

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

6–8 October • ADB Headquarters, Manila



SESSION 2

Breaking Barriers: Enabling Gender Equality through Social Protection

MODERATORS



Cindy Bryson
Principal Social Sector Specialist
Human and Social Development Sector Office
Sectors Department 3
Asian Development Bank

Cindy Bryson works across social development and education, supporting the design and implementation of projects in Pacific Island countries. Her work focuses on skills development, livelihoods, gender equality, social inclusion, and expanding opportunities for women and young people. She is a member of the organizing team for the Asia-Pacific Social Protection Week 2026.



Namrata Saraogi
Social Sector Specialist
Human and Social Development Sector Office
Sectors Department 3
Asian Development Bank

Namrata Saraogi has nearly 15 years of experience designing and implementing education and social protection programs globally. She currently serves as a Social Sector Specialist at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), where she leads programs and projects focused on school and tertiary education reform. Her career spans global institutions, including UNICEF, where she led the European Union's Programme on Social Protection Financing, spearheading efforts to strengthen social protection systems in low- and middle-income countries. She also managed UNICEF India's COVID-19 Emergency Response in close coordination with other UN agencies. At the World Bank Group, she led analytical and operational projects focused on strengthening education data systems, improving learning outcomes, and advancing institutional reforms.

SPEAKERS and PANELIST



Hera Subediang
Chief of Human Service
Ministry of Health and Human Services
Government of Palau

Hera Subediang is an accomplished public sector leader with more than a decade of experience in human services, health administration, program management, and community development. She currently serves as the Acting Director of the Bureau of Human Services within the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) of Palau, overseeing the Office of Persons with Disability, the Division of Family Services, the Division of Aging, and the Division of Community Support.

Prior to her current role, Hera served as Acting Chief of the Division of Human Services from 2023 to 2025, where she managed programs and services supporting persons with disabilities, families, older adults, and vulnerable communities. She also held leadership positions as Operations Manager for the Division of Human Services and Program Manager for Family Planning Programs, leading program operations, coordinating professional training for healthcare providers, and implementing community outreach initiatives.

She is currently pursuing studies in Community and Public Health (CPH) at Palau Community College. She also holds Certificates of Completion in Computer Applications and Business Management from Northern Marianas College.



Tsend Munkhzul
Director
Evaluation, Monitoring and Internal
Auditing Department
Government of Mongolia

Tsend Munkhul has been working for the Ministry for last 10 years as Director of Family policy department and the Department of Monitoring, evaluation and internal auditing.



Lauren Whitehead
Social Protection and Gender Lead
UNICEF

Lauren Whitehead oversees a global portfolio of technical assistance strengthening gender-responsive and transformative social protection, including care and support systems, with colleagues across the more than 130 countries and territories UNICEF serves. Previously, she was Chief Technical Specialist for the Generation Equality Action Coalitions at UN Women, overseeing delivery of thematic coalitions between governments, UN agencies, IFIs, foundations, private sector, and civil society to accelerate progress towards SDG 5 on gender equality.

Prior to this, Lauren spent six years at BRAC, where she led as the Director of Technical Assistance overseeing engagements with governments worldwide. She managed 40+ global staff to design and deliver technical assistance, advisory services, and policy advocacy to governments, bilateral and multilateral institutions, and international NGOs. Lauren's expertise includes the intersection of social protection and gender, economic inclusion, and measurement and evaluation. She has also worked with UNHCR, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and various non-profit organizations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. She holds an M.A. from Georgetown University and a B.A. from Princeton University.



Keiko Nowacka
Director
Gender Equality Division, Climate Change and
Sustainable Development Department
Asian Development Bank

Keiko Nowacka leads and oversees the division's mandate on gender equality and women's empowerment. Prior to joining ADB, Keiko led the gender program at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Development Centre, where she was responsible for the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). She has also held positions at UNESCO, where

she led the first Global Report on gender and culture (2014) and focused on gender mainstreaming in the cultural and creative industries; she has also worked as an Operations Manager at Camfed, an NGO supporting secondary girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa. She has a PhD from the University of Cambridge and is a graduate from the University of Sydney.