

Assessment-based National Dialogue: A process to define a national SPF



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Tajikistan

From February 2017 to May 2018, the President's Office of Tajikistan engaged ministries and government agencies, employer and worker organisations, civil society organisations and development agencies in a national dialogue on social protection. The key objective was to agree on recommendations to build a national social protection floor. These recommendations were included in the National Social Protection Strategy for 2019-2025 that is currently being drafted.

The national dialogue process was conducted using the Assessment-based National Dialogue (ABND) methodology. The ABND assessed the social protection system in Tajikistan, built a consensus around recommendations to complete the national social protection floor (SPF), estimated its cost and presented the findings to policymakers for endorsement. The process was led by the President's Office and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population of Tajikistan (MOHSP), while the ILO provided technical assistance.

The Recommendation on Social Protection Floors, 2012 (No. 202) stipulates establishing basic social security guarantees to ensure access to essential healthcare and income security for all, including children, people of working age and older persons.

The Sustainable Development Goal 1.3, part of the UN 2030 agenda, aims to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, supported by the Universal Social Protection partnership (USP2030).

This brief presents a successful experience of a country in extending social protection.



Main lessons learned

- The ABND process was mandated by the Government Decree No. 378 dated 16 May 2017 on "Creation of the Working Group for a Social Protection Floor in Tajikistan". This Decree helped to ensure the continuous participation of all relevant stakeholders throughout the dialogue process. The Working Group had a two-level structure; the Technical Working Group provided recommendations on social protection while the High-level Group politically endorsed them.
- The ABND helped to strengthen collaboration between the government, civil society and international organisations and provide a platform for civil society voices to be better reflected in national social policy.
- ABND working group members participated in regular training workshops between February 2017 and April 2018. In this way, the ABND served as a mechanism to build capacities and help national stakeholders to provide relevant inputs to the dialogue process.
- Civil society organisations and academia were engaged in various activities such as collation of statistical data, comparison of national legislation with international standards, organisation of workshops, etc. This contributed to capacity building and also helped to make the process participatory.

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1. Background of the ABND process

Tajikistan is a lower-middle income country in Central Asia. It had a relatively comprehensive social security system as part of the Soviet Union until 1991. After the subsequent civil war and national reconstruction efforts, the Government of Tajikistan now aims to provide a decent life for all its citizens with adequate social protection. This includes protection in case of old age, maternity, disability and other social risks faced during people's lives.

The right to social protection is provided by the Constitution, national laws on social protection and the National Development Strategy of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030. The ABND exercise was an effort of the stakeholders of Tajikistan towards establishing a nationally defined social protection floor for all people in the country, with a focus on the poor and vulnerable.

The ABND in Tajikistan assessed the social protection system and elaborated nationally agreed recommendations to expand an SPF, i.e. basic social security guarantees, to every person. It consisted of three steps:

1. preparing an assessment matrix on the social protection system of Tajikistan, which entailed identifying gaps and challenges, recommendations to address them and selecting priorities among the recommendations;
2. converting policy recommendations into scenarios, with a focus on the national priorities, and projecting the costs of the scenarios;
3. finalizing the findings and submitting the report to policy-makers.

2. A participatory approach involving several political and technical social protection stakeholders

The national dialogue saw the participation of multiple stakeholders such as the government, employers, workers, civil society, international organisations and academia. The stakeholders participated through a Technical Working Group and a High-level Group which involved around 100 specialists and policymakers. At each step of the exercise, the results were discussed and validated by the Technical Working Group and

presented to the High-level Group for endorsement and decision-making. The exercise was led by the President's Office and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population and received technical assistance from the ILO and other development partners. Members of the working group included representatives of the following organisations:

- Ministries and government agencies, such as MOHSP; Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration of the Population; Agency of Statistics, Agency of Social Insurance and Pensions, and many others;
- Employers Association of Tajikistan, and Federation of Independent Trade Unions; and
- International organisations, such as ILO; UNICEF; International Organisation for Migration; UNHCR; European Union; Japan International Cooperation Agency, and others.



"I think that such dialogue engaging all stakeholders in the social protection sector has never been conducted in Tajikistan before..."

- ABND working group member, feedback given during the independent evaluation

The involvement of the President's office and the government's commitment to conducting a transparent and inclusive national dialogue process greatly helped to engage different stakeholders working in the field of social protection. The ABND process was institutionalized and supported through the MOHSP Decree No. 378 dated 16 May 2017 on "Creation of the Working Group for a Social Protection Floor in Tajikistan". The continuous dialogue process and two-level working group structure carried political weightage for advocating for social protection reforms.

