



International
Labour
Organization

Progress Report – TIMOR-LESTE

01/01/2023 – 31/08/2023

ILO GLOBAL FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME ON BUILDING SOCIAL
PROTECTION FLOORS FOR ALL - PHASE II

Project Code GLO/21/34/MUL



Donor: Germany, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Admin Unit: ILO Country Office for Indonesia and Timor-Leste (CO-Jakarta)

Project title:	ILO GLOBAL FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME ON BUILDING SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS FOR ALL PHASE II – TIMOR-LESTE: ACCELERATING PROGRESS ON SDG TARGET 1.3 SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND MEASURES FOR ALL
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Linkages

Strategic Policy Outcome: Outcome 8: Comprehensive and sustainable social protection for all

DWCP 2022-2025 Outcome: Inclusive social protection and enhanced services accessibility

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere and SDG 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030, achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

UNSDCF 2021-2025 Outcome: Sustainable economic opportunities and decent work for all

Related project(s): Action Portugal – phase 3, and RBTC

Preparation and Review

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1. Country context

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste is among the world's 'newest' countries, having only become an independent nation in 2002, and it has now been an ILO member since August 2003. After some years of political instability, during which a UN peacekeeping mission was deployed to the country, sustainable development activities in the country have begun to take on a more prominent role, as detailed in the National Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2011–2030.

The ILO's activities were planned and integrated into the first Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2016–2020 for Timor-Leste and continued into the second DWCP 2022–2025, with a large social protection component included in both cases.

The ILO has been supporting the social protection sector in Timor-Leste, based on a tripartite engagement of partners in an integrated approach that combines different projects and funding sources to achieve common goals. Particular mention may be made of the ACTION/Portugal project, a three-year project whose first phase commenced in 2015 and which is now in its third phase (2022–2025). Prior to the advent of the ACTION/Portugal project, there had been other supporting projects operating in the country, namely PROSOCIAL in the early 2000s and STEP/Portugal from 2003 to 2013. The ILO also assigns regular budgets and funds from the Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC). The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) project has assumed a very important role in complementing the existing different sources of funds.

The National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030, approved in 2021, serves to emphasize the commitment by the Government of Timor-Leste to continuing the development of a social protection system and social protection measures for all citizens and to safeguarding their fundamental rights and guarantees as established in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. The NSSP is the first strategic document of its kind developed in the country and sets out three strategic objectives: reduce poverty; improve and expand social security for workers; and labour towards institutional development.

Since Timor-Leste gained independence in 2002, its protection system has been gradually developed. Thus, a series of programmes and measures have evolved over time to address needs and guarantee everyone's right to social assistance and social security in accordance with the law. Timor-Leste also offers universal and free access to the national public health system.

Social protection in Timor-Leste includes both a contributory and non-contributory scheme, offering benefits in cash or in kind. Its main flagship non-contributory benefits include: a subsidy for the elderly and persons living with disabilities, established in 2008 and converted into a social pension in 2022; a poverty-targeted cash transfer for poor and vulnerable families with children, which was created in 2012; and a universal cash transfer for children and pregnant women, which was approved in 2021. In what was a major advance for Timor-Leste, a contributory social security system was established in 2016. The system includes old-age, invalidity and survivors' pensions, as well as allowances for maternity/paternity/adoption.

In 2021, a new universal cash transfer for pregnant women and children, including children with disabilities, was approved and implementation of it began in three municipalities. The aim currently is to expand it gradually until there is universal coverage of all children under the age of 3 by 2025 and coverage of all children under the age of 6 by 2028. However, the new Government that was formed on 1 July 2023 decided to repeal the universal cash transfer and opted instead to increase investment in social protection through raises in social pensions and in the benefit amounts of the poverty-targeted cash transfer created in 2012 for poor and vulnerable families with children .

The Government of Timor-Leste's desire to ensure basic income security and access to healthcare to people throughout their lives reflects its commitment to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, particularly

with respect to achieving Target 1.3 of Sustainable Development Goal 1, on poverty eradication, and which is aimed at implementing a national social protection system, and also Target 3.8 of Goal 3, on “good health and well-being”, which is aimed at achieving universal health coverage.

There is, nevertheless, a considerable gap between these aspirations and the reality on the ground. In Timor-Leste, only 30.6 per cent of the population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while the remaining 69.4 per cent – as many as 930,262 of the population – are unprotected. The population effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit in Timor-Leste is lower than the estimated 44.1 per cent for the Asia and Pacific region.

