

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Social Development

20-21 October 2020

**India – Statement on Agenda Item 2 on  
Consideration of the draft action plan to strengthen regional cooperation on social  
protection in Asia and the Pacific**

*Honorable Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me start by offering India's best wishes for the efforts of the UNESCAP on this important issue of social protection. India is on sound footing to address social disadvantage on account of its deep democratic and egalitarian ethos and institutional outlook. With a powerful Constitution, India has a robust policy and legal framework as well as a long tradition of sound jurisprudence to offer all communities and social groups safe, dignified and productive lives with access to equal opportunities for growth and development. Policies and programmes on social protection are a crucial part of India's national development agenda mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and predicated on 'leaving no one behind'.

2. An array of policies and laws as well as government programmes and schemes protect various vulnerable communities and groups (e.g. under-privileged, women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and others) from discrimination and violence and enable them to pursue their social, economic and cultural rights.

3. The National Education Policy specifically addresses the needs of the socio-economically disadvantaged groups and a range of programmes ensure educational access to girls, children with special needs and those from marginalized communities through community mobilization, residential accommodation and nutritional support, scholarships, targeted coaching and counselling and other teaching-learning support.

4. Through rural employment guarantee, skill development, financial inclusion and credit assistance and entrepreneurship development sustainable livelihoods are promoted. Labour legislations and allied schemes protect minimum wages, provide for equal and non-discriminatory remuneration, compensation against injury and disability as well as protection of rights of migrant labour.

5. Ayushman Bharat, the National Health Protection programme, provides substantial insurance coverage, improves equity in health care, eliminates exclusionary practices and extends health security to various vulnerable communities. Affordable schemes of life and disability insurance now widely cover vulnerable sections of people.

6. Social pension schemes have been diversified to significantly improve outreach for people suffering from old age, disability, dereliction and destitution.

7. With the help of a comprehensive combination of policies, legislations, development programmes and schemes, social protection benefits are sought to be extended to women and children from all sections of society across the life cycle.
8. People living with HIV (PLHIV) are linked up with social protection schemes through Care and Support Centres (CSCs).
9. In the context of COVID-19, the Government of India has stepped up implementation of all social protection initiatives as far as possible under various constraints of the pandemic. Special packages are also implemented on direct cash transfer, food security, employment support and other social services.
10. India appreciates the draft action plan to strengthen regional cooperation on social protection in Asia and the Pacific as an integral part of its commitment to promote regional efforts to achieve the SDGs.
11. At the national level, the efforts at social protection are essentially multi-stakeholder affairs. The roles of civil society, academia and research institutions and the private sector are very important. At the same time, it is important to promote the participation and leadership of the representatives of the vulnerable communities in the initiatives in order to improve impact as well as accountability of the measures taken.
12. Peer learning and sharing of good practices at the regional level would be very useful to facilitate innovation and insight building. Region-wide research programmes on specific issues or intervention areas can help generate new data and resources which can enrich interventions both at national and regional levels.
13. India also supports regional connectivity initiatives, among others, as a measure to strengthen regional cooperation on social protection, provided they are based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. They must follow the principles of financial responsibility and must be pursued in a manner that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity.
14. Operationalisation of this Action Plan holds a lot of promise for improving social protection initiatives both at national and regional levels. Going forward, it can open many doors to new solutions to old problems in the region.

Thank You.