Asia-Europe Meeting

A Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction: Experiences and Lessons from Asia and Europe

Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights Seminar Series (ASEMHRS22)

9 September 2024 Bangkok, Thailand

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ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION

RAOUL WALLENBERG INSTITUTE
OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN LAW

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Executive Summary

This report of the **Expert Workshop on a Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction: Experiences and Lessons from Asia and Europe** held on 9 September 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand, highlights the importance of a human rights-based approach in addressing poverty nationally and internationally. The integration of human rights in poverty reduction strategies is essential as it draws attention to legal accountability, non-discrimination, and the empowerment of rightsholders.

However, the report also recognises that human rights-based approaches are not quick fixes, and the strength of poverty reduction strategies depend on data and knowledge from diverse disciplines. The report discusses issues related to measuring poverty and vulnerability and highlights the importance of inclusive social protection programs and access to justice to address the root causes of poverty and exclusion. It also underscores the significance of expanding anti-discrimination laws to include socio-economic status as a protected characteristic, enhancing the effectiveness of these laws and creating a stronger connection between anti-discrimination efforts and redistributive policies. The Workshop recommendations stress the need for evidence-based policies that are inclusive of those most at risk of being left behind. Overall, the report highlights the importance of integrating human rights into poverty reduction strategies to effectively address the structural causes of poverty and empower vulnerable populations in Asia and Europe.

The Workshop was held as part of the **22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights** and was attended by 38 experts from 20 Asia-Europe Meeting member countries representing national and international human rights organisations, development and multilateral development bank sectors, academia, and civil society organisations. Kudos to an impressive group of speakers. experts and human rights practitioners whose invaluable sharing of experience and knowledge contributed greatly to the fulfilment of the Seminar series' spirit of providing a forum for exchanging ideas and fostering networks for advancement of human rights.

The Expert Workshop was organised by the co-organisers of the Seminar series, Asia-Europe Foundation, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Switzerland, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the European Union.

A look back on the Expert Workshop on "A Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction: Experiences and Lessons from Asia and Europe"

WE SHOULD NOW, MORE THAN EVER, DOUBLE OUR EFFORTS TO REDUCE POVERTY

Ambassador Toru MORIKAWA, Executive Director, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)
(Welcome remarks at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

On behalf of the Asia-Europe Foundation, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand** and to the Thai Governor to ASEF, **Mrs. Chulamanee CHARTSUWAN**, for supporting this year's Expert Workshop of the Informal ASEM Human Rights Seminar series, with its special focus on poverty reduction. We are also honoured to have **Professor Olivier DE SCHUTTER**, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, to contribute to today's discussion.

The Asia-Europe Foundation, founded in 1997, has always taken pride in its role to complement the ASEM process by translating the Asia-Europe Meeting Agenda into concrete activities that enable exchange between civil society and governments of Asia and Europe. Advocacy has been and always will be a central role of ASEF, in terms of advancing crucial social, cultural and political pillars of the organisation. We consider events like this gathering of human rights and development experts to be imperative in realising ASEF's mission to strengthen mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, people-to-people and cultural engagements.

The Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights is one of the longest running programmes of ASEF. The programme is privileged to provide a platform for non-confrontational dialogue on human rights issues between Asian and European officials and civil society. It is the only multilateral human rights dialogue that takes place at the ASEM level and between Asian and European government and civil society representatives.

This year's edition of the Seminar series is another excellent opportunity to connect Human Rights and Poverty Reduction – through an Expert Workshop. It provides opportunity for important discussions not only about the importance of applying a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction, but also continuing conversations about the root causes of human rights violation caused by poverty and what can be done – both at government and non-government levels – to mitigate the devastating impact on those caught in the vicious cycle of poverty.

At a recent Human Rights Council meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, remarked that "we are going backwards … inequalities are skyrocketing … and the number of people living in severe poverty has risen, for the first time in a generation".

The World Bank estimates that in 2022 approximately 712 million people were living in extreme poverty. The number is said to be higher if a broader definition of poverty is taken. For example, instead of just looking at daily income, other poverty indicators like access to health, education and

overall living standards should be included. According to a United National article, based on the current rate of progress, "the world will likely not meet the global goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030". While the statistics and figures paint a rather grim picture, we should now, more than ever, double our efforts to reduce poverty.

But what more can be done, you may ask? Perhaps taking a more holistic approach to the problem in a more integrated way could be the way forward. Poverty reduction is in fact intertwined with other problems – namely, climate change, devastating wars, polarisation and a geopolitical climate of mistrust. Today's workshop has been curated specifically to discuss and debate what more can be done and how to overcome the existing hurdles to operationalising a human rights-centric approach to poverty reduction programmes and policies.

We are very fortunate to have several experts from international organisations, national human rights institutes, government and civil society present and I am certain we shall benefit from their contributions throughout the Workshop. I believe the Expert Workshop will bring about meaningful discussions, learning and cooperation, and we count on your openness to participate and share. Perhaps by the end of the Workshop, we will have gained a deeper understanding of how the issues facing poverty reduction and human rights are intertwined, and how we can bring about actual change – change based on actionable norms and laws, and not merely as a matter of charity or welfare.

Thank you.

Ambassador Toru MORIKAWA
Executive Director
Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

THAILAND ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO POVERTY ERADICATION AND TO HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Krongkanit RAKCHAROEN, Director-General of the Department of European Affairs, Thailand
(Welcome remarks at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, I welcome all of you to Thailand and to the Expert Workshop on A Right-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction: Experiences and Lessons from Asia and Europe to share and exchange our knowledge, expertise and ideas to bring about effective actions and collective efforts towards sustainable solutions.

Last year the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) reported that 650 million out of 6.1 billion people across 110 countries live under monetary poverty defined by 2.15 USD per day, while 1.1 billion people fall under multi-dimensional poverty, more than 80% of which live in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This highlights the importance of looking at the poverty that is beyond income.

According to this report, as many as 824 to 991 million of the 1.1 billion people living in multi-poverty lack adequate sanitation, housing, and cooking fuel. More than half of them are deprived in terms of nutrition, electricity, or years of schooling.

The same report also reveals that Thailand has made the most progress in ASEAN on eradicating poverty. Thailand successfully halved the number of people in multi-dimensional poverty within seven years, from 961,000 people in 2012 to 412,000 people in 2019, making it one of the 25 countries (of 110 countries), that halved their global MPI values within 15 years. This is attributed to lower child mortality and better access to basic infrastructure such as sanitation, drinking water, electricity, and housing.

Thailand attaches great importance to poverty eradication since it is one of the key factors for the achievement of sustainable development and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Amidst the current global traditional and non-traditional challenges, including pandemics and geopolitical conflicts, Thailand continues to promote the rights of the people through integration of people–centred and planet-centric approaches, guided by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and

Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model, in order to uplift the livelihood and well-being of the people and empower poor people to exit poverty.

Thailand submitted its UPR Third Cycle Mid-term Report in June 2024. This is in line with the Government's voluntary pledge during the presentation of Thailand's UPR Third Cycle Report in 2021 to submit a mid-term report on the implementation of the accepted recommendations. This demonstrates the Thai Government's sincere and firm commitment to promote and protect human rights.

Thailand is one of the 87 countries that have submitted mid-term reports for the previous three cycles of the UPR. From this number, only 20 countries have submitted mid-term reports under all three cycles, four of which are countries in Asia, namely Thailand, Japan, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. This reflects Thailand's commitment to work with the UN's human rights mechanisms to further strengthen human rights infrastructure and promote and protect human rights in the country. Thailand attaches priority to human rights' issues ranging from gender equality and protection of the rights and empowerment of women, children, and persons with disabilities to the promotion of business and human rights.

Recently, in March and June this year, the Equal Marriage Bill was approved by the Thai House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively. The draft Act is now under our internal procedure to be soon entered into force. In terms of business and human rights, Thailand was the first country in Asia-Pacific to adopt a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. And in May this year, Thailand ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which came into force in June 2024.

We are currently the ASEAN candidate for membership of the Human Rights Council for the term 2025-2027 with a firm belief that our constructive role in human rights will support the work of the HRC. Two weeks ago, the First Joint Parliamentary Meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives unanimously approved the Thailand-EU Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement or PCA. Thailand, together with the EU and its member states, will work closely to promote human rights, through capacity-building in implementing international human rights instruments, dialogues and exchange of information and increased cooperation within the UN human rights bodies. Moreover, both sides also agreed to promote economic growth through regional and international fora and organisations including ASEM. I believe that, once the Thailand-EU PCA enters into force, Thailand and the EU will foster inter-regional cooperation in promoting human rights, equality, trade, investment, and economic growth in a sustainable manner.

On a final note, I would like to express my appreciation to ASEF for organising today's workshop. I wish you all successful and fruitful discussions. I also hope that you will enjoy your time in Thailand. Thank you very much and Sawasdee ka.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO POVERTY REDUCTION ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT IN THE CURRENT TROUBLED TIMES

Mrs. Chulamanee CHARTSUWAN, ASEF Governor for Thailand
(Welcome remarks at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

As the ASEF Governor to Thailand, I would like to join Director-General Krongkanit in welcoming you all to Thailand. Your participation in today's workshop is crucial to Asia-Europe collaborative efforts in promoting the rights-based approach to poverty reduction, a topic that is very timely as we are now witnessing economic downturns after the COVID-19 pandemic, increased geopolitical tensions, and human rights violations in many parts of the world.

Thailand has been a committed member of ASEF and ASEM and has played an active role in enhancing cooperation between Asia and Europe through various activities, including hosting this Informal Seminar on Human Rights series, which is one of the longest-running programmes in ASEF.

Human rights and poverty are deeply intertwined as poverty both results from and exacerbates human rights violation. Approaching poverty reduction from a human rights perspective emphasises the importance of not only economic growth but also the protection of individual dignity, equality, and freedom. I would like to extend my gratitude to ASEF and all partners involved in organising this workshop that will give us better understanding of the relationship between poverty and human rights, as well as how best to help support poverty reduction as well as human rights.

Allow me at this juncture to touch upon each issue. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), poverty reduction in Asia and the Pacific, even in the countries with relatively high per capita income, remains "an unfinished agenda". As Ambassador Morikawa mentioned in his opening speech, we are now seeing that with the economic downturn, a large number of people are falling back into extreme poverty.

Economic downturns and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rising energy costs, and unaffordable rents, have threatened extreme poverty for millions of people. The ADB estimates that the pandemic alone has pushed about 78 million people in Asia back into extreme poverty and created approximately 162 million newly poor people, particularly in South Asia.

Thailand has placed poverty reduction high on its national agenda. The government has launched several welfare programmes to mitigate poverty issues, especially for the most vulnerable group of people to ensure their basic human rights and needs. This reflects what Ambassador Morikawa has mentioned in his opening remarks, that we need a holistic approach to poverty reduction.

The Thai government's approach includes issuing State Welfare Cards to cover the essential living expenses of vulnerable people, Universal Health Coverage to enable affordable and accessible

medical services for all, National Housing Projects to provide affordable and low-price rental accommodation, 15-year free basic education to ensure education accessibility and reduce inequality, and the Old Age Allowance programme to assist the elderly who do not receive pensions. Thailand will also continue our work to promote our home-grown approach with focuses on moderation – the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) – as a strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While addressing poverty reduction, Thailand is working hard to ensure the protection of individual dignity, equality, and freedom. As Director-General Krongkanit outlined, the Government has upgraded and passed new legislation as well as adopted mechanisms aiming to better promote and protect human rights and expand the provision and coverage of social services, as well as to ensure equal rights for all.

Nevertheless, there remain challenges in the implementation. These include:

1. Resource and personnel constraints to implement the laws and policies
2. Coordination among agencies in applying joint SOP or dealing with cross-cutting areas of work
3. The digital gap, digital literacy, and digital infrastructure as we need to ensure that people have equal access and understanding of digital world
4. We still need some legal and mandatory measures to supplement specific plans and frameworks to ensure more concrete progress and results
5. We need awareness and capacity of implementing officers to effectively apply new legislations and regulations.

The Thai Government is pleased and appreciative of the work of ASEF and all experts in promoting a rights-based approach to poverty reduction. I would like to thank everyone for being here today for this workshop which I hope will deepen our understanding and strengthen our approach to uplift the livelihood and well-being of the people at large. The exchange of ideas, best-practice, knowledge, and experience among us here are very important for everyone involved.

I wish to take this opportunity to wish for the success of this workshop and I also wish you all a pleasant stay in Thailand after the workshop. Thank you.

How can regional cooperation on rights-based poverty reduction be enhanced and made more effective? We asked this question to Mrs Chulamee Chartsuwan, ASEF Governor for Thailand

ANCHORING POVERTY REDUCTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS WILL HELP CLOSE THE GAPS IN SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

Professor Olivier DE SCHUTTER, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty
(Opening message at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights – transcribed from video recording)

Good morning. Let me first of all thank the Asia Europe Foundation and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for organising this important expert workshop on what does it mean to have a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction. This is a hugely important topic.

Many governments in good faith are trying to alleviate or eradicate poverty by using mechanisms - – public programmes, cash transfer systems – that seek to protect people from extreme destitution, but without recognising that these people have rights that they may claim against public authorities.

Although these schemes may be well intended, they will be less effective if not grounded in human rights. We have indeed a number of instruments from the International Labour Organization or from the United Nations Human Rights System that, in recognising social rights, state that the fight against poverty should be based on the recognition that people have human rights that they may claim.

Most important in this regard are:

- the ILO Convention number 102 on minimum standards in the field of social security
- a convention of 1952 that lists the nine components of a comprehensive social security system
- recommendation number 202 on national social protection floors adopted in June 2012 by the International Labor Conference within the ILO but also within the United Nations human rights system
- the universal declaration of human rights articles 22 to 25 which recognise a number of social rights
- and of course the international covenant on economic social and cultural rights that recognises the right to work, the right to social security, the right to food, the right to housing, the right to health care, and the right to education.

So we have a panoply of instruments in the field of human rights that basically provide entitlements to individuals that they may claim in order to receive support from the government. Now, this first of all means that poverty should not be seen as a failure of the individual. Poverty is a failure of the state. It is a symptom or an indication that the state has not been able to organise itself as it should in order to protect individuals from destitution. But beyond that, anchoring the fight against poverty on human rights has very concrete operational consequences.

First of all, it means that the individual will be treated as a rights holder that may claim certain benefits, certain forms of support against the state, against public service deliveries, and they have duties towards that individual. This is empowering. It rebalances the relationship between the rights holder and the service provider who will be treated as a duty bearer and that can remove the stigma of claiming support from the state.

And that's important because one reason why many individuals, although they should be supported by the state, do not dare to claim support is because they are ashamed. They fear the stigma of relying on public charity. Once you consider that they are rights holders who can claim certain benefits, you remove in part the stigma.

Moreover, you will achieve a better targeting of support if you define beneficiaries of social programmes as rights holders. If an individual entitled to certain benefits is excluded from a social programme, that individual will be able to claim those benefits before independent bodies, including courts. This will reduce the risk of discrimination in the delivery of the social programme in question. It will avoid instances of corruption. It will avoid instances of political manipulation when people receive, for example, certain forms of social assistance based on their political loyalty, their affiliation with the right political party.

It will also oblige the government.to organise social programmes so as to ensure that all those who have a right to benefit from them will indeed effectively enjoy such benefits. The government should make access to information much more accessible instead of, for example, requiring individuals to apply online for certain social benefits as this may result in excluding some people because they lack the digital skills to fill in online forms.

In other words, recognising that the fight against poverty should be grounded in human rights imposes on state bodies the obligation to set up systems that will ensure that social rights and benefits are delivered to all who are entitled to them. This will improve the effectiveness of social protection by reducing instances of under-inclusion, by ensuring that the take-up of rights will be effective and there will be no gaps in the social protection system that is meant to protect individuals from extreme poverty.

So for all these reasons, anchoring the fight against poverty on human rights is not only of symbolic importance. It sends a message that individuals should not fear to demand protection because they are rights holders who have a right to claim protection, it also has very concrete implications with respect to how the anti-poverty strategy is organised and which measures the state should take in order to ensure that it has a real impact.

I therefore welcome the organisation of this expert workshop. I very much hope that it will deliver very concrete recommendations to social security administrations and to governments as to how to organise the fight against poverty. Many thanks indeed.

EXPERT WORKSHOP

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO POVERTY REDUCTION: EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FROM ASIA AND EUROPE

(Report of the Expert Workshop, 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, poverty has come to be seen as a human rights problem, not a lack of resources. Consequently, there is now increasing recognition of the importance of incorporating a human rights-based approach in poverty reduction efforts both nationally and internationally. This approach helps us formulate and adopt policies and strategies that focus not only on reducing economic poverty but also address underlying structural causes sometimes related to human rights violations. The human rights-based approach to poverty reduction underlines the empowerment of rightsholders and the accountability of policymakers and others whose actions have an impact on the rights of people. Addressing poverty based on human rights then becomes a legal obligation for which states and duty-bearers should be held accountable.

1. Opening Address by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty

There is a panoply of human rights instruments, including the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and most notably ILO Convention 102 on Social Security Minimum Standards from 1952 and ILO Convention 202 on Social Protection Floors. The latter are the key instruments ensuring social security protection. The effectiveness of human rights poverty strategies hinges on the fact that they convert charity-based support into rights standards. For the poor, this means some of the stigma associated with requests for assistance is reduced or removed.

2. Presentation of the Background Paper: Human Rights and Poverty Reduction

Rights-based poverty reduction engenders protection of the vulnerable, less exploitation and discrimination, and in the longer term more effective institutions. Human rights-based approaches (HRBA) are important in poverty reduction as they draw attention to legal accountability and remedy, to non-discrimination, and to vulnerable groups, and they mobilise empowerment and participatory strategies including the representation of the poorest. HRBA may also lead to collaborative activism forging linkages and dialogues between rights-holders and duty-bearers. However, human rights-based approaches are not a quick fix in poverty reduction. The effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies also depends on data derived from outside the human rights framework and on knowledge and experience from disciplines other than law and human rights monitoring. Human rights prompts interdisciplinarity – a fact forcefully present in all the sessions of the workshop. (Pleaser refer to page 33 for full Background paper)

3. Human Rights Integration and Measurement

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is based on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 1.2 and SDG indicator 1.2.2, which are unique due to their overarching character covering other SDGs, namely those related to health, education, and living standards including food, housing, water and sanitation.

