



Introduction to social protection in the Pacific

The what, why and how of social protection in the Pacific

Table of Contents

Welcome	3
What is social protection?	4
Why is social protection important?	10
How is social protection implemented in the Pacific?	14
Congratulations on completing this course!	18

Welcome

Welcome to 'Introduction to social protection in the Pacific', by Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP), an Australian Government initiative supporting the strengthening of social protection systems in the Pacific.

This on-demand training is for you to learn, explore and gain insights into social protection at your convenience.



What is P4SP?

P4SP is an eight-year (2021-2029) Australian Government program that works with governments, civil society organisations and development partners in the Pacific to strengthen national social protection systems and enhance understanding of social protection.

Purpose of training

What is social protection?

Why is social protection important?

How is social protection implemented in the Pacific?

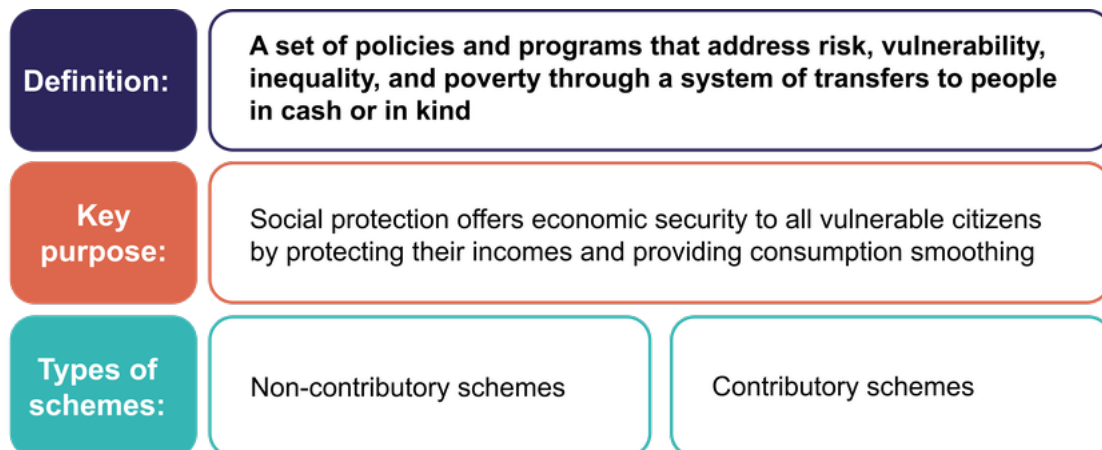
What is social protection?

Let's start by exploring what social protection is and how it is defined across the Pacific. While the definition may vary from country to country, social protection generally refers to a range of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability.

We'll look at the two main types of social protection—contributory and non-contributory—and why strong social protection systems are important. These systems are key to helping people to manage risks, improving wellbeing, and supporting inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

Defining social protection

We will begin by looking at how the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and P4SP define social protection.



But there is no one agreed definition of social protection – it varies depending on the country or the organisation.

Here are some other definitions of social protection.

International Labour Organization

Social protection, or social security, is a human right and is defined as the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle. Social protection includes benefits for children and families, maternity, unemployment, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability, survivors, as well as health protection. Social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed benefits, including social assistance.

UNICEF

(A) set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life-course, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups.

Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board

Social protection is defined as the set of policies and programs aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, social exclusion throughout their lifecycles, placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups.

Social protection can be provided in cash or in-kind; through non-contributory schemes, such as providing universal, categorical, or poverty- targeted benefits such as social assistance; contributory schemes (commonly social insurance), and by building human capital, productive assets, and access to jobs.

The World Bank

Social protection and labor systems, policies, and programs help individuals and societies manage risk and volatility and protect them from poverty and destitution - through instruments that improve resilience, equity, and opportunity.

Pacific countries' definitions of social protection

Pacific countries have different definitions of social protection too.



Nauru

Social protection is defined as government transfers of income or services such as health care or education that are designed to reduce vulnerability and build resilience.

