the general principle of reciprocity, are an effective international legal

instrument to safeguard migrant workers' rights to social security, although their scope is, by nature, limited to documented migrant workers.⁸ So far, only a small number of countries in the region have benefited from social security agreements, with the notable example of the Philippines which has been actively pursuing the conclusion of agreements with major destination countries in Asia and beyond. Recently, there has been a renewed interest among countries in extending social security agreements. For instance, ASEAN countries have been developing a coordination framework since the adoption of the Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN in 2022 (ASEAN 2022).

⁷ Real GDP growth in the Asia-Pacific region is projected at 4.4 per cent in 2024, more than 1 percentage point below its 2000–19 average and is predicted to fall to 4.2 per cent in 2025 (ILO 2024a).

⁸ Although most social security agreements include the provision of emergency medical care to migrant workers with irregular status.

**Current social
protection systems
in Asia and the Pacific**

chapter 3

► 3.1 Overview

One of the most notable characteristics of the region is the heterogeneity of different social protection systems. The region includes countries that already have comprehensive systems in place (for example, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea), and countries that are in the process of building their social protection systems (including many countries in South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia). Some countries have succeeded in implementing schemes over a short space of time. Widely cited examples include universal healthcare in China and Thailand, and universal child benefits in Mongolia and the Cook Islands.

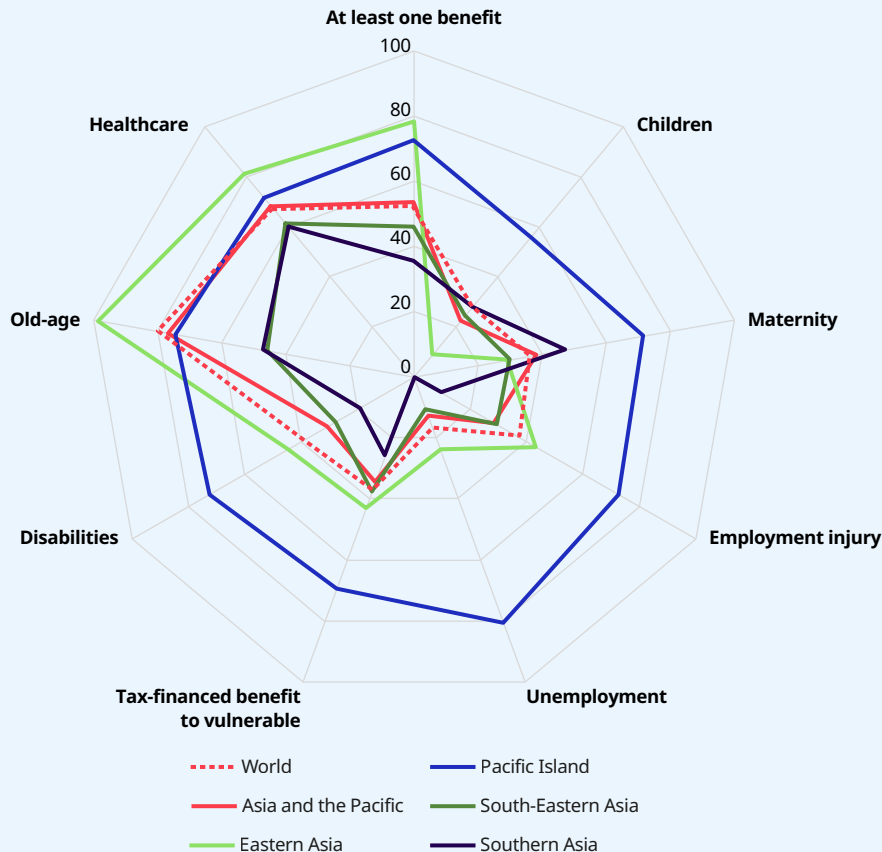
The region also exhibits different approaches to financing social protection. In Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, most countries combine both contributory and non-contributory schemes to provide social protection benefits. In China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, contributory social insurance schemes play a major role and tax-financed benefits complement the contributory schemes by covering low-income households. While in Australia and New Zealand, tax-funded universal schemes guarantee a fairly robust level of protection for the entire population, and private providers play an important role in providing higher level benefits (notably pensions and health insurance). In Southern Asia, the financing arrangement of social protection can be divided into three groups: (a) countries with contributory schemes for formal sector workers, such as India, Nepal and Pakistan; (b) countries with a provident fund-based system for formal sector workers, such as Sri Lanka; and (c) countries

that depend mainly on non-contributory schemes, such as Bangladesh. Both the extension of social protection and the increase of benefit levels in compliance with relevant international labour standards remain a major challenge.

With respect to the different social protection benefits, only the regional effective coverage rates of maternity benefits and healthcare exceeded the global average, as shown in figure 6. At the subregional level, Eastern Asia has higher coverage of and expenditure on old-age benefits (46.4 per cent), followed by healthcare (30.6 per cent) and benefits for the working-age population (19.4 per cent), but has lower coverage and expenditure for children (3.6 per cent) (ILO 2024f, figure 3.12). The Pacific Islands have achieved higher-than-average effective coverage for all benefits except for old-age benefits and have a high level of expenditure on health and child benefits.

South-Eastern and Southern Asia perform generally low in terms of effective coverage and expenditure despite the substantial economic development achieved in some countries in recent years. In particular, very low coverage of unemployment benefits and employment injury benefits is a major challenge for Southern Asia. It should also be noted that countries with large populations dominate the subregional trends, namely: Australia, China and India. Reflecting the regional diversity, the levels of effective coverage and public expenditure on social protection vary markedly among countries in the region.

► **Figure 6 SDG indicator 1.3.1: Effective social protection coverage by region and subregion and by benefit, 2023 (percentage)**



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population group. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); [ISSA Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

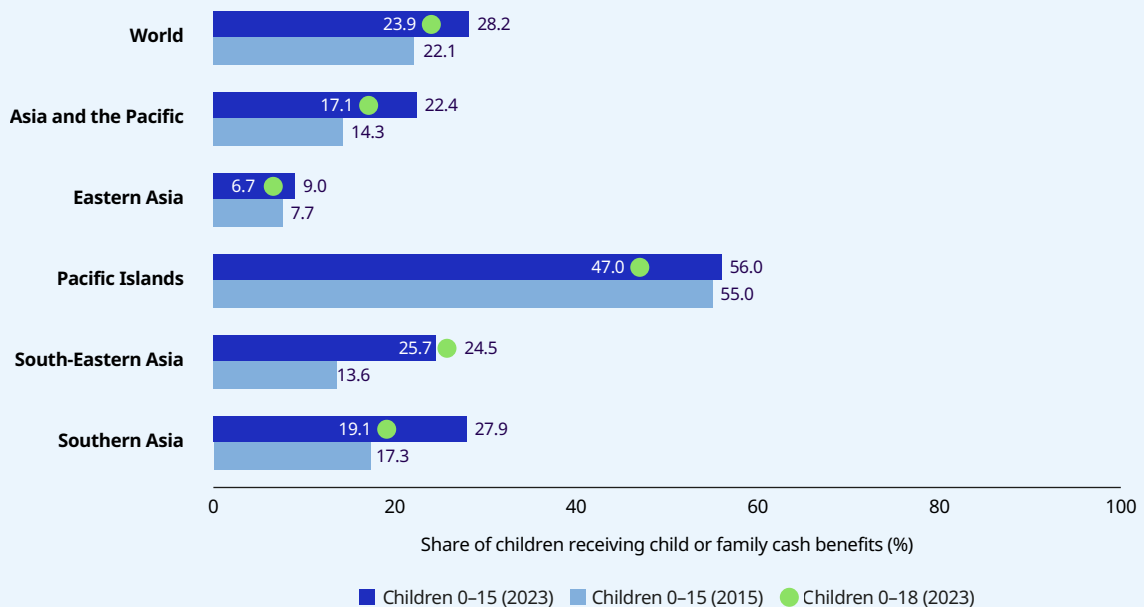
► 3.2 Social protection for children and families

In many countries, children are the largest population group living in poverty and face the highest poverty risk. The latest World Bank estimates show that the region is home to 355.3 million children in poverty, of whom 73.7 million are living in extreme poverty (Salmeron-Gomez et al. 2023). Social protection for children, notably child cash benefits have a profound effect on reducing child poverty and eliminating child labour (ILO and UNICEF 2022; 2023), and result in improved outcomes in

children's health and education. Child benefits also safeguard vulnerable households, including single-parent households, enabling them to seize opportunities and step out of poverty.

Social protection coverage for children in the region remains low. As shown in figure 7, there has been a modest increase in child benefit coverage, from 14.3 per cent in 2015 to 22.4 per cent in 2023. Within the region, the Pacific Island and Southern Asia have the highest coverage at 56.0 per cent

► **Figure 7** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for children and families: Share of children receiving child or family cash benefits, aged 0 to 15 (2015 and 2023) and aged 0 to 18 (2023), by region and subregion (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Data for coverage of children aged 0 to 18 are available for 2023 only. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population aged 0 to 15 and 0 to 18. Estimates are not strictly comparable with the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); ILOSTAT; national sources.

and 27.9 per cent respectively. Contrary to other sub-regions, Eastern Asia has a below-average coverage rate of 9.0 per cent. In Southern Asia, social protection coverage for children increased from 17.3 per cent in 2015 to 27.9 per cent in 2023. However, the level of coverage widely differs by country, ranging from 0.4 per cent in Afghanistan to 86.9 per cent in Iran.

In the region, Mongolia stands out as the only country providing universal coverage for all children aged 0 to 18 years, and Japan is poised to increase coverage to all children aged up to 18 years.⁹ Australia and the Cook Islands enjoy 100 per cent coverage for all children aged 0 to 15 years, but their coverage for children aged 0 to 18 years is not universal – with a coverage rate

of 83.6 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively. Other countries and territories provide quasi-universal child benefits for at least the crucial early years. For example, Singapore and Taiwan (China) provide a universal benefit for all children aged 0 to 6.5 years and 0 to 6 years, respectively (see ILO, UNICEF, and Learning for Well-Being Institute 2024).

Japan and the Republic of Korea, which exhibit fertility rates far below the replacement level, have introduced reforms that increase child benefits. Thailand has a mixed-system approach that combines a contributory child allowance for children up to 6 years of age, and a non-contributory means-tested child support grant that covers 2.3 million children up to 6 years of

⁹ From October 2024, the age limit of Japan's child benefits will be extended to 18 years and the household income limit for receiving child benefits will be removed, thus providing universal coverage for all children aged up to 18 years of age. To fund this expansion, the Government is considering an additional levy for members of public health insurance schemes from 2026.

age (ILO and UNICEF 2023). Bangladesh has a non-contributory child benefit covering 44.5 per cent of children up to 15 years of age. Nepal's child grant, despite the low amount (only US\$4 per month per child), covers 36.3 per cent of children up to 5 years, with universal coverage for children aged 0 to 5 years in 25 out of 77 districts. Furthermore, countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste, have established conditional cash transfer programmes targeting vulnerable families with children. Some of those countries have relatively low coverage and adequacy levels and also experience significant exclusion errors due to poverty-targeting.

It should also be noted that several countries in the region do not provide any family or child benefits anchored in legislation. Moreover, child cash benefits are not the only way in which countries address children's needs, and some countries provide in-kind payments for children. While they remain a legitimate option and, in contexts of food scarcity, can be crucial, in-kind payments lack the fungibility and empowerment advantages that are synonymous with cash (ILO and UNICEF 2023). For instance, India's child food programme covers 51.9 per cent of children. The expansion of this programme accounts for the recent increases in the effective coverage rate for child benefits in Southern Asia and the higher rate in the subregion than the regional average.

► 3.3 Social protection for women and men of working age

Social protection benefits for the working-age population mainly aim to ensure income protection during periods without income and for those with insufficient earnings. This includes job loss, temporary incapacity due to sickness or maternity, permanent disability and death, including incapacity due to work accidents and occupational diseases.

