

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

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Boosting Resilience to Face Polycrises and Megatrends

Norma Mansor

I. THE WORLD SOCIAL PROTECTION OPERATES IN HAS CHANGED

II. HAS SOCIAL PROTECTION CHANGED WITH IT?

III. CLIMATE: BUILDING RESILIENCE TO SHOCKS AND STRESSES

IV. DEMOGRAPHICS: PREPARING FOR A TRANSFORMATION WE CAN SEE COMING

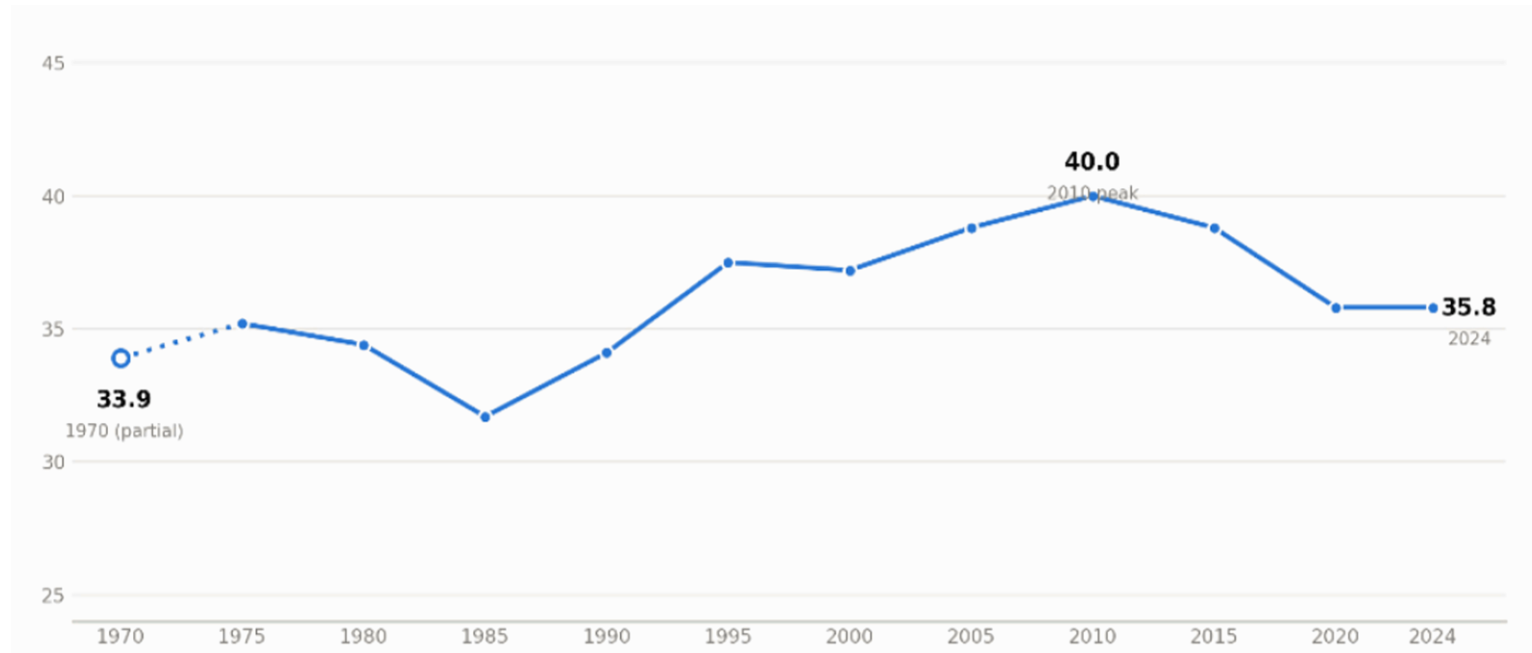
V. RETURN TO THE BIGGER PICTURE



Changing Environments Requires A Change In System

Population-weighted average Gini across Asia-Pacific, 1970–2024

Regional inequality peaked around 2010 and has since eased, but stayed structurally high, in the range of 32 to 40.



