

Social Protection Floor in India

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In recent years, the issue of social protection extension has assumed a lot of importance, in India, in particular with regards to the positive role social protection can play to alleviate the adverse effects of the global and domestic economic crises and to strengthen the social dimension of globalization. Important social security, poverty alleviation and social welfare measures are being implemented by various ministries, along with federal and individual state departments and civil society. India's social protection schemes can be broadly categorized in four groups: a programmatic framework to improve the living standards of the poor; targeted social security programmes for the very poor, (iii) social security measures for workers in the informal economy and (iv) social security measures for workers in the formal economy. To guide its social protection schemes India has a well-developed legal framework. Its provisions are enshrined in the Constitution, including Articles 38, 39, 41 42, and 43, which safeguard the right to work, education, public assistance, decent work and maternity relief.

India's national-level health insurance scheme, called *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana's* (RSBY), is one of the main elements of India's social protection floor. The scheme was launched in 2008 and its primary target is the population group below the poverty line. As of 2010, approximately 70 million people were enrolled, that is 24 per cent of the total target population. The scheme provides benefits for hospitalization and transportation expenses. The scheme is fully funded by the government, except for the annual registration fee of ₹. 30 (US\$ 0,70), and costs about ₹ 8,000 million (US\$ 174 million) or 0.013 per cent of GDP. One of its main features is the use of technology to implement the scheme. Each enrolled beneficiary is provided with a biometric smart card which enables beneficiaries to avail themselves of the benefits in any of the around 6,000 hospital that is part of the network of health providers.

Another key social protection scheme, is the *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MGNREGA) adopted in 2005. Under this scheme a rural household is entitled to demand up to 100 days of employment per year, which is made available on agreed schemes of public works. The programme undertakes projects facilitating land and water resource management, together with infrastructure development projects such as road construction. In 2010-11, this Act provided employment for about 2,900 million days to more than 52 million families. The programme is regarded as one of the largest rights-based integrated employment and social protection initiatives in the world.

Other programmes that can be considered to be part of India's social protection floor include the pension schemes for the elderly, the disabled and widows living below the poverty line (the *Indira Gandhi* schemes) as well as a variety of other programmes ensuring, amongst other, access to education, nutrition, housing and water for the poor and disadvantaged groups.

Despite these efforts, many are still excluded from social protection services. Today, around 94% of India's total labour force, around 370 million workers, are part of the informal economy. Providing this group and their dependents with the social protection they need, is one of the major challenges, India faces in extending social protection to all.