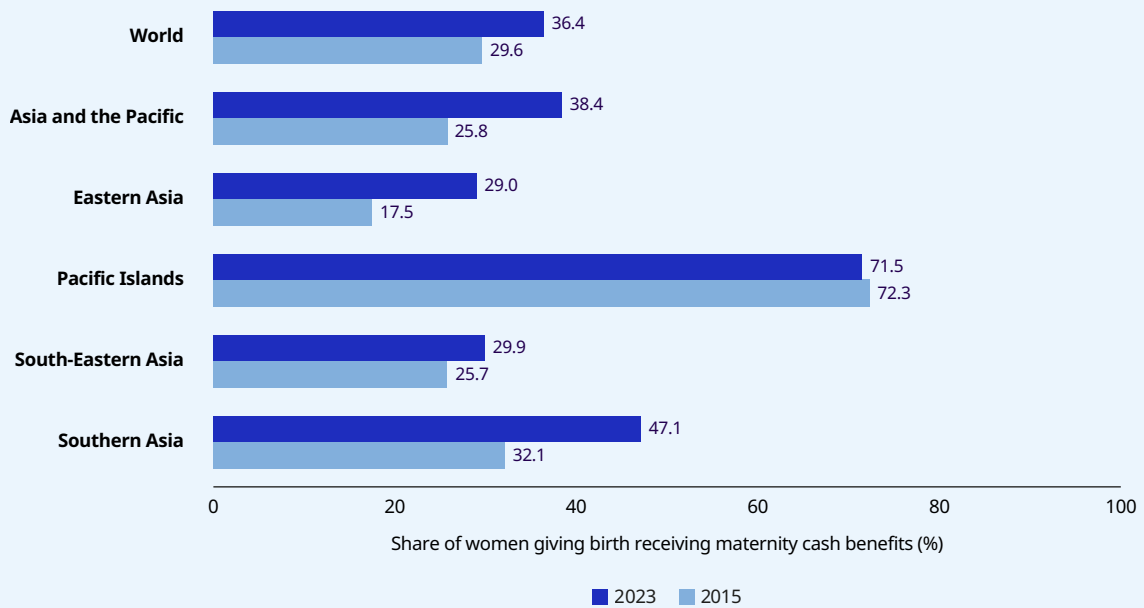
As shown in this subsection, the working-age population is insufficiently protected in terms of both coverage and level of protection in many countries in Asia and the Pacific. One of the main reasons for low coverage is a high level of informality in employment which restricts the coverage of employment injury and unemployment protection in particular. The prevalence of employer liability schemes for employment injury and maternity, particularly in countries in Southern Asia, means less reliable and lower levels of protection than social insurance. Non-contributory benefits play only a limited role in protecting the working-age population.

3.3.1 Maternity and paternity protection

Maternity and paternity protection is essential for the achievement of gender equality. There has been progress in the coverage of cash maternity benefits in the region, which increased from 25.8 per cent in 2015 to 38.4 per cent in 2023. This is slightly above the global average of 36.4 per cent, as shown in figure 8. Paternity protection is expanding steadily too.

However, there remains a significant gap in coverage and the level of protection between countries. The number of countries that have achieved universal or near-universal maternity protection has increased, including Australia, Mongolia, New Caledonia, New Zealand and Niue. Some countries, such as India and Myanmar, have extended coverage to women in the informal sector through cash transfers during pregnancy and after birth. Recently, Viet Nam extended maternity benefits to previously uncovered workers in the informal economy sector through a voluntary social insurance scheme, with the benefits being financed by the state budget. However, other countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar and Nepal cover less than 2 per cent of women giving birth.

► **Figure 8** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for maternity protection: Share of women giving birth receiving maternity cash benefits, by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by number of women. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); [ISSA Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

3.3.2 Employment injury protection¹⁰

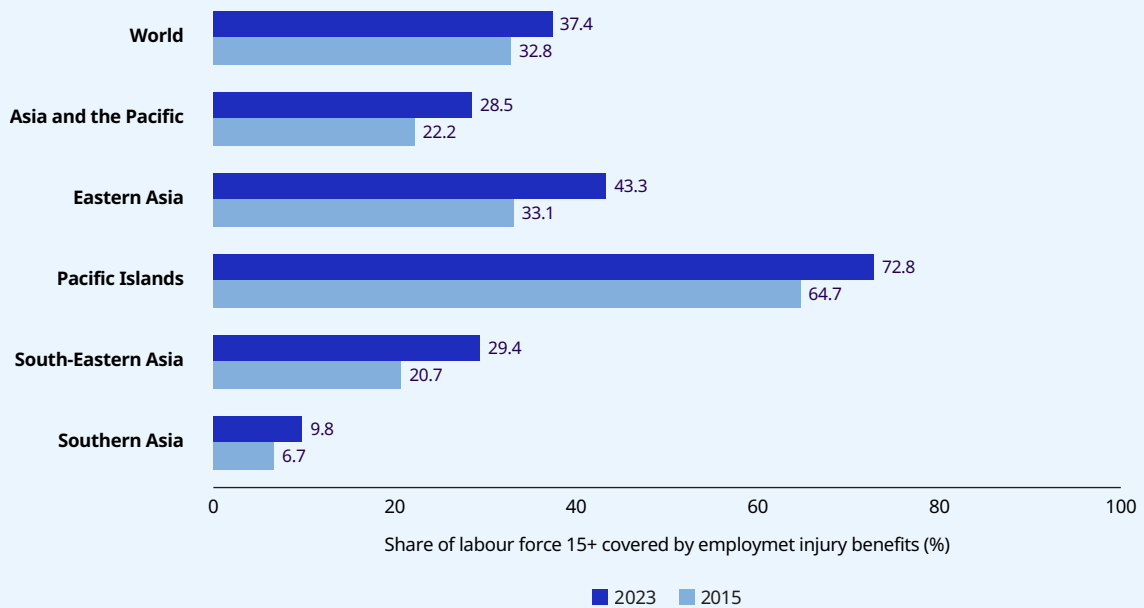
The ILO estimates that, worldwide, nearly 3 million people die from work-related accidents and diseases and 395 million workers sustain non-fatal work injuries in 2019 (ILO 2023a). Globally, compensation for work-related injuries and diseases is the oldest and one of the most widespread social protection benefits. As shown in figure 9, the effective coverage of employment injury benefits in the region increased from 22.2 per cent in 2015 to 28.5 per cent in 2023. Yet this remains significantly below the global average of 37.4 per cent. Again, the disparity between countries in the region is huge.

Coverage and protection in countries in Southern Asia are stagnating due mainly to high informality and reliance on employer liability schemes. However, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, China, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore have been expanding the basic functions of medical treatment and compensation to incorporate a strong emphasis on accident prevention as well as medical and vocational rehabilitation. Voluntary coverage of certain categories of self-employed workers is offered in Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea.

In 2023, the Republic of Korea extended employment injury insurance and employment insurance coverage to large numbers of platform workers through an extensive use of digital technologies (ILO 2024d). China established

¹⁰ Following the terminology adopted by international standards, the term “employment injury” refers to both work accidents and occupational diseases.

► **Figure 9** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for employment injury protection: Share of persons in labour force aged 15 and over covered by cash benefits in case of employment injury (active contributors), by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by labour force aged 15 and over. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); ILOSTAT; national sources.

pilot employment injury insurance schemes for workers in seven large platform companies in seven provinces, covering more than 6.68 million workers (ILO 2024f, box 4.9). Since 2023, Bangladesh has been piloting a scheme providing long-term benefits to workers and their families in case of disability or death due to work accidents for 4 million workers in the garment sector, which mainly employs women.¹¹

3.3.3 Unemployment protection

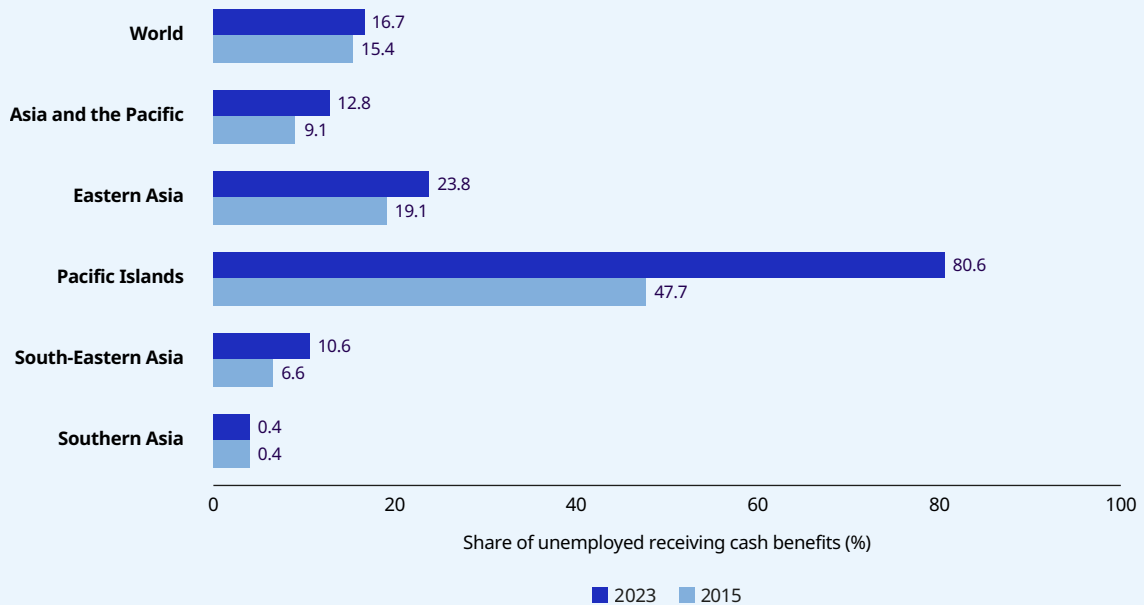
Unemployment protection involves the promotion of employment, employment services, vocational training programmes and income support

to provide income security and assist the unemployed in finding suitable employment. Unemployment protection is a key instrument to facilitate the just transition of workers affected by climate and environmental policies. Moving to more environmentally-friendly and sustainable economies means that new jobs will be created in green sectors but also that certain jobs will be lost, substituted or redefined. Affected workers will need protection and support to transition to greener jobs and more sustainable practices. However, for unemployment protection to truly perform this role, policymakers will need to quickly close the current protection gaps.

The ILO estimates the region's unemployment rate at 4.2 per cent, which corresponds to 87.8 million people in 2024 (ILO 2024a). Unemployment protection is one of the least established social

¹¹ See [Employment Injury Insurance Pilot](#).

► **Figure 10 SDG 1.3.1 on effective coverage for unemployment protection: Share of unemployed persons receiving cash benefits, by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)**



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates weighted by the number of unemployed. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions. Effective coverage data for 2023 are still affected by the high numbers of 2020 and 2021, when countries deployed large unemployment protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis, funded by the State's budget.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); ILOSTAT; national sources.

protection branches in the region, yet there have been some positive developments. As shown in figure 10, the share of unemployed workers receiving unemployment benefits increased from 9.1 per cent in 2015 to 12.8 per cent in 2023, which is still below the global average of 16.7 per cent. This situation can be partly explained by the fact that, despite recent efforts to introduce unemployment insurance by some countries, others still rely on severance payments upon termination of employment as employer liability.

Countries in Eastern Asia such as China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea have established unemployment insurance schemes covering most employees. In Japan and the Republic of Korea, employment insurance schemes provide unemployment benefits, employment promotion, vocational skills development and job retention programmes, as well as maternity and paternity benefits. Voluntary coverage of self-employed workers is offered in

the Republic of Korea. In South-Eastern Asia, the introduction of unemployment insurance schemes has gained momentum. Unemployment insurance schemes were introduced for private sector employees in Malaysia and the Philippines in 2018, and in 2020 in Indonesia. In Southern Asia, unemployment insurance schemes exist in India and Iran, but their coverage is limited. In India, unemployment insurance covers by law only 11.5 per cent of the working-age population. Moreover, not all unemployed jobseekers actually receive unemployment benefits. The extension of unemployment protection to workers in the informal sector remains a major challenge in India. As a way of providing unemployment support to those in the informal sector, some countries in Southern Asia provide public employment programmes. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have set up employment guarantee schemes, especially in rural areas.

In the context of climate change, such programmes can provide seasonal income security in the face of droughts (India), emergency employment and support for reconstruction after disasters (the Philippines) and potential co-benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation through the restoration of natural resources and carbon sinks such as forests, soils and mangroves (India and Pakistan).