Currently, however, there is a massive prioritisation of private sector development. Civic space has

Why is it important to recognise poverty as a human rights issue? We asked this question to Dr Hans-Otto Sano, Emeritus, Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute of Human Rights.

diminished in almost every country in Asia. This affects the ability to pursue HRBA, not least the capacity to make claims. However, human rights-based strategies are not only about redressing violations; they also entail key processes that may lead to positive outcomes. But measurements are still needed to determine the efficacy of strategies and of transformative change.

Child poverty is not confined to low-income countries, in fact, many children living in poverty are in middle income contexts. In Europe, one in four children is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Almost one-third of children in East Asia and the Pacific suffer from at least one form of severe deprivation.

There are, however, some positive trends. In Thailand, poverty has fallen significantly over two generations. Measured by the World Bank, using the poverty line for middle-income countries, poverty in Thailand has declined from around 50% of the population to single digit figures. (please refer to Jakob Dirksen's presentation in Annex 2)

4. Poverty and Vulnerability

In human rights, vulnerability is linked to discrimination, for example, discrimination on grounds of race, religion, gender, disability, and social origin. People in the most vulnerable situations include children, the elderly, people with different abilities, women and girls, migrant or informal economy workers, indigenous and tribal communities, the LGBTQ groups, and people living in extreme poverty.

Turning the lens to the vulnerable and poor themselves shows that some experience multiple dimensions of marginalisation and discrimination. They cannot be viewed as weak people because, within these groups, there is strong resilience in facing often insurmountable situations. However, they are in vulnerable situations with limited access to resources and opportunities and require protection, special attention and care to ensure their well-being and equal participation in society. People living in poverty experience discrimination on socio-economic grounds. The social and institutional maltreatment that arises from this form of discrimination is a hidden dimension of poverty.

The 'Add the 10th' campaign is a national movement in Ireland advocating to include socio-economic status as the tenth ground of discrimination in the country's equality legislation. Led by a coalition of organisations such as ATD Fourth World - Ireland, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland, and the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), the campaign raises awareness about socio-economic discrimination and its detrimental effects on individuals and communities.

Access to justice is necessary for addressing both the effects and root causes of poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability. Persons living in poverty are often deprived from a young age of the opportunity to acquire the tools, social capital, and basic legal knowledge necessary to engage with the justice system. Laws tend to reflect and reinforce the privileges and interests of the powerful. Many laws are inherently biased against persons living in poverty.

Women living in extreme poverty suffer compounded obstacles to accessing justice because the deprivations and abuse that women suffer as women are often not recognised in law. The inability of poor people to pursue justice remedies through existing systems increases their vulnerability to poverty and violations of their rights. There are, though, categories of legal need where States have at times provided broad-based legal and/or socio-legal support for those unable to pay themselves.

In Denmark, the 'Cobblestone Lawyers' or 'Street Lawyers' provide specialised legal aid to some of

the most marginalised members of society, including the homeless, drug users, and sex workers. These individuals often avoid mainstream legal services due to their involvement in illegal activities, and the stigma and discrimination they face when interacting with authorities. (please refer to Annex 3 for full presentation by Aye Aye Win)

5. Social Protection

Many existing social protection programmes are insufficient or not meaningfully responsive to the economic realities of people living in poverty. Many eligible people also find it hard to apply, or do not apply, for support because of the stigma associated with poverty. Exclusion errors mean that sections of the population eligible are sometimes do not receive social assistance. Inclusion errors indicate that non-eligible sections receive undue assistance.

UNICEF estimates that 1.3 billion children are not covered by any form of social protection. In countries where child allowance is available, the programmes are hardly effective and far-reaching enough. Studies have shown that 1 USD invested in social protection generates 1.7 USD in return. When social protection was examined five years ago, many benefited during the COVID pandemic. But the need for social protection is still urgent. Poverty is still there, and climate change is leading to ever more poverty. Workers in the informal sector do not have the same access to social protection, such as a pension system, as workers in the formal sector, be it public or private.

During the COVID pandemic, 1.4 billion people received social protection, with 50% of these being in East Asia. This was a 70% increase in social protection compared to pre-COVID levels. One participant gave this account of social protection efforts in the Philippines. The country's 4Ps Policy, which is a conditional cash programme, has led to 1.5% poverty reduction every year in the six years since the programme began, and it has reached 4.4 million households in the country. While the programme has succeeded to a certain extent, there were gaps in the targeting of recipients. The new list for targeting the poor was updated last year. Before this, many who were eligible were not included.

South Korea has seen a generational shift in the sense of shame and the stigma attached to poverty. The older generation, focused on education and achievement, saw claiming benefits as shameful. The younger generation, however, has grown up learning that they are entitled to social benefits, a right that is written in the South Korean Constitution. Younger South Koreans see no shame in claiming benefits in times of crisis.

A participant from Bangladesh emphasised the importance of tradition and values in communities and reminded the audience to take these elements into account when promoting poverty reduction according to human rights. The alternative approach to the neoliberal models that scientists and experts are establishing should be cognizant of traditions and religious beliefs even when rights-based poverty reduction are debated.

Poverty is one of the key barriers to women's economic empowerment and to realising their potential. Irrespective of the nature of poverty or its monitoring, women are always at the bottom ranks. They are the first ones to leave the labour market, and they bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care. The end of the 2030 agenda is approaching, and there is still no evidence that Goal 5 on achieving gender equality will be realised. The presenter from ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific) encouraged the audience to take inspiration in the model framework of action developed by ESCAP to advance gender equality.

6. Key Workshop Recommendations

If not grounded in human rights, poverty alleviation efforts will be less effective. The inclusion of human rights in poverty reduction strategies may contribute to less corruption.

In Europe, where the concept of population groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion is applied, the rights-based poverty reduction effort should target not only the poor, but also those at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

In Asia, rights-based poverty reduction should use the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which is a more accurate interpretation of reality, than the International Poverty Line.

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index will make it possible to identify sub-national regions or groups of people who are most vulnerable to poverty and deprivation.

There are duty-bearers who should be made accountable to their human rights obligations. The issue of accountability is rarely addressed, except in cases when grievances are filed.

Effective policies must be evidence-based. Poverty-reduction strategies must be inclusive of those most at risk of being left behind, and they need to take the realities of these people into account.

Countries that have moved from lower-income to upper-middle-income status need to involve human rights in its poverty reduction policies. It is important to understand who is left behind in order to effectively implement the poverty goal of the SDGs. Integration of human rights in poverty reduction policies will serve to enhance insights on who are left behind.

Public services should assess market-driven approaches and explore community-centred models, where local communities manage resources and services for the collective benefit.

Anti-discrimination laws should be expanded to include socio-economic status as a protected characteristic, as current legislation often overlooks socio-economic disparities. This inclusion would enhance the effectiveness of these laws and create a stronger connection between anti-discrimination efforts and redistributive policies.

Participatory approaches that centre on the lived experiences of marginalised individuals should be systematically incorporated into the policy design, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Access to justice is necessary for addressing both the effects and causes of poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability.

The key factor in social security is not cash handouts, it was argued. It is removing the structural barriers that block or limit people's access to services and resources that will enable them to get out of poverty and to thrive. States have an obligation to provide these services and resources, and to ensure that these are accessible to the people who most need them.

The potential of tapping subaltern expertise, that is, local, activist, or indigenous knowledge that is linked to social relations and is place-based, should be included in discussions about poverty.

When social protection is discussed, poor people are often contrasted to the rich, but the middle class must also be considered. There is a need to protect the middle class as they are the engine of the economy and society. The lower middle- is in particular need of social protection, but they often lack access to this.

Poverty is, all too often, a woman's place. The unpaid care provided by women and the economic empowerment of women should be a priority in poverty reduction efforts. Providing services such as childcare is an important tool to reduce poverty among women as it can free them from domestic tasks, allowing them to enter the labour market and earn an income.

7. Session Reports

7.1 Human Rights Integration and Poverty Measurement

The discussions in this session were focused on measurement, child poverty, and the integration of the poor in domestic policies, influenced partly by the diminishing role of civil society. The case of Thailand saw lively discussion among the panellists and the floor.

There were five key themes:

a) The human rights-based approach and the civic space
b) Measurement methods and the utility of the multi-dimensional poverty index
c) Child poverty
d) The case of Thailand
e) The potential non-integration of those left behind.

a) Human Rights and Civic Space

In the last 15 years or so, there has been a shift in the debate about human rights. On women's rights, for example, the focus has shifted from addressing patriarchy to seeking greater participation and empowerment for women. Identity has become an important part of claiming rights, and this is also seen in HRBA (human rights-based approach). Meanwhile, the discussion about climate change and sustainability has moved more closely to access to justice, dignity, and development.

There is a diminished civic space in almost every country. Nongovernmental organisations are under pressure and have difficulty holding the private sector accountable. There is a massive prioritisation of private sector development. State accountability to human rights has never been strong except in a few cases of grievance redress. Civil society laws are being revised, and states now sponsor people-to-people confrontation. The integration of HRBA is complicated by insufficient indicators and monitoring. Poverty reduction is not just about outcome indicators; it requires effectiveness of individual strategies and their processes of implementation.

b) Measurement

The multidimensional poverty measurement or MPI developed under the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has been

used by various governments around the globe. This measurement focuses on direct human experience and uses individual and human development data rather than country-level aggregates. The information is disaggregated into regions and subgroups so that the inequalities can be made visible.

The most well-known example of MPI is the Global MPI which is published every year together with UNDP. The global MPI has 3 dimensions - education, health, and living standard, with a total of 10 indicators. Each dimension is equally weighted and the indicators for each dimension are also equally weighted. This Global MPI also considers the deprivations and human rights violations in each country.

The global MPI will not only allow us to identify regions or groups of people who are most vulnerable to poverty and deprivation, but it also identifies those who are accountable and who have the obligation to guarantee and safeguard the indicated rights.

The MPI indicators are reported against SDG target 1.2 and SDG indicator 1.2.2 which is very unique due to its overarching character that covers other SDGs, namely those related to health, education, and living standards.

At the national level, the MPI can show how each deprivation is contributing to human rights violations in a country. It can be used in multiple areas, complementing monetary poverty statistics and identifying safeguards for human rights. OPHI is working to support the implementation of human rights.

Quantitative measures require accurate data. Artificial intelligence can be used to bridge the gaps and produce more comprehensive data. Discussion is needed about the ethical use of technology, and how AI innovation can put forward the poverty reduction strategy.

In Cambodia, the government only recognises the monetary approach as they are not conversant with the multidimensional approach. The policymakers do want a more objective way of assessing needs, but they need to be convinced about the multidimensional approach.

UNICEF Bangkok made the point that the MPI is like a blood test that helps to identify the root cause of the problem and the possible solutions. Unfortunately, it can be too complicated a tool for policymakers to understand and use effectively,

Do countries do enough to prioritise child poverty? Why is it important to understand poverty as a children's right issue? We asked these questions to Andrea Rossi, UNICEF's Regional Adviser Social Policy and Economis Analysis.

c) Child Poverty

The latest available data shows that around 22% of children globally are living in multidimensional poverty. At UNICEF, the work is based on the child rights-based approach with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the heart. The CRC sets out the seven key principles for the child rights-based approach: the dignity of children; participation, life survival and development; non-discrimination;

transparency and accountability; best interests; and interdependence and indivisibility.

Most recently, UNICEF published a report looking specifically at inequalities among children in Thailand. Equality of opportunities is critical for children. Thailand has seen improvements in access to health services and education, and the average years of schooling have increased. However, if we look closely, the situation is more nuanced. For example, education in Thailand is free up to the secondary level and school attendance is very high at the primary level. But at the upper secondary level, there is a high dropout rate, especially among the boys.

d) The Case of Thailand

Thailand deserves congratulations for having reduced its poverty levels, especially monetary poverty. Poverty in Thailand has been declining significantly and steadily. Over the last two generations, monetary poverty has been reduced from over 50% of the population to a single digit. Underprivileged mortality has decreased dramatically.

However, Thailand is measuring poverty by globally approved measures such as MPI and child MPI. But are these measures sensitive enough now that poverty, as tracked by MPI and child MPI, is in the single digits? Is MPI valid and relevant in Thailand today? Does it incorporate the human rights-based approach? Is there a better way to measure poverty and to ensure that no one is left behind. Should Thai policymakers look at other poverty measures, such as MoDa (Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis) that UNICEF has used in other countries?

Thailand has many policies related to poverty reduction, but there are challenges in the implementation of these policies. Many of the policies are focused on increasing the income of poor people rather than on their human rights. Thailand needs to include human rights in its poverty reduction policy. It also needs to understand who is being left behind with its current policies. Centralised data will be needed for this.

e) The Potential Non-Integration of Those Left Behind

Those who are left behind are usually undocumented people such as refugees and migrant workers. In Thailand, for example, an estimated 80% of the people not covered by the various poverty reduction schemes have no legal status in Thailand. How can data about such people be collected and tracked? What is UNICEF doing to document and monitor the groups that are left behind?

7.2 Vulnerability, Discrimination and Poverty

This session explored vulnerability as a concept and how it relates to the absence of protection of human rights. The various grounds of discrimination were highlighted, and there was discussion of how legal frameworks and mechanisms of participation can be incorporated in effective poverty reduction strategies, consistent with the principle of 'leave no one behind'.

There were three themes:

a) Expanding justice and legal frameworks for socio-economic rights.
b) Addressing stigma and discrimination of vulnerable groups in poverty.
c) Recognising lived experiences in shaping poverty reduction policy is essential. This is the foundation of meaningful participation.

a) Empowering Marginalised Groups through Inclusive Legal Frameworks and Access to Justice

Legal frameworks often reflect the interests and perspectives of those in power, which can result in laws that do not adequately protect or consider the rights of marginalised groups, particularly those living in poverty. Such situations exacerbate discriminatory practices that further entrench vulnerabilities. (Fukuda-Parr, 2007).

The discussion highlighted that while there is no shortage of international frameworks to address discrimination, the protection of the rights of those who experience socio-economic discrimination has yet to be recognised. Anti-discrimination laws traditionally focused on status-based traits like race and gender, but there is a growing recognition of the need to include socio-economic status (SES) as a protected characteristic.

The 'Add the 10th' campaign is a national movement in Ireland advocating for the inclusion of socio-economic status as the tenth ground of discrimination in the country's equality legislation. Led by a coalition of organisations such as ATD Fourth World - Ireland, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland, and the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), the campaign raises awareness about socio-economic discrimination and its detrimental effects on individuals and communities. Its key objectives are to lobby for legal reform, ensure that socioeconomic status becomes a protected characteristic, and provide a platform for those affected to share their experiences and seek support.

The discussion of inclusive justice systems has hinged on the argument that the absence of such systems perpetuates a cycle of poverty and rights violations. The rule of law serves as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainable economic progress. Conversely, a lack of access to judicial remedies often leads to the exploitation of the impoverished and their inability to seek adequate recourse. Equality legislation, it was agreed, is essential to safeguard the rights of persons living in poverty.

In Denmark, the 'Cobblestone Lawyers' or 'Street Lawyers' provide specialised legal aid to some of the most marginalised members of society, including the homeless, drug users, and sex workers. These individuals often avoid mainstream legal services due to their involvement in illegal activities, such as drug use or sex work, and the stigma and discrimination they face when interacting with authorities. Many have had negative past experiences with state institutions, leading to deep mistrust. These barriers are addressed by offering free legal counselling on the streets, via phone, or at their clinic in Copenhagen, covering issues like housing, benefits, and health services. Additionally, they support ongoing legal cases and engage in advocacy campaigns to protect the rights of these vulnerable groups, working closely with user representatives to address systemic issues.

Even with the goal of strengthening legal frameworks, there are differing views about whether these may grant more rights to marginalised groups, endangering widely accepted norms. For instance, the anti-discrimination bill in South Korea has faced significant opposition, especially from conservative religious groups, who argue that the law could potentially undermine traditional societal values by expanding rights for minority groups. A major point of contention

is the perceived increase in rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, which some oppose on religious grounds. Despite numerous attempts to pass the bill, staunch opposition has resulted in its withdrawal multiple times. Some pundits have proposed renaming the legislation as an 'equality bill' to lessen resistance; nevertheless, the core issues of societal values and apprehension of social change continue as substantial obstacles.

Ultimately, a human rights-based approach that includes legal frameworks and the rule of law must emphasise that access to justice is a right, not charity. These frameworks should empower individuals experiencing poverty as subjects, not mere objects, of the justice system. They should be given knowledge of their human and legal rights, confidence to exercise these rights, and the capacity to seek help.

b) Addressing Stigma and Discrimination and the Role of Public Services in Poverty Reduction

The discussions also raised concerns that the poor often face stigma and discrimination, interconnecting with other social categorisations such as race, gender, and class. Individuals from vulnerable groups often face multiple levels of discrimination that compound their challenges. Acknowledging intersectionality is essential for understanding the complexities of poverty and for designing interventions that address the unique experiences of individuals within these groups.

Given that human rights are universal, prioritising rights-based approaches means going beyond stereotypical assumptions that pathologise poverty, such as having the notion that poverty is self-inflicted. Selective approaches further divide those who can access public services and those who are excluded.

Among the issues which surfaced was institutional maltreatment, or discrimination in public services that disproportionately affect poor and marginalised populations, particularly in developing countries. Differences in treatment quality were observed across public services, and these issues stem from complex structural factors like social exclusion and poverty.

The stigmatisation of poverty also points to considerations regarding access to public and social services in general. The dichotomy of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor creates barriers for the most marginalised groups to access essential services, including justice services. Public services are essential for democratic societies, ensuring equitable wealth distribution and equal treatment for all, regardless of various personal attributes. The importance of including all people, especially marginalised groups, in public life and political decision-making, should be emphasised.

It is worth noting that successful country experiences on poverty reduction were rooted in effective public services. It was highlighted that China's poverty reduction efforts have been extraordinary, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty through targeted and strategic interventions. Key to this success was the implementation of tailored policies for specific regions and populations, which included developing local industries, relocating individuals from impoverished areas, and enhancing social security systems. The government also revised laws and allocated substantial resources to poverty reduction, investing in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Additionally, China focused on improving elderly care as part of its strategy, ensuring that older populations received necessary services and support. A five-year transition period for monitoring and evaluation was introduced, fostering collaboration between

national and local governments to assess the effectiveness of these measures.

c) Incorporating Lived Experiences and Enhancing Participation for Effective Policymaking in Poverty Reduction

The recognition of these root causes of discrimination highlights the importance of incorporating lived experiences in the policy-making processes. Studies suggest that marginalised groups, when introduced to rights-based approaches, define poverty as a human rights violation and propose interventions designed and implemented by the poor themselves. The valuable insights of individuals with lived experiences of poverty and vulnerability allow the development of more informed and effective policies.