While Timor-Leste has near universal coverage for the elderly through a non-contributory social pension, it faces significant challenges in closing coverage gaps and achieving universal social protection in most of the branches of social protection. In this regard, two major challenges can be identified: extending coverage to workers who are still uncovered, namely those workers in the informal and rural economies; and closing gender gaps. More than 60 per cent of workers make up the informal economy, meaning that they are engaged in economic activities not covered by any formal employment or social protection structure. Furthermore, women are one of the most vulnerable groups. The exceptional COVID-19 social protection measures implemented in 2020 and 2021 assumed a critical role in bringing workers, including informal workers, within the contributory social security system. While subscriptions to the scheme did indeed increase during that time, it has been a challenge to keep contributors enrolled in it.

Closing gaps in coverage and providing an adequate social protection system in Timor-Leste in order to achieve universal social protection requires securing and sustaining the necessary resources for more effective spending and for bringing about the desired effect in society. Timor-Leste spends around 8 per cent of its GDP on social protection (excluding health), which is 0.5 per cent less than the estimated average for the Asia and Pacific region, though it is 6 per cent higher than for the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). Social protection spending has been funded primarily by the Timor-Leste Petroleum Fund; however, with the Fund expected to be fully depleted by 2034, alternative sustainable financing options need to be explored in order to achieve implementation of the policy and programme reforms approved by the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030.

Timor-Leste has set about laying a sound foundation for financial management reforms, particularly through the approval of key legislation, such as the Framework Law on the General State Budget (GSB) and Public Finance Management (PFM) approved in 2022. However, some of the measures to increase revenues, such as additional taxes on alcohol, sugar and tobacco, have been repealed by the new Government.

The establishment of the governance structure as per the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030 will have a major role to play, particularly in ensuring that adequate and sustainable resources are channelled towards social protection, while simultaneously ensuring the efficient and effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy.

2. Progress report

Outcome: In Timor-Leste: Improved national capacities and knowledge bases for monitoring social protection and informing social protection financing and digitalization
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The GIZ project started in January 2022. Before the budget became available in May 2022, ILO Timor-Leste began work on the preparation of certain activities, such as detailing the work plan, initiating discussions

with Government counterparts, drafting terms of reference and advertising vacancies. The first progress report was submitted to GIZ on 8 July 2022.

Between June and September 2022, the GIZ project provided four months of funding to support the ILO official in the Timor-Leste field office by covering the funding gap in this field office position during the transition from the second to the third phase of the ACTION/Portugal project. The ILO official at the field office has played a strategic role in providing technical assistance on social protection, liaising with ILO constituents and coordinating with the UN, development partners and donors in Timor-Leste. This GIZ contribution towards sharing the cost of a staff member's salary has demonstrated the high level of integration among the different ILO social protection projects for ensuring the delivery of service to the Timorese authorities.

The GIZ project activities were mostly completed successfully, with the notable exception of the dissemination of the social protection statistics, as preparation and production of the bulletin of statistics is contingent on validation and harmonization of derived data. Thus, more time should have been allocated for training and capacity-building activities, as well as for communication of findings and dissemination so as to ensure the transfer of knowledge, internalization of findings and ownership. The same applies to the policy note on fiscal space for social protection, as these concepts are new for most of the counterparts and to the Social Security Portal, which will require ongoing support for maintenance and updating.

In May 2023, Timor-Leste held parliamentary elections and the new Government was formed in July of the same year. This change resulted in delays to the implementation of activities, particularly to those requiring the active engagement of the Government's counterparts and to all other activities that involving dissemination. During the period of the electoral campaigns and after the elections, it was very difficult to meet with Government officials, engage technical staff actively and to organize dissemination events.

Output 1: Improved national capacities to implement and monitor the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021-2030

Approval of the first Implementation Annual Plan 2022-2023 of the National Strategy for Social Protection

Between 21 February and 30 June 2022, the ILO provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) to develop the first Annual Implementation Plan 2022–2023 for the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021-2030¹. This Annual Implementation Plan will be used in guiding the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the first two years that the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030 runs.