Sources: SWIID source data, World Bank population data.



Social Protection Goes Beyond Alleviating Poverty

1 PROTECT

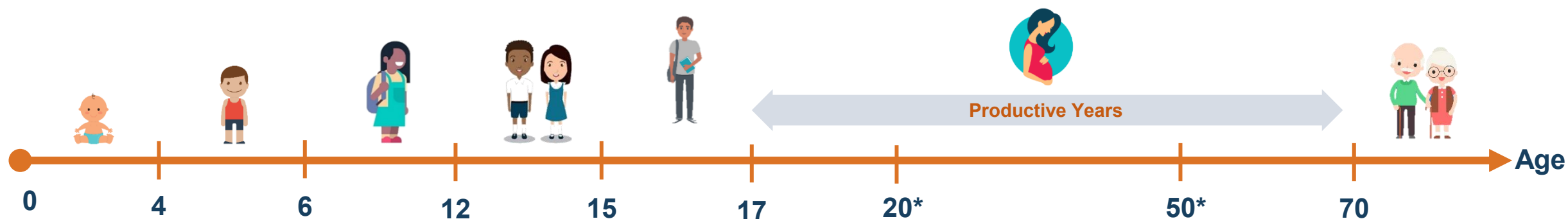
Protect people when risks and shocks materialise
e.g. social assistance, income support, healthcare

2 PREVENT

Prevent people from falling into poverty and vulnerability
e.g. social insurance, savings, risk mitigation

3 PROMOTE

Build capabilities and opportunities to improve livelihood
e.g. skills, labor market intervention, productive inclusion



Social protection manages risks across the life cycle, before, during and after vulnerability occurs



Catering to a World of Poly-crises

The world is now in **VUCA**:



It shows up as poly-crisis: three pressures that **overlap**, not three separate stories.



1 ECONOMIC

- Cost-of-living pressures (price shocks)
- Geopolitical conflict and trade disruption
- Employment and livelihood volatility
- Technological disruption, including AI



2 CLIMATE

- Extreme weather and disasters
- Extreme heat
- Food and water insecurity
- Displacement and asset loss



3 DEMOGRAPHIC

- Rapid population ageing
- Longer lives
- Changing dependency structures
- Growing health and care needs

These risks do not occur in isolation, they interact and compound vulnerability.



That Leads to Major Ramifications for Asia and the Pacific



ECONOMIC

156 million

more people living in poverty due to the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, 2022

ESCAP 2024

Largest ever

monthly increase, as the 2026 Middle East conflict disrupted global oil supply, March 2026

IEA, April 2026

> 15 million

more children in poverty by 2026 from price shocks after the Strait of Hormuz closure

UNICEF, July 2026



CLIMATE

82 million

people affected by climate-related disasters, 2025

EMDAT 2026

8.2 million

more people expected to face acute food insecurity due to the 2026–2027 El Niño

WFP, Aug 2026

31 million

jobs lost annually in South Asia to extreme heat, projected to cut the economy 7% by 2050

World Bank 2026



DEMOGRAPHIC

1.3 billion / 1 in 4

people aged 60+ by 2050

ESCAP 2026

0.72 (2023) → 0.90 (2050)

increase in the economic dependency ratio (non-employed per employed adult)

ILO 2024a

Only 37%

of the working-age population is contributing to a pension (<19% in South and South-East Asia)

Asia 2024b

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Poverty Has Fallen. Is the System Fit for Tomorrow's Risks?