Lived experience as a methodological tool is gaining more prominence. For example, the Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration & Evaluation of Policies (IDEEP) framework is designed to ensure meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies that affect their lives. IDEEP emphasises inclusive participation by actively involving marginalised individuals in the policymaking process, recognising the hidden dimensions of poverty that are often overlooked. It advocates for a deliberative approach integrating experiential knowledge, fostering a deeper understanding of poverty, and enhancing policy effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. By positioning people in poverty as agents of change rather than passive recipients, IDEEP empowers them to contribute to solutions. The framework also provides a structured methodology for engaging stakeholders and ensuring that diverse forms of knowledge are included in policy design and evaluation.

Another example raised during the discussion involved the experience of addressing decent work conditions for informal workers in Thailand. Informal workers in Thailand often endure precarious working conditions and lack essential social protections, highlighting the need for tailored interventions. Recognising and validating their lived experiences is crucial, as these workers seek the right to employment and decent work conditions without being patronised. Customised approaches, such as building long-term relationships and offering consistent support, can improve their outcomes. Additionally, fostering participation among these workers requires the use of clear and simple language, respectful phrasing, and providing organisational support to help them understand and navigate the systems affecting their livelihoods.

The merging of knowledge (MoK) was also highlighted as a valuable approach for developing more informed and effective policies for poverty alleviation. This was exemplified by a collaboration between ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford, aiming to gain deeper insights into the hidden dimensions of poverty. However, this approach, akin to the lived experience approach, may face challenges such as the risk of underestimating the broader structural and complex nature of poverty, tokenistic participation without meaningful influence, and potential isolation due to the public sharing of personal experiences.

Multilateral development organisations have also explored enhancing community participation. The Community Resilience Partnership Program (CRPP) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) aims to strengthen community-level resilience to climate change by supporting community-led adaptation initiatives. It empowers local communities to develop and implement their

solutions to climate challenges. Through grants to grassroots organisations, CRPP enables these groups to address climate vulnerabilities and enhance resilience. The programme also emphasises monitoring participation and ensuring accountability, with regular evaluation to track progress and outcomes.

Summary

Despite the methodological complexities and the need for clear accountability, the overarching theme that emerged from the session was the urgent need to acknowledge the multidimensional and socially relational nature of poverty and to actively engage marginalised individuals as agents of change in the policymaking process.

7.3 Social Security Protection and the Role of Women as Care Givers

This session included two issues, namely how social protection addressed the poor and the vulnerable, and how women as caregivers are falling under the radar.

Exclusion and Inclusion of The Poor and Vulnerable Groups

Social protection is a human right that has been adopted since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It is especially important because it is a pre-condition to the realisation of other human rights, such as access to health. It is one of those human rights that puts rights realisation into practice. It is about action and solutions. This is particularly important when reducing poverty is at stake.

Social protection is not, however, only about reducing poverty. Poverty is a dynamic phenomenon; people can get out of poverty but also fall into it very quickly, as was witnessed throughout the world with the COVID pandemic. Social protection thus means both taking people out of poverty and also preventing them from falling into it. In other words, social protection means social safety nets.

Despite the existence of social protection in many countries, the poor and vulnerable may not be aware of these schemes or do not think they qualify for them. This is what is defined as exclusion errors, when poor sections of the population fail to get social protection, despite their eligibility. Conversely, inclusion errors mean groups who are not eligible will receive social protection. Despite some critical political discourse on social protection fuelled by inclusion errors, these are much smaller in numbers than the exclusion errors. Inclusion errors should be reduced in order to use resources wisely and guarantee fairness, and addressing exclusion errors should be prioritised by, for instance, expanding the scope of social protection.

In this regard workers in the informal sector do not have the same access to social protection measures such as a pensions scheme as workers in the formal sector, be it public or private. It is therefore crucial to reach these workers. Shame can also be a reason for exclusion errors. Many people do not look for social protection as it may be perceived as an individual failure. Education could mitigate this problem. It has been verified that younger generations, having had more education, have a more positive perception of rights and, therefore, are more inclined to apply for social protection when needed. The exercise of the right to education, like with so many rights, enhances the enjoyment of other rights, social protection in this case.

The fact that poverty is multidimensional should guide social policy. This means that even if cash transfers are an important tool of social policy in the short term, one should be looking also

for more long-term solutions, such as providing access to public services. While cash transfers are considered a short-term solution, it is an important measure as it has many beneficial effects for individuals and communities. Cash transfers give agency to vulnerable people, allowing them to exercise choice. In addition, cash disbursed circulates within the community and therefore has a multiplier effect. It has been calculated that for each dollar in cash transfers, 1.7 dollars are generated within the community.

Cash transfers can reduce poverty and enhance food security, as in the Philippines for example, where the 4P programme has benefitted 4.4 million households and led to a 1.5% poverty reduction every year in the last six years. It has also had indirect effects on other rights, such as increasing access to schools or to vaccination programmes as the Bolsa Família Program has shown in Brazil. Increasing education levels will expand opportunities for young people in the future and thus contribute to reducing the chances of falling into poverty in adulthood.

'Poverty is a Woman's Place' not Least in Domestic Care

Poverty is the result of social and economic inequalities deriving ultimately from the fact that the state has not complied with its duty regarding economic and social rights. One of the inequalities that is responsible for much of the existing poverty is gender inequality. Indeed, poverty impacts mostly women; they are the first to leave the labour market in the case of economic downturns. A large share of their work tends to be unpaid, mostly connected with domestic tasks and caring for children and the elderly. Women not only suffer more from poverty, but also work more to compensate for the absence of social protection in the family and the community.

Brazil's experience has shown that making women the main receivers of cash transfers will not only increase the positive impacts of social protection but will also empower women within the family and the community.

Social protection in the form of an economy of care, that is, providing services in the domain of care, such as childcare for example, is an important tool to reduce poverty as it can free women from domestic tasks and allow them to get access to the labour market and earn an income. But there is also a need to think about ways of valuing unpaid work. Furthermore, the development of this economic domain will also create new jobs and new opportunities, leading to more jobs for poorer groups. The role of the care economy is emerging in policy discourses. A declaration on care will be presented for adoption at the ASEAN summit in October 2024.

While the lack of resources may hinder the implementation of social protection, the effort must be made. Accountability all round is crucial; the state must provide social protection, workers in the sector must fulfil their duty, and citizens must pay taxes.

Summary Observations

There are five aspects to action concerning social protection to reduce poverty:

- First, it is important that the state takes a rights duty approach, and the state must prioritise key elements of social protection, such as access to health.
- Second, it is crucial that cash transfers reach the largest numbers possible of eligible groups while also avoiding situations of dependency. The evidence is that cash transfers generally have not created much dependence, but new ways of approaching cash transfers can be useful. Participatory research in this case can

be an important tool to avoid exclusion errors and dependence. If the vulnerable groups participate in the discussions concerning their situation, there is greater likelihood of finding ways to ensure that social protection will enhance self-reliance.

- Third, it is important to take culture and values into consideration in poverty alleviation, and to prevent dependence and exclusion errors. People perceive social protection in different ways according to their values. Designing social policies that take into account local values and culture can make them more effective.
- Fourth, attaching conditions to the receipt of social protection can have the effect of punishing and stigmatising poor people. Also, the middle class should be given some attention, squeezed as they are between the rich that do not need protection and the poor that get most of it.
- Finally, sustainability is a crucial issue. Rights do not have an expiration date, and the rights of future generations must be considered when securing human rights today. This means that social protection must be managed to guarantee future resources. When transferring cash to new individuals, some others will have to be exited from the system if social protection is to be sustainable. This has to be handled carefully as the removal of benefits from people can lead to social unrest.

8. Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

Session 1 focussed on measurement methods and policies, with much reference to the experience in Thailand. There was lively debate and discussion of various issues and ideas, with some scepticism about tagging poverty to just one monetary measure. There was also discussion of the need for the integration of human rights instruments in poverty reduction policies.

Session 2 emphasised the urgent need to acknowledge the multidimensional and socially relational nature of poverty and to actively engage marginalised individuals as agents of change in the policymaking process.

Session 3 underlined sustainability is a crucial issue. Rights do not have an expiration date, and the rights of future generations must be considered when securing human rights today. This means that social protection must be managed to guarantee future resources.

Three targets were identified as Directions for the Future

- Reducing the digital divide, working with digital citizenship, promoting exchange, learning, and training programmes are important tasks to be undertaken as part of the poverty reduction effort.
- Pay attention not just to outputs and outcomes statistics, but also processes that may reveal hidden dimensions of poverty. This entails a stronger focus on procedural rights, rights of participation, remedy, and rights to information and transparency.
- Business has a role to play in poverty reduction generally and specifically in social protection.

(Workshop rapporteurs: Dr Hans-Otto SANO, Emeritus, Senior Researcher, the Danish Institute of Human Rights; Dr Manuel BRANCO, Professor, Department of Economics at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Évora; and Dr Maria Kristina G. ALINSUNURIN, Associate Professor, Institute for Governance and Rural Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños)

Expert Workshop: A Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction, Experiences & Lessons from Asia and Europe

22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights (ASEMHRS22)

9 September 2024 • Bangkok, Thailand

Participants List

SPEAKERS	Ambassador Toru MORIKAWA Executive Director Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) (virtual) Professor Olivier DE SCHUTTER United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty (virtual) Mrs Krongkanit RAKCHAROEN Director-General Department of European Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand Mrs Chulamanee CHARTSUWAN Asia-Europe Foundation Governor for Thailand Mr Rolf RING Deputy Director Raoul Wallenberg Institute Steering Committee Representative Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights Series Professor Amara PONGSAPICH Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
PRESENTORS/ MODERATORS	Mr Jakob DIRKSEN Research & Policy Officer Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) (virtual) Mr Ramesh SINGH Independent Practitioner & Advisor Ms Natalya BORODCHUK Social Policy Specialist UNICEF Thailand Ms Aye Aye WIN President International Committee for October 17 Mr Paul DALTON Chief Advisor on Human Rights, Neighboring Countries & Asia The Danish Institute of Human Rights Mr Andrea ROSSI Regional Advisor Social Policy & Economic Analysis UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office Ms Channe LINDSTRØM-OĞUZHAN Social Affairs Officer UN Economic & Social Commission for Asia & the Pacific (UNESCAP)

RAPPORTEURS	Dr Hans-Otto SANO Senior Researcher Emeritus The Danish Institute for Human Rights Dr Maria Kristina G ALINSUNURIN Associate Professor Institute of Governance & Rural Development University of the Philippines Los Baños Mr Manuel BRANCO Professor Department of Economics School of Social Sciences University of Évora
PARTICIPANTS	
BANGLADESH	Mr Aftab OPEL Country Director Innovations for Poverty (IPA) Philippines Dr Badiul MAJUMDAR Vice-President/Country Director The Hunger Project
CAMBODIA	Mr Theara KHOUN Policy Specialist Social & Economics UNDP Cambodia
CHINA	Ms LIU Jianxiu Third Secretary Permanent Mission of China to ESCAP Ms Nanlin WANG First Secretary Permanent Mission of China to ESCAP
INDIA	Mr Victor KARUNAN Visiting Professor Institute of Human Rights & Peace Studies Mahidol University Ms Palak RAWAL Social Development Specialist Asian Development Bank
INDONESIA	Mr Ah MAFTUCHAN Executive Director The PRAKARSA Ms Femmy SOEMANTRI Partnership & Advocacy Lead UN Global Pulse – Asia Ms Anna ZUZY Director SDGs Center Universitas Padjadjaran
LAO PDR	Mr Sinthavy MALAVONG Team Leader, Inclusive Growth Unit UNDP

MALAYSIA	Ms Hawati ABDUL HAMID Director of Research Khazanah Research Institute
PHILIPPINES	Ms Klarise Grace FORTALEZA Officer-in-Charge Economic, Social & Cultural Rights Center Commission on Human Rights Mr Agustus Lito NARAG Project Development Officer & Division Chief Dept of Social Welfare & Development
POLAND	Ms Kamila PLOWIEC Board Member European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
PORTUGAL	Professor Sergio Hugo COSTA ARAÚJO Professor Adjunto Politécnico do Porto Escola Superior de Educação
SOUTH KOREA	Dr Seongsa KIM Associate Research Fellow Korea Institute for Health & Social Affairs Dr Yoonkyung KWAK Associate Research Fellow Korea Institute for Health & Social Affairs
THAILAND	Ms Rungtip IMRUNGRUANG Program and Policy Manager ActionAid International Ms Narumol NIRATHRON Professor in Labour Development & Welfare Thammasat University Dr Sriprapha PETCHARAMESREE Chulalongkorn University Mr Boonthan TANSUTHEPVERAEONGSA Secretary General Human Rights & Development Foundation (HRDF) Dr Chantha THANAWATTANAWONG Ubon Ratchathani University Ms Nakmeen WAEMENG OHCHR Thailand

Background Paper on Human Rights and Poverty Reduction

by Dr Hans-Otto Sano

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hans-Otto Sano is an expert in human rights and development. He has worked intensively on human rights-based approaches and has critically examined the impact and uptake of the approach. Hans-Otto Sano has also undertaken research on human rights and poverty reduction and has focussed his research mainly on African and Asian economic and social development. Recently, he has coedited the revised second edition of Research Methods in Human Rights (Edward Elgar 2024). He has worked as Research Director at the Danish Institute for Human Rights for eight years. Earlier he worked at the World Bank as Senior Programme Officer and as an Associate Professor at University of Roskilde. He has undertaken consultancy work for the European Union, for the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) and for Swedish and Norwegian development Institutions.

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I. Introduction

Poverty is both a development and a human rights issue that affects people in every nation across the globe. Poverty undermines not only the right to health, housing, food, water, and education, but also impedes the exercise of civil and political rights. Poverty reduction is essential if people living in poverty are to fully realise their rights and freedoms.

Estimates of the number of people living in poverty vary significantly because analysts define and measure poverty by both economic and non-economic metrics. For example, according to the World Bank, in 2022 an estimated 712 million people, or about 8.9% of the world population, were living in extreme poverty. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the UNDP, however, says that in 2022, 1.2 billion or about 8.5% of the people in the developing world were living in severe multidimensional poverty, a measure of poverty that looks beyond daily income to encompass the interlocking deprivations in health, education, and living standards that the poor face. However, the latter percentage was based on the developing world only.[1]

Since the late 1990s, development actors have increasingly been taking a human rights-based approach (HRBA) in analysing poverty. With HRBA, poverty is seen as a human rights problem, not a lack of resources.

According to authoritative sources emerging in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, a HRBA perspective helps planners and analysts formulate and adopt policies and strategies that not only focus on reducing financial poverty but also address underlying structural causes and related human rights violations. HRBA addresses discriminatory structures of inequality, prodding governments to establish social protection programmes while also emphasising states' obligations in health, education, food, water, and housing.[2]

With HRBA, there is the notion of causality – poverty happens when human rights are not recognised and prioritised. Rights scholars, however, emphasise that neo-liberal or neo-classical economic policies have also undermined social rights.[3]

At the strategic level, the central importance in HRBA of the principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability provide a framework for structuring policy analysis and key objectives to ensure human rights are factored into development implementation.[4]

The programming tools of HRBA include foci on rightsholders and duty-bearers and methods and tools of actor-relevant measures among donors, states, business corporations, and NGOs.[5]

HRBA has opened the space for broader agendas than just the economic ones. With its emphasis on rightsholder agency and empowerment, HRBA overlaps with people-centred and human development approaches. In addition, a rights-based approach revolves around legal obligations for which states should be held accountable. The legal angle has become a stronger integral element of social policies inspired by human rights thinking in development as well as generally.

The International Poverty Line is currently set at USD 2.25/person/day, measured at fixed prices, and is used in conventional international comparisons and definitions of extreme poverty.[6] Within the development field and among International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and domestic governments, poverty metrics are mostly based on income or consumption measures. In the last decade,

the mainstream economic and human rights-based interpretations of poverty have become closer to each other, not least because poverty is recognised by most observers as a multifaceted predicament that expresses itself in non-economic dimensions.[7]

What are the trend lines in Asia and Europe? In both regions policies and strategies are under debate and in flux, making it difficult to point to firm and congruent trends. Chapter II of this paper will discuss the issues. However, one element can be stated with some certainty: discriminatory structures and policies prevail. While there is in European Union policy rhetoric much talk about human rights, it cannot be said that human rights policy notions have resulted in less discrimination.

This paper looks at the nexus between conceptual perspectives from development studies and economic doctrine and human rights. It brings into the debate on poverty a diversified understanding of socio-economic deprivation, marginalisation, inequality, powerlessness, and rights.

Between 2015 and 2018, global poverty continued its historic decline, with the extreme poverty rate falling from 10.1% to 8.6%.[8] However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the crisis in Ukraine have reversed much of the progress made, with global extreme poverty rising for the first time in two decades. Furthermore, the pandemic exposed deep-seated inequalities and significant gaps and inadequacies in social protection coverage across many countries. Meanwhile, climate change threatens to undermine efforts to eradicate poverty and unravel hard-won development gains.

