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## **UN-backed Asia-Pacific forum stresses social protection for poverty reduction**



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Basic social protection for all segments of the population is key to protecting people from extreme poverty and economic exclusion, according to views expressed today by government representatives from the Asia-Pacific region attending a United Nations forum in Thailand.

Developing countries can afford to provide universal basic social protection, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)) says in an assessment, which formed the basis for discussions at the ESCAP Commission Session for Asia-Pacific governments being held in Bangkok.

According to the ESCAP study, entitled “The Promise of Protection,” a universal basic social protection package costs no more than 3 per cent of gross national income (GNI) and is affordable at virtually any stage of economic development.

“Social protection is not a cost,” Noeleen Heyzer, the ESCAP Executive Secretary, [told](#) the Ministerial Round Table on the topic. “It is an investment and smart economics.”

In their presentations, governments from Central Asia to the Pacific Island sub-region outlined national social protection policies and programmes tailored to their specific socio-economic conditions.

Summing up the discussions, Ms. Heyzer emphasized that social protection is also a question of entitlement and the State’s social obligation. “It is also a matter of rights. It is a social contract with our people,” she said.

According to ESCAP, social protection should not be seen simply as a “handout,” but as creating conditions which help build a “staircase” for the most vulnerable to graduate out of poverty and exclusion. By reducing their vulnerability, a “social protection floor” provides the poor with the opportunity and confidence to take risks to improve their lives.

Sixty Asia-Pacific countries are attending the annual session, which [began](#) last Thursday and will continue until Wednesday.

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