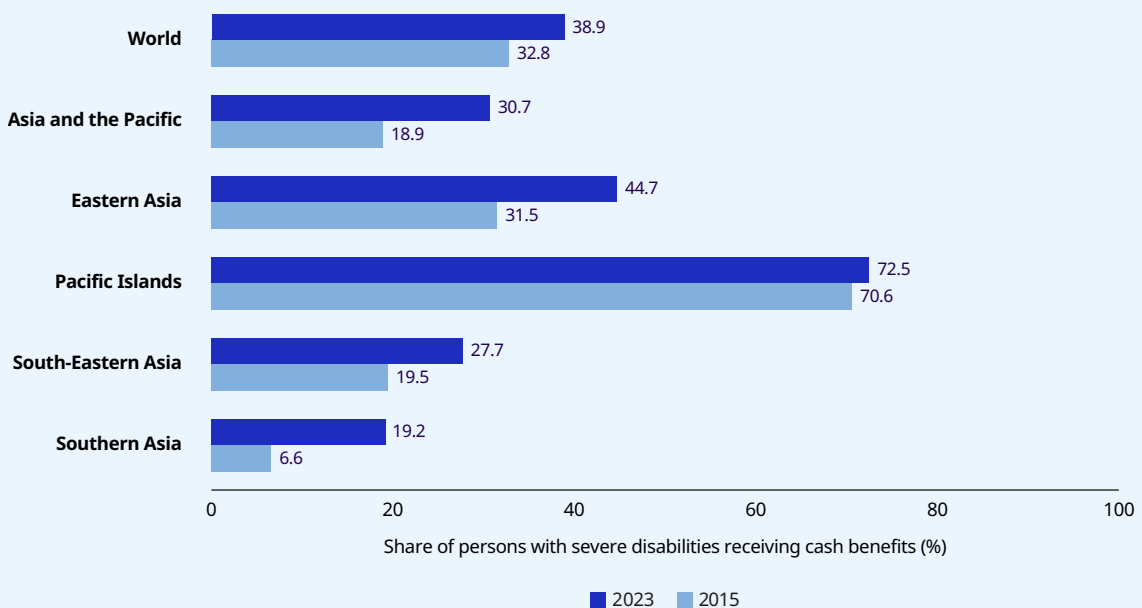
While such programmes can provide basic protection, more needs to be done to improve their decent work credentials in terms of work conditions and the adequacy of support. Furthermore, these programmes often do not produce quality public infrastructure, nor do they support workers' employability, such as enhanced marketable skills.

3.3.4 Social protection for persons with disabilities

Disability benefits are essential for protecting persons with disabilities and their families, as well as supporting opportunities for participation in society and other activities. As shown in figure 11, the share of persons with severe disabilities who have access to disability benefits increased from 18.9 per cent in 2015 to 30.7 per cent in 2023. The region lags behind the global average by 8.2 percentage points and there are also considerable disparities across the region.

One reason for this wide coverage gap is the complex administrative procedures for the assessment of disability. Countries would benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach combining disability benefits with measures to promote the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, such as vocational rehabilitation or flexible work arrangements that reintegrate workers with disabilities into the labour market.

► **Figure 11** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for disability protection: Share of persons with severe disabilities receiving cash benefits, by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

► 3.4 Social protection for older women and men

3.4.1 Old-age protection

Broad effective coverage has been achieved for old-age protection in the region. As shown in figure 12, with respect to beneficiary coverage, 76.6 per cent of older persons had access to pensions or other old-age benefits in 2023 – up from 68.4 per cent in 2015 – although this figure is slightly below the global average of 79.6 per cent. Concerning coverage by contributory schemes, despite the high prevalence of informality, 61.9 per cent of the labour force is actively contributing to pension systems, which exceeds the global average of 58.5 per cent (see figure 13).

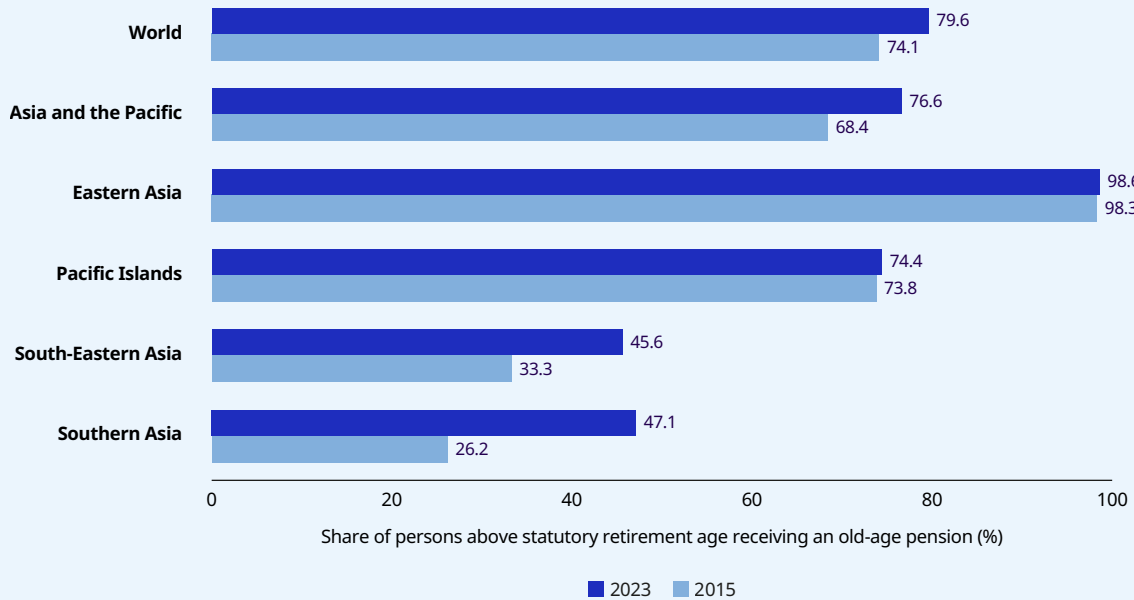
Due to their long-term nature, old-age benefit schemes in the region display a wide heterogeneity. Defined-benefit social insurance pension schemes prevail in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia, and many of the countries have achieved universal or near-universal coverage. Australia and New Zealand provide means-tested universal flat-rate pensions. Fiji, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Singapore implement national provident funds, inherited from colonial times, as the main old-age benefits, which are mostly paid as a lump sum.

Distinct trends are observed across the region. Countries that have achieved universal coverage and are facing rapid demographic ageing, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, are focusing on reforming their pension schemes to ensure their long-term sustainability. Countries such as Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic cover less than 10 per cent of older persons, but are making efforts to close the coverage gap. In 2022, Cambodia implemented a pension scheme for employees in the private sector, which plans to integrate the existing civil servant pension scheme. In 2024, Viet Nam amended its social insurance law, leading to the creation of a multi-tier pension system. Several countries, including Bangladesh, Kiribati, Nepal, Samoa, Timor-Leste¹² and Viet Nam,¹³ are implementing tax-funded social pensions with the aim of progressive extension. In Southern Asia, the Maldives has achieved 100 per cent coverage by combining the mandatory contributory pension scheme and a basic pension scheme covering the rest of older persons. Bangladesh enacted a law in 2023 with the stated objective of achieving a universal pension through five contributory schemes on a voluntary basis; yet it is too early to tell whether these schemes will lead to a significant coverage extension.

¹² In Timor-Leste, social pensions are funded by revenue from the Petroleum Fund.

¹³ For example, as a result of the 2024 reform, the pensionable age for social pensions in Viet Nam was reduced from 80 to 75 years of age.

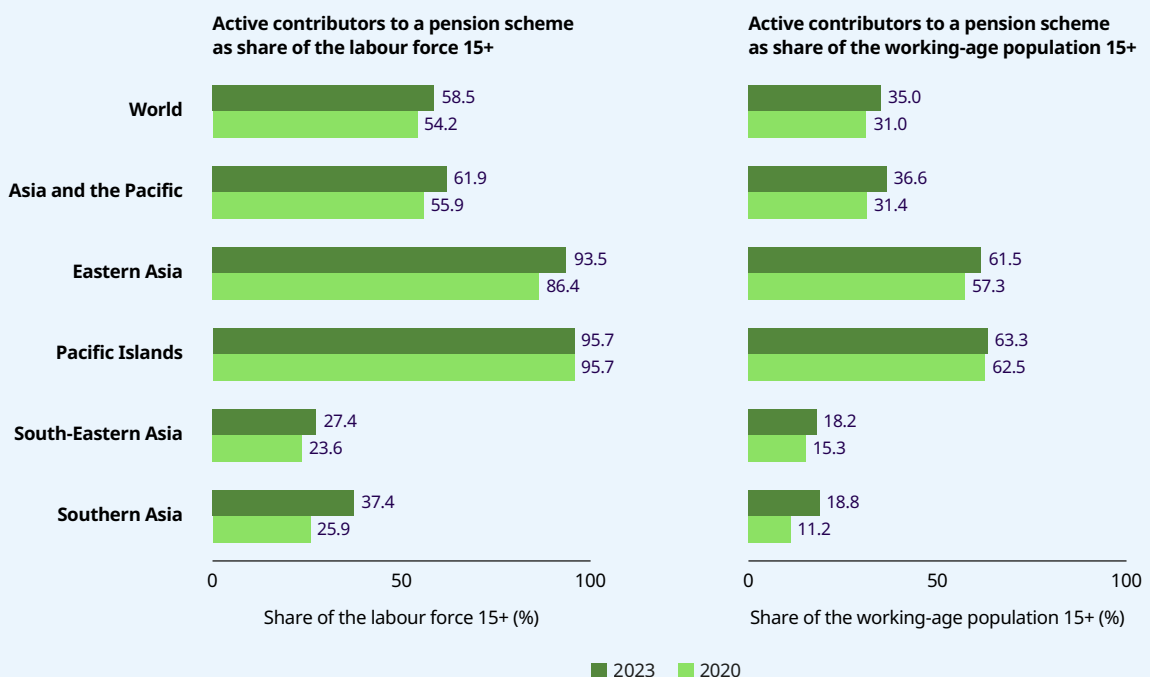
► **Figure 12** SDG 1.3.1 on effective coverage for old-age protection: Share of persons above statutory retirement age receiving an old-age pension, by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population aged 65 and over. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

► **Figure 13** Effective coverage for old-age protection: Share of persons in labour force and working-age population aged 15 and over covered by a pension scheme (active contributors), by region and subregion, 2020 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024-26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by the labour force aged working-age population aged 15 and over.

Sources: ILO estimates; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); ISSA [Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

► 3.5 Social protection for vulnerable persons

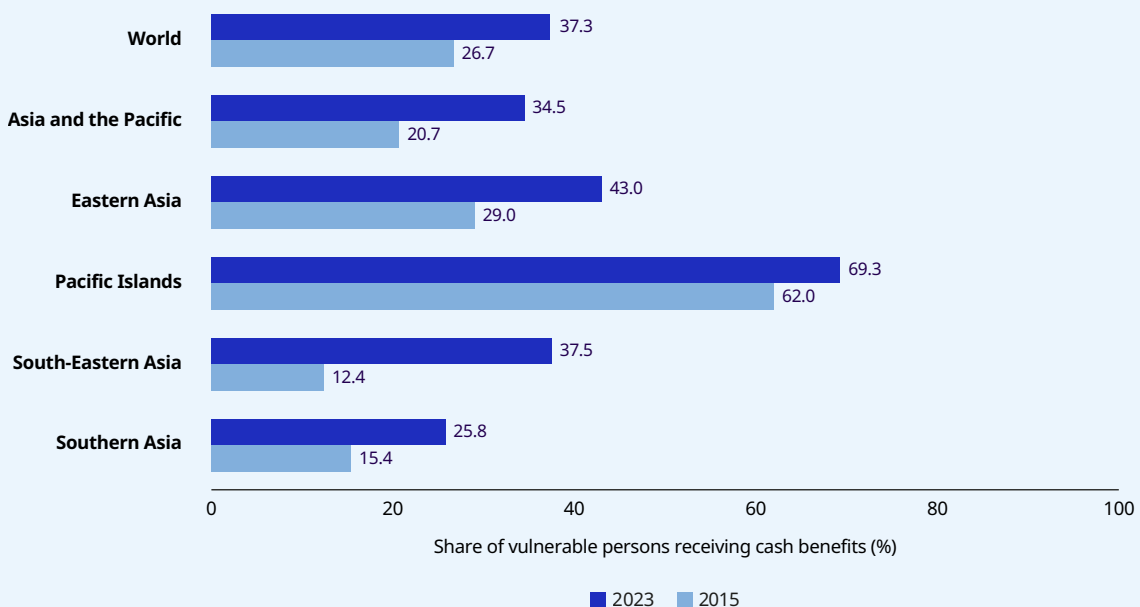
Social assistance is key in guaranteeing a basic level of income that allows for a dignified and healthy life for vulnerable persons who are insufficiently covered by social insurance or other schemes.