The international human rights framework broadens the scope of poverty reduction strategies by recognising the interdependence of rights. Although poverty may seem to concern mainly economic, social, and cultural rights, the human rights framework highlights that the enjoyment of these rights may be crucially dependent on the enjoyment of civil and political rights. It is a misconception that civil and political rights and freedoms are luxuries relevant only to relatively affluent societies, and that economic, social, and cultural rights are merely aspirations and not binding obligations. Accordingly, the human rights framework demands that civil and political, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights, are integral components of poverty reduction strategies.[9]

Legal scholars have emphasised that human rights have an important dual function: they are claims based on particular values or principles, as well as legal rights to entitlements and freedoms. Philosophical and political conceptions of human rights are broader than international human rights law. While the two spheres are closely intertwined, they do not necessarily share a causal or direct relationship, i.e. that every claim must transform into a legally recognised right. Nor is the relationship always harmonious. A legally recognised right may be defined too narrowly and may therefore exclude certain categories. For example, age may not explicitly fall within the purview of the right to non-discrimination.[10]

The fact that most of the rights recognised in international human rights treaties are conceptualised as individual rights harks back to the notion that human beings have rights by virtue of their humanity, which was traditionally understood to apply solely to individuals. While some of the most prominent human rights movements in the early twentieth century had a collective dimension (for example, indigenous minority rights), these rights were understood to

belong to the individual members of minorities, not to any collective entity.[11]

One of the most distinctive features of HRBA when applied to poverty reduction is its explicit basis on the norms and values set out in international human rights law. All policies are imbued with norms or values, just as all institutions operate within a normative framework. Based on these foundations, international human rights law provides inspiration for national and international policies.[12]

Rights can be negative, i.e., freedom from something, such as the right not to be enslaved, or positive, i.e., the right to something, such as the right to education. By their nature, rights can either be absolute or subject to limitations or qualifications. Absolute rights, such as freedom from slavery, allow for no exceptions and are non-derogable. Even in highly exceptional situations, such as major emergencies, states are not permitted to interfere with absolute rights.[13] However, not all non-derogable rights are absolute rights. Qualified rights, such as the right to privacy and freedom of expression, may be, and frequently are, restricted on specific grounds relating to the rights of others, national security, public order, or norms.[14]

The major operational components of HRBA are their emphasis on human rights standards, i.e., an individual's rights, and the broader principles of non-discrimination, participation, and accountability. These latter principles have been more important in defining the implementation of rights-based approaches than the principles of interdependence, indivisibility, and universality, which also form part of the human rights framework.[15] The principle of non-discrimination implies equal treatment according to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other social status.[16] The principle of accountability implies that duty-bearers must operate in compliance with legal human rights obligations and must promote human rights awareness. The principle of participation implies ensuring that national stakeholders have genuine ownership and control over development processes.[17] HRBA conceptual thinking reinforces rightsholders' entitlements to make claims, while promoting more consistent duty bearer (States) engagement with human rights obligations and promotion.[18]

A cornerstone of HRBA is the empowerment of rightsholders. The most fundamental way in which empowerment occurs is through the introduction of the concepts of rights and legal obligations. Once these concepts are applied in policymaking, the rationale for poverty reduction is no longer simply that people living in poverty have needs, but that they have rights—entitlements that give rise to legal obligations on the part of others. This is the conceptual foundation of HRBA.

The human rights perspective is that the existence of poverty indicates the non-realisation of human rights. The adoption of a poverty reduction strategy is thus not just desirable but obligatory for States that have ratified international human rights instruments.[19] In addition, unlike earlier approaches to poverty reduction, a human rights-based approach attaches as much importance to the processes for achieving developmental goals as to the goals themselves. In particular, the rights-based approach aims to ensure the active and informed participation of the impoverished in the formulation, and at times also in the implementation and monitoring, of poverty reduction strategies. HRBA highlights the fact that participation is valuable not just as a means to other ends, but also as a key to ensuring fundamental human rights.[20]

II. International, Regional and National Protection

This chapter examines the issues related to the evolution of the human rights-based approach in poverty reduction over the last 20 years: the international development goals established in 2000, the impact of a people-centred development approach in combating poverty, the influence of the HRBA agenda, including the importance of human rights principles and standards and their role in the formulation of the development goals, and the institutionalisation of human rights at regional levels.

Apart from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda and the HRBA efforts, China and the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) have placed importance on the people-centred approach. With this approach, as seen at a China-ASEAN and United Nations Development Programme symposium in 2018, extreme poverty reduction is linked with the objective of 'Leaving No One Behind' and with human development empowerment goals. Community and local government actors are seen as agents of change, combatting inequality and employment insecurity. The strategy is described as rules-based, people-centred, and people-oriented. However, beyond Asia the people-centred approach has had little influence in the last decade.[21]

a) Human Rights and & Poverty Reduction at the International Level: Reflecting on International Spheres of Influence

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were an important step towards the convergence of development and economic and social rights while being silent on civil and political rights. The MDGs overlapped with economic and social human rights, for example, by aiming to halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 (MDG 1) and by their performance objectives on food, health, education, water, housing, and gender equality.[22]

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a more emphatic human rights perspective in prioritising poverty reduction and social security (Goal 1), strengthening efforts on food and social rights, and in their aim to promote the rule of law, good governance and inclusion, while explicitly expressing objectives of non-discrimination and gender equality. But human rights are only explicitly mentioned once across the 17 goals.[23]

The SDGs are marked by an effort to prioritise marginalised groups. Aiming to Leave No One Behind, the 2030 Agenda includes 169 targets that can be regrouped into five themes, aimed at protecting people, the planet, prosperity, peace, and promoting partnerships.[24] The SDGs aim *"to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment"*.[25] It has been argued that 156 of the 169 targets are linked to human rights and labour standards. If we compare the content of the SDGs with the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR) we can conclude that the SDGs cover important elements of the rights to social security (SDG 1), food (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), water (SDG 6), work (SDG 8) and housing (SDG 11). Two SDGs are specifically designed to combat formal and substantive inequality and discrimination. SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and SDG 10 aims to reduce inequality within and among countries.[26]

The UN human rights mechanisms have made significant efforts to include the SDGs in their work. Monitoring and meetings have been instituted and voluntary country reviews have been undertaken.[27] However, halfway through the SDG 15-year implementation period, there are indications that the SDG agenda has lost some of its momentum. The British House of Commons Fifth Report of Sessions 2020-23 reports that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the SDGs seemed to be off track concerning the goal of extreme poverty. The three Cs were referred to as explaining the bleak performance: COVID-19, climate, and conflict.[28]

Despite the not entirely positive reports on SDG outcomes, the rights agenda's position remains relevant through its legitimacy and broad mandates and as the human rights principles of accountability, non-discrimination and participation (and inclusion) are key points in global policies even beyond the SDG period.

The human rights agendas strengthened by the SDGs include social security rights and the rights to health and food, education, housing, and water. Non-discrimination and equality are integral parts of SDG Goal 5 and 10[29], while inclusion is emphasised in six Goals (4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16). Key strategies in framing non-discrimination and equality are the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, older persons, minorities and unemployed persons. Goal 1 of the SDGs centre on extreme poverty; social security rights under Goal 1.3 of the SDG aim to *"Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable."*

An important element in reinforcing human rights protection and accountability is the institutionalisation of human rights at a regional level. This would mean, for example, a regional convention offering access to courts and jurisprudence and regional collaborative bodies that are endowed with strong human rights implementation mandates. The lack of institutional progress in this regard in Asia will be discussed in the next chapter.

What are the other human rights agendas in poverty reduction? At the international level, the agendas tend to focus on social protection, inclusion, and non-discrimination.[30] In its recent policy brief on the right to social security, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) states: *"A fundamental human right, social security is a potent tool to combat discrimination and an essential instrument for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. COVID-19 has made realising this right even more pressing. The pandemic has exposed the weakness of a social and economic system that has neglected to invest sufficiently in rights such as social protection and health care."* In his 2022 report on the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights, the UN Secretary General recommended the establishment of human rights-based social protection systems in order to operationalise his call for a renewed social contract underpinned by a global new deal in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.[31] The priority given to social protection by the UN has been complemented by the World Bank in its 2022 social protection report. It is significant that the Bank identifies social protection as a universal priority, linking the need to the COVID-19 crisis and other global shocks.[32]

An important point about the international poverty agenda is that once strategy components such as human rights principles are implemented, they tend to overlap with other agendas. The human rights-based notion of underlining action from below overlaps with human development

and people-centred approaches. The latter approach draws on inspiration from community development approaches and efforts to put capabilities and self-reliance in focus.[33] There are, therefore, broad similarities between the rights-based approach and **people-centred** and **human development approaches** in their emphasis on empowerment and the capability to raise claims against duty-bearers. However, there is less emphasis on agency in the people-centred and human development approaches and, as noted above, these approaches are not predominant in the strategic efforts and policies of states.

In many countries, poverty reduction strategies are bedevilled by corruption. Corruption is less likely to flourish where there is access to information, freedom of expression, participation, and justice. The emphasis in the human rights-based approach of both the narrow legal and the broader political accountability may help to reduce corruption and lead to more effective poverty reduction efforts not just by the state and the government, but also by the corporate sector and the international community.[34]

Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 is a key goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To achieve this, transformative, just, and inclusive approaches in line with the promise of Leaving No One Behind and that address the challenges of an unpredictable global environment are needed. It is against this backdrop that the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights – Expert Workshop will discuss how human rights-based and people-centred approaches can facilitate poverty reduction by providing an effective framework for practical action, at international, national and subnational levels.

b) Human Rights and Poverty Reduction at a Regional Level: Asia

Asia has seen the sharpest declines in global poverty, thanks to its recent immense economic growth and social transformation, according to Asia Poverty Reduction Report 2020 by Boao Forum for Asia (BFA). This trend has, however, been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly disrupted the decline of poverty worldwide. The **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**, produced by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the UNDP (see OPHI above), is a human development-oriented poverty metric covering access to health and education and disaggregating data in terms of gender and children's rights.[35] The data for most Asian States has, however, not been updated since 2020.

Based on the **International Poverty Line (IPL)**, the **Asian Development Bank** confirms that poverty reduction in Asia and the Pacific has been significantly thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report suggests that individuals in the Asia-Pacific region will face greater difficulties escaping poverty compared to the pre-pandemic period.[36]

While the OPHI data cannot be used to complement the IPL,[37] the Human Development Index (HDI) published annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) can be used to corroborate the most recent poverty trends in Asia as indicated by the Asian Development Bank report.

Table 1 provides data on 2021 HDI components, disaggregated by the three main sub-regional entities: East Asia, South-East Asia, and South Asia. The HDI reveals marked distinctions

between East Asia and the two other sub-regions. East Asia represents the most affluent and socially developed sub-region, while South Asia, especially in terms of incomes, displays an average income level only a little more than one sixth of East Asia's. The economic inequality among Asian countries is clear. However, comparing the current HDI with pre-pandemic 2018 data indicates that the negative impact of the pandemic has been more significant in East Asia than in South-East and South Asia. While East Asia had an average HDI of 0.874 in 2018 compared to an average HDI of 0.862 in 2021, South-East Asia scored an average HDI of 0.725 in 2018 compared to the 0.734 in 2021. The three South Asian counties also improved income and HDI scores between 2018 and 2021.[38]

The **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)** reports to the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**. It provides a forum for all regional governments to review and discuss economic and social issues and to strengthen regional cooperation.[39] According to ESCAP, the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented socio-economic impact on the Asia-Pacific region and required a well-coordinated, multi-sectoral response. In addressing the pandemic, ESCAP focused on assessing the developmental impact of the health crisis and reoriented its support for member states to where it was most needed. In May 2020, ESCAP announced its framework of support for member states in addressing the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Four areas of work were highlighted: ensuring economic recovery, protecting people, restoring and building resilience in supply chains, and protecting and restoring ecosystems under the overarching principle of building back better through integrated actions aligned with the SDGs.[340] While emphasising poverty, the post-pandemic ESCAP program did not have an explicit human rights orientation. However, alignment with the SDGs implies a stronger focus on inequality, non-discrimination, and inclusion.[41]

A second institutional framework in Asia is the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**. In 2009, the ASEAN **Intergovernmental**

Table 1. Asian Regional Development Distinctions Based on Human Development Performance 2021 and 2018.

Sub-region	Per-capita Gross national income (GNI) USD 2011 - prices	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	Human Development Index (HDI)
East Asian ASEM Member States* (4)	28717 (2021) 26116 (2018)	79 (2021)	10 (2021)	0.862 (2021) 0.874 (2018)
South-East Asian Member States (11)	24266 (2021) 25400 (2018)	72	8	0.734 (2021) 0.732 (2018)
South Asian Member States (3)	5562 (2021) 5359 (2018)	69	6	0.613 (2021) 0.607 (2018)

Source: UNDP, 'Documentation and Downloads: Data Downloads' (Human Development Reports, 2022), **https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads**

*The East Asian figures excludes Australia and New Zealand as ASEM Member States, but includes Japan, Korea, China, and Mongolia. The South-East Asian countries are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Kazakhstan. The South Asian countries comprise Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was inaugurated. The international human rights regime, long lacking a regional counterpart in Asia, could now look to a subregional institutional framework covering the 10 ASEAN states, all of them ASEM Members: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.[42]

According to a recent research study, AICHR has generated regional human rights debates, engaged civil society and wider stakeholders, built capacity, and conducted studies on human rights during the last 10 years. The adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in 2012 enabled the region to further promote human rights. While AICHR has gradually become important for human rights in the region, it continues to struggle in performing its work of human rights protection due to the lack of a formal protection mandate and the political will of member states.

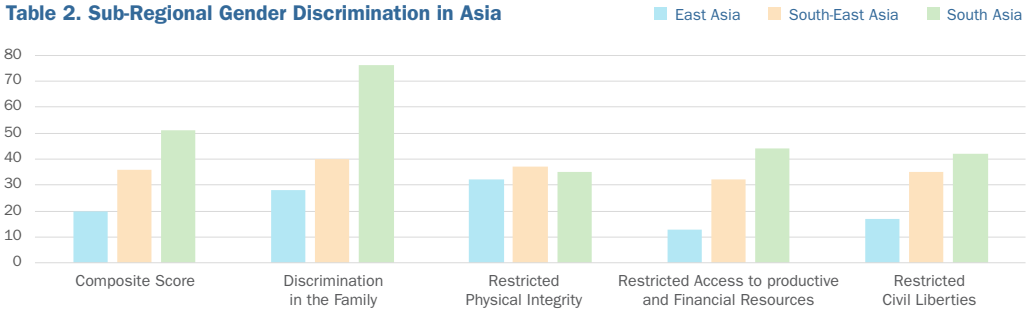
AICHR introduced a mechanism for human rights communication in 2019 and, as shown in the 2021–2025 working plan, has prioritised more activities that support a protection mandate, such as conducting country visits, developing a grievance mechanism and referral system, initiating an ASEAN human rights index, and managing human rights correspondence and complaints to the AICHR.[43]

The South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985. Three member states, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, are ASEM member countries. SAARC has focused mainly on economic cooperation. While poverty, social development, migration, and trafficking are defined as issues of collective action, there is no recent progress in these areas. The last summit was held in 2014.

1. The Challenge of Discriminatory Practices and Inequality

According to the 2023 OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index report, the Asian continent is marked by the second-highest level of gender discrimination after Africa. Index scores are based on assessments of four categories of discrimination: discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources, and restricted civil liberties.[44]

Table 2. Sub-Regional Gender Discrimination in Asia



Source: OECD Development Centre, 'SIGI 2023 Global Report: Gender Equality in Times of Crisis' (OECD Library, 2023) <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en>

*The scores are based on a 0–100 scale where 0 represents no discrimination and 100 indicates absolute discrimination on every parameter. Family discrimination includes child marriage, inheritance, divorce, and household responsibilities. Physical restrictions involve violence against women, female genital mutilation, missing women, and reproductive autonomy. Restricted access to resources comprises access to land, access to non-land assets, access to financial services, and workplace rights. The civil liberties column includes citizenship rights, freedom of movement, political voice, and access to justice.

Table 2 demonstrates a systematic pattern of gender discrimination by sub-region, with East Asia and Southeast Asia showing less gender discrimination compared to South Asia. The systematic pattern follows the economic and development performance revealed in Table 1. The better developed sub-regions are also the regions with less discrimination. However, considerable variation occurs within the sub-regions. Japan in East Asia, for instance, performs worse than Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand in South-East Asia in terms of the composite score.

Discrimination in the family takes place more systematically compared to any other dimension (with the exception of the East Asian physical integrity score). South Asia has a very high level of gender discrimination in the family, but also fairly high levels of discrimination across the other dimensions.

The civil liberties dimension shows high levels of discrimination in Bangladesh, India, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. In other words, examples of high levels of this restrictive and oppressive dimension can be found in all sub-regions, although mostly in Southeast and South Asia.

Annex *Table 2* (below) records the Asian GINI coefficients. It ranks 14 Asian member states among the Asia-Europe members (ASEM) according to their GINI coefficients with the most unequal countries ranked first. Nine of the 14 states have a level of inequality where adjustments of more than 33% and 41% of the incomes are needed to achieve income parity. High income inequality characterises all of the sub-regions in Asia, but East and Southeast Asia to a greater extent.

Workplace discrimination is an issue which, like gender discrimination, illustrates how poverty and human rights intersect. According to the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the groups at particular risk of labour exploitation include domestic workers, women, migrants, human trafficking victims, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, people living with HIV-AIDS, and people with disabilities. More than 60% of workers in the Asia–Pacific region are characterised as 'vulnerable,' meaning they are own-account workers, unpaid family workers, or in casual, part-time or temporary employment.[45]

A group which is particularly relevant to the Asian context is migrant workers. According to the most recent ILO estimates, there were 163.8 million migrant workers globally in 2017. Of these, 58.4% (95.7 million) were male and 41.6% (68.1 million) were female. Asia and the Pacific hosts 20.4%of these migrant workers. Arab states have the highest proportion of migrant workers to all workers (40.8%), and host 13.9% of migrant workers worldwide, most of them from South-East and South Asia.

Another group important in this context are indigenous people. About 260 million indigenous and tribal people live in the Asia-Pacific region, which is about 70% of the global total of 370 million. But, as in other parts of the world, indigenous people are among the poorest of the poor in almost every Asian country. Globally, while they account for 5% of the population, they make up more than 15% of the poor. Most indigenous and tribal people live in rural areas. They often lack control over land and resources and face discrimination and poverty. In addition to having low incomes, they have limited access to basic education, health care, and other services. While they have their own ways of life, traditions, and customary laws, a lack of respect for their cultures has, throughout history, brought social conflict and bloodshed.[46]

c) Human Rights and Poverty Reduction at a Regional Level: Europe

We now look at the situation in Europe generally and among the ASEM member countries in Europe. Again, we will use the Human Development Indicators (HDI) rather than examining incomes, growth rates, or inequality according to the GINI coefficient. The HDI will ensure that non-economic measures are included in describing broad country status. The Oxford Poverty Human Development Index (OPHI), which is the most comprehensive recent measurement of poverty from a multidimensional perspective, does not cover European countries.[47]

1) The Broad Evolution: Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe

In studying the socio-economic and poverty situation within Europe, we differentiate three sub-regions: North, Southern, and Eastern Europe. The **Council of Europe** consists of 46 member states, while the European Union has 27 states. The Council of Europe comprises 700 million people, while the **European Union** has 450 million people. This means that some 250 million people are living outside the borders of the EU. These populations, located in the Eastern and South-Eastern parts of Europe, are subject to distinct patterns of poverty and low economic well-being compared to the EU groups, as demonstrated in *Table 3*.

Table 3 records the Human Development Index distinctions between EU and non-EU members. In terms of incomes, longevity, years of schooling, and the HDI score (the top score being 0.9999 and top rank being 1, the EU group performs better on every score, illustrating the regional poverty differentiation between the two state member groups.

