

Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

Social Protection

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What is social protection in the Pacific?

Persons with disabilities and their families face higher costs in all facets of life and are also at higher risk of poverty. In the Pacific, social protection generally involves transfers of cash, benefits, allowances such as travel allowances, or other in-kind assistance that aims to support equality and community inclusion by assisting people to overcome higher risks and inequalities, to respond to shocks and crises, and to promote opportunities. Social protection is particularly important to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) due to their high vulnerability to sudden economic changes caused by their remoteness, risk of disasters, geographical spread, small internal markets, and limited natural resources.

Role of social protection as a precondition in the Pacific

Social protection is needed because of the additional costs faced by persons with disabilities and their families. These include disability-specific expenses, such as assistive technology and support services, as well as higher general expenses such as medical care and transport. There are also indirect costs associated with disability because persons with disabilities experience lower levels of income than the general population, including lower levels of employment, lower salaries, and being more likely to be engaged in the informal sector. Factors contributing to this include exclusion from education, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of other essential preconditions that would enable economic engagement. The most marginalised groups experience higher rates of poverty, for example women with disabilities and those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. Other indirect costs might be family members forgoing school or work opportunities to provide support (Mont et al., 2022).

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities stated that social protection for persons with disabilities needs to have a clear aim related to facilitating social inclusion. This is a shift from previous 'welfare' models of social protection for persons with disabilities, rooted in a medical model that saw disability as a deficit, and often came with a presumption that persons with disabilities could not work or contribute to their communities (Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, 2016). It is therefore essential that disability-inclusive social protection schemes **aim to enable the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in their communities on an equal basis with others.**

This purpose is already a strong feature of PICT culture, traditions, and laws, reflected in concepts of togetherness, inclusion, and ensuring individuals are provided for within the community setting. It is essential that government schemes, programs, and legislation consider, draw from, and build upon cultural and local laws and traditions when devising social protection mechanisms. Doing so will lead to stronger schemes, as they will not be imposing a new model but rather building upon existing cultural strengths that communities already understand and accept.

Social protection under the CRPD

Under Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), states are required to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities receive equal access to mainstream social protection programs and services (such as poverty reduction, housing and retirement schemes) as well as access to specific programs and services for disability-related needs and expenses. Social protection also strongly relates to other provisions of the CRPD, including the right to live independently and be included in the community (Article 19), respect for home and the family (Article 23), education (Article 24), health (Article 25), rehabilitation (Article 26) and work and employment (Article 27).

Current status of social protection in the Pacific

There is evidence of disability benefits already in existence in the Pacific region, with seven countries introducing schemes since 2005 and many more doing so recently. This is partly due to a broader trend towards social protection efforts but is also tied to PICTs' efforts to ratify the CRPD in recent years (Knox-Vydmanov & Cote, 2023). While this progress is positive, there is still much work to be done, as anecdotal evidence shows that the disability-specific schemes are not meeting the additional costs needed to adequately overcome the barriers to inclusion. There have been pockets of success, but there is much work still to do to ensure that persons with disabilities access mainstream social protection programs, related to issues including those described below.

Key issues for social protection in the Pacific

- **Investment levels:** A recent study found that Kiribati was the only PICT that spent more on social protection than the average of all other countries in their income bracket (Knox-Vydmanov, Soni, Satriana, & Attenborough, 2023).
- **Amount of social protection available to persons with disabilities:** Whilst it is positive that PICTs are increasingly enacting schemes such as disability benefits, the amount of allowances provided is significantly less than adequate to cover the many additional costs that persons with disabilities face. Moreover, schemes often do not incorporate measures to increase adequately as costs of living increase.
- **Types of social protections:** The type and amount of support required by different persons with disabilities varies. CRPD-aligned social protection schemes must be designed to include a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of disabilities and be able to consider functional limitations and support needs.

- **Disability-specific schemes that are incompatible with work or other social protection payments:** The purpose of disability support benefits as a pre-condition to inclusion is to address the burden of the additional costs of disability, which often exclude persons with disabilities from participating equally in everyday life. Disqualifying persons with disabilities who work, or who receive other social protection payments, from disability-specific benefits defeats this purpose.
- **Lack of legislation:** Many countries have not enacted disability benefits into law, which undermines confidence in their longevity and sustainability.
- **Barriers to assessments for disability-specific social protections:** In many PICTs, eligibility assessment has been based on a medical model of disability. For example, to be eligible, a person may have to show evidence that a medical professional has assessed them as having a particular impairment. This is problematic, as (i) it does not consider the actual support needs of the person based on their circumstances; and (ii) there are barriers to accessing medical professionals. Fiji's assessment scheme was developed in consultation with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and focuses on the support required, which, in most cases, can be provided by a community worker.
- **Access to schemes and payments:** For both mainstream and disability-specific schemes, there are many barriers for persons with disabilities to access and receive payments. This can include inaccessible information and venues, especially for payments and vouchers that have to be collected in person. For people living in rural and remote areas with limited access to public transportation and public services, travel to collect their social welfare assistance can be impossible. Some persons with disabilities may rely on family members to collect their funds, which can lead to them not receiving the allowance.
- **Inclusive and accessible awareness-raising and communication** regarding the availability of schemes is also crucial for the success of social protection for persons with disabilities. Strong engagement by OPDs is a critical enabler here.

Further resources:

CBM Global. (2021). [*Disability inclusive cash assistance: Learnings from practice in humanitarian response.*](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). [*Joint statement towards inclusive social protection systems supporting the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities.*](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO), International Disability Alliance (IDA), & United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). (2022). [*Social protection for the inclusion of persons with disabilities*](#) (pp. 6-9).

Knox-Vydmanov, C., & Cote, A. (2023). [*The path towards inclusive social protection for persons with disabilities in the Pacific.*](#)

Mont, D., Cote, A., Hanass-Hancock, J., Banks, L. M., Grigorus, V., Carraro, L., Morris, Z., & Pinilla-Roncancio, M. (2022). [*Estimating the extra costs for disability for social protection programs.*](#)

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. (2016). [*The rights of persons with disabilities to social protection.*](#)