45%

lack access to any social
protection benefit

ESCAP 2024



1.3 billion

workers around two-thirds of the
regional workforce remain
informally employed

ESCAP 2024



8.2% vs 12.9%

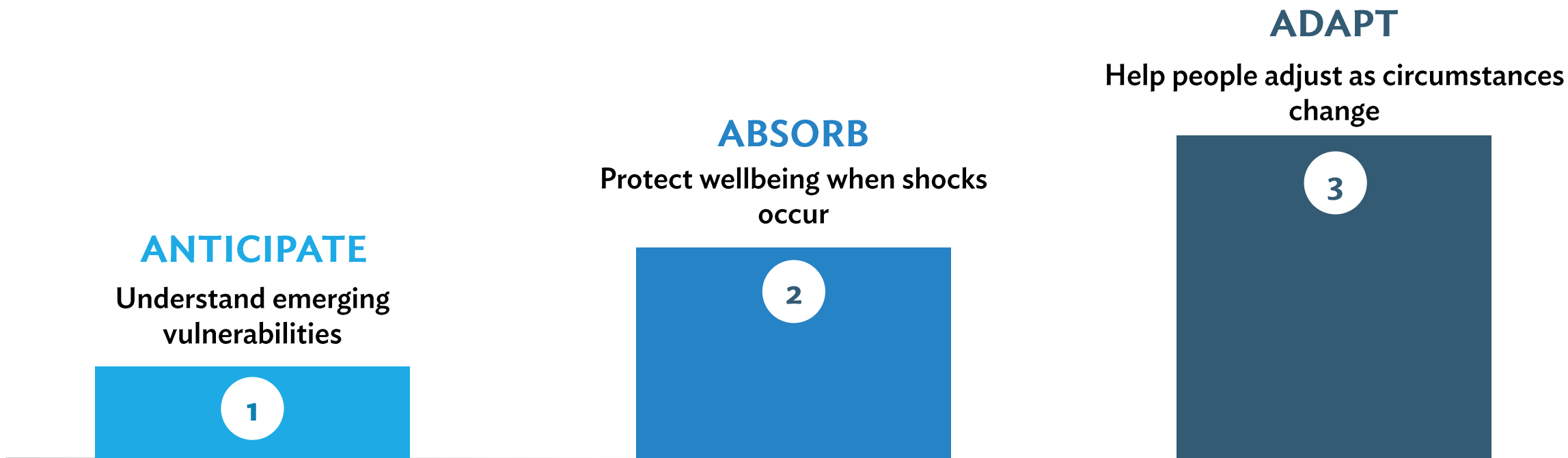
APAC vs. global social protection
spending, % of GDP

ESCAP Working Paper 2024



Moving From Responding to Hardship → Building Resilience

The **3A framework** reframes social protection as something that prevents vulnerability, not only responds to it.



Source: Bahadur et al. 2015

Resilience requires capacity across all three

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Climate Shocks Are Increasingly Livelihood Shocks