3. Stages of the ABND

The ABND took place from February 2017 to May 2018 and was comprised of three main stages.



Stage 1: Preparing an assessment matrix on the social protection system

The assessment matrix is an inventory of the existing social protection, employment promotion, nutritional and educational programmes in the country. It identifies policy gaps and obstacles in the implementation of programmes, and recommendations to address the problems and expand a nationally appropriate SPF. The matrix was developed through joint consultations between ILO and national technical experts and validated by the high-level ABND committee.

	OVERVIEW OF SCHEMES	POLICY GAPS	RECOMMENDATIONS	BARRIERS TO ACCESS	RECOMMENDATIONS
HEALTH					
CHILDREN					
WORKING AGE					
ELDERLY					

The assessment matrix is structured according to the four SPF guarantees, namely access to health care and social protection for children, working-age people and elderly people. For each guarantee, there is a description of all the related schemes, policy gaps, barriers to access, and recommendations.

Stage 2: Converting recommendations into scenarios and costing the scenarios

The costs of the recommendations, i.e. the additional cost of completing the national SPF, was estimated using a tool known as the Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP). Parameters of the different policy scenarios such as benefit levels and persons to be covered, among others, were determined through national consultations. As part of this step, members of the

working group were provided basic training on the RAP methodology.



“I am working on the organisational strategy right now and the experience gained from the project helps me to better frame it... training related to costing was very interesting, I feel comfortable now to make some cost estimations in other project and activities...”

- ABND working group member, feedback given during the independent evaluation

The results of the RAP were used as a basis to prioritize recommendations through a voting process and phase their implementation from 2019 until 2025. Thus, the cost calculations of the scenarios helped to identify the most relevant and affordable scenarios. These four priorities (one priority recommendation for each SPF guarantee) were included in the draft National Social Protection Strategy 2019-2025.

Stage 3: Finalizing the findings and submitting the report to policy makers

The recommendations for establishing the national SPF were developed by the Technical Working Group and politically validated at the national level by the High-level ABND Committee. This helped to ensure that both the technical and political angles were reflected in the recommendations. It also contributed to making the process inclusive and tailored to the ground-level reality by proposing reasonable and mutually agreeable recommendations and to increase their political weightage.

The inclusion of civil society organisations in the Technical Working Group gave a platform to the organisations to voice their concerns and highlight

challenges faced at the decentralised level. Members of civil society organisations, along with government officials, social partners and journalists, also participated in a series of eight training workshops on social protection and maternity protection, conducted between February 2017 and April 2018. Some of the officials also participated in a field visit to study the social security system and its implementation in Moldova. As Moldova has a similarly structured system inherited from Soviet times, the field visit helped Tajik officials to broaden their understanding and learn about good practices from another country. All these activities contributed to capacity building of national stakeholders.

“This dialogue process helps us to understand the most important developmental issues and challenges we face today and to identify solutions.”

- Ms. Saida Umarzoda, First Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection

4. What’s next?

The ABND report was published in 2018 and serves as a comprehensive source of information on the social

protection system of Tajikistan (see References for link). The priority recommendations of the ABND report have been included in the draft of the National Social Protection Strategy for 2019-2025. Three out of four of the prioritised recommendations follow a universal approach. The prioritized recommendations are:

1. To ensure the provision of accessible, affordable, good quality and equitable medical care for all;
2. To increase the amount of all social payments and expand coverage to children up to 18 years of age;
3. To expand the coverage of maternity benefits, including the birth grant and child care allowance, to all women;
4. To increase the social pension from 60 per cent to 80 per cent of the minimum pension.

The recommendations constitute a national consensus on what needs to be done to complete the national SPF and are therefore expected to contribute to policymaking in the country. Furthermore, the participatory dialogue process helped to increase cooperation between ILO, UNICEF, other development partners, and national agencies.



Discussions of the Technical Working Group

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This brief was written by Artiom Sici and Loveleen De and reviewed by Jasmina Papa of ILO.

The Social Protection Floors in Action brief series is edited by Valerie Schmitt and Loveleen De, Social Protection Department, International Labour Organisation (ILO).

For more information, contact: socpro@ilo.org



www.social-protection.org

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

4, route des Morillons
1211 Genève 22
Switzerland

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