Table 3. European Human Development 2021: EU Member States and Non-EU States

	Gross national income (GNI) per capita USD 2011 – prices	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	Human Development Index (HDI)
European Union Average HDI figures	43547	79	12	0.897 (28)*
Non-EU Average HDI figures*	19732	74	11	0.781 (74)*

Source: UNDP: Human Development Report 2022

Note: The figure in parentheses is the rank status of the member group. The HDI represents the calculation of the geometric means for the three core components of the Index. The geometric mean is the **average**, which indicates a **central tendency** of a finite set of **real numbers** by using the product of their values (as opposed to the **arithmetic mean** which uses their sum). The non-EU member states exclude Norway, Iceland, and Lichtenstein – states with a much stronger affinity to the Northern EU members.

Table 4 divides the European region into three groups based on Human Development performance. The Northern, Southern, and Eastern regions are marked by differences in income and life expectancy while being equal in number of years of schooling.

Table 4. European Regional Development Distinctions Based on 2022 Human Development Performance: EU Member States and Non-EU States

	Gross national income (GNI) per capita USD 2011 – prices	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	Human Development Index (HDI)
Northern Europe HDI figures	59782	79	12	0.942 (10)
Southern Europe HDI figures	39568 (50787) *	81 (81)	12	0.882 (35) 0.935 (31)
Eastern European HDI figures	15739	71	12	0.882 (35) 0.935 (31)

* These are the numbers when Switzerland and Lichtenstein are included in the Southern European group.

Source: UNDP, 'Documentation and Downloads: Data Downloads' (Human Development Reports, 2022), <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads>

The striking difference in table 4 is in terms of incomes, with per capita Eastern European incomes averaging at one third of the Northern European per capita incomes. If Switzerland and Lichtenstein are included among the Southern European states, the income gap between Northern and Southern Europe is less marked. Longevity shows a marginally better performance in Southern Europe, but the HDI rank is significantly lower in Southern Europe compared to its northern counterparts. Finally, the Eastern group of states are distinctively worse off in terms of incomes, longevity, and HDI rank.

2) Institutional Strength

The **European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR)** is the first Council of Europe convention and the cornerstone of all its activities. Its ratification is a prerequisite for joining the organisation. The ECHR entered into force in 1953. The Convention has an impressive record of achievements. It has been ratified by both Western and Eastern European States (the latter group after the collapse of communist systems there).[48]

In recent years, European countries have been adding special clauses to their constitutions about the observance of international human rights standards. Such clauses have been written into the constitutions of Sweden (Chapter 2, Section 23), Norway (Section 110 C), Latvia (Article 89), and Finland (Section 16a). In Norway, a Human Rights Act was promulgated on 21 May 1999. It includes

a priority clause (Section 3) and coverage of three treaties: the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

Under the ECHR, there is a mandatory individual complaints system. Individuals of the States that have ratified the Convention can petition the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg, France, if they feel that their governments have violated their Convention rights. A huge body of human rights jurisprudence has emerged as a result of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights.[49]

The European Court of Human Rights oversees and enforces the implementation of the Convention in the 46 Council of Europe member states. Individuals can bring complaints of human rights violations to the Strasbourg Court once all possibilities of appeal have been exhausted in the member state concerned. The European Union is preparing to sign the European Convention on Human Rights, creating a common European legal doctrine for over 700 million citizens.

Almost all European states have ratified the two main covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Only one state has not ratified the latter, Andorra.

The **European Social Charter of Fundamental Rights** is a Council of Europe (COE) treaty that guarantees fundamental social and economic rights as a counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights, which refers to civil and political rights. The COE guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection, and welfare. Within the European Union, the Social Charter is legally binding, coming into effect with the December 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. The Charter includes fundamental rights, such as data protection and guarantees on bioethics.[50]

Outside the EU, European citizens and inhabitants depend on domestic constitutional guarantees and on UN treaties for legally enforceable human rights protections.

3) Human Rights-Based Approaches

HRBAs remain a cornerstone of EU external action policies while being much less important as a policy instrument in domestic European contexts. This is also the case for non-EU member states. In the strong legal regime instituted by the ECHR and the European Court of Human Rights, HRBA is considered to an instrument of developmental support. However, civil society in Europe and the human rights defenders have employed HRBA to safe-guard civil society and democratic spaces. In a study undertaken by the **Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union**,[51] about one third of civil society groups indicated that conditions for democratic convening are poor.

4) The Challenge: Discriminatory Practices and Inequality

According to the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 report, of the four continental regions (Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe), Europe scores the best in terms of gender discrimination. Europe's scores are similar to those of East Asia, which we saw in Table 2.

Table 5 shows the scores for the EU and non-EU member states. EU countries in Eastern and Southern Europe exhibit higher levels of

restricted physical integrity compared to the Northern European countries. This explains the similar figures between EU and non-EU states in this column. With respect to gender and civil liberties, a similar regime of gender inequality prevails in Eastern and Southern Europe, which explains the high score among EU member states. The breakdown into sub-regional averages in Europe in general shows a nearly similar pattern regarding discrimination in the family, but marked differentiation between North-Western Europe and respectively Eastern and Southern Europe. Eastern Europe displays a restricted regime with respect to civil liberties.

Table 5. Sub-Regional Gender Discrimination in Europe among ASEM Member States

Source: OECD Development Centre, 'SIGI 2023 Global Report: Gender Equality in Times of Crisis' (OECD Library, 2023)
<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en>

Note: North-Western Europe includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Ireland, Sweden and United Kingdom. - Eastern Europe comprises Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Rep, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, - Southern Europe includes Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain

5) Economic Inequality

The Human Development Index provides information on economic inequality across Europe measured by income. The GINI coefficient further illustrates economic inequality by identifying the magnitude of economic transfer from affluent groups to poorer ones in order to achieve equal distribution of income, i.e., a situation where 75% of the population is allocated 75% of total income.

Annex Table 1 records GINI scores by country. Northern Europe has a fairly equal distribution of income, averaging a GINI coefficient of 27.2, while Southern Europe has the most unequal distribution of incomes, with a GINI coefficient of 31.1. Eastern Europe lies in between the latter regions, with a score of 28 points. Countries like Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova exhibit a more even distribution of incomes, whereas countries like Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Romania, also belonging to the Eastern group, are marked by fairly high levels of inequality. Within the Northern group, the Nordic countries stand out as quite equal, while higher levels of inequality can be found in the UK, Luxembourg, and Germany.

d) Conclusions: Human Rights and Poverty Reduction in Asia and Europe

The international effort to reduce poverty and to take a human rights-based approach in poverty reduction has lost some of its momentum. This does not mean that these policy efforts have become redundant or unimportant, but they are less effective now compared to the period before 2020. The impact of the COVID pandemic and the current global political tensions have destabilizing influences on human rights and poverty reduction.

Poverty has increased in Asia and Europe, while there continues to be ambiguity about the role of human rights in addressing poverty. Regional variations are seen in both continents. Southern and Eastern Europe suffer economically and with respect to social rights.

Gender discrimination is highly prevalent in Asia, especially in South Asia. Other forms of discrimination prevail in Asia and Europe. This concerns workplace discrimination, as well as discrimination faced by migrants and indigenous persons.

Economic inequality is very high across Asian sub-regions. Economic inequality is less significant in northern European states, while GINI levels in Eastern and Southern European states are comparable to those in Asia. In Asia and Europe, the growth of poverty and insecurity is marked by discrimination and inequality. Lower-income individuals are left behind and treated in a discriminatory manner in both regions.

III. Thematic focus: Strategies of Human Rights Protection in the Global and Local Arena

This chapter deals with human rights integration and protection as integral parts of poverty reduction strategies. We will look in particular at duty-bearer commitments and practices, i.e., the institutional and political anchoring of human rights practices. In theory, domestic pressures, such as the empowerment of vulnerable groups, can influence policymakers into adopting rights-based policies and practices, but there is little evidence so far of advocacy and empowerment of marginalized groups.

It should be emphasized that, globally, development assistance has not been increasing significantly during the 2020s. According to the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, overseas development assistance (ODA) increased by 13.6% in real terms between 2021-2022, but the bulk of this increase was for in-donor refugee support. If the refugee costs were excluded, the increase of assistance 2021-22 would only be 4.6% in real terms.[52]

We begin with an overview of theoretical and conceptual dimensions of poverty reduction, moving on to reflect on how economic and social rights have gained importance in poverty reduction. Social security rights and the right to health have become very important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vulnerable groups and empowerment processes are part of the analysis of current rights reinforcement policies. The chapter ends by assessing compliance, monitoring and indicators, and the role of the SDGs.

a) Integration of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction Strategy and Measurement

Three analytical perspectives have characterised human rights scholarly perspectives on poverty. These are the institutional emphasis, legal obligations reflections, and the political economy and development critical analysis, which includes the question of whether human rights scholars are adequately addressing extreme poverty in their research.

The first perspective is Thomas Pogge's institutional approach, which applies a moral as well as legal perspective on the global order. The international institutional system, as it currently stands, engenders extreme poverty and does little to address its consequences. Human rights should be understood as giving rise to minimal moral claims against those who participate in imposing such social institutions. A very important source of positive obligations with regard to severe poverty is the negative duty not to participate in the imposition of social institutions under which vulnerable people lack access to their economic rights. At the core of the creation and persistence of extreme poverty are profound acts of omission that fail to deal with the unjust institutional order and acts of commission that engender poverty through discrimination, repression, and irresponsible economic policies.[53]

The second perspective involves legal obligations reflections. According to Suzanne Egan and Anna Chadwick, it is only recently that poverty has been analysed seriously from a human rights perspective. Their main concern is to establish a viable connection between legally binding human rights obligations and anti-poverty efforts.[54] They have two proposals in this regard. One involves Polly Vizard's efforts to establish links between social rights and capabilities,

whereby internationally recognised human rights standards are used to define an accurate list of capabilities, allocating the specific roles and obligations of duty-bearers.[55] An alternative legal strategy is an instrumental approach, departing from the uses and consequences of human rights denials on poverty. Under this perspective, states are obliged to address human rights denials, fulfilling their rights obligations.

A critical legal insight is the insignificance thesis. This is illustrated by the former Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, Philip Alston, who stated: *"For its part, the human rights community has had all too little to offer in response to the profound challenges associated with deep economic insecurity. The human rights to an adequate standard of living, to work, and to social security have been very low on the list of priorities of the major human rights groups and of the principal international and human rights organizations with the exception of the International Labour Organization (ILO). There is a strong risk that when confronted with the challenge of addressing economic insecurity the human rights system will proceed in a zombie mode. It will keep marching straight ahead on the path mapped out long ago, even as the lifeblood drains out of the enterprise. Its supervisory and monitoring organs will address themselves even more insistently to State actors that have made themselves marginal, and they will continue to demand respect for standards that have long since been overtaken by the grim realities of global supply chains."*[56]

A third analytical view on human rights and poverty is found in development literature – the political economy analysis. According to Balakrishnan Rajagopal, political economy and critical social science and development scholarship have long paid attention to the human rights implications of the global economic and political order (i.e., neoliberalism, and geopolitics and securitisation). Poverty and human rights violations are the consequence of an unjust economic order, which produces inequality and sacrifices human rights protections on the altar of political opportunity and economic interests. The approach is analytical rather than normative and legal: what are the human rights consequences of the global order and its governance structures?[57]

Being able to identify three perspectives on human rights and poverty is an indication of a much richer debate on poverty today within human rights circles. Part of this development has been due to a growing understanding of the importance of economic, social, and cultural rights. Conversely, during the 1980s and 1990s, the perspectives on economic and social rights from leading human rights scholars tended towards dismissive observations, describing these rights as utopian or as aspirations. The debate on social rights during the last few decades has been much more serious, at least among scholars in the US and in Europe. Examples of improved social rights interpretations can be found in the work of Gauri and Brinks, Young, Fukuda-Parr, et al., and Haglund and Stryker.[58]

1. The Growing Importance of ESCR

In their 2003 review of human rights and development practices, Nelson and Dorsey emphasised the growing social rights movement. The change, they argued, was rooted in new networks and organisations which were explicitly linked to social rights standards and objectives. However, the strengthening of the social rights movement was also brought about by an expansion of mandates, which included social rights among civil and political rights NGOs like Amnesty International, for instance.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the UN began to put more emphasis on social rights enforcement and the human rights-based approach, and so did national and international NGOs and international donors.[59]

The EU has stepped up its efforts to reinforce economic, social, and cultural rights and strengthen **the link between human rights and the environment**. The EU supports activities raising awareness of the negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on human rights, namely, health, food security, safe drinking water and sanitation, adequate housing, education, culture, work and development, and even life itself. The EU is the largest contributor to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and works closely with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ensure the right to education, for example, through the **Generation Unlimited** project. Only through free, inclusive and quality education for every child will we be able to eradicate poverty, inequality and resolve climate change challenges.[60]

Important works have appeared covering the national courts systems and economic and social rights. These include the work of Gauri and Brings (eds.) and Katharine Young.[61]

Additionally, the efforts of the UN HR treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) dialogues, and specialised agencies in monitoring the SDGs have strengthened practices around the ESCR. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the UN human rights oversight system has made significant efforts to engage with SDG monitoring mechanisms, particularly the **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)**[62]

2. HR Indicators: Compliance and Promotion

In 2012, the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** issued "Human Rights Indicators: A Guide for Measurement and Implementation."[63] These measurement efforts stimulated methodological as well as practical achievements in measuring social rights implementation, and brought development indicators into the human rights domain.

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Human Rights Council decided to ensure that its agenda promotes and advances the achievement of the SDGs. It adopted several resolutions linking the ESCR to the SDGs and tasked its subsidiary bodies and special procedures, as well as the UN Secretary-General and the OHCHR, with including the SDGs in their work or in their reports. In 2016, it devoted its annual high-level panel discussion on mainstreaming human rights in the UN system to the 2030 Agenda and human rights. In March 2017, in a joint statement made during the 34th session of the Human Rights Council, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Portugal, Rwanda, and Uruguay announced a new initiative on human rights and the 2030 Agenda. This is aimed at identifying and using the many ways through which the UN human rights system can best support states in implementing the SDGs.

When they included the SDGs in their country visit reports, UN special procedures have monitored the level of realisation of the SDGs, often comparing what is required under the SDGs with what was required to reach the MDGs. A number of special procedures have emphasised the same issues they focused on in their thematic reports, such as the need to eliminate homelessness, curb illicit financial flows, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Special procedures have also pushed for the adoption of human rights-based laws, policies, and programmes to implement the SDGs and to reach the most vulnerable and those who are often left behind.

Some have further focused on the need to ensure participation of vulnerable groups in the design of these laws, policies, and programmes, and on the need to protect women's rights in SDG implementation. Since 2015, several UN treaty bodies have included the monitoring of the SDGs in their review of party states' reports, at the end of which they made recommendations linking the ESCR and the SDGs. Some treaty bodies have drafted a specific recommendation that they systematically include in their concluding observations to all party states that they examine. This recommendation focuses on the need to implement the SDGs in a manner that is consistent with their obligations according to international human rights law and following human rights principles. Some treaty bodies are also recommending to party states the need to collect disaggregated data to monitor the realisation of ESCR and the SDGs, and to design policies targeting the most vulnerable. Most treaty bodies use the SDGs to reinforce their recommendations on the realisation of specific rights or party states' obligations, in relation to the SDGs they consider to be particularly relevant.[64]

There are many measurement initiatives formulated by global research collaborations and by the UN. A key challenge which is often overlooked is the alignment between the SDG targets and the human rights standards. The expediency of statistical measurement may lead organisations to ignore the finer details of legal substance. The 2023 Eurostat report on SDG monitoring fails to reflect on these issues in its methodology annex.

An early review of the SDGs and Human Rights (2017) was undertaken by Winkler and Williams. They cited Saiz and Donald's critique of the way in which Goal 10 on Equality was formulated, citing *"imprecise language or distortions that could jeopardise implementation."* Saiz and Donald suggested that Goal 10 is *"vulnerable to strategic neglect or even backlash, given that of all the goals it will arguably require the most profound and lasting changes to the 'business-as-usual' economic and development model."* The authors suggest that human rights standards and tools could guide two crucial policy areas to reduce inequality: social protection and taxation.

Winkler and Williams also reviewed the gaps in the SDG indicators around human rights principles of participation and quality of health care. The data about communities that are "most left behind" are frequently absent, resulting in the absence of real assessment of status and progress in such communities.[65]

The OHCHR has taken a less pointed and more positive perspective on human rights and SDG alignments: *"Although the specific SDGs are not framed in terms of human rights, many targets reflect the content of international standards. For instance, SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) reflect much of the core content of economic, social and cultural rights. SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions addresses some key dimensions of civil and political rights, including personal security, access to justice and fundamental freedoms. SDG 17 addresses issues related to the right to development and means of implementation."*[66]

A few other indicator initiatives should be mentioned. The **Index of Social and Economic Rights Fulfilment (the SERF Index)** uses survey-based data published by national and international bodies to measure the performance of countries and sub-national units on the fulfilment of economic and social rights obligations. The starting point is the obligations that countries have under international law and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** in particular, to *"take steps… to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant."* Statistics like school enrolment and infant mortality reveal only the extent to which individuals enjoy economic and social rights, but not whether a state is complying with its obligation to take steps or its broader obligations to respect, protect and fulfil rights under the ICESCR. Measuring economic and social rights fulfilment requires considering the perspectives of both the rights-holding individual and the duty-bearing government. Thus, the composite SERF Index is comprised of separate scores for each economic and social right, and each correlative obligation uses an innovative approach called the Achievement Possibilities Frontier, which defines international human rights obligations in the social rights domain according to feasibility benchmarks at the national level, defined by the per capita GDP. [67]

The **Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI)** is a post-2016 effort developed by a group of mostly North American scholars, some of whom were involved in the creation of the SERF Index. They have broadened the range of civil and political rights covered in the Political Terror Scale in order to cover rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[68] HRMI describes itself as the first global initiative to track human rights performances of countries. It currently includes five economic and social rights (the rights to education, food, health, housing, and work), five civil and political rights related to safety from the State (the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest, from disappearance, from the death penalty, from extrajudicial execution, and from torture) and three so-called empowerment rights (the rights to assembly and association, opinion and expression, and participation in government). With respect to methods, the HRMI measures social rights according to similar metrics as the SERF Index, that is, country scores are defined against benchmarks set by per capita GDP, and how effective countries are in fulfilling social rights is measured against the Achievement Possibilities Frontier. The methods for assessing infringements of civil and political rights are based on expert assessments from human rights practitioners and by creating scores obtained from a number of country experts according to Bayesian analysis as used by Varieties of Democracy.[69]

Another example of recent indicator work is the **V-Dem initiative**. V-Dem is an international research project to develop new democracy indicators worldwide from 1789 to the present.[70] The project indicators are based on expert assessment, like the CIRI index, but the methodology based on the Bayesian item response theory measurement model is more elaborate and reliable than other human rights assessment methods. The database includes several hundred indicators, some relating to equality (egalitarian component index), some more narrowly gender-based (women's access to justice), some based on political participation (civil society participation index), and some covering access aspects of social rights (education and health care). The V-Dem indicators illustrate

how human rights indicators can encompass democracy and governance measurement, political rights and freedoms, social rights, and development processes metrics (e.g., resource allocation and organizational measures).[71]

b) Poverty Reduction and the Most Vulnerable

The vulnerability concept in human rights is linked to the grounds for discrimination: **race, colour, language, religion, disability, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. There is much debate about including sexual orientation, indigenous status, and caste.**[72] To understand vulnerability, poverty needs to be included in this list. The poor are often discriminated against to the extent that they remain in positions of unequal status, unsupported by processes of empowerment.[73]

In Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments relied heavily on social protection as a key policy instrument, in particular to protect vulnerable groups such as the poor, older persons, women, children, and those employed in the informal sector. For social protection systems to work, it is critical that social protection policies and programs are inclusive, adaptive, and shock-responsive to ensure they benefit poor and vulnerable households and build long-term resilience.