As shown in figure 14, 34.5 per cent of vulnerable individuals in Asia and the Pacific received social assistance benefits in 2023, which is below the global average of 37.3 per cent. Social assistance coverage for vulnerable populations is uneven across the region.

There is a long-standing debate on the effective design of the eligibility criteria for non-contributory social protection programmes. In countries in the

region, a large body of evidence indicates that narrowly targeted social assistance programmes result in substantial targeting errors and hence fail to reach many individuals or households most in need (Kidd and Athias 2020). Schemes that provide support to broader categories of the population, typically schemes providing categorical universal benefits, are often considered as more inclusive and more effective in preventing and reducing poverty and vulnerability. This is particularly important in the context of climate change, which requires preparedness and possible adaptations to schemes and delivery mechanisms (ILO 2024f, Chapters 2 and 3).

► **Figure 14** SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for protection of vulnerable persons: Share of vulnerable persons receiving cash benefits (social assistance), by region and subregion, 2015 and 2023 (percentage)



Notes: See Annex 2 of the *World Social Protection Report 2024–26* for a methodological explanation, and Annex 1 for more detailed data. Global, regional and subregional aggregates are weighted by population. Estimates are not strictly comparable to the previous *World Social Protection Report* due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions.

Sources: ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the [Social Security Inquiry](#); [ISSA Social Security Programs Throughout the World](#); [ILOSTAT](#); national sources.

► 3.6 Social health protection

Universal health coverage embodies the aspiration that all people can obtain good quality health services without suffering financial hardship. Social health protection is an essential mechanism for turning this aspiration into reality.

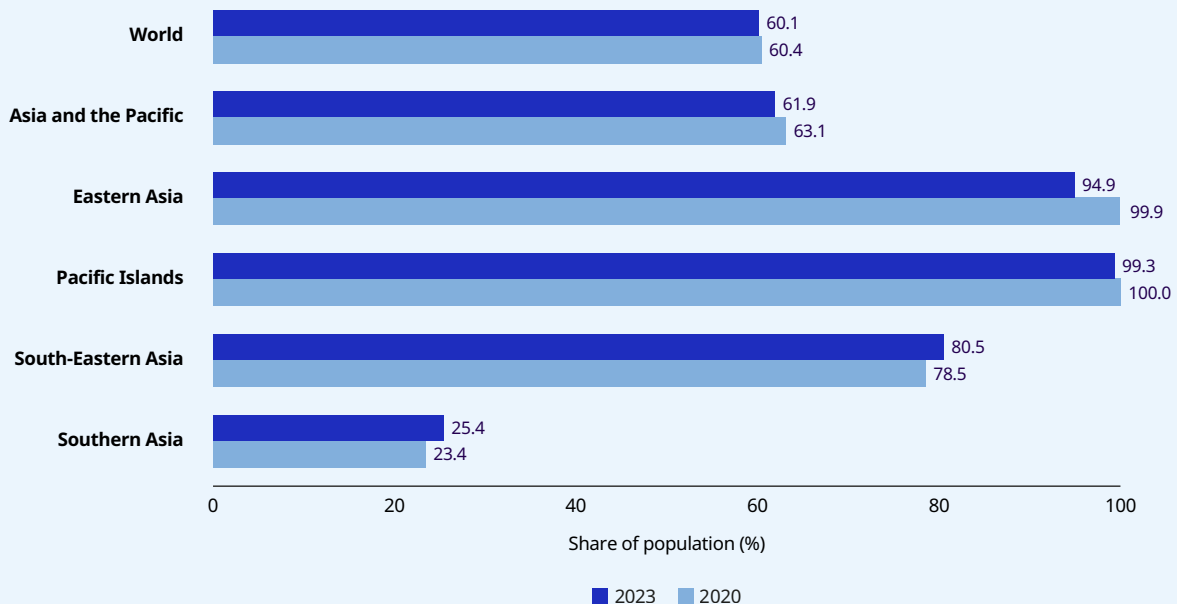
The region's progress towards universal health coverage has stalled, with 61.9 per cent of the population affiliated to a social health protection scheme in 2023, down from 63.1 per cent in 2015, yet still exceeding the global average at 60.1 per cent (see figure 15).

Several countries have achieved universal or near-universal population coverage in social health protection, including both high- and

middle-income countries. Examples of high-income countries include Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, and examples of middle-income countries include China, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Recently, low-income countries have also made remarkable progress in extending social health protection coverage. In 2023, Cambodia introduced a voluntary healthcare scheme for self-employed workers and their dependents, which paved the way for access to national health insurance for 3 million persons. Cambodia is committed to achieving universal health coverage by 2035 in line with the roadmap it adopted in 2024. In 2016, Lao People's Democratic Republic

► **Figure 15 Share of the population protected by social health protection (protected persons), by region and subregion, 2020 and 2023 (percentage)**



Note: Based on data collected for 127 countries and territories representing over 90 per cent of the world's population. Regional estimates are weighted by the total population. The figure represents the best estimate of people protected by a healthcare scheme for their primary coverage. Mechanisms include: national health insurance; social health insurance mandated by the State (including subsidized coverage for the poor); national healthcare services guaranteed for free or with small co-payments; and other programmes (such as user fee waivers and vouchers). For primary coverage, 202 schemes were identified and included. This is substantially more than in 2020. Therefore, in order to generate trends, the 2020 estimates were recalculated, including the new countries and schemes for which data points are available in both periods. Only public or publicly mandated privately administered primary healthcare schemes were included. Supplementary public and private programmes were not included.

Source: Based on data from ILO [Social Security Inquiry](#) and OECD [Health Statistics 2023](#); national administrative data published in official reports; information from regular national surveys of target populations on awareness of rights.

introduced a state-subsidized national health insurance scheme to cover the population outside the capital who were not covered by any existing health insurance schemes. This has significantly increased legal coverage, with health insurance coverage expanding from 45 per cent of the total population to more than 94 per cent (WHO and World Bank 2023).

Despite the progress in coverage, the public healthcare expenditure of the region in 2023 or the latest available year was 3.8 per cent of GDP, significantly lower than the global average of 6.5 per cent of GDP (see figure 5). This translates into low public healthcare spending per capita, indicating limited availability of healthcare services and requirement of out-of-pocket payments. As a consequence, social health protection in the region is facing challenges in improving financial protection. In the latest available year of 2019, it is estimated that 734 million people in the region living below the relative poverty line (60 per cent of median per capita consumption) incurred impoverishing health spending, accounting for 56.7 per cent of the global total, and 146 million people at the extreme poverty line of US\$2.15 a day faced impoverishing out-of-pocket health spending, accounting for 42.4 per cent of the global total.¹⁴ A number of countries in the region are facing challenges in securing sustainable fiscal space which allows for access to affordable and quality care services for all.

Along with population coverage and financial protection, the availability of essential healthcare services is a fundamental component of universal health coverage. In South-East Asia and the Western Pacific regions, progress on availability of services, measured by the Service Coverage Index (SCI, SDG target 3.8.1),¹⁵ have stalled between 2019 and 2021, from 61 in South-East Asia and

80 in the Western Pacific in 2019 to 62 and 79 in 2021 respectively. In particular, access to services related to non-communicable diseases is lagging. Analysis shows that progress and deficits in service coverage are unevenly distributed across countries, with major achievements observed in Thailand (SCI at 80+) while access to essential services remains a challenge in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines (SCI < 60).

3.6.1 Long-term care for older persons

Long-term care can be defined as a range of health and social services for persons requiring long-term help with daily activities due to physical or mental disabilities or other chronic morbidity resulting from ageing. Such services may be provided in a variety of settings including institutional, residential or home care, and with different financing arrangements.

In the face of a rapidly ageing population and the shortage of carers, countries in the region must take proactive steps to ensure access to affordable and quality long-term care services for all older persons in need, securing the care workforce, both formal and informal carers, and creating a fiscal space to finance the cost of long-term care services.

In the early 2020s, Japan and the Republic of Korea established long-term care insurance schemes. China launched a pilot long-term care insurance scheme in 2016, which now covers 49 cities and 180 million people. Australia¹⁶ and New Zealand¹⁷ provide residential care as well as home and community care programmes in the framework of social welfare services.

¹⁴ See [WHO Global Health Expenditure Database](#).

¹⁵ SDG indicator 3.8.1 computes 14 tracer indicators for specific medical interventions across four clusters, namely reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; infectious diseases; non-communicable diseases; and service capacity and access (WHO and World Bank 2023). The index ranges from 0 to 100. The lower the indicator, the lower service coverage is.

¹⁶ [Home Care Packages Program](#).

¹⁷ [Support services for older people](#).

**Social protection
and climate change
in Asia and the Pacific**

chapter 4

► 4.1 The role of social protection in just transition

Social protection plays a crucial role in supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.¹⁸ The region is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (see section 2.2). It experiences frequent natural hazards that have intensified due to climate change, resulting in significant human and economic costs. Climate change disproportionately affects populations in vulnerable situations, including those in the informal economy, women and marginalized groups.

Social protection instruments like unemployment protection, social health protection, pensions, cash benefits and public employment programmes can provide income security and access to healthcare, and create job and income-generating opportunities to help these groups adapt to climate-related risks and disruptions (ESCAP 2023).

Ambitious climate change mitigation and environmental policies are necessary to reduce emissions towards net zero to limit global warming and protect the region's biodiversity and natural resources. Transitioning to more resilient and environmentally sustainable societies and economies can deliver positive economic and social outcomes. The combined shift to low-carbon and circular economies, and sustainable agriculture, could create millions of new decent jobs worldwide (ILO 2023b). However, the prospective gains are not automatic and, unless the necessary policy measures are taken, some mitigation and other environmental policies may lead to temporary disruptions of incomes, jobs and livelihoods.

The Paris Agreement¹⁹ on climate change recognizes the importance of social protection in facilitating a just transition. Social protection can have an important enabling function for climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Integrating social protection into climate policies is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable outcomes, as it can safeguard people during the transition to a low-carbon and more resilient economy (Costella and McCord 2023; ESCAP 2023).

4.1.1 Enabling climate change mitigation and environmental protection

As countries shift towards more sustainable, green economies, social protection can help manage the social impacts, ensuring displaced workers and vulnerable groups are supported during the transition. In this sense, social protection will be required to compensate and cushion people and enterprises against the potential adverse impacts of mitigation and other environmental policies as well as when extreme climate events strike. There are several social protection options to address such challenges. Unemployment insurance or worker retention schemes can support business continuity while protecting workers' income and the employment relationship.

Climate policies may affect different regions and sectors differently. The climate crisis will also create some opportunities. While some jobs could be displaced, new jobs and technologies will emerge that can accommodate displaced workers and support the transition towards a green economy. Social protection can help smoothen this process through the provision of support for workers to further develop skills and access new employment opportunities.

Social protection can also directly contribute to climate change mitigation efforts by reducing the emissions driving climate change. In the region, there is substantial scope for this in the form of protection and restoration of natural carbon ecosystem sinks (for example, forests and wetlands). This can take the form of payments for environmental services – the provision of income support to disincentivize harmful activity to protect and restore crucial natural carbon sinks. Fossil fuel subsidy reforms create fiscal space to finance more classical social protection benefits, which is another example of reducing fossil fuel consumption.

Although pension funds must aim to increase investment returns to retain sufficient reserves for future pension payments, investment activities should also take into consideration the

¹⁸ See footnotes 2 and 3 of Chapter 1.

