

Media Fast Facts

Social Protection Index (SPI): Asia and the Pacific

- The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) SPI measures the size, reach and effectiveness of central government social protection programs.
- The average SPI for high-income Asian countries (Japan, Republic of Korea, and Singapore) 0.262, which implies that social protection spending is 10.2% of GDP.
- For *upper* middle-income countries, the average SPI is 0.122 or about 4% of GDP, and for *lower* middle-income countries, the average SPI is 0.096, or about 3.4% of GDP.
- Low-income countries have an average SPI of 0.061, or about 2.6% of GDP.
- The latest SPI uses 2009 data on central government social protection programs in 35 countries in Asia and the Pacific, covering social insurance, social assistance and labor market programs.
- *Social insurance* such as pensions, health insurance, unemployment insurance, severance pay, and maternity benefits accounts for 59% of the region's social protection expenditures, but primarily benefits those in formal employment and public service.
- *Social assistance* such as cash transfers for poor and vulnerable persons and households, health assistance, disability benefits, disaster relief and assistance to elderly accounts for 36% of regional social protection spending and covers 58% of target beneficiaries in Asia and the Pacific.
- *Labor market programs* such as cash-for-work and food-for-work programs, and skills and development training programs, account for only about 5% of total spending on social protection.
- The SPI for poor people is significantly lower than for the non-poor given the predominance of social insurance programs, which tend to benefit more of the non-poor.
- Women receive fewer benefits from social insurance because they lack access to formal-sector employment. Similarly, women also benefit less from labor market programs. In contrast, men and women receive almost equal benefits from social assistance programs.
- Expanding social protection to cover the common risks of the "missing middle" – households that do not benefit from social assistance and social insurance programs - is a major challenge for policy makers in many Asian and Pacific countries.
- Most countries in developing Asia need to substantially boost investments in social protection to address chronic poverty and vulnerability to economic, environmental and health shocks.