Armed with the lessons and experiences of the past years, the Asian Development Bank sees the following emerging trends in social protection:

Table 6. The Recommendations of the UN Mechanisms with Respect to Vulnerable Groups and to SDG Goals and Targets

INDIA Total: 1,964	Children	Women & girls	Members of minorities	Persons with disabilities	Human rights defenders	Indigenous peoples
Recommendations by rightsholder group	642	609	277	186	58	49
INDONESIA Total: 2,140	Women & girls	Children	Members of minorities	Migrants	Persons with disabilities	Indigenous peoples
Recommendations by rightsholder group	676	479	234	200	196	79
THE PHILIPPINES Total: 2,280	Children	Women & girls	Migrants	Persons with disabilities	Indigenous peoples	Members of minorities
Recommendations by rightsholder group	650	394	216	203	164	152

Source: The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer' https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en/sdg/report/country/882. The filters applied in identifying the number of recommendations are the respective rightsholder group identified by the source and the number of "recommendations" and "observations".

"The pandemic highlighted the importance of universal social protection. Many countries have responded by providing an integrated mix of social insurance, social assistance, and labor market programs. For example, health insurance programs in some countries, like Cambodia, Indonesia, and Viet Nam, were integrated with broader social protection systems. In addition to contributory pensions, a number of countries like People's Republic of China, the Philippines, and Thailand, are extending non-contributory, tax-funded provision of health coverage for poor and sometimes near-poor people. The region has also seen new and expanding social assistance programs for people with disabilities."[74]

One way to assess the prevalence of vulnerability in Asia and Europe is to look at the recommendations made by UN monitoring mechanisms to the states they have monitored.

In the SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer, the Danish Institute for Human Rights records how UN monitoring mechanism recommendations are linked to the SDG Goals and targets. This database indicates major critical points observed by human rights mechanisms, including critical observance with respect to vulnerable groups. The focus in the present analysis in Asia and Europe is on population-rich states. *Table 6* records vulnerable groups recommendations of human rights mechanism in three population-rich states in Asia: India, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

For India, Indonesia, and The Philippines, there is broad similarity in the rightsholder groups that have attracted the most recommendations - children, women and girls, and members of minorities or, in the case of the Philippines: migrants.

While it is clear that women, children, minorities, and people with disabilities are key areas of vulnerability, a focus on the SDG dimensions could add a disaggregated and more meaningful analysis. It should also be noted that such data may reflect the perspectives of the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the UN rather than the reality on the ground.

In India, the SDG Human Rights Data Explorer defines Goals 5, 3 and 4 of the SDGs as the most important ones, i.e., issues relating to gender equality and to education and health rights. Goal 1, on poverty, is second from the bottom, with more recommendations than water and sanitation, but with fewer recommendations than Goal 10, on reducing inequalities. Goal 16 relating to the rule of law and the quality of governance is the SDG to which most recommendations of the UN mechanisms can be linked (595 rec.).

In Indonesia, the SDG database includes the following top targets in terms of recommendations: 16.3, *"Promotion of the rule of law and access to justice"* (277 rec.), 5.2, *"End all violence and exploitation of women and girls"* (229 rec.) and 8.8 *"Universal labour rights and safe working environments"* (190 rec.).

In the Philippines, Goal 16 on *"Promotion of the rule of law and access to justice"* and the quality of governance is by far the SDG goal to which most recommendations and observations of the UN mechanisms can be linked (849 rec.).

Thus, in Asian population-rich states, access to justice, the rule of law, and governance in addition to discrimination, violence against women and children, unsafe labour environments, and inadequate health services are important in the SDG and human rights context when

defining vulnerability. These factors are not exhaustive and precise as they are based on the perspectives of the UN mechanism and not on analyses on the ground, but they remain the most important ones.

Taking a global view, the UN includes as vulnerable groups people living in extreme poverty. These groups are often subject to racial discrimination. Migrants, minorities, including Roma and indigenous groups, refugees, persons with disability and asylum seekers, are well-known groups among the vulnerable, but foremost in these categories are women and children.[75]

Table 7 reviews comparable European data from the SDG – Human Rights Explorer, focusing on the recommendations of the UN treaty bodies and mechanisms. For Europe, the selection of states includes the states in Western and Southern Europe with larger populations.

Table 7. The Recommendations of the UN Mechanisms with Respect to Vulnerable Groups and to SDG Goals and Targets

INDIA Total: 1,964	Children	Members of minorities	Migrants	Women & girls	Refugees & asylum seekers	Persons with disabilities
Recommendations by rightsholder group	649	572	429	411	294	219
INDONESIA Total: 2,140	Children	Women & girls	Migrants	Members of minorities	Persons with disabilities	Refugees & asylum seekers
Recommendations by rightsholder group	736	679	565	540	342	218
THE PHILIPPINES Total: 2,280	Children	Members of minorities	Women & girls	Migrants	Persons with disabilities	Refugees & asylum seekers
Recommendations by rightsholder group	1492	735	652	375	300	208

Source: The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer' **https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en/sdg/report/country/882**

The European context is marked by a focus on children, minorities, and women. In Germany, women and girls rank lower. Migrants play an important role in all three countries - in Germany and Spain migrants rank third, and in the UK, fourth.

In Germany, the SDG targets with the highest number of recommendations are: 10.3, *"Equal opportunities and reductions of discrimination,"* followed by 16.3, *"Promotion of the rule of law and access to justice."* In terms of SDGs, Goal 16, 10, 8 and 5 are the most important ones: peace, justice and strong institutions, reduction of inequality, decent work and economic growth, and gender equality.

In Spain, the top target recommendations are: 16.3, *"Promotion of the rule of law and access to justice,"* 10.3, *"Equal opportunities and reductions of discrimination"* and 5.2, *"End all violence against and exploitation of women and girls."* and 16.b, *"Strong institutions to prevent violence, terrorism and crime."*

In the UK, the SDG target with the most recommendations is 10.3 *"Ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination"*, followed by 16.3 *"Promote the rule of law and access to justice for all"*. A third target group is 16.2 *"Protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence"*.

Among the goals and targets in the European examples, poverty ranks low, while lack of protection and discriminatory behaviours toward minorities, migrants, and women rank high. The importance of rule of law and access to justice, including institutional remedies emphasised in the European context illustrates the need for legal remedy as an important element in addressing vulnerabilities.

c) Social Protection: A Human Right and Sustainable Development Goal

The right to social security or social protection was one of the few economic and social rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Subsequently, this right has been included in domestic legislation as well as in various human rights covenants and conventions, also at a regional level.[76] SDG 1 aims to *"End poverty in all its forms everywhere."* Target 1.3 aims to *"Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."*

This is a tall order which assumes effective measures in diverse spheres. The ILO has a particular role in monitoring the right to social security together with CESCR. The benefits afforded to vulnerable groups under the right to social security comprise unemployment, single parent and disability benefits, cash transfers (conditional as well as unconditional), food and in-kind transfers including school feeding programmes, and social pensions.[77]

The COVID-19 pandemic created a new space for social protection efforts globally. The ILO describes the COVID-19 pandemic as "A crisis unlike any other." The pandemic exposed pronounced gaps in social protection coverage, scope, and adequacy. The vulnerability of 2 billion workers in the informal economy, most of whom are not covered by sickness and unemployment benefits, became especially apparent during the pandemic. The social safety nets established after 2020 were novel in their measures to reach

the urban poor, whereas earlier the targets were mainly the rural poor.[78]

The social protection measures introduced in 2020 in response to the pandemic covered all aspects of social protection and social security rights, including social assistance, basic health services, maternity and paternity support, unemployment, food and nutrition relief, access to education, support for housing, and employment injuries. However, many measures were temporary and support packages were inadequate. In 2022, the World Bank reported that a total of 3,856 social protection and labour measures were planned or implemented by 223 economies. This constituted a net increase of 523 measures, or 15.6% since the data was last updated in May 2021.[79] Cash transfers and food support were among the most prevalent measures. This was the case for both the Asian and the European countries as revealed by Annex Tables II and III. In Asia, food transfers are common, whereas in Europe, the latter are only found in six of 22 countries (Annex Table III). Insurance policies are less important than social assistance support as evident from the health insurance data of the two annex tables (II and III).[80]

It is not always possible to calculate the quantitative level of benefits in countries at a per capita level. The World Bank, which provides fairly up-to-date data, does not offer such a calculation. What can be established is that social protection instruments have grown in importance since 2020.[81] The pandemic forced governments to pursue global social protection policies much more actively. Many efforts were temporary, however, and inadequate. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that the significant breakthrough of social protection assistance and insurance will disappear in the way governments address social policy.[82] The Asian Development Bank issued a progress assessment of social protection in 25 countries in Asia. A few conclusions from the study may illustrate current performance and the needs for change:

- Across 25 countries in Asia, average social protection expenditure was 5.3% of aggregate GDP, with average expenditure per intended beneficiary amounting to 4.0% of GDP per capita in 2015. There was a wide variation in expenditure at country level, ranging from less than 1% of GDP to 21%.
- Social insurance comprises two main programmes: pensions and health insurance. Social insurance dominated spending across country income groups and regions, with an average spending of 4.2% of aggregate GDP. Social insurance was the primary category of social protection in high-income countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea. These countries spent above Asia's average for social insurance.
- Social assistance spending averaged 1.1% of Asia's aggregate GDP. Spending in more than half the region's countries was below this average, leading to partial coverage and low value of benefits in most social assistance programmes. Social assistance programmes include welfare assistance, child welfare, assistance to the elderly, health assistance, and disability assistance.
- There is progress toward strengthening social insurance and social assistance programmes across Asia. Many countries are expanding pensions and health-care entitlements by extending social insurance to workers in the informal economy and subsidising contributions for the poor.
- Social protection covered only 55.1% of

intended beneficiaries— that is, nearly half the intended beneficiaries remained without support.
- Social protection spending in Asia favours the nonpoor over the poor (defined as the population living below the nationally defined poverty line). The expenditure on each nonpoor beneficiary amounted to 3.0% of GDP per capita, compared to 1.0% for the poor.[83]

In Europe, France remains the country most committed to social benefits, with almost a third of French GDP spent on social services in 2019. Scandinavian countries appear high up in the ranking, with Denmark, Sweden and Norway all spending more than 25%.[84]

1. The impact of social protection

Social protection is increasingly recognised as a critical strategy for poverty reduction and inclusive growth. The ILO and the World Bank have collaborated on a Social Protection Initiative. The Initiative emphasises that there is considerable scientific evidence that well-designed and implemented social protection systems can be the foundation for sustained social and economic development for individuals, communities, and nations. Social protection systems:

- Prevent and reduce poverty, promoting social inclusion and dignity of vulnerable populations;
- Contribute to economic growth: Raising incomes increases consumption, savings, and investments at a household level, also raising demand at a macro level;
- Promote human development: Cash transfers facilitate access to nutrition and education, thus resulting in better health outcomes, higher school enrolment rates, reduced school drop-out rates, and a decline of child labour;
- Are a human right that everyone, as a member of society, should enjoy, including children, mothers, persons with disabilities, workers, older persons, migrants, indigenous peoples, and minorities.[85]

Women, children, minorities, and migrants are the most vulnerable rights-holders. These groups are subject to discrimination, inequality, lack of access to justice, legal remedies, and adequate labour rights protection. While health targets do not rank highly in this review, which covers data up to 2022, health has since the COVID-19 pandemic become an issue requiring more systematic efforts from states and global governance institutions.

The relatively modest focus on goal 1, poverty, and on target 1.3, social protection, among the human rights recommendations highlights the fact that a broader perspective is needed on poverty. It is only when poverty is conceptualised as a multidimensional policy agenda which involves social protection, food, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, labour rights, and the rule of law, access to justice, and better institutions that the human rights and SDG agenda kicks in. Within this broad agenda, social security rights, health support, non-discrimination, equality, labour rights and the rule of law, and access to justice are the issues that have attracted most attention in the human rights and SDG contexts. Women, children, minorities and migrants are key vulnerable groups, but in the context of the fairly broad and complex analysis above, specific data on these groups to inform well-formulated agenda points are not always available within monitoring operations.

d) From Global to Local: Multistakeholder Partnerships for the Advancement of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction

A number of policy agendas at the global level are influencing and defining poverty reduction according to human rights-based thinking. SDG monitoring and implementation are involved in most agendas, but the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, climate threats, the Gaza conflict, and and the ever-existing goal of economic growth have led to a shift of the global poverty agendas to the specific goals and rights of the SDGs. The security dimension is an overriding factor, thus Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies including accountable and inclusive institutions. The rights to social security and to health, have acquired a much stronger position vis-à-vis social rights in general. Goals 4 (education) and 2 (the right to food) may also acquire a new importance, while Goal 8 (economic growth and labour rights) are a persistent policy effort across many local contexts.

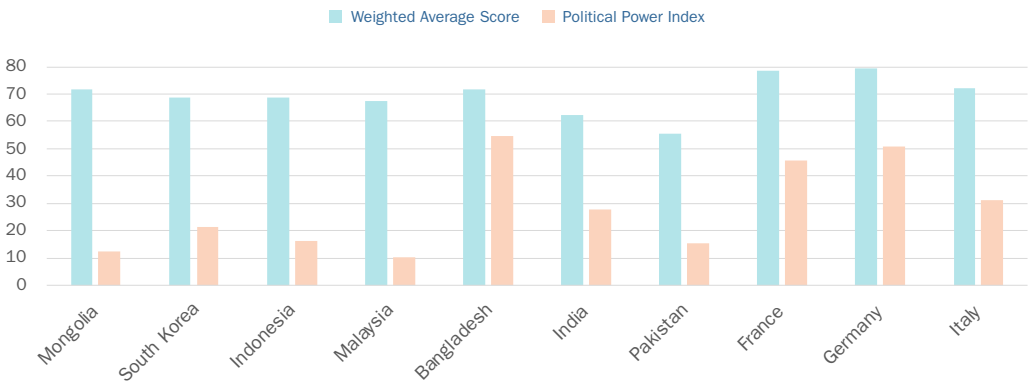
Locally, gender equality is significant. It remains a policy dimension that few governments can escape, but where processes of genuine change occur with marked differences.

1. Gender Equality and Empowerment

According to the 2021 World Economic Forum (WEF) report, the gender gap has widened since 2019 in all of the four areas measured - economic opportunity, education, health, and political power). This is largely due to the impact of the pandemic.

Globally, the 2021 report shows a 0.6% point step back compared to 2020. This is mainly driven by a decline in the performance of large countries. On its current trajectory, it will now take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide. The gender gap in political empowerment, with a global score of 22%, remains the largest of the four gaps tracked. The Political Power Index represents a 2.4 percentage point decline since the 2020 report.[86]

Table 8. The Global Gender Gap 2021 in select Asian and European States



Source: World Economic Forum, 'Annual Report: 2021-2022' (2022) **< https://www.weforum.org/reports/annual-report-2021-2022/>**

Table 8 shows the weighted average score of the four dimensions tracked by the WEF, and the Political Power Index indicates the gap in the political power of women compared to men. It is based on the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. This sub-index includes the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) in the last 50 years. A clear drawback in this category is the absence of any indicators capturing differences between the participation of women and men at local levels of government.[87]

While the weighted average score for all the states is around 60%, the political power index is much lower, except for Bangladesh which benefits from having had a long-term female president. This latter point illustrates the challenge of accurately measuring gender gaps in political power when the data available is largely at the formal elite level. Nonetheless, Table 8 does show the fairly low levels of female political power in Southeast Asian and East Asian states, with South Asian states scoring slightly better.

The World Bank in its 2023 report titled *"Women, Business and the Law"* said that, on average, women globally enjoy only 77% of the legal rights that men do. In addition, nearly 2.4 billion women of working age around the world live in economies that do not grant them the same rights as men. In 2022, the global pace of reforms towards equal treatment of women under the law slumped to a 20-year low. This 'reform fatigue' is a potential impediment to economic growth and resilience at a critical time for the global economy. As global economic growth is slowing, mobilisation of productive capacity is needed everywhere to confront a confluence of crises. Reforms encouraging women to contribute to the economy as employees and entrepreneurs will level the playing field as well as make the economy more dynamic and resilient.[88]

However, while women's economic integration and legal progress has made some headway over the last few decades, these are achievements at the macro level. The challenge remains local, among the poorest groups of women. Local and bottom-up efforts and results are required to transform institutional practices that prevail in most societies. Organisations with leverage need to challenge and change institutional practices and change strategies must include the active participation of marginalised women.

One example of this approach is the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) programme of the **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)**. This programme focuses on building movements to challenge patriarchy. In practice, it has connected women across geographies, ethnicities, sectors, and life-stages to drive structural change.

APWLD puts out a call for interested organisations, social movements, or communities to nominate potential participants. It specifies a focus area—such as labour rights, land rights, or development justice— and applicants put forward an issue that the community is seeking to change. Rather than fund external practitioners to research the issue and implement a programme, APWLD provides funds for the organisation to employ a young woman researcher for up to two years that will carry out a project under the guidance of a mentor. APWLD also provides funds to support the researcher and her mentor to participate in FPAR training workshops and networking opportunities.