Source: Nauru Department of Finance. (2023, May 30). National Social Protection Strategy 2022-2032.

Samoa

Social protection is defined as a mix of policies and programs aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, covering measures relating to lack of basic income, lack of access to healthcare and other basic services, insufficient family support (especially for children and adult dependents), including social security and support for protection against disaster, economic and social risk, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability and old age.

Source: Ministry of Finance, Samoa. (2023). National Social Protection Policy Framework 2023.

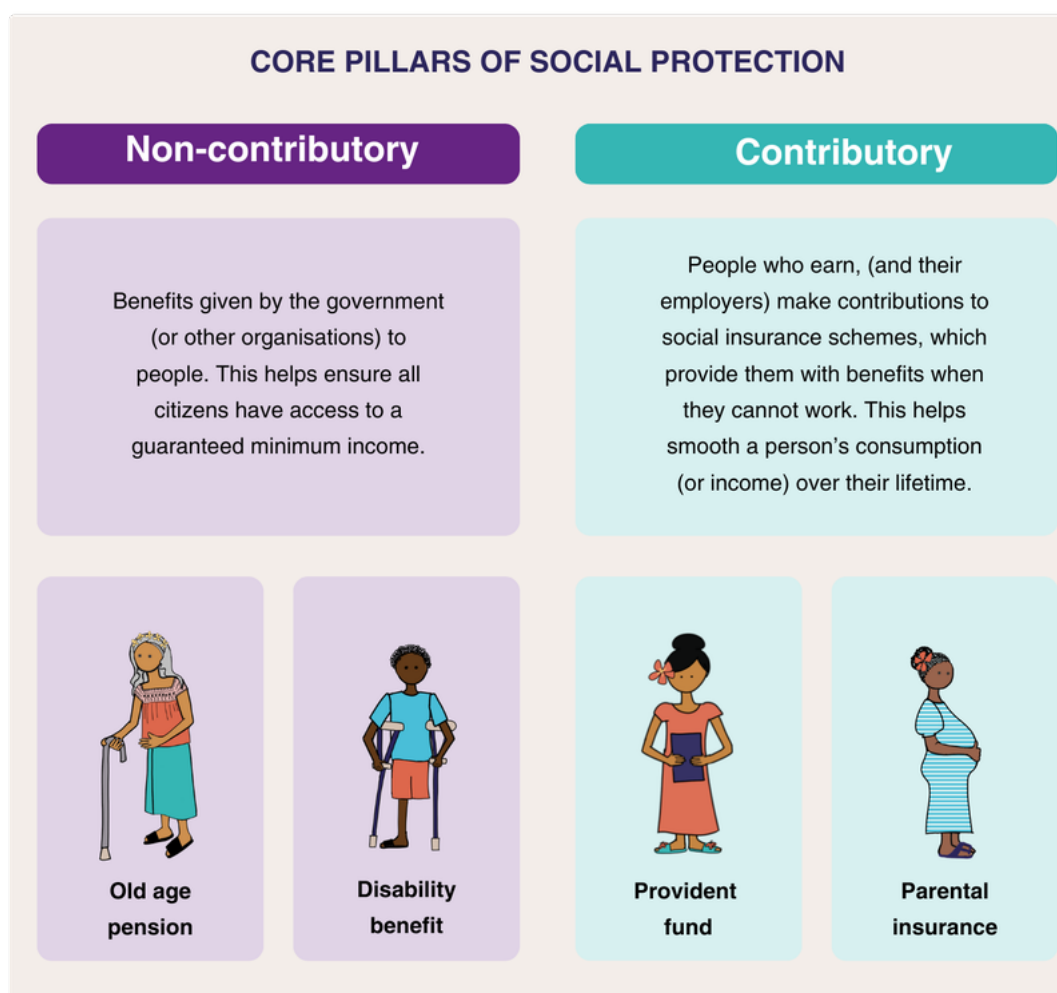
Tonga

Social protection can be defined as policies and programs that help individuals, families and societies to cope with risks and volatility, protect them from poverty and reduce inequality, assist them in accessing economic opportunity. Social protection achieves this by increasing individuals' resilience, equity and opportunity and through a modality of instruments, such as social assistance, social insurance, care services and labor market policies.

