

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY 1 Social Protection as a Platform for Empowerment

MODERATOR



Ayako Inagaki
Deputy Director General
Sectors Department 3
Asian Development Bank

Ayako Inagaki currently works with the Director General in setting Sector Department 3's strategic direction and oversees sector operations, human resources, talent and budget management, policy dialogue, programming, knowledge management, innovation, and strategic initiatives in Finance, Public Sector Management and Governance, and Human and Social Development sectors offices. She has more than 35 years of professional experience, including over 25 years with ADB. Since joining ADB in 2001 as an Education Specialist, she has held progressively senior roles, including Senior Education Specialist, Principal Social Sector Specialist, Director of the Southeast Asia Human and Social Development Division, and Senior Director of the Human and Social Development Sector Office. In these roles, she led sector operations, knowledge initiatives, innovation, and cross-sector collaboration to advance ADB's work in education, health, social protection, and other cross cutting areas related to human capital development.

Ayako holds a Master's degree in Education from Keio University Graduate School, Japan.

SPEAKERS



Naila Kabeer
Emeritus Professor of Gender and Development
Department of International Development
London School of Economics

Naila Kabeer is Emeritus Professor of Gender and Development at the Department of International Development.

Naila is also a Faculty Associate at LSE's International Inequalities Institute and on the governing board of the Atlantic Fellowship for Social and Economic Equity. She has done extensive advisory work with international agencies (World Bank, ADB, UNDP, UN Women), bilateral agencies (DFID, SIDA, CIDA, IDRC) and NGOs (Oxfam, Action Aid, BRAC, PRADAN and Nijera Kori).

Her most recent projects were supported by ERSC-DIFD Funded Research on Poverty Alleviation: Gender and Labour Market dynamics in Bangladesh and West Bengal. She is on the editorial boards of Feminist Economics and Gender and Development and on the international advisory board of the Canadian Journal of Development Studies. She is also a member of the Inequalities Advisory Group, Bosch Foundation and a member of the Advisory Board of the United Nations University Institute for Global Health.



Rex Gatchalian
Secretary
Department of Social Welfare and Development
Government of the Philippines

As the current Secretary on Social Welfare and Development, Secretary Rex Gatchalian vows to prioritize the ease of doing social welfare and development services through streamlining and digitization of social protection services and improve disaster management and response operations by creating additional response hubs around the country.

He was a Representative of the 1st District of Valenzuela during the 14th Congress wherein he became Vice-chairman for the Congressional Committee for Overseas Workers' Affairs. He was the principal author of Republic

Act No. 10022, which amended the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995. He introduced new policies for the further protection and genuine representation of migrant workers. At the same time, he also principally authored Republic Act No. 9576, which increased the maximum deposit insurance coverage and further strengthened the financial capability of the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation.

From 2013-2022, Secretary Gatchalian served as Mayor of Valenzuela City and championed the “Five Pillars of Good Governance” by prioritizing the delivery of essential programs and services in relation to education, health and social services, housing, employment generation, and trade and industry.



Aishath Zuhurubaan
State Minister
Ministry of Health, Family and Welfare
Government of Maldives

Aishath Zuhurubaan currently leads the Elderly Rights and Well-being Section, advocating for the rights and welfare of senior citizens. Additionally, she contributes her expertise as a member of the National Social Protection Agency Review Committee, representing the social sector. She is committed to social development and public health, and strives to improve the lives of vulnerable populations.



Sudhanshu Handa
Chief Economist and Global Director
for Economic and Social Policy
United Nations Children's Fund

Sudhanshu (Ashu) Handa Ashu is a trained economist, and one of the principal investigators of The Transfer Project, an initiative to measure the wide-ranging impacts of government sponsored cash transfer programs in Sub-Saharan Africa. His current research involves long-term follow-ups of these evaluations to understand the intergenerational effects of early-life income support on adult children of the original recipients, including impacts

on the immune system and biological ageing. Handa previously worked at UNICEF's Office of Research-Innocenti, the Inter-American Development Bank, the University of the West Indies-Mona, the International Food Policy Research Institute, and is currently on-leave from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he is Kenan Eminent Professor of Public Policy. Handa received his PhD in Economics from the University of Toronto.



Fa'atino Masunu Utumapu
Co-chair of the Pacific Disability Forum and
Member, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with
Disabilities

Mataafa Faatino Utumapu is a Samoan disability rights leader, human rights advocate and international policy practitioner, serving as General Manager of Nuanua o le Alofa (NOLA) and a Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee). She is also a Disability Advisor to Samoa's National Human Rights Institution and a Female Co-Chair of the Pacific Disability Forum.

With extensive experience advancing disability-inclusive development, social protection, political participation and the rights of persons with disabilities, Faatino works at the intersection of human rights, policy reform and inclusive social protection systems. Her work focuses on ensuring that persons with disabilities particularly women, children and people facing multiple forms of exclusion are meaningfully included in policy design, decision-making and access to social protection.

As a blind Samoan woman and disability rights leader, she brings lived experience and regional expertise to international policy processes, advocating for rights-based, inclusive and accessible social protection systems that leave no one behind.