CLIMATE SHOCKS & STRESSES

HEALTH

Heat, disease, injury

LIVELIHOODS

Lost working hours, jobs,
agricultural income

ASSETS

Homes, crops, productive
assets

ESSENTIAL NEEDS

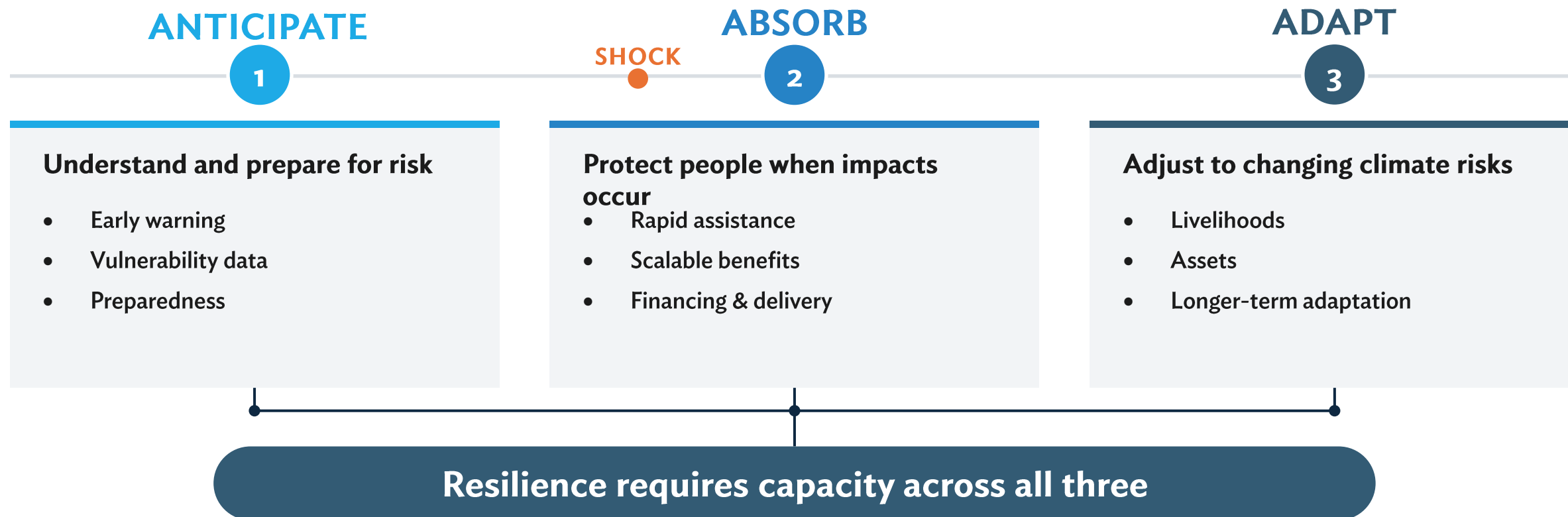
Food, water, energy

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Climate vulnerability quickly becomes social and economic vulnerability.



Climate Resilience Begins Before Crisis Hits





Countries Can Build Climate Resilience Across the 3A Dimensions

1

A A E



PHILIPPINES

Anticipatory Action: early warnings + pre-shock assistance

2

ABSORB



FIJI

Shock-Responsive Social Protection: rapid disaster response

3



INDIA

Rural Public Works: employment + natural-resource management

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Different Risks, Different Time Horizons – But Both Require Preparation

CLIMATE CHANGE

Sudden-onset shocks

Floods • cyclones • extreme events

+

Slow-onset stresses

Rising temperatures • sea-level rise • coastal erosion

V.S.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Long-term structural transformation