Source: Kingdom of Tonga. (2023). National Social Protection Policy (2023 - 2033).

Core Pillars of social protection

Around the world, and in the Pacific, most people agree that social protection includes at least two core pillars - non-contributory and contributory.



But wait, these definitions are all so confusing!

We agree! Many definitions are hard to understand, with a lot of technical words.

Let's try to talk about it more simply...

Purpose of social protection

Social protection is money or other help that is given to a person often from the government.

The purpose of social protection is to make sure that:



Everyone can receive the minimum amount of money that is needed to live.



People that earn money from a job are able to use what they need to live, and also save money to use in the future.

Here are some examples of social protection:



Money given to older people or people with a disability.



Money given to parents when they have a baby.

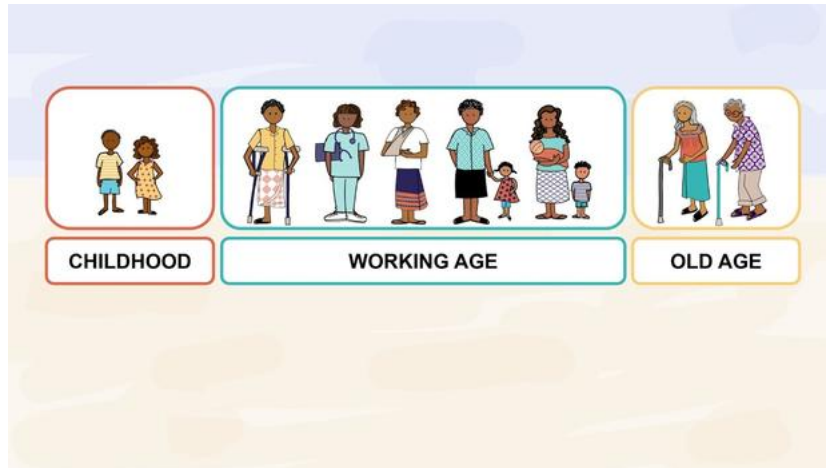


Money that workers save in their provident / superannuation fund for when they retire.

Strong social protection systems

A strong social protection system can help people to deal with things that happen at different stages of their life, and provides a safety net for those in need.

Watch the video below to learn more about social protection systems.



[Watch: Social protection systems](#)

In the Pacific, there is a strong tradition of supporting each other. For example through churches, remittances or customary practices, such as the wantok system in countries in Melanesia and Fa'asamoa in Samoa.

Mythbuster

There are lots of myths and perceptions related to social protection that you may have heard before. Here is one example.

If the government gives people money, it will ruin traditional support systems.

True or false?

This myth is False.

Good social protection does not replace or harm community supports and cultural practices - it complements them and helps vulnerable people to also contribute and support others.

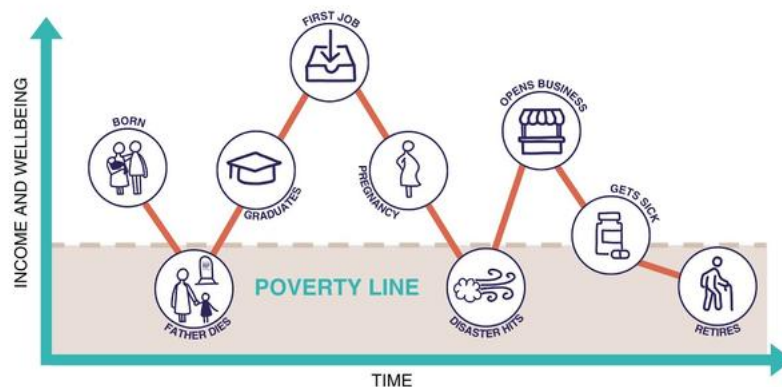
This is particularly important when disasters hit and lots of people are impacted - when everyone is struggling, it is hard for people to support each other.

