

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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SESSION 4

Advancing Autonomy: Disability-Inclusive Social Protection

MODERATOR



Charles Knox-Vydmanov
Social Policy Specialist (Inclusive Social Protection – Disability), UNICEF

Charles Knox-Vydmanov has over 18 years of experience working in the field of social protection, focusing on approaches to build inclusive social protection systems with particular attention to persons with disabilities, older persons, and children. This has included technical support and policy analysis in more than 25 low- and middle-income countries working in partnership with stakeholders across government, civil society, academia and international organizations. Charles has worked for a variety of organizations across the social protection space including the International Labour Organization, HelpAge International and also as an independent consultant.

SPEAKERS and PANELISTS



Lusine Kocharyan
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
Government of Armenia

Lusine Kocharyan is a public health professional with nearly 30 years of experience in government, healthcare, humanitarian response, and the Red Cross Movement. She has held senior leadership roles including Head of the Health Care Policy Department at the Ministry of Health, Director of the State Tuberculosis Control and Care Centre, Secretary General of the Ministry of Health during the COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflict, and Head of Disaster Risk Reduction at the Armenian Red Cross Society.

Lusine's experience spans health policy, hospital management, emergency response, and social protection. Her work with vulnerable populations, particularly as director of an orphanage for children with complex disabilities, reinforced her commitment to people-centered policies and services.

She holds a Master of Public Health from the American University of Armenia and remains actively engaged in academic and research activities. Through her public service, she focuses on strengthening social protection systems, advancing labor rights, and improving the well-being and resilience of communities across Armenia.



Berthor Tongpaorthor
Head of Disability Development Division
Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
Government of Lao PDR

Berthor Tongpaorthor is a senior Lao public official specializing in inclusive social protection, disability policy, and international human rights frameworks. He serves as the Head of the Disability Development Division within the Department of Policy for Devotees, Persons with Disabilities, and Older Persons at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) of Lao PDR.

In his role, Mr. Tongpaorthor leads strategic national initiatives aimed at advancing disability inclusion, social welfare, and policy implementation across Lao PDR. He regularly represents the Lao government in international and regional forums, including serving as a senior delegate for the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD).



Ngin Saorath
Executive President
Disability Youth Network Organization; and
Steering Committee Member
ASEAN Disability Forum

Ngin Saorath is a prominent leader and founder of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) both in Cambodia and across Asia. He brings nearly three decades of technical expertise in policy advocacy, legal framework development, and social protection to regional disability-inclusive development.

Throughout his distinguished career—which includes 15 years as Executive Director of the Cambodian Disabled People’s Organization (CDPO) and serving as Chairperson of the ASEAN Disability Forum—Saorath has engaged directly with high-level political leaders and policymakers across the region, and was instrumental in urging governments to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopt national disability legislation, and establish inclusive social protection schemes. In Cambodia, he directly advised the Royal Government on pioneering social protection mechanisms, including disability classification frameworks and national employment quota systems.

Saorath has led key policy studies, including an in-depth analysis of COVID-19 impacts on access to the national IDPoor social protection scheme (with OXFAM) and World Bank research on integrating social accountability into public service delivery systems. His ongoing work bridges social protection, GEDSI (Gender, Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion), climate change resilience, and human rights across the ASEAN region and broader Asian context.



Shirleen Ali
Gender, Disability, and Social Inclusion Adviser
Partnerships for Social Protection (P4SP)

Shirleen Ali is a Pacific islander and independent consultant from Fiji, with over 20 years' experience of living and working in the Pacific. As Gender, Disability and Social Inclusion Adviser with the Partnerships for Social Protection program, her recent work includes contributing to the review of Naoero's Disability Allowance, development of Tuvalu's National Social Protection Policy, research on intimate partner violence and social protection, and a Pacific Disability Inclusive Guidance Note with organizations of persons with disabilities and the Pacific Disability Forum.



Benjamin Graham
Director
Fragility and Engagement Division
Climate Change and Sustainable
Development Department
Asian Development Bank

Ben Graham leads thematic teams that support ADB operations in fragile and conflict-affected situations and small island developing states, ADB engagement with civil society organizations, and the Bank's work on poverty and social analysis and disability inclusion. In earlier roles he served as Advisor and Principal Evaluation Specialist in ADB's Independent Evaluation Department, Chief Secretary of the Marshall Islands, and consultant and advisor based in Washington, DC and the Pacific region, focusing on public sector reforms, climate change adaptation, and capacity development. He holds degrees in economics, management, and development policy from the University of Hawaii, Georgetown University, and Australian National University.