¹⁹ See <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>.

sustainability of the overall capital market in the long term. A transition to sustainable financing – that is, the use of public pensions funds to invest in carbon neutral or carbon negative portfolios in emerging green sectors instead of finance fossil fuel extraction – is an important area that merits exploration.

4.1.2 Supporting climate change adaptation by reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience

Social protection can also help populations and enterprises adapt to a changing climate by protecting people’s incomes, through livelihood diversification opportunities, health and jobs, and by ensuring business continuity when climate shocks hit. This helps build the adaptive capacity of households and communities (ESCAP 2023). It is essential to ensure that comprehensive social protection is in place, which builds resilience *ex ante*, and to design systems to be more shock-responsive and better anticipate climate risks.

Shock-responsive social protection systems that can rapidly expand in response to climate-related

disasters are crucial for providing timely assistance to affected populations. As observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, having social protection systems in place in the first instance allows needed support to be channelled quickly and effectively rather than having to improvise in real time. The same holds true for when extreme climate shocks occur.

Expanding coverage and improving the adequacy of social protection benefits, can help vulnerable populations cope with climate-related shocks and stresses. This is especially important for those in the informal economy who are often excluded from formal social protection schemes. Investing in climate-resilient social infrastructure, such as healthcare facilities, can enhance the ability to maintain critical support during climate emergencies (Costella and McCord 2023).

There are other examples of adaptations that can ensure protection against growing climate risks. For instance, enhanced occupational safety and health and employment injury protection can provide income security on days when it is too hot to work safely. This is an important consideration for the region, where 74.7 per cent of the workforce is exposed to excessive heat, which exceeds the global average of 71.0 per cent (ILO 2024c).

► 4.2 Strengthening social protection systems to respond to climate change and facilitate a just transition

Having solid social protection systems in place that provide adequate and comprehensive provision sooner rather than later is crucial. Closing protection gaps will ensure better preparedness for the shocks delivered by the climate crisis, and these systems can also be used to compensate persons affected by climate policies. This will help ensure a well-managed and equitable just transition. However, beyond getting these fundamentals right, more can be done by modifying and enhancing schemes and systems.

As a starting point, national social protection policies and strategies should be adjusted to take into consideration evidence of the socio-economic impacts of climate policies and the climate crisis on traditional life-cycle risks (Costella and McCord

2023). They should also be aligned with the objectives of national climate change strategies like Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) (ESCAP 2023) in an effort to maximize their contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Equally, it is important for climate policies and strategies, including NDCs and NAPs, to incorporate a concrete and strategic role for social protection.

This section provides a non-exhaustive selection of policy examples of how social protection can accelerate a just transition and underpin climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

► **Enabling climate change mitigation and environmental protection**

- **Coordinating environmental and biodiversity protection policies with social protection and green employment services.** In 2020, the Government of China implemented a ten-year fishing ban on the Yangtze river²⁰ to restore biodiversity and promote green industrial development. To compensate for fishers' lost livelihoods, the Government introduced old-age pension insurance schemes in ten riverside provinces with subsidies for low-income or severely disabled fishers. By 2023, 221,000 fishers were covered and received full pensions. Moreover, fishers have been supported in transitioning to roles as fisheries protection workers and environmental wardens, aiding the recovery of aquatic biodiversity in the Yangtze.²¹
- **Inserting a 'social package' of employment support into public transport modernization projects.** Davao City in the Philippines has been implementing a transformative project that is expected to cut 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions by switching from jeepneys to electric buses. Based on a social package, jeepney drivers will receive job placement services and vocational training and will be given priority for employment in the new bus system. This will secure formal employment for these drivers, with access to social and health insurance, as well as educational and cash-for-work assistance (ADB 2022; 2023).
- **Protecting and enhancing carbon sinks through public works:** Pakistan has implemented the "Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme"²² – a major reforestation project which aims to increase natural carbon sequestration, and which creates at least temporary jobs and provides some modest income security.
- **Reforming fossil fuel subsidies to create fiscal space for social protection:** Indonesia's 2015 fossil fuel reform created more fiscal space to reallocate US\$15.6 billion

to several sectors including social protection (UNDP 2024). An unconditional cash transfer programme, *Bantuan Langsung Sementara Masyarakat*, was created to offset losses, especially for lower-income persons affected by the phased-out fuel subsidy. While promising, this reform was not without challenges and underscored the importance of managing fuel subsidy reforms carefully (Costella and McCord 2023).

- **Pension fund greening:** Pension funds can also help combat the climate crisis through strategic investments in sustainable and low-carbon assets. By aligning their investment strategies with environmental sustainability and embracing responsible investment principles, pension funds can become key players in global mitigation efforts (ILO 2024f, section 4.3.9). For example, the Government Pension Investment Fund of Japan²³ and the New Zealand Superannuation Fund²⁴ have begun to explore the incorporation of environmental, social and governance factors into the investment process (such as promoting green, social and sustainability bonds) and have committed to report on environmental, social and governance integration as well as on climate change-related risks and opportunities (UNCTAD 2023).
- **Payment for ecological services or eco-compensation:** The Government of China provides major subsidies for ecological services. Since 1999, the Government has allocated over 130 billion Renminbi to fund the Conversion of Cropland to Forest and Grassland Programme, which pays farmers to leave 9 million hectares of cropland to either rewild or be afforested. Additionally, since 2001, the Forest Ecosystem Compensation Fund, which pays local people to protect forests, has spent over 13.34 billion Renminbi to protect 44.5 million hectares of forest across 30 provinces (ADB 2010). Not only do such schemes protect and increase natural carbon sinks and therefore support mitigation, they also prompt rewilding and allow space for biodiversity renewal.

²⁰ "10-year Fishing Ban in Yangtze River Reaps Tangible Results". *CGTN*, 2 January 2024 (updated 9 January 2024).

²¹ China, State Council. "China to Push 10-Year Fishing Ban in Yangtze Waters", updated 21 March 2024.

²² See [Ten Billion Trees Tsunami Programme – Phase-I Up-scaling of Green Pakistan Programme](#).

²³ See [Government Pension Investment Fund \(Japan\) – ESG](#).

²⁴ See [NZSUPERFUND](#).

► **Supporting climate change adaptation by reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience**

- **Enhancing responsiveness to shocks:** The Philippines' social protection system is a good example of a system prepared for climate shocks. In the event of hydrological climate shocks such as hurricanes and flooding, it makes advance pension payments and expedites health insurance to ensure that people's income security is maintained and financial shocks are lessened (ILO 2024f, box 2.9). Its non-contributory scheme, the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program*, which provides conditional cash transfers, is also designed in such a way that it can be scaled up during disasters.
- **Temporary society-wide emergency support:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, East Asian countries were at the forefront of initiatives to provide universal cash benefits to temporarily support their populations, in addition to the other social protection measures implemented. Hong Kong (China), Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan (China) all provided one-time or several universal or quasi-universal benefits to their population to support income security. Tuvalu was the one country in the world to introduce an emergency basic income for its entire population for several months during the pandemic (Choi et al. 2024; Orton, Markov, and Stern-Plaza 2024). Such approaches may also be relevant for climate shocks when society-wide or entire geographic regions are severely affected and everyone needs additional support to cope. Such measures may be an option to complement existing provision or act as a proxy for a social protection floor, at least temporarily, and protect the whole population during extreme events (Orton, Markov, and Stern-Plaza 2024).
- **Simple modifications or enhancements of existing schemes and systems for extreme climate conditions:** Simple adaptation can be seen in Australia's 2009 Fair Work²⁵ legislation, which has extended sick leave provision and stipulates that employees can take paid sick leave if they

become unwell due to extreme heat.²⁶ New Zealand makes Winter Energy Payments²⁷ as a top-up transfer to support pensioners and jobseekers and enable them to heat their homes during winter or cold snaps. This protects against the risk of cold weather-related ill health such as hyperthermia. While this may be relevant for some parts of Asia and the Pacific when there is extreme cold, it can also serve as inspiration for extreme heat. Additional payments could be channelled through the pension system during periods of extreme heat so that older people – who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat – can regulate their body temperatures by using air conditioning without worrying about cost implications and protect against heatstroke and related cardiovascular problems. Moreover, hot weather payments may also be needed as part of employment injury or unemployment protection when it is too hot to work.

- **Active labour market policies that promote climate resilience.** Social protection programmes in the region have been used to help communities cope with climate-related shocks and stresses. For example, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides employment and income support to rural households, which can help them withstand droughts and other climate impacts (ESCAP 2023).
- **Health system strengthening and sickness benefits extension to protect against new health risks.** Climate change will mean greater spread of disease and heightened risk of pandemics (ILO 2024f, section 4.2.3). The lesson of preparedness gleaned from the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, which has already dealt with a number of pandemics, can be utilized to prepare health systems for future health risks. For example, the use of sickness benefits, as deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, can support quarantine and social distancing measures in the future. Expansion of sickness benefits will be important for supporting public health policy to contain disease spread and protect human health and income security simultaneously.

²⁵ [Fair Work Act 2009](#).

²⁶ See [Pay during inclement or severe weather and natural disaster](#).

²⁷ See [Winter Energy Payment](#).

► **Supporting enterprises to maintain business continuity when climate shocks occur.** As was also observed during the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, governments adapted their social security systems to ease the financial burden on employers and employees stemming from workplace closure, by freezing, reducing or suspending contributions, until economic activity could resume. Job retention schemes or wage subsidy schemes were also used to maintain the employment relationship and support employers' and workers' income.²⁸ Unemployment insurance schemes were also used in Thailand and Malaysia (ILO 2020). These modifications and schemes are all relevant to dealing with the climate crisis.

They can support business continuity should workplaces be disrupted and temporarily out of commission as a result of extreme climate events.

► **Taking into account climate risks in actuarial planning to ensure pension fund sustainability.** The climate crisis threatens the financial sustainability and adequacy of pension schemes. Consequently, pension schemes must adapt to contend with climate-related risks to ensure long-term sustainability and protect the quality of life of beneficiaries. This means appropriate actuarial assessment of the risks of climate change and adjusting contribution needs and investments accordingly (ILO 2024f, section 4.3.9).

²⁸ For example, the [JobKeeper Payment scheme in Australia](#).

**Conclusion:
Regional priorities
for action**

chapter 5

Supported by robust economic growth, countries in Asia and the Pacific have achieved significant progress in social protection during the last decade. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the crucial role of social protection in mitigating adverse impacts and protecting jobs and income. In 2023, the share of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit exceeded the world average for this indicator. The region is quickly catching up with more advanced regions. Although the number of ratifications of ILO Convention No. 102 and other international social security standards remains low compared to other regions, many countries use these standards as guidance in strengthening their social protection systems, and several countries are considering ratification.

Despite these positive trends, the region is still only halfway towards the full achievement of universal social protection. A large share of the population in the region remains unprotected against various life-cycle and socio-economic risks. In addition to coverage gaps, social protection in the region is facing challenges in terms of both adequacy of benefits and financial sustainability. The share of public social protection expenditure still lags significantly below the world average. The need to invest in building comprehensive and resilient social protection systems has never been as urgent before as it is today.

At the same time, ongoing transformations – globalization, demographic transition, climate change and technological development – require new adaptations of social protection systems in the future. Countries in the region are facing the dual challenge of extending social protection and adapting the system to global economic conditions, rapid demographic ageing and climate change-related challenges.

In order to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG target 1.3 and related goals, social protection should be prioritized in national development agendas. Only if it is recognized as a crucial developmental tool to enhance both inclusive economic development and resilience, can social protection achieve the intended policy goals and create necessary fiscal space to have a transformative impact in societies. In turn, more inclusive and adequate social protection can contribute to building human capabilities and enhance productivity, thereby generating greater fiscal space for redistribution, through taxation and social security contributions.

Social protection coverage should be extended to workers in all types of employment, including those in temporary, part-time and self-employment, whether in agriculture, domestic work or the platform economy, and including migrant workers. This requires consideration of the wide heterogeneity of situations of workers, high levels of labour market mobility and informality, which can be addressed through a context-specific mix of traditional and novel approaches requiring coordinated and concerted actions by all stakeholders involved. Integration between different areas of public policy and administration is required to promote the formalization of enterprises and employment. Countries should take urgent actions by enhancing the institutional capacity for law enforcement and leveraging innovative digital technologies. To ensure the right to social security for a growing number of migrant workers, countries should seek to conclude bilateral and multilateral social security agreements.