Why is social protection important?

Now we will look at the impacts of social protection and how it can help people throughout their life, including in times of disasters.

Social protection helps individuals and families to look after themselves and protect themselves from poverty. We all have times in our lives when it is harder to work and to have enough money.

Lifecycle social protection

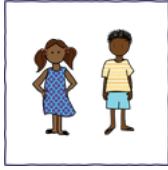


Watch: How social protection supports people at different stages of their life

Benefits of regular, predictable social protection

- Pay for the things we need such as food and power
- Access services like health and education
- Save money
- Start a business
- Contribute to our family and community

Social protection can improve social outcomes



Children's health, nutrition and growth



Children's education (including girls' education)



Gender equality



Social inclusion for other vulnerable populations



Disability inclusion

Social protection during shocks

Many countries have used social protection like cash transfers to respond to disasters such as COVID-19, tropical cyclones, and volcanic eruptions.

Giving people money during a disaster means that:



People can keep buying food and things they need.



People who work can still go to work.



People are less likely to resort to negative strategies like selling assets to get money.

Climate change and social protection

The Pacific faces ongoing shocks and disasters. Climate change is adding to the region's risk level.

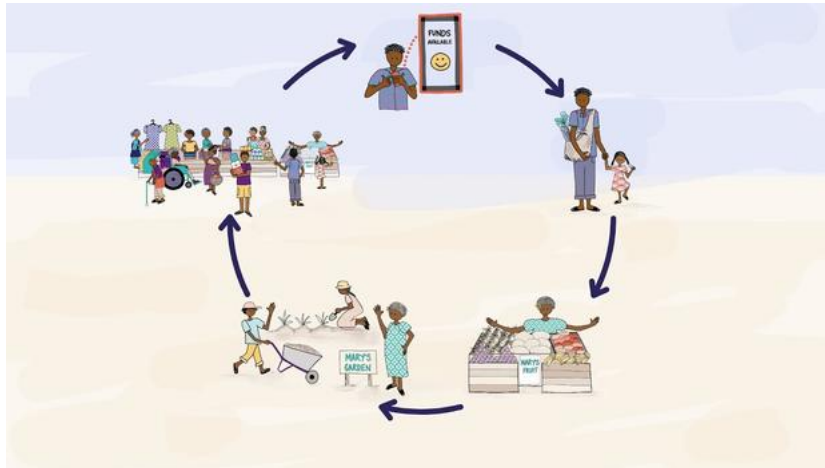
Social protection systems can be used to help people manage climate change and other risks, including helping them to prepare, respond and recover from shocks.

Social protection can also help communities and boost local economies.



Multiplier effect

In some countries, there is evidence that for every dollar invested in social protection, more than a dollar is made from local markets – this is what we call the ‘multiplier effect’.



Watch: Multiplier effect

Mythbuster

There are lots of myths and perceptions related to social protection that you may have heard before.

You might hear people say that social protection will make people lazy.

Do you think this is true or false?



This myth is false

There is no systematic evidence of cash transfers making people lazy, with research showing that there was no significant decrease in the number of hours worked or labor market participation as a result of receiving cash transfers.

How is social protection implemented in the Pacific?

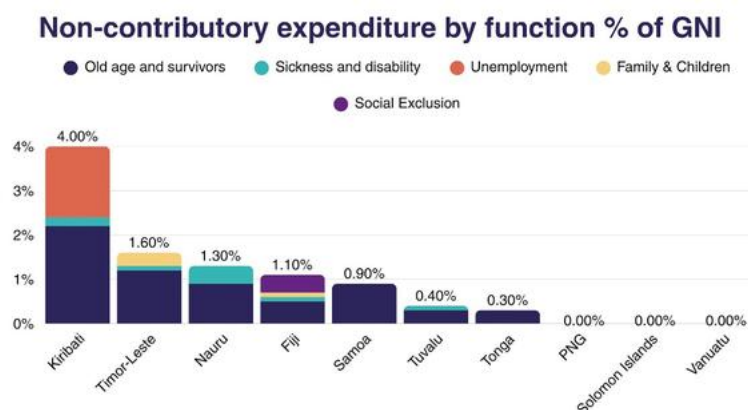
Finally, let's look at how social protection is put into practice across the Pacific. Some people think that formal social protection systems are quite new in the region—but in fact, many countries have been investing in and building these systems for decades.

