

Social Protection Floor in Mexico

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The Mexican government has boosted its social spending and integrated its social programmes under a comprehensive social development strategy named *Vivir Mejor*. Its flagship programmes include the *Oportunidades* human development programme for poor families, and the *70 y Más* social pension scheme for the elderly. Recently, the *Seguro Popular* health insurance scheme has extended health access to previously uninsured families. These schemes combine access to essential services with the provision of cash and in-kind social transfers, creating the basis for the Mexican Social Protection Floor.

Oportunidades provides cash transfers, training and other services to support the human development of poor families. In 2010, 5.8 million families, around 30% of all Mexicans, received these benefits. The programme has a budget of 65.7 billion pesos (US\$5.7 billion) and has had a considerable impact on the quality of life of poor families: For instance, the consumption of beneficiary families has risen by 16-22% and school enrolment and attendance rates are now higher. Thus, central mechanisms causing poverty are addressed.

70 y Más is a non-contributory pension scheme that addresses the challenge of old-age poverty by offering a monthly transfer of 500 pesos (US\$41.65) to poor persons aged over 70 living in small towns. The beneficiaries also access activities and services geared to improve their physical and mental health. In January 2011, beneficiaries numbered 2.1 million.

The popular health insurance *Seguro Popular* allows uninsured families to obtain health insurance. The scheme is offered for free to the poorest and at a low cost for others. By 2011, 44 million people had become affiliated. The programme budget tripled from 18 billion pesos (US\$1.56 million) in 2006 to 52 billion pesos (US\$4.5 billion) in 2010. The long-term aim is to provide health coverage for a total of 51 million people.

These programmes and their coordination under *Vivir Mejor* have contributed to social development in Mexico. According to the Social Development Secretariat (SEDESOL), 2,8 million more people would have suffered extreme poverty between 2006 and 2008 without social programmes. Yet, efforts are needed to expand the coverage, scope and level of benefits and strengthen the institutional framework for social protection. There is a need to improve the linkages between social and employment programmes and to further develop the oversight and evaluation mechanisms. Addressing these challenges is crucial for a Mexico's Social Protection Floor. So far, Mexico's achievements attest to the multiple benefits of placing social protection at the heart of the national development strategy both in times of crisis and stability.