MAP Foundation, a Thai NGO that works with Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, used

the FPAR programme to learn more about how women migrant workers consider to be a living wage and their views of the obstacles to attaining it. Similarly, Tanggol Bayi, an organisation for women human rights defenders in the Philippines, engaged women employed in the informal economy as market vendors to collect data on the gendered impacts of the proposed privatisation of a public market. Using the FPAR approach, the community mobilised and was able to halt the privatisation. In Vietnam, where women are being adversely impacted by climate change and disasters, participants used the FPAR programme to alter communal regulations so that at least 30% of the previously male-only Village Disaster Response Committees are women, and women are also included in decisions to change crops. Participants reported an increased sense of power and respect arising from their inclusion in policymaking and being active civic decision makers.[89]

In the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, over half of all women report that they have suffered physical violence from an existing or former partner or husband (an 'intimate partner'). In response to this, women in the town of Kanpur formed Sakhi Kendra, an organisation that helps with re-housing, legal assistance, and medical care for women who have been subject to violence, rape, or forced prostitution. The organisation has initiated training programmes for the police, among others, and has begun monitoring the state's legislation and policy on domestic violence and discrimination.

The establishment of Sakhi Kendra illustrates the importance of advocacy in cases where wrongs are committed against oppressed or marginalised groups. Even though those who are exposed to assault are often engaged in sex work for reasons having to do with poverty, in the above example, the human rights-based aspect is clear, not least from the training of the police. The example also shows that the involvement of external (that is, foreign) parties is not a precondition for the application of a human rights-based approach.[90]

2. Citizenship, Cities and Urban centres: New Locales for Struggles

UNICEF and the Institute of Development Studies in the UK made an effort in 2017 to link citizenship of the most vulnerable to social rights action. Their report made the following conclusions:

"Legislative and policy frameworks, such as constitutions and social protection strategies, help to firmly ground social protection in rights-based institutions. However, it is necessary that citizens are aware of their rights. Forms of active citizenship provides a pathway towards improved delivery of social justice-based protection.

The realization of justice-based social protection can be spurred by different catalysts in addition to active citizenship. For example, donor funded support can help establish the institutional set-up, or a strong civil society can mobilize citizens to make a stand against the State and claim their rights, using grievance redress mechanism inter alia.

Examples from India, Brazil and Ghana show that laws and policies are important to provide a framework for citizen rights and entitlements. However, the realization of these rights requires sustained political commitment at all levels."[91]

In 2016, Habitat III, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, took place in Quito, Ecuador. The conference resulted in a New Urban Agenda, which aims to "leave no one behind" and which established the

roadmap of urbanisation for the next 20 years. Critical areas in the New Agenda are persons in vulnerable situations, social exclusion, unequal land distribution in urban spaces, migration and displacement, and informal settlement areas.[92]

Five years after the launch of the New Urban Agenda, the UNDP published the following assessment of the current trends, also influenced by the pandemic:

"Urban areas are increasingly epicentres of crises, insecurity, and violence, fuelling displacement and forced migration. *The majority of the 25 million refugees and 40 million Internally Displaced Persons in the world today live in cities and urban settlements, often under difficult conditions.*

Housing remains largely unaffordable both in the developing and developed world. *According to* **UN Habitat World Cities Report**, *1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing, of which one billion live in slums and informal settlements lacking basic services. See also the example from Spain above.*

Female-headed households in slums and informal settlements are growing in numbers. *Female-headed households in the urban sector are often part of informal employment and therefore vulnerable and economically marginalised. These groups represent forms of exclusion that affect women, youth, older persons, migrants, and other marginalized groups disproportionally."* [93]

The urban agenda has gained renewed importance since the pandemic. While social protection was of limited importance in urban areas before the pandemic, the priority has gradually changed from rural poverty to urban. Previously, cash transfers were the principal instruments of protection in poorer countries, and they were directed to the rural population. The pandemic saw part of transfers shifting to the urban centres.[94] Street protests in the face of lockdowns and restrictive policies hurting urban labour forced governments to liberalise restrictions and to step up protection policies involving food and cash on top of pre-existing pension systems.[95] According to Fortune magazine, *"The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed the depredations of Asia's urban poor. They toil in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and domestic labor, and have been let down by their governments and their employers. Fragile safety nets and ineffective systems for social transfers have marooned hundreds of millions of them."* [96]

e) Conclusions: Poverty Protection and Impact

Has human rights protection become an integral element in poverty reduction? Chapter III suggests a mixed record. The strengthening of economic and social rights norms and the stronger importance attached to these by duty-bearers and donors give cause for optimism. So does the integration of human rights values and principles in the SDGs, both in terms of economic, social, and civil and political rights.

However, the SDG apparatus has lost some of its momentum. While non-discrimination and equality have become core elements in the implementation of the goals, the COVID-19 pandemic and the global political crises have led to a weakening of the SDG agenda.

In terms of conceptual tools and measurement technologies on the implementation of

human rights, many efforts have been made but with little success. The lack of legitimate human rights indicators imply that comparable monitoring remains weak and subject to diverse interpretation.

As consequence of these developments, vulnerability prevails among the poor. This is evident from human rights and SDG monitoring and in the analyses of global reporting. Women, children, migrants, minorities, and persons with disabilities, and not least, the poor themselves, are part of prevailing and growing poverty.

The New Urban Agenda has addressed informality, marginalisation, and social insecurity in Asia as well as in Europe. It is too early to claim success. The human rights agenda has gained importance in the poverty domain but its actual impact for the poor is debatable.

IV. The Way Forward: Future Prospects for Better Integration of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction Policies, Strategies and Action

We saw in the previous chapter how poverty levels have grown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic A parallel development is the undermining of values and rights brought about by the war in Europe. The pandemic has disrupted social progress and undermined previous levels of broad-based human rights commitment in Western states and in Latin America. There are no precise indicators to illustrate the weakening of human rights support among States and regional organisations, but the indications are of reactive patterns of human rights commitment rather than proactive and strategic support.

One example of reactive human rights support is the growth in social security programmes and in health budgets. States have been forced to engage in these areas in order to safeguard urban populations who have been the primary victims of the pandemic. There is little evidence of the much-heralded empowerment and advocacy that are important aspects of the human rights-based approach. Vulnerable groups have been left if not speechless then marginalised.

The duty-bearers are visible in diverse arenas, institutions are engaged in monitoring human rights, while new initiatives on the human rights front have taken place in the private sector and only with respect to gender equality. Such positive examples are not enough, however, to point to promising progress in human rights generally.

The SDGs represent a domain where human rights concepts and values have been taken in and brought to the centres of policy efforts. Non-discrimination, inclusiveness, remedies of participation, universalism, and checks and balances of institutional governance are all part of a much stronger formulation of not only development goals, but global ones. However, the SDGs are more than a human rights-based approach. Human and people-centred development can be accommodated with the 17 2030 Agenda Goals. Poverty indicators are human rights-based, but they are also framed in a development language which leaves space for ambiguity.

While equality and non-discrimination are part and parcel of the SDGs, the results so far are not impressive. Gender discrimination prevails in Asian states but is also an important feature in the EU outside its northern parts. A World Bank report in global legal gender policies emphasises that there is now a situation of reform fatigue. Racial and ethnic discrimination in Europe is a prevailing feature among the Roma, and discrimination of migrants and workers is a noteworthy element in Asia and Europe. In terms of income inequality, all sub-regions in Asia are marked by persistent inequality (high GINI scores), and similarly in Southern Europe.

The SDGs offer promising agendas that may redress the negative global poverty evolution of the 2020s in time. The indications are that states are providing more support with respect to social security and health rights in order to avoid social unrest, and particularly in urban centres. However, it is uncertain whether this trend will persist even with the SDG target of Leaving No One Behind.

The SDGs represent a competing agenda of change. There is a tug of war between a rights-based efforts and conventional economic growth reforms. The absolute need for sustainable climate policies contributes further to the unresolved dilemmas.

Important in balancing dilemmas are the domestic rights deficits among rights-holders and duty-bearers. Domestic, state-based, human rights respect, protection and fulfilment should ideally flow from domestic dialogues and from external monitoring. The National Human Rights Institutions, civil society groups in general, the community and people-centred efforts of social mobilisation together with the monitoring of Treaty-bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, and the Specialized Mechanisms all form part of an actor-based addressing of rights challenges. These dilemmas and challenges are what McCann has coined the *"unbearable lightness of rights"*. McCann states: *"In short, if rights are so light and supple [in order to gain support], they must also mean very little and carry little weight as a challenge to the status quo; they are merely the superficial "um" and "ah" of social and political banter, mere talk rather than action with sufficient material consequence to compel respect."* [97]

We have shown, however, that rights are not all 'light[. The experience in Europe indicates the importance of having strong institutions. The European Court and Convention of Human Rights are factors of institutional strength despite shortcomings with respect to caseloads.

Effective rights regimes are crucial in dealing with dilemmas and in providing convincing responses to rights-based stakeholders and to actors who address agendas from a broader and overlapping front like the SDGs. Effectiveness matters in terms of institutional policies, but also with respect to the impact among poor and vulnerable groups.

There are four agenda points for the integration of human rights in poverty reduction:

- Evidence of poverty reduction impact among poor and vulnerable groups
- Effectiveness of combatting discrimination whether in gender, among migrants, among ethnic groups and minorities, among persons with disability, or among refugees.
- The strengthening of the New Urban Agenda
- Innovative digital rights and new rights

a) Poverty Reduction Documentation and Impact

Poverty reduction has so far been tracked with macroeconomic income and consumption measures that provide average income or consumption estimates per capita. From a rights-based point of view, these averages are not meaningful. What is needed is disaggregated documentation of rights achievements with respect to social rights and to reduction of discrimination of vulnerable groups over time.

The Gender Gap Index and the Human Rights Measurement Initiative are two efforts that substantively document resource allocation to social rights and to non-discrimination, while also providing evidence of achievements with respect to political power and to economic participation, educational attainment, and health and survival. The recent data provided by the World Bank on social protection funding represents a major validation of social security

resource allocation. Apart from these, data on prevailing social practices are required.

The Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union has documented minority discrimination and racism in select states within the EU. The Barometer Studies within the EU also documents these factors. However, outside the EU in Eastern and Central Europe, Barometer studies are scarce and tend to document economic transitions rather than the evolution among social and marginal groups.[98] In Asia, the Barometer studies documenting discriminatory practices, hate crimes, and social perceptions of change are not given priority.[99] Future rights-based research efforts must focus on these issues and provide disaggregated evidence of local change among social groups.

1. The Strengthening of the Urban Rights Agenda

The World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) has been held annually since 2011 in Gwangju, Republic of Korea, to achieve its vision of becoming a human rights city. The Forum has become a gathering place to share the spirit of justice and community, the values that the citizens of Gwangju demonstrated when the resisted the ruthless oppression of the then military regime in May 1980. At the WHRCF participants exchange experiences on challenges and successes in human rights especially at the local level. The Forum has become a major human rights event and distinctive platform for sharing and networking amongst human rights cities, human rights organisations, activists, and miscellaneous stakeholders.

The Habitat III report (mentioned above) recounted the world urban population as 54%. of the current global population. The Habitat III Policy Paper developed thematic challenges under a roadmap of urbanisation for the next 20 years. Critical areas in the new agenda are persons in vulnerable situations, social exclusion, unequal land distribution in the urban space, migration and displacement, and informal settlement areas.[100]

The urban agenda has received new importance due to the pandemic. Urban social protection has gained in prominence (see Section III c)[101] While social protection was of limited importance in urban areas before the pandemic, the priority has gradually changed from rural poverty to urban. Cash transfers were the principal instruments of protection in poorer countries, and they were directed to the rural population. With the pandemic, street protests in the face of lockdowns and restrictive policies hurting urban labour forced governments to ease the restrictions and to step up protection policies involving food and cash on top of pre-existing pension systems.[102]

Since 2016, the partners in the urban agenda initiative have held regular meetings, as have the coordinators of each partnership. The Urban SDG 11, the urban-related dimension of the 2030 Agenda, and the New Urban Agenda are linked. However, questions persist on the strength of the urban agenda and on the ability of EU and member states to redress inequality, poverty, and health threats such as the COVID-19 within the urban centres. In Asia, given the size of urban populations and the diverse socio-political dynamic within cities, the potential of the urban agenda must be assessed more carefully to understand pitfalls and promising avenues.

b) Interlinks with Other Rights and New Rights

Two new rights should be mentioned: 'The right to be forgotten"'(or the right of erasure) and the 'Convention of the rights of older persons]. While the former illustrates the importance of transparency and governance in poverty reduction, the latter provides important legal norms with respect to non-discrimination and dignity. Over the years, there has been much evidence of gaps in the international human rights system as it relates to the human rights of older persons, as recognised by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in her 2022 report.[103]

1. Data Protection and the Right to be Forgotten

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) manages how personal data must be collected, processed, and erased. A 2014 judgement from the European Court of Human Rights instituted the right of erasure of personal data: The data subject shall have the right to obtain from the controller the erasure of personal data concerning him or her without undue delay and the controller shall have the obligation to erase personal data without undue delay (about a month). The right to be forgotten relates to peoples' access to personal information in article 15 of the GDPR. The right to control one's data is meaningless if people cannot take action when they no longer consent to processing, when there are significant errors within the data, or if they believe information is being stored unnecessarily.[104] However, critics of this right have argued that the right to be forgotten is tantamount to efforts to rewrite history. The legal interpretation of the right must be balanced against person data protection and the broader concerns for information retrieval.

2. The Convention of the Rights of Older Persons

The 'Convention of the rights of older persons"'(UNCROP) is likely to be the next human rights treaty to be adopted by the UN. The treaty under formulation is inspired by the Child Rights Convention that also covers younger persons. The UNCROP will address those who form the older sections of society who are becoming increasingly vulnerable according to the UN. A growing number of NGOs across the world have expressed support for a universal instrument. The debate on the treaty started at the World Assembly on Ageing in 2011. The most recent development is a proposal from Argentina during the 12th session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in 2017. The Secretary General of the UN and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights have encouraged the progress of the Open-Ended Working Group. Previously sceptical members of the Working Group, e.g. Germany and Austria, have reversed their position and are now supporting the work.[105]

3. Digital Rights

Digitalisation substantially affects virtually all social relationships, and this calls for reassessment of many basic legal concepts.[106] Human rights challenges brought about by digital technological innovations raise issues of access for rights holders as well as new dimensions of responsibility of use and of control relating to duty-bearers. The digital divide between those with access and those without is wide. About 2.2 billion children and young people below the age of 25 do not have access to the internet at home.[107] Currently, under the aegis of the UN Secretary General, a Global Digital Compact is being elaborated. The Digital Compact is to

be agreed upon at the Summit of the Future in September 2024. The Compact is expected to outline shared principles for an open, free, and secure digital future for all.[108] The most frequent rights debated in the context of digital challenges are a right to internet access, right to personal data protection, and right to be forgotten (right to erasure). Relevant debates are about digital citizenship and a universal understanding of accountability in the digital field.

Digital citizenship is an agenda for the future. It involves access to the internet, literacy, tech awareness and command, ethical regulation, law, security, privacy, and protection. The potential for advocacy and empowerment of vulnerable group, is tremendous. In an age where democracy and rights respect are weakening, the digital evolution is a countervailing force.[109]

The digital accountability challenges raise questions about transparency and about the actors involved in governing the digital domains. While governments and citizens used to be the main stakeholders of accountability, the framing of digital accountability now involves new actors like the corporate sector and the prevailing cultures of interaction in universal digital practices.

There is an imbalance between those who hold and those who interrogate the information that is available. Data sources are inherently biased and open to interpretation. Media management is both needed and difficult to achieve according to human rights and transparency standards.

Regulators of digitalisation can be captured and constrained by partisan and authoritarian governments, by the weakening of judicial bodies, and by populist communication.[110]

4. Interlinking Human Rights Domains

Two interlinking rights domains deserve mention: the right to a sustainable and healthy environment and the right to governance free of corruption.

All people have the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Human rights and the environment are interdependent. The state of the environment determines the right to health, life, food, water, and sanitation, among others. At the same time, the enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to information, participation and access to justice, is of great importance for the protection of the environment. Despite myriad international agreements, as well as national laws and policies, environmental degradation and climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution represent some of the most threatening factors to humanity, and are severely affecting the enjoyment of human rights.[111]

Efforts have been made to document the significant negative impact that corruption has on the enjoyment of human rights. It has been argued that the best way to combat corruption is to promote and safeguard human rights standards. Currently, the Universal Rights Group and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre are involved in a study to gather knowledge on strategic dimensions of human rights and corruption interaction. The involvement of the private sector in this work is important as the worst instances of human rights violations tend to happen at the intersection of government and business/commercial interests.[112] Also important is the adoption of a holistic approach rather than to compartmentalise the study domains, i.e. CSRs, business and climate change, anti-corruption, and compliance. These research efforts are important for future poverty research.

c) Areas for Future Collaboration

This report has shown that poverty defined from a human rights angle is not a field backed up by an abundance of in-depth studies. Precise data for a human rights-based understanding of poverty are simply not available. The SDGs add important insights to the human rights-based trends in social protection, food, health, education, water and sanitation, and discriminatory practices. However, the persuasive insights that would satisfy legal as well political economy arguments are still wanting and this is an obstacle to the development of a stronger human rights-based agenda of poverty reduction.

There is a need for local disaggregated studies which document discriminatory practices or provide findings on the importance of rights struggles in combatting abuse or discriminatory practices over time. In the text, reference has been made to the Gender Gap Analysis, but such macro-level analysis needs to be complemented and validated by further data. Similarly, disaggregation analysis which documents ethnic and minority rights discrimination is a field for future collaboration. Such studies would facilitate the formulation of indicators in assessing poverty impact.

Apart from joint efforts in documenting poverty evolution and discriminatory practices and identifying relevant indicators of poverty monitoring, there are three future areas for collaborative effort.

The promotion and protection of rights in cities create a platform not only for major rights groups and victims of abuse, but also for local governments and locally based studies. Alliances have already been created among cities in Asia and Europe, and major achievements in the poverty domain have been undertaken in the Americas.

It is widely recognised that, on the one hand, poverty should not be seen only as a lack of income, but also as a deprivation of human rights. And on the other hand, it is recognised that unless poverty is addressed in a participatory, effective, and consistent way, there can be no sustainable development.

Goal 16 of the 17 SDGs is a promising entry into human rights and institution building. Access to justice, less corruption, and better instruments of participation are among the areas where collaborative efforts have been addressed within individual states. What is needed is institutional effort at the regional and global level.

