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How can FAO assist in improving social protection for rural communities in Europe and Central Asia?

Türkiye FAO and social protection

Social protection is a fundamental human right recognized by international conventions¹ and the 2030 Agenda, where SDG Target 1.3 calls for “the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, leading to substantial coverage of the poor and the

Table I. Core pillars of social protection for rural populations

Social protection type	Sub-categories of social protection	Examples of social protection transfers
Social insurance	Contributory pensions	Old age, survivors’, disability benefits
	Other social insurance	Occupational injuries, paid sick leave, health, parental leave
Social assistance	Unconditional cash transfers	Poverty-targeted, emergency transfers, family/orphan allowance, charity
	Conditional cash transfers	Cash transfers conditional upon actions that improve e.g. nutritional, educational or health outcomes
	Social pensions	Old age, disability, survivors’ benefits
	Food and in-kind transfers	Food stamps, food distribution, nutritional schemes, non-food support
	School feeding	Programmes that provide food to children or their households through schools or that are conditional on school attendance
	Public works	Cash or food for work schemes
	Fee waivers and subsidies	Health, education, food, housing, utility, agricultural input subsidies
	Other	Scholarships, social care
Labour market programmes	Active labour market programmes	Skills training, workplace adaptation, activation and intermediation services
	Passive labour market programmes	Out-of-work income support
Agricultural insurance schemes	Indemnity-based	Named or multiple peril crop insurance
	Index-based	Weather-based, area-yield or remote sensing enabled insurance

Sources: FAO. 2021. *Protecting livelihoods – Linking agricultural insurance and social protection*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2690en>; World Bank. 2019. *The Atlas of Social Protection: Indicators of Resilience and Equity*. In: *The World Bank*. Washington, DC. Cited 17 February 2021. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/the-atlas-of-social-protection-indicators-of-resilience-and-equity/Type/TABLE/preview/on>

¹ International Labour Organization (ILO) Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102); Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

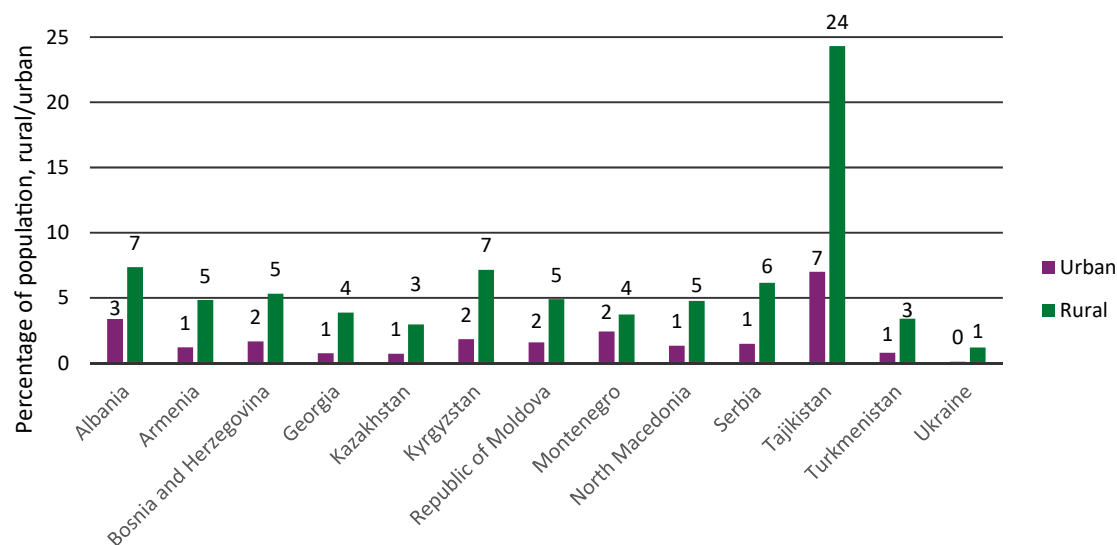
vulnerable by 2030” (UN, 2015, p. 15). FAO (2017, p. xii) envisages that social protection systems should support people in rural areas and those whose livelihoods depend on natural resources, in order to “ensure their food security and improved nutrition, protect them before, during and after shocks and stresses, promote resilient livelihoods and sustainable management of eco-systems, and stimulate pro-poor growth and inclusive rural development”. Within this vision, FAO seeks to guarantee that rural populations enjoy their right to adequate and comprehensive social protection. Expanding the coverage, adequacy and comprehensiveness of social protection is key to improving food and nutrition security, tackling rural poverty, and facilitating rural development (FAO, 2017).