In the face of a rapidly ageing population, countries must take proactive steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of their social protection systems, notably healthcare and pensions, while maintaining or improving benefit levels. Ageing will also create an additional need for social protection, especially long-term care for older persons, which will also provide opportunities for the creation of decent jobs in the care economy if appropriate policies are in place (ILO 2024b). In view of the financial constraints and the shortage of carers, countries in the region must also take action to ensure access to affordable and quality long-term care services for all older persons in need of care.

As the growing impact of climate change is felt in the region, social protection can play a vital role in supporting adaptation and mitigation, and in facilitating a just transition, ultimately enhancing the resilience of all, especially vulnerable communities. Properly designed and funded social protection systems can soften the adverse impacts of climate change and provide income protection for those affected by climate policy measures. It can also promote the transition towards a green economy through support for workers to further develop skills and to access new employment opportunities. Social protection systems must be adapted to enhance resilience and support climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. The following actions are recommended:

- ▶ Integrate climate risk assessments into the design and implementation of social protection programmes to ensure they are responsive to climate-related vulnerabilities.
- ▶ Create social protection programmes that specifically address the needs of communities affected by climate change, including those impacted by extreme weather events, sea-level rise and other environmental changes.
- ▶ Promote sustainable and climate-resilient livelihoods through social protection measures, such as support for green jobs and investment in sustainable agricultural practices.
- ▶ Strengthen the capacity of social protection systems to respond to natural disasters by establishing rapid response funds and mechanisms to provide immediate support to affected populations.
- ▶ Utilize technology and innovative approaches to improve the delivery and effectiveness of social protection programmes, particularly in remote and vulnerable areas.
- ▶ Support community-based adaptation initiatives through social protection

programmes that empower local communities to implement climate-resilient strategies.

- ▶ Promote regional cooperation and knowledge sharing on climate-resilient social protection strategies to benefit from best practices and experiences across the region.

Social dialogue should be at the core of the process, with strong participation by social partners ensuring the representation of both those contributing and social protection entitlement holders. Effective participation by governments, workers, employers and other stakeholders not only helps ensure that social protection policies respond to people's needs, but is also key to building trust, public support and a sense of ownership, thereby leading to a lasting solution.

Future actions will determine whether Asia and the Pacific will become a role model for the successful achievement of both universal social protection and a just transition to a circular economy. Despite the challenges facing the region and the persistent coverage and financing gaps that remain in many countries, recent progress raises the hope that the region is moving in the right direction.

The background consists of several overlapping geometric shapes. A large green triangle is positioned in the upper left. A blue triangle is positioned in the lower right. A smaller blue triangle is positioned in the center, overlapping the larger green and blue triangles. The word "references" is written in a bold, green, sans-serif font, oriented vertically along the right edge of the blue triangle in the lower right.

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annexes

► Annex 1 Social protection effective coverage

► Annex 1.1 Social protection effective coverage (including SDG indicators 1.3.1 and 3.8.1), 2015 and 2023 (percentage of the relevant population group)

Full dataset available at: <https://wspdb.social-protection.org>.

Income level/region	SDG 1.3.1 – Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health) ¹						People protected by social protection systems including floors														SDG 3.8.1 – Universal health coverage (WHO) ¹⁰		Population affiliated to a social health protection scheme ¹¹			
	By year		By sex (2023)		By type of scheme		Children (0–15) ²		Children (0–18) ³		Mothers with newborns ⁴		Workers in case of work injury ⁵		Persons with severe disabilities ⁶		Unemployed ⁷		Older persons ⁸		Vulnerable persons receiving social assistance benefits ⁹		2015	2023	2020	2023
	2015	2023	Men	Women	Contri- butory	Tax- financed	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2020	2023
World	42.8	52.4	54.6	50.1	35.0	17.3	22.1	28.2	...	23.9	29.6	36.4	32.8	37.4	32.8	38.9	15.4	16.7	74.1	79.6	26.7	37.3	64.5	67.4	60.4	60.1
Asia and the Pacific	38.7	53.6	57.0	50.2	33.6	20.0	14.3	22.4	...	17.1	25.8	38.4	22.2	28.5	18.9	30.7	9.1	12.8	68.4	76.6	20.7	34.5	63.6	68.3	63.1	61.9
Eastern Asia	63.3	78.5	80.5	76.6	63.6	14.9	7.7	9.0	...	6.7	17.5	29.0	33.1	43.3	31.5	44.7	19.1	23.8	98.3	98.6	29.0	43.0	76.1	81.2	99.9	94.9
Pacific Islands	65.7	72.5	72.4	72.7	36.1	36.4	55.0	56.0	...	47.0	72.3	71.5	64.7	72.8	70.6	72.5	47.7	80.6	73.8	74.4	62.0	69.3	73.4	71.5	100.0	99.3
South-Eastern Asia	32.5	45.9	47.3	44.6	18.3	27.6	13.6	24.5	...	25.7	25.7	29.9	20.7	29.4	19.5	27.7	6.6	10.6	33.3	45.6	12.4	37.5	58.7	61.4	78.5	80.5
Southern Asia	18.7	35.4	40.8	29.7	14.1	21.3	17.3	27.9	...	19.1	32.1	47.1	6.7	9.8	6.6	19.2	0.4	0.4	26.2	47.1	15.4	25.8	54.2	60.1	23.4	25.4

► **Annex 1.2 Social protection effective coverage (including SDG indicators 1.3.1 and 3.8.1), 2023 or latest available year (percentage of the relevant population group) – Countries and territories**

Full dataset available at: <https://wspdb.social-protection.org>.

Country/territory	SDG 1.3.1 – Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health) ¹						People protected by social protection systems including floors																				SDG 3.8.1 – Universal health coverage (WHO) ²⁰												
							Children (0–15) ²				Children (0–18) ³				Mothers with newborns ⁴		Workers in case of work injury ⁵				Persons with severe disabilities ⁶				Unemployed ⁷				Older persons ⁸				Vulnerable persons receiving social assistance benefits ⁹						
	By sex		By type of scheme ¹⁴		Year	Total	Boys	Girls	Year	Total	Boys	Girls	Year	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Year						
	Total	Men	Women	Contributory																														Tax-financed					
Asia and the Pacific																																							
Eastern Asia																																							
China	75.6	77.6	73.2	60.9	14.7	2021	2.9	...	...	2021	2.4	...	...	2021	24.2	2019	35.9	36.9	34.7	2021	43.9	...	...	2021	21.9	...	...	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	38.7	...	...	2021	81.0	2021
Hong Kong, China	63.3	...	...	44.2	19.1	2023	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	77.2	...	...	2023	77.4	...	...	2023	9.6	...	...	2023	82.5	...	...	2023	35.7	...	...	2023	...	...
Japan	94.6	...	...	82.2	12.4	2020	85.4	...	...	2019	53.4	...	...	2020	41.8	2020	89.9	...	...	2020	51.9	...	...	2020	24.9	...	...	2020	100.0	100.0	100.0	2020	69.8	...	...	2020	83.5	2021
Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)	68.0	2021
Macau, China	75.3	72.2	3.1	2022
Mongolia	93.5	...	...	44.2	49.4	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	100.0	2021	80.7	74.8	87.3	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	26.7	25.0	28.9	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	88.4	...	...	2021	65.0	2021
Republic of Korea	80.2	...	...	60.7	19.6	2022	35.3	...	...	2022	30.8	...	...	2022	45.6	2021	95.1	...	...	2019 ^c	29.4	...	...	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	49.3	...	...	2022	89.1	2021
Taiwan, China	78.4	77.4	79.2	74.1	4.3	2023	19.8	19.7	20.0	2023	16.5	16.4	16.6	2023	68.9	2023	87.7	79.5	97.9	2023	48.9	59.1	38.6	2023	6.9	5.6	8.7	2023	99.3	98.4	100.0	2023	16.1	14.3	17.8	2023	...	...
Pacific Islands																																							
Australia	94.0	94.4	93.7	52.8	41.2	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	83.6	83.7	83.6	2022	93.0	2022	79.9	75.8	84.5	2021 ^c	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	74.4	71.9	76.5	2022	93.6	...	...	2022	86.8	2021
Cook Islands	100.0	100.0	100.0	76.3	38.6	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	90.0	90.4	89.5	2022	22.5	2022	...	...	...	...	48.6	51.2	46.1	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	67.2	71.3	63.7	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	46.0	2021
Fiji	65.6	...	...	42.9	22.7	2022	10.8	...	...	2022	9.1	...	...	2022	28.4	2022	55.7	...	...	2020 ^c	45.6	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	39.7	...	...	2022	58.3	2021
Kiribati	21.0	...	...	...	...	2020	1.3	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	32.8	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	93.8	...	...	2020	5.1	...	...	2020	47.7	2021
Marshall Islands	25.2	...	...	...	0.0	2020	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	2022	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	62.7	...	...	2019	1.7	...	...	2020	58.9	2021
Micronesia (Federated States of)	20.0	21.9	18.1	20.0	0.0	2021	6.8	...	...	2020	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	16.1	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	97.0	96.9	97.0	2021	2.2	...	...	2019	47.7	2021
Nauru	65.8	...	...	33.7	32.0	2020	66.0	...	...	2019	57.9	...	...	2019	80.3	2018	88.6	88.2	89.1	2020 ^c	18.3	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2018	45.4	...	...	2020	60.4	2021
New Caledonia	72.6	...	...	64.0	8.6	2022	98.6	...	...	2022	85.6	...	...	2022	100.0	2022	67.7	...	...	2022	59.9	...	...	2017	14.6	...	...	2020	98.8	...	...	2022	24.0	...	...	2022	...	...
New Zealand	100.0	...	100.0	...	100.0	2023	79.9	...	...	2023	66.3	...	...	2023	100.0	2023 ^a	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023 ^c	98.9	100.0	93.1	2023	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	84.8	2021
Niue	48.6	...	...	32.5	16.1	2018	84.5	...	...	2018	73.4	...	...	2018	100.0	2018	...	...	...	...	21.6	...	...	2018	...	...	...	...	100.0	100.0	100.0	2018	23.8	...	...	2018	43.6	2021
Palau	93.2	...	...	91.8	1.5	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	31.9	2020	...	...	...	...	85.6	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	17.8	...	...	2020	64.8	2021
Papua New Guinea	9.1	...	...	9.1	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	...	...	20.5	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	1.9	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	30.4	2021
Samoa	20.2	...	...	14.4	5.8	2023	0.0	0.0	0.0	2023	0.0	0.0	0.0	2023	19.5	2021 ^a	44.2	43.8	44.7	2021 ^c	30.3	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2023	93.9	...	...	2023	6.8	...	...	2023	55.1	2021
Solomon Islands	17.2	20.7	12.5	17.2	0.0	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	23.8	2020 ^a	35.9	...	...	2021 ^c	2.4	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	0.4	...	...	2019	47.3	2021

► Annex 1.2 (cont'd)