The Annual Implementation Plan 2022–2023 was approved in June 2022, after a participatory process of consultation, capacity-building and training sessions supported by the GIZ project. This process included many meetings with key decision makers and capacity-building/training sessions delivered to technical staff from the main entities responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030, namely: the National Institute of Social Security (INSS); Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEJD); Ministry of Health (MOH); Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI); and the Secretary of State for Employment and Vocational Training (SEFOPE). A total of 20 capacity-building/training sessions were conducted between 25 March and 23 June 2022, in which 107 people participated (36 females, 71 males). These training courses have contributed to increasing staff knowledge and understanding of the

¹ Technical assistance in drafting the Implementation Plan was funded through resources jointly provided by the ACTION/Portugal project and the Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC).

strategy for the Annual Implementation Plan, as well as to strengthening staff capacity to coordinate planning and monitoring.

The Annual Implementation Plan for 2022–2023 was drafted in Portuguese and was translated into Tetum and English using GIZ funds. The graphic design of the three versions was completed² and presented to the Vice Minister of Social Solidarity and Inclusion on 29 of May 2023³.



The Annual Implementation Plan 2022-2023 was printed (100 copies in Tetum, 100 copies in Portuguese and 50 copies in English) and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) presented and distributed it on 2 June 2023⁴⁵.



Update of the Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) for the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030 of Timor-Leste

The National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030 includes information on the impact of the implementation of the NSSP on costs and the number of beneficiaries in a chapter based on the ILO Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP). Changes made to some of the policy reforms and the results of new data from the Census and Labour Force Survey require that the RAP be updated. As the existing Excel-based tool is being upgraded, the RAP will be transferred to an online version.

A first training session on the online Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) was conducted on 26 May 2022 at ILO headquarters by the technical officer of the Public Finance, Actuarial Services and Statistics branch of the Social Protection department (SOC/PFACTS). The training concerned was given to the Senior Social Protection Technical Officer at ILO Timor-Leste. A second training session was conducted on 2 December

² Graphic design funded by the ACTION/Portugal project.

³ Links to news on the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/100067917001818/posts/583667667240462/?d=w&mibextid=qC1gEa>

⁴ Links to news on Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/100067917001818/posts/581524144121481/?d=w&mibextid=qC1gEa>

2022 by the same ILO Officer at ILO headquarters to an international consultant based in Timor-Leste. The consultant concerned was recruited through Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC) funding and is supporting the draft of some sections of the policy note on sustainable financing of social protection under the guidance of the Senior Social Protection Technical Officer. Since then, the Officer at the ILO headquarters has been providing trouble-shooting support on an 'as needs' basis.

The Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) model for Timor-Leste was updated in the Excel version and transferred to the online version. Training on the topic entitled "Updating cost estimates of the National Social Protection Strategy 2021–2030 through the RAP model" was held on 22 and 23 August 2023 for 13 trainees from the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Social Inclusion (MSSI); the National Social Security Institute (INSS); the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEJD); the Ministry of Health (MS) and the National Statistics Institute. Funds for this training came from the Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC).

A policy note had originally been prepared to include the results of the Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) model, in particular the updated costs of social protection reforms based on it. However, the RAP model and policy note must once again be updated owing to the changes that have occurred in them as a result of reforms instituted since July 2023 under the new Government of Timor-Leste.

Output 2: Improved national capacity to produce statistics of social protection

The basic statistics and indicators of social protection are disseminated via the first Statistical Bulletin on Social Protection in Timor-Leste

The ILO through the ACTION/Portugal project has been providing training and technical assistance to the key Government institutions and social partners responsible for the social protection statistics with the aim of improving the national statistical capacity and producing the first Statistical Bulletin on Social Protection in Timor-Leste, following in the steps of other Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) countries, such as Cabo Verde and Mozambique⁶.

In February 2022, the ILO Senior Social Protection Technical officer, who provides technical assistance to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI), took part in the drafting of the terms of reference for an intersectoral group on social protection statistics. The group comprises technical staff from the National Institute of Social Security (INSS); Ministry of Education; Ministry of Youth and Sports (MEJD); Directorate General of Statistics of the Ministry of Finance (DGE-MOF); Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI), as well as the National Agency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (NAPME); Public Service Commission (PSC); Secretary of State for Civil Protection (SECP); Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion (SEI); Secretary of State for Employment and Vocational Training (SEFOPE); and workers' representatives from the Konfederacao Sindicato De Timor-Leste (KSTL) and employers' representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Timor-Leste (CCI-TL).