The three main types of social protection programmes (see Table I) are noncontributory taxfinanced social assistance, contributory social insurance (such as old age pensions and unemployment benefits) and labour market programmes (ILO and FAO, 2021). Agricultural insurance schemes (contributory or subsidized) are additional tools that can enhance protection for small farmers (FAO, 2021).

The regional context: the nature of risks and vulnerabilities facing rural populations

Despite the region’s legacy of well-developed social protection systems, 47 percent of the rural population² in the countries and territories covered by this brief do not receive any social protection benefits (World Bank, 2019).³ As seen in Figure I, rural populations in the region face a significant risk of income and multidimensional poverty which leads to food insecurity, malnutrition and use of child labour (FAO et al., 2021).

Figure I. Share of population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty in the region



Source: Alkire, S., Kanagaratnam, U. & Suppa, N. 2020. Global MPI data tables and do-files 2020 – archive. In: *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative*. Oxford, UK, University of Oxford. Cited 06 May 2021. <https://ophi.org.uk/data-tables-do-files-2020-archive>

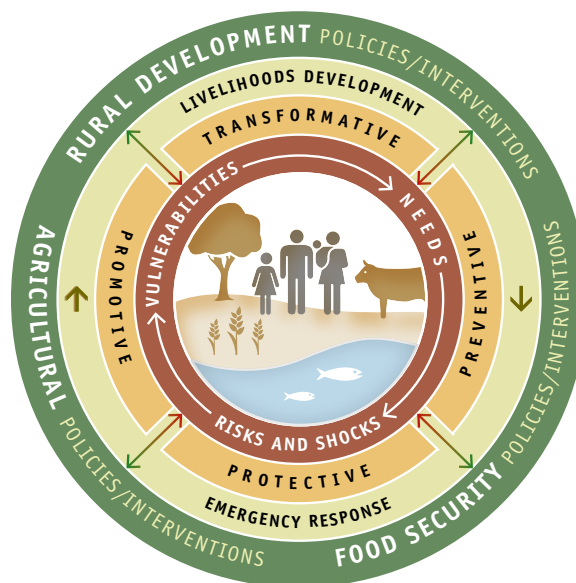
Note: A person is identified as multidimensionally poor if s/he is deprived in at least one-third of the weighted indicators. The term vulnerable to multidimensional poverty represents those who are close to the one-third threshold (deprived in 20 percent to 33.33 percent of weighted indicators).

Rural populations often face heightened exposure to, and risks associated with, environmental degradation, natural disasters and climate change. Limited access to decent jobs pushes large sections of the working age population towards low productivity, and unprotected or precarious on- or off-farm

² The estimate is a regional average weighted to the rural populations of each country/territory and is based on the World Bank (2019). Data are unavailable for North Macedonia and Turkmenistan.

³ This report covers Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo*, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

Figure II. FAO's comprehensive approach to social protection for rural communities



Source: FAO. 2017. *FAO social protection framework: Promoting rural development for all*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/i7016e/i7016e.pdf>, p.17.

employment. Moreover, poverty and a lack of decent jobs further fuel labour migration from rural areas. To tackle these vulnerabilities, there is a need to expand social protection schemes and ensure their coordination with agricultural, rural development and food security policies as demonstrated in Figure II.