Country/territory	SDG 1.3.1 – Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health) ¹						People protected by social protection systems including floors																								SDG 3.8.1 – Universal health coverage (WHO) ¹⁰								
							Children (0–15) ²				Children (0–18) ³				Mothers with newborns ⁴		Workers in case of work injury ⁵				Persons with severe disabilities ⁶				Unemployed ⁷				Older persons ⁸				Vulnerable persons receiving social assistance benefits ⁹						
	By sex			By type of scheme ¹⁴			Year																																
	Total	Men	Women	Contributory	Tax-financed																																		
Tonga	28.2	30.4	26.0	21.8	6.3	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	26.3	2019	...	...	...	...	76.7	70.2	83.2	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	8.1	7.3	8.9	2022	56.7	2021
Tuvalu	4.5	...	...	0.0	4.5	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	2022	...	...	...	...	42.3	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	4.5	...	...	2019	52.4	2021
Vanuatu	57.4	2019	12.9	2019	2019	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	4.1	2019	53.3	2019	47.0	2021
South-Eastern Asia																																							
Brunei Darussalam	36.0	...	...	24.1	11.8	2021	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	52.8	2021	88.3	...	...	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	15.6	...	...	2021	78.3	2021	
Cambodia	20.8	16.6	24.9	18.6	2.2	2022	7.0	4.5	9.8	2020	6.2	3.9	8.5	2020	42.5	2020	32.1	23.8	41.4	2022	0.7	...	...	2015	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	8.1	11.5	5.7	2020	2.7	1.8	3.7	2020	58.0	2021
Indonesia	54.3	...	...	14.2	40.1	2021	43.6	...	...	2021	47.2	...	...	2021	29.4	2021	26.3	...	...	2021	2.5	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	31.2	...	...	2021	49.5	...	...	2021	54.8	2021
Lao People's Democratic Republic	15.5	...	...	4.9	10.6	2021	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8.1	2021	10.3	...	...	2021	0.3	...	...	2021	30.8	...	...	2021	7.0	...	...	2021	11.2	...	...	2021	51.8	2021	
Malaysia	29.2	32.0	21.0	27.7	1.5	2023	1.6	...	...	2021	1.4	...	...	2021	49.9	2019	43.8	...	...	2023	32.2	...	...	2021	10.4	...	...	2019	18.5	24.3	13.0	2023	2.0	...	...	2020	76.0	2021
Myanmar	6.3	...	...	...	...	2019	2.1	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	1.6	2019	8.5	...	...	2019	10.6	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	...	...	...	...	1.1	...	...	2019	52.5	2021
Philippines	34.9	...	...	15.7	19.1	2022	9.9	9.8	9.9	2021	16.9	16.9	17.0	2021	14.6	2021	33.4	...	...	2021	2.2	...	...	2021	5.6	...	...	2021	65.6	71.4	60.7	2021	22.7	...	...	2022	58.2	2021
Singapore	100.0	100.0	100.0	74.0	32.1	2023	27.8	...	...	2023	23.0	...	...	2023	63.1	2021 ^a	95.9	96.4	95.3	2021 ^c	55.7	...	...	2023	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	37.3	...	...	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	88.5	2021
Thailand	70.1	...	...	30.3	39.8	2020	31.8	...	...	2020	26.2	...	...	2020	38.8	2020	30.9	...	...	2019	97.9	...	...	2020	62.8	...	...	2019	82.6	...	...	2020	59.9	...	...	2020	82.0	2021
Timor-Leste	23.6	...	...	6.7	16.9	2023	16.4	...	...	2023	13.7	...	...	2023	2.2	2023	14.8	...	...	2023	22.3	...	...	2023	0.0	0.0	0.0	2023	92.7	...	...	2023	18.1	...	...	2023	52.3	2021
Viet Nam	38.3	...	...	21.2	17.1	2022	1.4	...	...	2020	1.2	...	...	2020	44.0	2019	29.6	...	...	2022	85.1	...	...	2021	59.2	...	...	2021	40.9	...	...	2019	21.7	...	...	2021	68.1	2021
Southern Asia																																							
Afghanistan	7.5	...	...	...	...	2019	0.4	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	1.7	2019	4.2	...	...	2019	13.6	...	...	2019	1.7	...	...	2019	24.7	...	...	2019	5.9	...	...	2019	40.9	2021
Bangladesh	22.0	...	...	3.5	18.6	2021	44.5	...	...	2021	1.9	...	...	2021	34.6	2021	12.5	...	...	2019	43.5	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	56.9	...	...	2021	19.2	...	...	2021	51.6	2021
Bhutan	11.9	...	...	5.6	6.3	2021	4.0	...	...	2021	3.2	...	...	2021	6.3	2021	28.4	...	...	2019	0.7	0.7	0.6	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	18.8	...	...	2019	6.7	...	...	2021	60.4	2021
India	48.8	...	...	17.0	31.9	2022 ^{b,c}	51.9	...	...	2022 ^b	43.0	...	...	2022 ^b	58.2	2022	8.3	...	...	2022	18.3	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	45.9	52.6	39.5	2022 ^d	38.2	...	...	2022 ^b	63.3	2021
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	100.0	100.0	100.0	19.7	86.9	2023	86.9	...	...	2019	87.0	...	...	2019	20.4	2023	45.9	55.4	4.8	2023	8.7	...	...	2023	5.3	5.1	5.8	2023	87.2	...	...	2019	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	74.3	2021
Maldives	30.1	...	...	21.3	8.8	2021	8.2	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	26.3	2021 ^a	...	...	...	...	63.8	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	11.2	...	...	2021	61.4	2021
Nepal	21.0	19.8	22.1	2.9	18.1	2022	27.5	27.7	27.3	2021	25.4	25.3	25.4	2021	1.0	2021	7.1	8.3	5.1	2022	27.5	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	77.2	71.7	82.1	2021 ^e	18.6	16.1	20.8	2021	53.7	2021
Pakistan	20.2	...	...	3.9	16.3	2022	5.2	...	...	2021	4.4	...	...	2022	5.3	2021 ^a	2.8	2.8	2.7	2021	9.5	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	17.4	...	...	2022	17.1	...	...	2022	45.2	2021
Sri Lanka	41.3	...	...	18.8	22.5	2021	36.1	...	...	2021	29.9	...	...	2021	77.8	2021	36.6	37.5	34.8	2021 ^c	17.8	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	31.1	...	...	2021	27.7	...	...	2020	66.7	2021

► **Annex 1.3 – SDG indicator 1.3.1 on effective coverage for old-age protection: Share of persons above statutory retirement age receiving an old-age pension, by type of scheme, and share of labour force and working-age population aged 15 and over covered by a pension scheme (active contributors), 2023 or latest available year (percentage)**

Full dataset available at: <https://wspdb.social-protection.org>.

Income level/region	Beneficiaries receiving an old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age ^{8, 14}				Beneficiaries receiving a contributory old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Beneficiaries receiving a tax-financed old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the labour force 15+ ¹²				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the working-age population 15+ ¹³			
	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year
World	79.6	82.6	77.2	2023	55.6	63.2	49.2	2023	30.7	26.9	34.2	2023	58.5	56.4	61.6	2023	35.0	40.9	29.1	2023
Asia and the Pacific	76.6	79.4	74.2	2023	38.6	49.3	29.3	2023	44.4	36.9	51.4	2023	61.9	58.6	67.3	2023	36.6	43.3	29.7	2023
Eastern Asia	98.6	98.6	98.6	2023	56.8	72.7	43.3	2023	52.9	37.8	66.3	2023	93.5	93.0	94.0	2023	61.5	66.8	56.0	2023
Pacific Islands	74.4	72.1	76.4	2023	5.3	5.8	4.8	2023	69.0	66.1	71.5	2023	95.7	95.4	96.1	2023	63.3	67.8	58.9	2023
South-Eastern Asia	45.6	52.7	40.2	2023	15.2	18.7	12.4	2023	30.5	34.0	27.7	2023	27.4	27.4	27.3	2023	18.2	21.3	15.2	2023
Southern Asia	47.1	54.7	40.4	2023	14.6	20.2	9.7	2023	33.0	35.0	31.2	2023	37.4	37.8	36.0	2023	18.8	28.2	9.1	2023

Country/territory	Beneficiaries receiving an old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age ^{8, 14}				Beneficiaries receiving a contributory old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Beneficiaries receiving a tax-financed old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the labour force 15+ ¹²				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the working-age population 15+ ¹³			
	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year
Asia and the Pacific																				
Eastern Asia																				
China	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	51.1	...	...	2021	62.9	...	...	2021	93.3	92.8	93.9	2021	61.8	66.8	56.7	2021
Hong Kong, China	82.5	...	...	2023	...	...	...	...	82.5	...	...	2023	83.4	...	...	2023	58.6	...	...	2023
Japan	100.0	100.0	100.0	2020	100.0	100.0	100.0	2020	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	99.1	98.9	99.5	2020	62.5	71.3	54.3	2020
Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Macau, China	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	31.5	...	...	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	86.7	81.6	91.6	2022	60.0	61.1	59.1	2022
Mongolia	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	48.3	...	...	2021	80.7	74.8	87.3	2021	48.6	50.6	46.4	2021
Republic of Korea	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	50.4	...	...	2022	52.2	...	...	2021	82.3	82.3	82.2	2022	51.8	59.6	44.0	2022
Taiwan, China	99.3	98.4	100.0	2023	85.4	82.0	87.6	2023	17.7	16.4	18.7	2023	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	66.4	67.7	65.0	2023

► Annex 1.3 (cont'd)

Country/territory	Beneficiaries receiving an old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age ^{8,14}				Beneficiaries receiving a contributory old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Beneficiaries receiving a tax-financed old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the labour force 15+ ¹²				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the working-age population 15+ ¹³			
	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year
Pacific Islands																				
Australia	74.4	71.9	76.5	2022	5.8	6.5	5.3	2022	68.6	65.4	71.2	2022	96.3	96.2	96.4	2022	63.2	67.6	59.0	2022
Cook Islands	67.2	71.3	63.7	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	67.2	71.3	63.7	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	99.9	100.0	84.7	2022
Fiji	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	14.4	17.1	12.4	2022	92.8	...	...	2020	58.1	57.2	59.9	2021	33.0	43.2	22.9	2021
Kiribati	93.8	...	...	2020	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	42.3	...	...	2019	18.2	...	...	2019
Marshall Islands	62.7	...	...	2019	62.7	...	...	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2019	81.8	...	...	2019	47.2	...	...	2019
Micronesia (Federated States of)	97.0	96.9	97.0	2021	97.0	96.9	97.0	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	36.1	43.1	29.2	2020	20.6	24.5	16.6	2020
Nauru	100.0	100.0	100.0	2018	0.0	0.0	0.0	2018	100.0	100.0	100.0	2018	88.6	85.5	92.6	2020	54.8	59.4	50.1	2020
New Caledonia	98.8	...	...	2022	89.0	...	...	2022	9.8	...	...	2022	67.7	...	...	2022	38.3	...	...	2022
New Zealand	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	...	...	...	...	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	100.0	100.0	100.0	2023	71.6	76.4	66.9	2023
Niue	100.0	100.0	100.0	2018	57.1	...	...	2018	68.9	...	...	2018	50.0	50.0	50.0	2017	29.1	30.0	28.2	2017
Palau	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2019	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	66.7	77.4	55.2	2019
Papua New Guinea	1.9	...	...	2022	1.9	...	...	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	29.0	...	...	2022	13.6	...	...	2022
Samoa	93.9	...	...	2023	0.0	0.0	0.0	2023	93.9	...	...	2023	29.4	28.9	30.4	2021	15.8	19.1	12.5	2021
Solomon Islands	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	...	...	...	...	33.0	40.6	24.9	2019	27.7	34.8	20.5	2019
Tonga	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	0.0	0.0	0.0	2022	100.0	100.0	100.0	2022	60.3	62.6	57.5	2021	32.2	40.8	24.4	2021
Tuvalu	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	0.0	0.0	0.0	2019	100.0	100.0	100.0	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Vanuatu	4.1	...	...	2019	4.1	...	...	2019	0.0	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

► Annex 1.3 (cont'd)