- Ageing
- Longevity
- Changing dependency
- Changing care needs

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AT A GLANCE

1.3 billion

1 in 4, people aged 60+
by 2050

0.72 → 0.90

economic dependency
ratio, 2020–2050

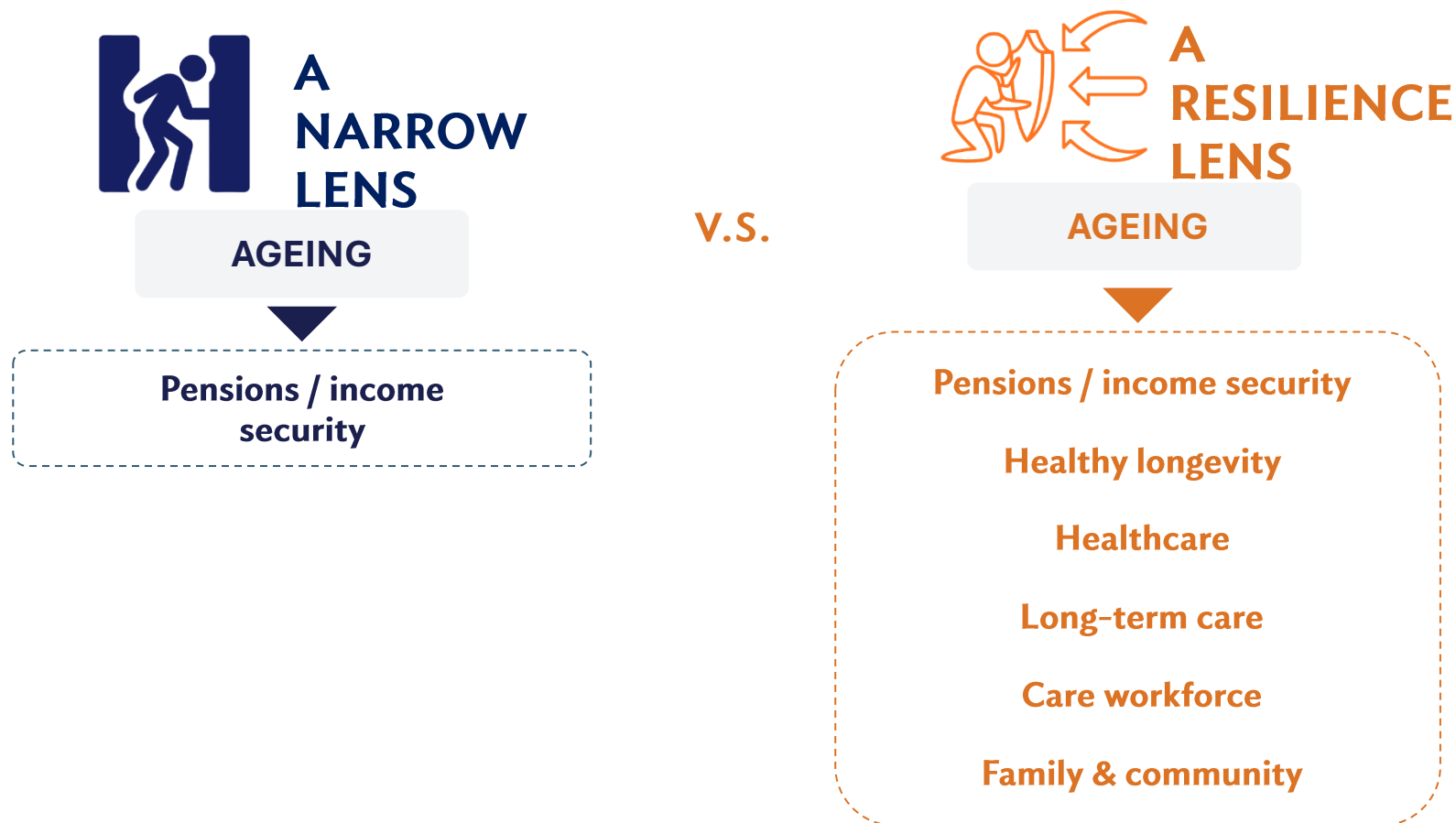
80% → 144% ↑

projected health
expenditure, 2020–2060

Different risks give us different windows to prepare.



Ageing Requires More Than a Pension Response



Preparing for ageing means preparing systems, not only retirement income.



Preparing for Ageing Also Means Preparing Fiscally

ANTICIPATE

1

UNDERSTAND FUTURE NEEDS

Demographic projections

Long-term expenditure
projections

Fiscal Sustainability Assessments



Long-term fiscal projections to understand future pension, health and ageing pressures

ABSORB

2

BUILD SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

Revenue Mobilisation

Social Insurance Contribution

Fiscal Buffers/Reserves



Combination of taxation and social insurance to finance growing social security needs

ADAPT

3

REFORM EARLY

Pension Reforms

Health and LTC Financing

Preventive and Care Investment



Examining revenue, pension and long-term care reforms to manage future fiscal pressures

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Different Risks, Same Imperative: Build Resilience Before It Is Needed

1

BROADEN

From poverty → poverty + vulnerability

Continue protecting those who are poor today, while recognising and preparing for those who may become vulnerable tomorrow.

2

PREPARE

From reacting → preparing before pressures deepen

Different risks unfold differently. Build capacity to anticipate, absorb and adapt.

3

BUILD

From programmes → resilient systems

Strengthen coverage, data, delivery, financing, institutions and workforce so systems can respond as risks evolve.

Resilience is not built during a crisis. It is built in the years before it.



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