Rural populations' access to comprehensive social protection in Europe and Central Asia

Access to comprehensive social protection schemes is limited in rural areas of the region. In the countries and territories covered by this brief, 53 percent of the rural populations receive one or more types of social protection and labour benefits. Thirty-nine percent of rural populations are covered by social insurance, 21 percent by social assistance and 6 percent by labour market schemes (World Bank, 2019). In addition, social protection is underinvested in the region accounting for 10.1 percent of the region's⁴ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared with 19.3 percent of GDP in the European Union (ILO, 2021; Eurostat, 2019). Contributory pensions (old-age, survivors' and disability) have the largest coverage and adequacy⁵ for rural households. Yet, the predominance of minimum pensions for older men pensioners highlights the social protection gaps for younger men, women and children. Furthermore, social assistance schemes for low-income groups are limited in size and scope. Only one-third of the poorest quintile in rural areas in FAO programme countries and territories are covered by social assistance schemes. Moreover, benefits are too modest to have a poverty reduction impact: only 25 percent of post-transfer household consumption on average (World Bank, 2019).

What are the main barriers faced by rural populations in accessing social protection?

The key barriers faced by rural populations in accessing social protection are manifold and include: (i) exclusion from legal frameworks and programme design; (ii) financial barriers (both for the state and for beneficiaries); (iii) limited institutional capacity/burdensome administrative procedures; (iv)

⁴ All FAO programme countries/territories except Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Turkmenistan for which data are unavailable.

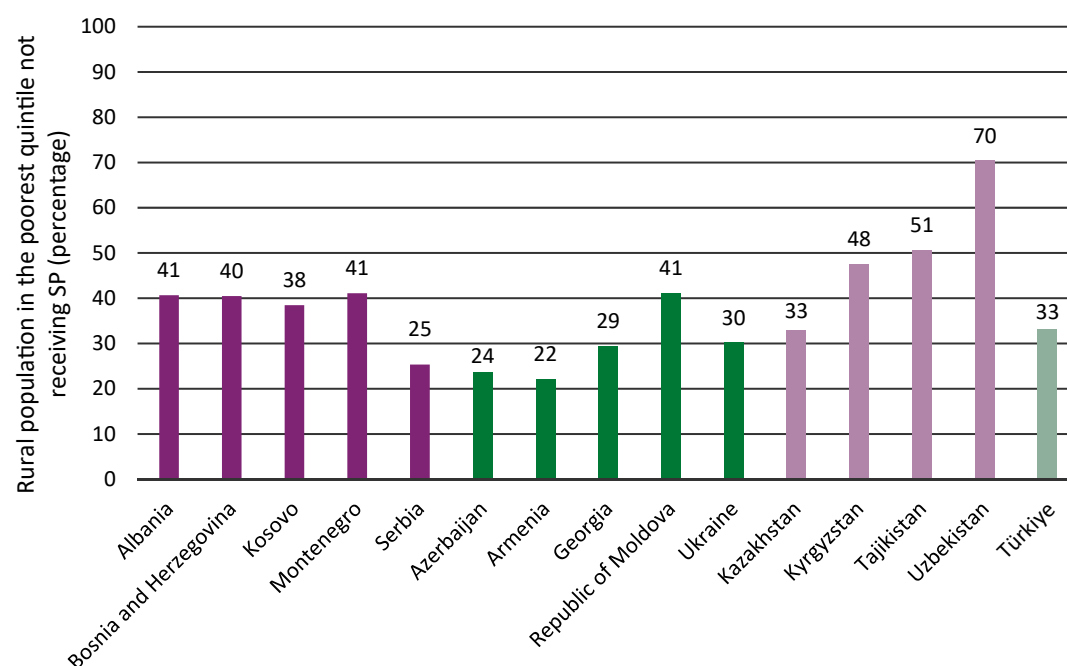
⁵ Adequacy is defined as the total transfer amount received by all beneficiaries in a quintile as a share of the total welfare of beneficiaries in that quintile (World Bank, 2019).

inadequate awareness and information among rural populations and local service-providers leading to the exclusion of rural beneficiaries; and (v) lack of coherence and fragmentation in social protection systems, leading to gaps in coverage, duplications, inefficiencies and distorted incentive structures (FAO, 2016; Vukovic, 2018; ILO and FAO, 2021; Allieu and Ocampo, 2019; Sato, 2021).