Country/territory	Beneficiaries receiving an old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age ^{8, 14}				Beneficiaries receiving a contributory old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Beneficiaries receiving a tax-financed old-age pension as percentage of persons above statutory retirement age				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the labour force 15+ ¹²				Active contributors to a pension scheme as percentage of the working-age population 15+ ¹³			
	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year	Total	Men	Women	Year
South-Eastern Asia																				
Brunei Darussalam	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	14.6	...	...	2021	87.3	...	...	2021	45.6	44.2	47.5	2021	29.3	31.9	26.5	2021
Cambodia	8.1	11.5	5.7	2020	8.1	11.5	5.7	2020	0.0	0.0	0.0	2020	32.1	23.8	41.4	2022	24.2	19.5	28.7	2022
Indonesia	31.2	...	...	2021	8.0	...	...	2021	23.2	...	...	2021	13.5	15.0	11.2	2021	9.0	12.1	5.9	2021
Lao People's Democratic Republic	7.0	...	...	2021	7.0	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	10.3	10.0	10.6	2021	6.1	6.2	5.9	2021
Malaysia	18.5	24.3	13.0	2023	16.1	21.1	11.3	2023	2.5	3.2	1.7	2020	46.1	46.3	45.8	2023	30.4	36.4	24.1	2023
Myanmar	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8.4	...	...	2019	4.7	...	...	2019
Philippines	65.6	71.4	60.7	2021	25.5	36.3	16.5	2021	40.1	35.1	44.2	2021	33.4	33.6	33.2	2021	19.6	23.8	15.4	2021
Singapore	37.3	...	...	2021	37.3	...	...	2021	0.0	0.0	0.0	2021	88.1	88.6	87.5	2021	61.0	67.1	54.4	2021
Thailand	82.6	...	...	2020	9.3	...	...	2020	73.3	...	...	2020	49.3	...	...	2020	32.4	...	...	2020
Timor-Leste	92.7	...	...	2023	0.3	...	...	2023	92.3	...	...	2023	14.8	...	...	2023	10.0	...	...	2023
Viet Nam	40.9	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	12.8	...	...	2020	31.5	31.5	31.6	2022	23.2	24.7	21.8	2022
Southern Asia																				
Afghanistan	24.7	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3.8	...	...	2019	1.2	...	...	2019
Bangladesh	56.9	...	...	2021	5.5	...	...	2021	51.4	...	...	2021	1.5	1.9	0.7	2017	0.9	1.5	0.3	2017
Bhutan	18.8	...	...	2019	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	13.6	...	...	2019	7.5	...	...	2019
India	45.9	52.6	39.5	2022	15.7	20.8	11.0	2022	30.1	31.8	28.5	2022	45.8	45.4	47.1	2022	22.8	33.5	11.4	2022
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	87.2	...	...	2019	9.3	20.5	1.9	2019	87.2	87.2	87.2	2019	60.0	58.9	65.0	2023	25.7	40.8	10.5	2023
Maldives	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	24.5	...	...	2021	100.0	100.0	100.0	2021	41.2	35.8	53.0	2021	26.3	27.9	22.9	2021
Nepal	77.2	71.7	82.1	2021	10.1	15.3	5.5	2021	67.1	56.4	76.6	2021	7.1	8.3	5.1	2022	2.9	4.4	1.5	2022
Pakistan	17.4	...	...	2022	16.9	...	...	2022	0.5	...	...	2020	10.9	12.2	5.9	2020	5.7	9.8	1.5	2020
Sri Lanka	31.1	...	...	2021	12.7	...	...	2021	18.4	...	...	2020	36.6	37.5	34.8	2021	18.5	26.4	11.5	2021

Source

► Main source

Regional estimates (Annex 1.1): ILO modelled estimates, 2024; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the Social Security Inquiry (SSI).

Country/territory estimates (Annex 1.2 and 1.3): ILO estimates; [World Social Protection Database](#), based on the Social Security Inquiry (SSI), national sources.

► Other sources

ADB (Asian Development Bank). [Social Protection Index Database](#).

ILO. [ILOSTAT](#).

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. [World Population Prospects database](#).

UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) & IPC-IG (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth). 2019. [Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific: Inventory of non-contributory programmes](#).

WHO (World Health Organization). [Global Health Observatory](#).

Notes

Global and regional aggregates are weighted by relevant population groups. Estimates are not strictly comparable to previous regional estimates due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions. For detailed definition of the indicators, please see Annex 2 of the World Social Protection Report 2024-26.

... Data not available

^a Estimated based on legal coverage.

^b Including school feeding programme(s) and other food benefits for children

^c Based on available data mainly from central government schemes

^d India: Data not available for Building and Other Construction Workers Fund.

^e Nepal: Estimated based on available data for Public Sector Pension and Social Security Allowance Programme only.

¹ Proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection cash benefit: ratio of the population receiving cash benefits, excluding healthcare and sickness benefits, under at least one of the contingencies/social protection functions (contributory or tax-financed benefit) or actively contributing to at least one social security scheme to the total population.

² Proportion of children (0 to 15 years old) covered by social protection benefits: ratio of children/households receiving child or family cash benefits to the total number of children/households with children.

³ Proportion of children (0 to 18 years old) covered by social protection benefits: ratio of children/households receiving child or family cash benefits to the total number of children/households with children.

⁴ Proportion of women giving birth covered by maternity benefits: ratio of women receiving cash maternity benefits to women giving birth in the same year (estimated based on age-specific fertility

rates published in the UN World Population Prospects or on the number of live births corrected for the share of twin and triplet births).

- ⁵ Proportion of workers covered in case of employment injury: ratio of workers protected by injury insurance to total employment or the labour force.
- ⁶ Proportion of persons with disabilities receiving benefits: ratio of persons receiving disability cash benefits to persons with severe disabilities. The latter is calculated as the product of prevalence of disability ratios (published for each country group by the WHO) and each country's population.
- ⁷ Proportion of unemployed receiving benefits: ratio of recipients of unemployment cash benefits to the number of unemployed persons.
- ⁸ Proportion of older persons receiving a pension: ratio of persons above statutory retirement age receiving an old-age pension (including contributory and tax-financed benefits) to persons above statutory retirement age.
- ⁹ Proportion of vulnerable persons receiving benefits: ratio of social assistance cash benefits (including non-means-tested benefits) recipients to the total number of vulnerable persons. The latter are calculated by subtracting from total population all people of working age who are contributing to a social insurance scheme or receiving contributory benefits, and all persons above retirement age receiving contributory benefits.
- ¹⁰ Coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population).
- ¹¹ Proportion of the population protected by a healthcare scheme for their primary coverage. Mechanisms include: national health insurance; social health insurance mandated by the State (including subsidized coverage for the poor); national healthcare service guaranteed for free or with small co-payments; and other programmes (such as user fee waivers or vouchers). Only public or publicly-mandated privately administered primary healthcare schemes were included. Supplementary public and private programmes were not included.
- ¹² Proportion of the labour force actively contributing to a pension scheme: ratio of workers protected by pension scheme (active contributors) to the total labour force.
- ¹³ Proportion of the working-age population actively contributing to a pension scheme: ratio of workers protected by pension scheme (active contributors) to the total labour force.
- ¹⁴ Total number of beneficiaries does not always correspond to the sum by type of scheme due to possible simultaneous coverage by multiple social protection benefits.

► Annex 2 General government actual expenditure on social protection including and excluding healthcare, latest available year (percentage of GDP)

Income level/region	Total expenditure on social protection (including health), 2023	Domestic general government health expenditure, WHO (2021)	Total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) ¹	Expenditure on social protection systems including floors, by broad age group		
				Children ²	Working age ³	Old age ⁴
World	19.3	6.5	12.9	0.7	4.8	7.6
Asia and the Pacific	11.8	3.8	8.0	0.5	2.4	5.4
Eastern Asia	13.7	4.2	9.5	0.5	2.7	6.4
Pacific Islands	17.8	7.8	10.0	1.9	4.3	3.7
South-Eastern Asia	5.0	2.5	2.5	0.4	1.5	1.5
Southern Asia	5.1	1.2	3.8	0.0	0.9	2.4

Country/territory	Total expenditure on social protection (including health)	Domestic general government health expenditure, WHO (2021)	Total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) ¹	Expenditure on social protection systems including floors, by broad age group			Year	Source
				Children ²	Working age ³	Old age ⁴		
Asia and the Pacific								
Eastern Asia								
China	10.8	2.9	7.9	0.1	2.6	5.3	2021	National
Hong Kong, China	3.9	...	3.9	0.4	3.1	0.5	2021	IMF
Japan	26.3	9.2	17.1	2.1	2.5	12.6	2022	IMF
Macao, China	26.2	...	26.2	...	...	...	2022	IMF
Mongolia	20.0	4.5	15.4	9.4	6.0	0.0	2021	IMF
Republic of Korea	13.4	5.7	7.7	0.5	2.7	4.6	2020	OECD
Taiwan, China	11.0	...	11.0	0.9	4.9	5.3	2022	National

► Annex 2 (cont'd)

Country/territory	Total expenditure on social protection (including health)	Domestic general government health expenditure, WHO (2021)	Total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) ¹	Expenditure on social protection systems including floors, by broad age group			Year	Source
				Children ²	Working age ³	Old age ⁴		
Pacific Islands								
Australia	18.1	8.0	10.1	1.9	4.6	3.6	2022	IMF
Cook Islands	8.4	3.7	4.8	1.6	0.3	2.9	2022	National
Fiji	9.5	3.4	6.2	1.0	0.4	3.1	2022	National
Kiribati	29.9	11.1	18.8	...	...	...	2022	IMF
Marshall Islands	6.8	5.3	1.4	...	...	...	2019 ^a	IMF
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2.3	1.9	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.0	2020 ^a	IMF
Nauru	16.8	11.3	5.4	0.0	5.4	0.0	2018	IMF
New Zealand	18.6	7.7	10.9	2.2	2.6	5.2	2022	National
Palau	7.6	7.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	2019 ^a	IMF
Papua New Guinea	1.3	1.2	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	2020 ^a	IMF
Samoa	7.0	5.1	1.8	0.3	0.0	1.5	2021 ^a	IMF
Solomon Islands	3.8	3.3	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.0	2020 ^a	IMF
Tonga	6.2	3.6	2.6	...	0.2	2.4	2021	National
Vanuatu	2.3	1.2	1.1	...	...	...	2022	National
South-Eastern Asia								
Brunei Darussalam	2.7	2.1	0.6	...	...	...	2021	ADB
Cambodia	3.1	2.0	1.1	...	...	...	2021	ADB
Indonesia	3.7	2.2	1.5	...	...	...	2022	IMF
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.6	2019	National
Malaysia	2.5	2.5	...	...	...	...	...	National
Myanmar	2.0	1.1	0.9	...	0.9	...	2019	IMF
Philippines	5.0	2.3	2.7	0.8	0.5	1.4	2022 ^a	IMF
Singapore	4.5	3.5	1.0	0.4	0.6	0.0	2022	IMF

► Annex 2 (cont'd)

Country/territory	Total expenditure on social protection (including health)	Domestic general government health expenditure, WHO (2021)	Total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) ¹	Expenditure on social protection systems including floors, by broad age group			Year	Source
				Children ²	Working age ³	Old age ⁴		
Thailand	8.5	3.6	4.9	0.0	3.0	1.9	2022	IMF
Timor-Leste	17.1	7.3	9.9	...	...	...	2023	National
Viet Nam	7.0	2.0	5.1	0.4	1.8	2.8	2020	National
Southern Asia								
Afghanistan	2.6	0.7	1.8	0.1	1.3	0.4	2017	IMF
Bangladesh	1.3	0.4	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.7	2022	National
Bhutan	5.5	2.2	3.3	...	...	...	2022	ADB
India	5.1	1.1	4.0	0.0	1.0	2.8	2021	National
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	12.0	3.2	8.8	...	...	...	2020	National
Maldives	12.4	7.2	5.2	0.1	3.4	1.7	2022	National
Nepal	4.0	1.8	2.2	0.0	2.2	0.0	2021	IMF
Pakistan	2.0	0.8	1.2	0.0	0.8	0.3	2021	National
Sri Lanka	4.7	1.9	2.8	...	1.5	1.3	2022	National

Sources

ADB (Asian Development Bank). [Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2023](#).

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National sources: Ministry of Finance/Statistics Office/Other national sources, detailed sources are available upon request.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). [Social Expenditure Database \(SOCX\): Social and Welfare Statistics](#).

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Notes

Global and regional aggregates are weighted by GDP for the year 2024. Estimates are not strictly comparable to previous regional estimates due to methodological enhancements, extended data availability and country revisions. For a detailed definition of the indicators, please see Annex 2 of the World Social Protection Report 2024-26.

... Data not available.

- ¹ Total social protection expenditure (excluding health) does not always correspond to the sum of expenditures by age group, depending on data availability, source and year, and on inclusion of non-age-group-specific expenditures.
 - ² Expenditure on children includes provision of social protection in the form of childcare and family benefits.
 - ³ Expenditure on working-age population includes social protection expenditure that cannot be classified under children and/or old-age benefits.
 - ⁴ Expenditure on old-age benefits includes social protection expenditure for persons who are survivors of a deceased person.
- ^a Budgetary central government



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The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to drive a human-centred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

This regional companion report is intended to complement the ILO's *World Social Protection Report 2024–26*. It includes a section summarizing the status of social protection worldwide, followed by a section highlighting key social protection developments, challenges and priorities for this region from a life-cycle perspective.

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