In this section, we'll explore:

- how social protection systems have evolved
- how countries in the Pacific have used social protection to respond to shocks and disasters
- the “Pacific model” of social protection - where social protection has been gradually strengthened over time to meet the needs of different populations.

Social protection in the Pacific

Around the Pacific, countries are increasingly investing in social protection. Although it is different in each country, most countries are already spending money on social protection. Simple life cycle schemes, such as social pensions supporting the elderly are common. Poverty-targeted schemes are less common.

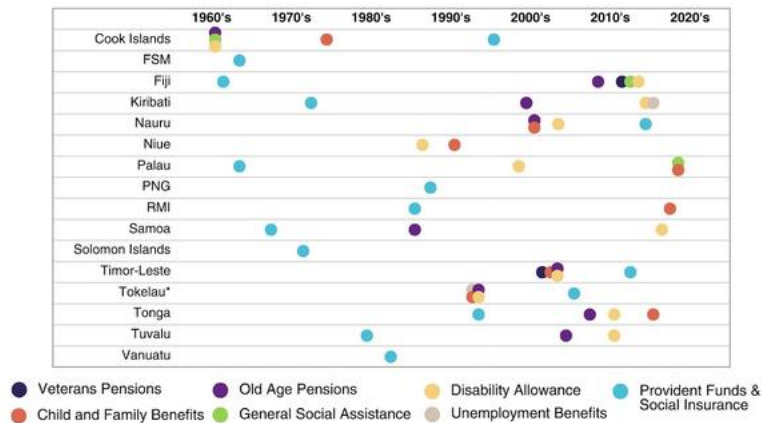


[Watch: Social protection financing in the Pacific](#)

Find out more about social protection in the Pacific, with this **[database of social protection expenditure](#)** across a selection of in the Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste.

Timeline of Social protection in the Pacific

Countries have usually started by setting up contributory schemes such as provident funds, but in the last 20 years many countries have introduced budget-financed social protection programs.



[Watch: Timeline of social protection in the Pacific](#)

Social protection as a response to disasters

Many Pacific countries have use social protection to respond to disasters. For example:

- The provident funds and various social assistance schemes (social pensions and disability benefits) have been used to cushion the impact of tropical cyclones (including in Fiji and Tonga).
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries used social protection to cushion the impacts of the pandemic.
- The pandemic showed the importance of strong ongoing social protection systems: countries with existing social protection systems could use them to respond quickly.

The Pacific model of social protection

The Pacific model of social protection shows how systems can be gradually strengthened over time.



Introducing new schemes.



Increasing how many people are eligible, for example lowering the age when people can receive old age benefits.