These barriers disproportionately limit rural poor households' access to social protection (see Figure III) and are mirrored in real life in various ways across the region:

- ◆ Rural households who own a land plot are often excluded from targeted social assistance schemes, regardless of whether the land is productive and the family can use it productively.
- ◆ Rural populations often have pensions with shorter contributory periods and lower contribution rates. This reduces both pension size and incentives for potential beneficiaries to join and contribute.
- ◆ Rural women often work as contributing family members with limited or no access to social insurance. Women tend to work in lower paid jobs and with fewer years of contributions leading to lower pension size. Rural women also lag behind urban women in enjoying maternity rights due to widespread informality in rural labour markets.
- ◆ Administrative processes are not always tailored to rural clients. Procedures are complex and require the meticulous management of personal documents, records and deadlines.
- ◆ There is inadequate coordination between public employment, agricultural extension and social protection services, for example, through data exchange, joint meetings or standard operating procedures.
- ◆ The engagement of non-public entities, such as rural-focused non-governmental organizations and cooperatives, in social and labour market service delivery is underutilized.

Figure III. Rural population in the poorest quintile not receiving social protection as a percentage of the rural population in the same quintile, in Europe and Central Asia



Source: World Bank. 2019. The Atlas of Social Protection: Indicators of Resilience and Equity. In: *The World Bank*. Washington, DC. Cited 27 February 2021. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/the-atlas-of-social-protection-indicators-of-resilience-and-equity/Type/TABLE/preview/on>

Notes: (i) Latest available data are used (2008–2018). (ii) Social protection here refers to social insurance and social assistance schemes.

What can FAO do to tackle social protection challenges in the region?

FAO currently provides technical support to the economies across the Europe and Central Asia region in strengthening social protection for rural populations through evidence generation, policy advice and advocacy, and programme implementation.

- ◆ **Evidence generation:** FAO provides support to governments in generating evidence on the risks faced by rural populations, and suggests social protection solutions to avert these risks. It is important to make the economic and human rights cases for social protection. To this end, FAO (i) conducts country-level situation analyses, and policy and programme evaluations, (ii) improves national household surveys, (iii) digitizes social and rural registries, and (iv) undertakes gender-sensitive poverty and vulnerability analyses.
- ◆ **Policy advice and advocacy:** FAO provides policy advice on the design of social protection schemes for rural communities in line with agricultural, rural development and labour market policies. Coordination and dialogue between central and local authorities are key to tackling the fragmentation in national social protection systems.
- ◆ **Programme implementation:** FAO documents promising practices from the implemented projects and programmes. For example, FAO has developed the “Cash+” model to enhance the economic, social and environmental impacts of cash transfers, combining them with productive support, technical training, extension and coaching services. This approach has improved nutritional outcomes and the agricultural productive capacity of rural social assistance beneficiaries in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, the provision of schoolfeeding programmes and matching grants for returning migrants in Tajikistan exemplifies FAO’s experience in improving social protection outcomes.
- ◆ **Cross-cutting interventions:** Digitalization is a cross-cutting issue where FAO helps countries to build rural- and gender-responsive digitalization paths, to integrate social and agricultural databases and to ensure automated registration, delivery and monitoring of social protection systems.

Further analysis and inspiration

This document is based on the report, *Improving social protection for rural populations in Europe and Central Asia: Priorities for FAO*, prepared by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in 2022.⁶ Further data analysis, good practices and policy pathways are detailed in this report. In addition, global priority areas for social protection and future recommendations for the UN family are elaborated in the joint ILO, FAO and UNICEF report, *UN collaboration on social protection: Reaching consensus on how to accelerate social protection systems-building* (2022).⁷

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⁶ The report is available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc1925en>.

⁷ The report is available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0015en>.

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