

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY 3 Securing the Future of Social Protection

MODERATOR



Bhargav Dasgupta
Vice-President (Market Solutions)
Asian Development Bank

VP Dasgupta is responsible for the Private Sector Operations Department and Office of Markets Development and Public-Private Partnerships. He is a financial industry leader with over 35 years of experience across a range of economies, including in Asia and the Pacific. He was previously Chief Executive Officer of ICICI Lombard General Insurance Co. Ltd., the largest nonlife insurance company in India. He led ICICI's successful initial public offering, making it the first listed general insurance company in India.

In his earlier years at ICICI Bank, VP Dasgupta held various leadership positions in project finance, corporate banking and treasury, e-commerce, international banking, and insurance. He was instrumental in ICICI's globalization and insurance business growth. As Senior General Manager and Head of the International Business Group and the Global Markets Group, VP Dasgupta was responsible for the company's clients in international markets, including correspondent banks and all international lending. He also led the establishment of international operations in 14 countries through branches, subsidiaries, or representative offices.

VP Dasgupta holds a post graduate diploma in business administration from the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India. He obtained his Bachelor of Engineering (mechanical) degree from Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India.

PANELISTS



Farzana Sharmin
State Minister
Ministry of Social Welfare
Government of Bangladesh

Farzana Sharmin (Putul) is a distinguished Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, human rights activist, and prominent political analyst. Born on November 2, 1984, in Dhaka, she originates from a well-known political family in Gouripur, Lalpur, Natore.

Farzana possesses an outstanding academic background in law. She obtained her LL.B (Honours) and LL.M in International Law from the University of Dhaka. Pursuing higher studies in the United Kingdom, she completed a second LL.B (Honours) from the University of London and an LL.M in International Business Law from BPP University, London. She is also an esteemed member of The Honorable Society of Middle Temple, UK.

In addition to her legal expertise, she plays an active role in national reform and governance as a Member of the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission under the Interim Government of Bangladesh. Within the BNP, she holds responsibilities as Special Assistant to the Chairperson's Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, and member of both the Human Rights Affairs Committee and the Media Cell. Dedicated to social service, she regularly offers free legal aid to victims of political persecution and human rights abuses, alongside organizing relief and medical assistance during crises. She is fluent in Bengali, English, Hindi, and Urdu.



Dasho Kesang Deki
Cabinet Secretary
Government of Bhutan

Dasho Kesang Deki chairs the Cabinet Committee overseeing national policy integration across the Social, Economic, Security and Governance sectors, personally coordinating the Governance domain.

With more than three decades of senior leadership experience across public finance, taxation, national governance and public policy, she has spearheaded key national fiscal initiatives, public service enhancement programs, and strategic administrative reforms. Under her leadership, Bhutan is advancing a range of policy reforms aimed at strengthening social protection systems and promoting more inclusive and equitable development. Her career includes extensive board governance and leadership of major cross-ministerial committees, including Chairperson of the National Commission for Women and Children. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Delhi and a Master's in Public Finance from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in Japan.



Renata Nowak-Garmer
Global Director of Social Protection
Women in Informal Employment Globalizing &
Organizing (WIEGO)

Renata Nowak-Garmer provides thought leadership and shapes programmatic strategies and partnerships to strengthen social protection systems and expand access to services for workers in informal employment.

Nowak-Garmer brings two decades of experience with the United Nations Development Programme, serving both at the global level and in Africa, where she was the regional lead for social protection. In this role, she worked across more than 20 countries, advising country offices and governments on strengthening social protection systems and promoting the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable populations. She also led and co-authored numerous reports and publications, and developed policy guidance and tools to inform practice.

She holds an MA in German Philology from Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and a Master's Degree (MIA) in Economic and Political Development from Columbia University, New York, where she was a Harriman Fellow. Most recently, she has completed post-graduate studies in social policy and research at the Bath University, UK.



Valérie Schmitt
Chief of the Universal Social Protection Branch
International Labour Organization (ILO)

Valérie Schmitt is Chief of the Universal Social Protection Branch at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, where she leads a global team supporting governments, workers' and employers' organizations in building inclusive and sustainable social protection systems. She oversees strategic partnerships and resource mobilization efforts to advance universal social protection, including through the ILO's Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All and the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

With 28 years of experience in social protection, Ms. Schmitt has held leadership roles at ILO headquarters and in field assignments across Africa and Asia. She has contributed extensively to global research, policy development, and innovative approaches to financing social protection, promoting its role in supporting inclusive and sustainable development.

Ms. Schmitt holds a postgraduate degree in Quantitative Economics, is a graduate of HEC Paris, and also holds a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Sorbonne University.



Luis Benveniste
Regional Director for People
East Asia and the Pacific
World Bank

Luis Benveniste is responsible for overseeing World Bank's investment and knowledge portfolio for education and skills, health and social policy. As Global Director for Education and Skills, he oversaw the development of a new corporate education strategy from 2023 to 2026. His role included oversight of programs supporting education systems worldwide, from early childhood to tertiary education, and using innovative approaches such as education technology, with a focus on improving learning outcomes and skills that prepare learners of today for the jobs of tomorrow.

Previously, he was the Human Development Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the World Bank. He was a co-author of the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development.

Luis has worked on a wide variety of World Bank-financed education projects across the globe. He received a B.A. Magna Cum Laude in Psychology from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in International Comparative Education from Stanford University.