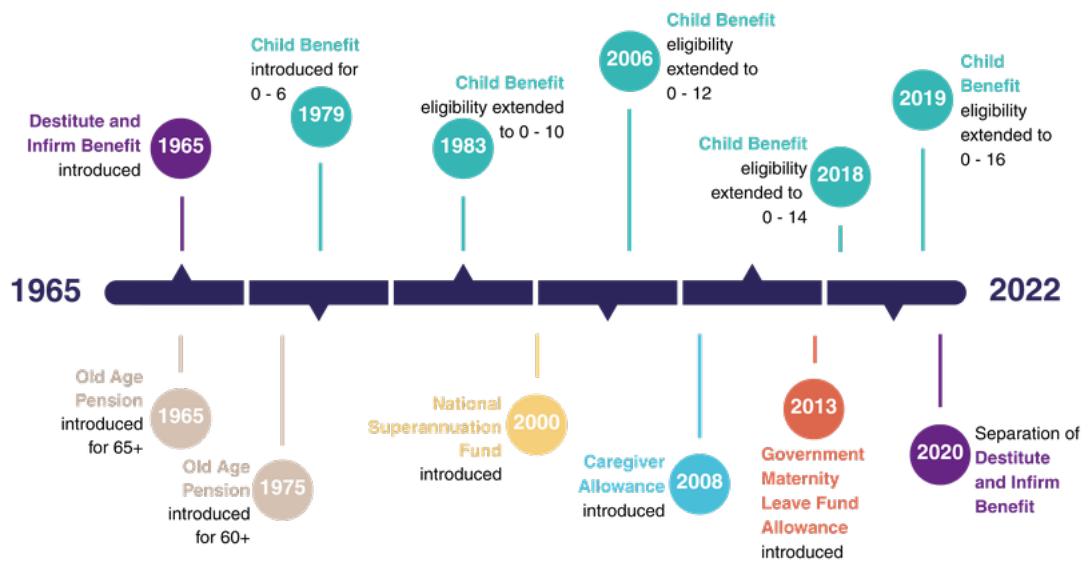
Increasing benefit levels, which is important to keep up with the cost of living and helps people better take care of themselves.



Setting different benefit levels within a scheme – for example, in some countries the severity of a person's disability impacts how much they receive.

The Cook Islands social protection system

The Cook Islands social protection system is a good example of how these strategies can be used. Over time, new schemes have been added and existing schemes have been expanded to include more people.



Benefit levels have also increased. The real value of the old age benefit for people 70 years and over grew 120% between 2000 and 2021. There is also a lower benefit level for people 60-69 years, compared to those 70 years and over.

Congratulations on completing this course!

Throughout this course, we've explored what social protection is, why it matters, and how it is implemented across the region.

- You've learned that social protection includes a wide range of policies and programs—both contributory and non-contributory—that help reduce poverty, manage risks, and support inclusive development.
- You've seen that social protection is important throughout the life course, helping individuals and families during times of need, and playing a critical role during shocks and disasters.
- And finally, you've explored how Pacific countries are putting social protection into action, drawing on both formal and informal systems, and adapting these systems over time to meet local needs and contexts.

While approaches may differ across the Pacific, one thing is clear: strong, inclusive, and context-appropriate social protection systems are essential for building resilience, promoting wellbeing, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Thank you for your participation. We hope this has sparked your interest in the evolving and vital role of social protection in the Pacific and beyond.



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Things to think about

Now that you've completed the training, take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- How would you describe social protection and what does it mean in your country?
- How does your community help people who do not have enough money?
- How else might social protection support people to deal with climate change related shocks?
- How do you think Cash transfers support and promote resilience in the Pacific Islands?
- Does social protection exist in your country?
- Do you think your country has any of the following in place - child benefit, disability benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, provident fund, maternity protection, sickness benefits, benefits for poor families

To receive your certificate of completion, please complete the final quiz.

[Click here to complete the quiz](#)

More resources

Want to learn more?

Check out socialprotection.org, an online member-based knowledge sharing and capacity building platform, open to social protection practitioners, policymakers, and experts, as well as academics and students.



Check out the below courses:



SPOT e-Learn

A self-paced online learning course by UNESCAP to help us capitalize on social protection as a key policy instrument to achieve inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

Social Protection: A Primer

A free online and self-paced course by IDS about the basics of social protection and its implementation around the world.

Read more:

- **What the evidence says about cash transfers:** Cash transfers: What does the evidence say? A rigorous review of programme impact and of the role of design and implementation features (2016). Overseas Development Institute.
- **How old age benefits can support older women in the Pacific:** Old age pensions in the Pacific: Benefits for women (2023). Devpolicy Blog.
- **How social protection impacts people with disability in the Pacific:** How can social protection be inclusive of persons with disabilities in the Pacific? (2022). P4SP.
- **How the Pacific and Timor-Leste used social protection to respond to COVID-19:** Social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific: A tipping point for the sector? (2021). SPACE.