The right to a healthy and sustainable environment remains an important agenda for the future. Many states have endorsed the agenda by underlining the right to a healthy environment and climate in their constitutions. This is an area where advocacy and local demands targeted at governments or enterprises, be they national or international, are of major importance.

The commitment of Member States to achieve SDGs by 2030 without undermining priorities of human rights commitment requires concerted effort and robust regional and global collaboration in poverty reduction, promotion and protection of rights in the cities, equal access to justice, combating corruption, climate change, and better instruments of participation in societies.

Finally, there is the digital rights domain: Reducing the digital divide, working for digital citizenship, engaging in strategic litigation, promoting exchange, learning and training programmes are important tasks to be undertaken.

Annexes

Annex Table 1. Ranking Economic Inequality in Europe as Measured by the GINI Coefficient

Rank	Country	GINI	Year		Rank	Country	GINI	Year
1	Turkey	41.9	2019		21	Albania	30.8	2019
2	Bulgaria	40.3	2019		21	Estonia	30.8	2019
3	Montenegro	36.8	2018		23	Ireland	30.6	2018
4	Lithuania	35.3	2019		24	Austria	30.2	2019
5	Italy	35.2	2018		24	Poland	30.2	2018
6	UK	35.1	2017		26	Hungary	30.0	2019
7	Romania	34.8	2019		27	Sweden	29.3	2019
8	Serbia	34.5	2019		28	Netherlands	29.2	2019
9	Latvia	34.5	2019		29	Croatia	28.9	2019
10	Spain	34.3	2019		30	Finland	27.7	2019
11	Luxembourg	34.2	2019		30	Denmark	27.7	2019
12	Greece	33.1	2019		30	Norway	27.7	2019
12	Switzerland	33.1	2018		33	Belgium	27.2	2019
14	Bosnia H.	33.0	2011		34	Iceland	26.1	2017
14	N. Macedonia	33.0	2019		35	Moldova	26.0	2019
16	Portugal	32.8	2019		36	Ukraine	25.6	2020
17	France	32.4	2018		37	Czech Rep.	25.3	2019
18	Germany	31.7	2018		38	Belarus	24.4	2020
19	Cyprus	31.2	2019		38	Slovenia	24.4	2019
20	Malta	31.0	2019		40	Slovak	23.2	2019

Source: World Bank. **Gini index | Data (worldbank.org)**

Annex Table II. Ranking Economic Inequality in Asia as Measured by the GINI Coefficient								
1	Malaysia	41.2	2018		8	Thailand	35.0	2021
2	Philippines	40.7	2021		9	Australia	34.3	2018
3	Laos	38.8	2018		10	Japan	32.9	2013
4	China	38.2	2019		11	Mongolia	32.7	2018
5	Indonesia	37.6	2022		12	Bangladesh	32.4	2016
6	Vietnam	36.8	2020		13	Pakistan	29.6	2018
7	India	35.7	2019		14	Kazakhstan	27.8	2018

Annex Table III. The Prevalence of Social Protection Measures in Asian Countries			
Country	Cash-Based Transfers	In Kind Transfers incl. School Meals	Health Insurance Benefits
Australia	X	0	0
Bangladesh	X	X	X
Cambodia	X	X	0
China	X	X	X
India	X	X	X
Indonesia	X	X	0
Japan	X	X	X
Korea Rep.	X	X	X
Malaysia	X	X	0
Myanmar	X	X	X
New Zealand	X	X	X
Pakistan	X	X	0
The Philippines	X	X	0
Singapore	X	X	0
Thailand	X	0	X
Vietnam	X	0	X

Annex Table IV. The Prevalence of Social Protection Measures in European Countries			
Country	**Cash-Based Transfers**	**In Kind Transfers incl. School Meals**	**Health Insurance Benefits**
Austria	X	0	0
Belgium	X	0	0
Bulgaria	X	X	0
Croatia	X	0	0
Cyprus	X	X	X
Czech Rep.	X	0	X
Estonia	X	X	0
Denmark	0	0	0
Finland	X	X	X
France	X	X	0
Germany	X	X	X
Greece	X	0	0
Hungary	0	0	0
Iceland	X	0	0
Ireland	X	X	0
Latvia	X	0	0
Lithuania	**X**	**0**	**0**

Luxembourg	X	X	0
Malta	X	0	0
Moldova	X	0	0
Th Netherlands	X	0	0
N. Macedonia	X	X	X
Norway	X	0	0
Poland	X	X	0
Portugal	X	0	0
Romania	X	0	0
Serbia	X	X	0
Slovakia	X	X	0
Slovenia	X	0	0
Spain	X	X	0
Sweden	X	0	X
Turkey	X	X	0
United Kingdom	X	X	0
12	Switzerland	33.1	2018

Source: World Bank: Index Mundi. **https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SI.POV.GINI/rankings/europe**.
Also see: **https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/110221643895832724/pdf/Social-Protection-and-Jobs-Responses-to-COVID-19-A-Real-Time-Review-of-Country-Measures.pdf 2022.**

Annex 1

Workshop Programme

Venue: InterContinental Bangkok, 973 Phloen Chit Rd, Lumphini, Pathum Wan, Bangkok 10330
Room: Pinnacle 1 & 2

All times are displayed in Bangkok time (GMT+7)

09:00-09:15	**Registration**	
09:30-09:45	**Official Welcome**	**Welcome remarks** • **Amb Toru MORIKAWA**, Executive Director, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) (video message) • **Mrs Krongkanit RAKCHAROEN**, Director-General of the Department of European Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand • **Mrs Chulamanee CHARTSUWAN**, ASEF Governor for Thailand • **Mr Rolf RING**, Deputy Director, Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, representing the Steering Committee of the Informal ASEM Seminar of Human Rights
09:45-10:30	**Setting the Stage** (Chair: Rolf RING, Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law)	**Opening message** • **Professor Olivier DE SCHUTTER**, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (video message) **Presentation of the Background Paper** • **Dr Hans-Otto SANO**, Emeritus, Senior Researcher, the Danish Institute of Human Rights *(Followed by an interactive questions and answer session)*
10:30-12:00	**Session 1: Integration of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction Strategy and Measurement**	**Intro presentation:** • **Mr Ramesh SINGH**, Independent Practitioner and Advisor • **Mr Jakob DIRKSEN**, Research and Policy Officer, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) (video message) • **Ms Nataliya BORODCHUCK**, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Thailand • **Moderator: Mr Ramesh SINGH**, Independent Practitioner and Advisor • **Rapporteur: Dr Hans-Otto SANO**, Emeritus, Senior Researcher, the Danish Institute of Human Rights
12:00-13:00	**Group photo** **Lunch and Networking @ Espresso Restaurant, M level Intercontinental Hotel**	
13:15-14:45	**Session 2: Poverty Reduction and Those in the Most Vulnerable Situations**	**Intro presentation:** • **Ms Aye Aye WIN,** President, International Committee for October 17 • **Mr Paul DALTON,** Chief Advisor on Human Rights, Neighbouring Countries and Asia, the Danish Institute of Human Rights **Moderator: Ms Aye Aye WIN,** President, International Committee for October 17 **Rapporteur: Dr Maria Kristina G. ALINSUNURIN,** Associate Professor, Institute for Governance and Rural Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños
14:45-15:00	**Coffee Break and Networking**	

15:00 –16:30	**Session 3: Social Protection: A Human Right and Sustainable Development Goal**	**Intro presentation:** • **Mr Andrea ROSSI,** Regional Advisor Social Policy and Economic Analysis, UNICEF, East Asia and Pacific Regional Office • **Ms Channe LINDSTRØM-OĞUZHAN,** Social Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) **Moderator: Mr Andrea ROSSI,** Regional Advisor Social Policy and Economic Analysis, UNICEF, East Asia and Pacific Regional Office **Rapporteur: Mr Manuel BRANCO,** Professor, Department of Economics at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Évora
16:30 – 17:00	**Tea Break**	
17:00-17:45	**Summary and Concluding Remarks** (Chair: Mr. Rolf RING, Raoul Wallenberg Institute)	**Intro presentation:** • **Dr Hans-Otto SANO,** Emeritus, Senior Researcher, the Danish Institute of Human Rights • **Ms Channe LINDSTRØM-OĞUZHAN,** Social Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) **Concluding remarks and future directions:** • **Prof Dr Amara PONGSAPICH,** Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)
19:00	**Dinner and Networking @ Espresso Restaurant, M level Intercontinental Hotel**	

About the Workshop

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation established in 1996 to deepen relations between Asia and Europe. It presently comprises 53 Partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat.

The Workshop is part of the Informal Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Human Rights Seminar series (ASEMHRS), which aims to promote better mutual understanding and co-operation on human rights issues in Asia and Europe. The Seminar series is co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Department of the Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. ASEF's contribution is with the financial support of the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

The Workshop is organised as part of the 22nd edition of the ASEMHRS, which focuses on human rights and poverty reduction.

Annex 2

THE RIGHT ANALYTICAL TOOLS MAKE POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES MORE VISIBLE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES MORE EFFECTIVE

Jakob Dirksen, Research and Policy Officer, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford

(Presentation at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

First of all, when considering the relationship between human rights and poverty, I would like to suggest that we should start from the conceptualisation of poverty – what is it that we refer to when we speak of someone as being poor or impoverished?

It is by now widely recognised that poverty is not a mere deprivation of income or purchasing power. And among the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that point towards poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon are, very prominently, human and social rights – health, education, material living standard, political participation, freedom from discrimination and exclusion, and so on.

Such a human rights-based conception of poverty in itself is not a novelty. What was missing though, were, on the one hand, data, and on the other hand, the methodological basis to translate this concept into actionable statistics.

On the first point, the data 'revolution' since the late 1990s – household surveys in particular, –has provided data. These data are not perfect. They do not perfectly measure all and everyone's rights, but they have enabled large scale quantitative rights-based poverty measurement.

On the second point, a now very widely used method to measure rights-based multidimensional poverty was developed by OPHI Director Sabina Alkire and OPHI Research Associate James Foster at the start of this millennium.

The Alkire-Foster method – a mathematical algorithm – is flexibly adaptable to various contexts, which has made it the most widely used method around the world to measure multidimensional poverty.

It is used not only in thousands of academic studies, but also in over 40 countries' official poverty statistics, and in the work of numerous international organisations and NGOs. The host country of this seminar, Thailand, is one among these many countries that have used the method to construct official permanent statistics of multidimensional poverty and child poverty.

UNICEF has also mainstreamed the use of the Alkire-Foster method to measure children's multidimensional poverty all around the world, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The most well-known poverty measure that belongs to the statistics that the Alkire-Foster method produces are so-called Multidimensional Poverty Indices, or MPIs. These combine information on the proportion of people in a given society that are identified as being multidimensionally poor and the average intensity of poverty or disenfranchisement among those poor.

MPIs are people-centred and ethically individualist, focusing on direct human experiences with individual and household-level data, rather than gross aggregates and averages. MPIs can be disaggregated for regions or all kinds of subgroups so that inequalities can be made visible. And they can also be broken down by indicator, to show which rights people in a given society, region or subgroup are particularly frequently deprived of.

The most well-known example of an MPI is the global MPI, which we publish every year together with our colleagues at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). But the global MPI is just one particular example of a multidimensional poverty index. It is meant for international comparison at global level, covering more than 110 countries and over 6 billion people. There are many other MPIs that measure multidimensional poverty, often from a rights-based perspective, in particular country contexts, with different indicators of poverty.

The global MPI has three dimensions – education, health, and living standards – and ten indicators of poverty. The dimensions are equally weighted, and the indicators within each dimension are also equally weighted. It considers the overlapping or simultaneous deprivations, that is, at the same time, that a person or household experiences across these 10 indicators. It thus also measures simultaneous deprivation of human rights – e.g. not having access to safe drinking water, to education, shelter. It then identifies anyone as multidimensionally poor who in their household experiences at least a third of the weighted deprivations.

Through the global MPI, we can see the unequal burden of multidimensional poverty across world regions, within regions, and then within countries. And we can also study the composition of multidimensional poverty – showing how much each deprivation contributes to overall multidimensional poverty in each world region, country, and subnational region. This allows us not only to identify regions and groups that are particularly vulnerable, but it also tells us which deprivations or human rights violations these are affected by.

MPIs can and have been used for various policy purposes, not only to complement conventional monetary poverty metrics, but also to coordinate across government agencies and other

stakeholders – thus breaking silos – and to help them join forces to reduce multiple deprivations or disenfranchisement, allocate budgets, target vulnerable populations, and so on. And if progress is not made, rights-based MPIs can be used to hold accountable those with obligations to guarantee and safeguard violated rights.

At OPHI we are very humbled and privileged to be able to support many countries and international organisations, including many of the ones represented at this seminar such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, and Thailand, that are in the process of constructing their own national multidimensional poverty indices. We are doing this with support from SIDA in Sweden and FCDO in the UK.

The national MPIs capture deprivations relevant to each countries' unique context, and are used for evidence-based policy making, which often means human-rights based poverty alleviation programmes. National MPIs are also reported against SDG target 1.2. SDG indicator 1.2.2. is a unique indicator, because it captures and reports on many other SDGs and human rights at the same time (since these are reflected in poverty indicators related to, for example, health, education, material living standards, employment, exclusion.)

At OPHI, we are also proud to be able to serve as the Secretariat of the Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network (MPPN). This is a South-South network of governments and international organisations measuring and reducing poverty in all its forms and dimensions. With regular UNGA side events, events at the HLPF, annual meetings, and its own magazine, the network provides an opportunity to exchange experiences on measuring and reducing multidimensional poverty for governments and other organisations.

Annex 3

POVERTY REDUCTION AND THOSE IN THE MOST VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Aye Aye Win, President, International Committee for October 17
(Presentation at the Expert Workshop of the 22nd Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights)

This session is devoted to poverty reduction and people in the most vulnerable situations. To start with, please allow me to point you to the excellent background paper prepared by Hans-Otto Sano (particularly pages 21 to 24). So, who are the people in the most vulnerable situations? Who are we talking about? People in the most vulnerable situations are sections of the population who are more at risk and more susceptible to experiencing harm or exploitation due to a variety of factors.

As pointed out in the background paper, in human rights, vulnerability is linked to discrimination. For example, discrimination on grounds of race, religion, gender, disability, social origin, and so forth. People in the most vulnerable situations include children, the elderly, people with different abilities, women and girls, migrant or informal economy workers, indigenous and tribal communities, the LGBTQ community and people living in extreme poverty. Some may experience multiple dimensions of marginalisation and discrimination.

We cannot view them as weak people because there is strong resilience in facing often insurmountable situations, but they are in vulnerable situations with limited access to resources and opportunities and require protection, special attention, and care to ensure their well-being and equal participation in society. There is a strong link between access to justice and vulnerability and Paul Dalton, our main speaker for the session, will address that later. In the Sustainable Development Goals language, the people we are addressing in this session would be the ones who are furthest behind. They are the ones that we need to put first in our policy priorities.

Let's consider the issue of socio-economic discrimination (povertyism) and stepping up efforts to end this discrimination. People living in poverty experience discrimination on socio-economic grounds. The social and institutional maltreatment that arises from this form of discrimination is a hidden dimension of poverty.

People experiencing poverty are discriminated against because of how they look, how they talk, where they live, their employment status, or by the type of work they do. They are blamed and shamed for their situation, dismissed as people who have failed rather than as people for whom society and our policies have failed.

This disrespect and maltreatment is felt in many places – on the streets, in schools and hospitals, in offices and other places of work, in interaction with police, social services and other public authorities.

The stigma and shame that result from discrimination and maltreatment negatively impacts mental health and wellbeing.

Discrimination on socio-economic grounds has to be addressed and people must be protected by law. Although this is recognised in a range of international and some regional human rights instruments (for example, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights article 2.2, European Convention on Human Rights, article 14, and Protocol 12, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, article 21), we need to accelerate efforts at the national level to prohibit discrimination on socio-economic grounds and enshrine this in national legislation.

In Ireland, for example, the current equality legislation covers nine grounds - race, religion, gender, civil status, family status, travellers community, disability, sexual orientation, and age. The exclusion of socio-economic status represents a significant gap, and those experiencing poverty and discrimination because of poverty fall through the cracks. There is now a national campaign called 'Add the 10th' to include socio-economic discrimination in the national equality legislation. So in countries where socio economic discrimination is not yet covered in the equality legislation, please consider doing so. Accelerate efforts to stop discrimination on socio-economic grounds, as it will help address the social and institutional maltreatment that is an important hidden dimension of poverty.

Now let's look at participation, empowerment, and merging of knowledge for better policy outcomes. This workshop is about taking a human rights-based approach to poverty eradication. Participation and empowerment are key elements of a human rights-based approach. You all know that when we talk of participation, we are not talking about participation that is simply symbolic or extractive; we are talking about participation that is informed, meaningful, and empowering. What I propose to add to this conversation is the need to merge or combine the different types of knowledge for better policy outcomes.

So far, we have been pretty good at bringing together knowledge of the academics and knowledge of the practitioners or, in other words, research and action knowledge. What has often been missing is the existential knowledge of poverty, the life experience knowledge that can only be provided by people living in poverty themselves. They are the holders of the existential knowledge, the life experience, and that knowledge must be acknowledged and respected. Conditions need to be put in place to make sure that we can include this valuable knowledge in the design, implementation, and evaluation processes of anti-poverty initiatives.

Some years ago, ATD Fourth World, a human rights movement working to end poverty and a movement that I am proud to associate with, together with the University of Oxford undertook a pioneering research project to better understand poverty and the different dimensions. It involved the participation of people with life experiences that revealed the hidden dimensions of poverty, a deeper understanding of poverty and its consequences that goes beyond the income measure or the multiple dimensions of poverty index.

This year in February, we made ground-breaking progress. After years of negotiation, the World Bank and the IMF hosted a workshop on the 'hidden dimensions of poverty' and invited the life experience knowledge holders to Washington DC to share with them the results of the joint research. Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, presented a new emerging tool called IDEEP (Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration & Evaluation of Policies). The whole idea of IDEEP is to guide decision-makers to ensure strong and deliberate participation of people in poverty in the design, implementation, and assessment of projects or policies and that various dimensions of poverty – the measurable, the visible, and the hidden – are properly addressed.

Taking into account the experience, the thoughts, and reflections of people in poverty may be a path that we have not yet taken, an uncharted territory. But if we want our policies to be evidence-based, and if we want our policies to work, let's take steps in this direction.

Endnotes

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that affect their lives. For a more detailed discussion of empowerment, see Deepa Narayan, ed., 'Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook' (Washington, D.C., World Bank 2002) <https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Narayan-2002-Empowerment.pdf> and the World Bank Poverty website.

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