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Social assistance outlook for South and Southeast Asia

Social assistance schemes are an essential tool to ensure populations are protected, but spending is low, and large shares of populations continue to be excluded. Social assistance schemes are only effective if they are reaching everyone.

Countries in South and Southeast Asia commendably responded to COVID-19 with expansion in social assistance spending and coverage, but these gains have since been reversed. However, social assistance spending in South Asia still remains well below international benchmarks.

There is a need to improve data collection and monitoring processes to obtain a full picture on the equity of investments, and to track budgets at national and subnational levels. This is particularly necessary for child-specific social assistance schemes such as the Universal Child Grant.

There is also a need to implement a countercyclical approach to social assistance policies to protect in times of compounding shocks, ensuring that children and families have support when they need it most.



Social assistance schemes

are essential to support the development of human capital, promote economic growth, reduce inequality, and to prevent families in times of crisis.



US \$42

average per capita annual spending on social assistance in South Asia.



US\$ 131.36

average per capita annual spending on social assistance in East Asia.



94%

of workers in Nepal are employed in the informal economy.

Social assistance spending as a percentage of GDP (int'l benchmark 3.3%)

■ 2017 ■ 2021