The terms of reference were shared and discussed with the Director-General of Social Solidarity and Inclusion in the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) and the Director-General of Statistics of the Ministry of Finance. Revisions were in turn made to these terms of reference and the MSSI legal advisers adapted them in order to gain approval of them in law. Although the terms of reference have not yet been approved, they are nonetheless being utilized in guiding an informal intersectoral group of officers from relevant Government institutions and social partners when they meet and participate in capacity-building activities. A workshop on social protection statistics was conducted from 26 to 28 July 2022⁷, with the goal

⁶ The training on statistics of social protection have been primarily supported by ACTION Portugal since 2018.

⁷ Workshop funded by ACTION Portugal.

of training technical staff from relevant Government institutions and representatives of social partners concerned with the statistics and key indicators of social protection and methods for its calculation (for example, internationally recognized SDG 1.3. statistical indicators). The workshop was also used as a forum for sharing examples of experience from other countries, in particular Cabo Verde.

Since July 2022, the Senior Social Protection Technical Officer has been working closely with the National Institute of Social Security's (INSS) Executive Director and Head of Departments to guide them in the compilation, harmonizing and validating of the statistics on contributory social security. This process is taking longer than expected because the INSS does not have an information management system with which to handle and process the data. Hence, all data compilation and validation have been performed manually. The contributory social security data is spread across different departments and the data is often duplicated, thus requiring time and internal coordination to extract the most reliable data for use in summarizing.

The validation and harmonization of data has not yet been completed. With the newly elected Government now in power, efforts have been focused on obtaining the approval of this data by the intersectoral group on social protection statistics so that work on statistics can commence and planning of the bulletin of statistics of social protection can go ahead.

Translation, adjustment, and deployment of the online Social Security Inquiry (SSI) for its application in Timor-Leste

The ILO Social Security Inquiry (SSI) is the main source of global data on social protection and the ILO has applied the SSI in compiling of internationally comparable and consistent data on social security expenditure and revenue and coverage trends of national social protection systems. Data compilation on social protection is mainly driven by the administrative data received from Governments through the SSI questionnaire. This ILO/SSI tool is currently available in English, French and Spanish, but it needs to be translated into Portuguese and the requisite technical adjustments made to it so that it might be applied in the context of Timor-Leste.

Between February and March 2022, the ILO drafted terms of reference and launched a drive to recruit a consultancy firm to oversee the deployment of the online SSI for Timor-Leste. The consultancy firm that was finally selected signed a contract on 24 May 2022 and it has completed the full localization of the online SSI tool into Portuguese, carried out all technical adjustments and deployed, tested and documented the system. It will also allocate some hours to maintenance. The online SSI tool is ready to store the data on social protection, in particular for the purpose of aiding in the calculation of the key indicators on social protection and assisting Government counterparts to improve their capacity to produce evidence-based planning and decisions. Populating of the online SSI tool has commenced with the available 2023 data.

Output 3: Improved knowledge base and capacities to inform on sustainable financing social protection

Policy Note on sustainable financing of social protection produced for national dialogue

Terms of reference for a national consultant to assist in the analysis of social protection financing were drafted and a vacancy advertised in August 2022. Interviews were conducted in November 2022. A national consultant was contracted for a period of 30 working days starting in November 2022 and ending on 31 May 2023. Under the guidance of the Senior Social Protection Technical Officer for Timor-Leste, the national consultant assists in the compiling and summarizing of key information and data as per a practical handbook in order to assess financing options for extending social protection coverage and benefits adapted to Timor-Leste, as well as assist in the dissemination process

Through the utilization of Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC) funds, an international consultant was also recruited for the same period in order to support the drafting of specific sections of the policy note and to supplement the national consultant's technical skills and competencies.

The Senior Social Protection Technical Officer conducted bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI), Ministry of Finance, National Institute of Social Security (INSS) and social partners to brief and explain about the purpose of the policy note, its methodology, the plan for its dissemination.

With a combination of funds from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the ILO Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC) and the ACTION/Portugal project, the team has completed the policy note on fiscal space for financing social protection in Timor-Leste. However, since the new Government came to power in July 2023, there have been many delays and the publication and launch of the policy note is now planned for early 2024.

Output 4: Strengthened digital national tools and systems

Web-based solution for achieving the provision of open social protection data sharing

A consulting company was contracted between 1 May 2023 and 30 August 2023 to develop the Social Security Portal, which was successfully tested and deployed on the National Institute of Social Security server. This is the first social security gateway to provide citizens, workers and employers with all detailed information about the social security system in Timor-Leste. The Social Security Portal includes easily accessible information delivered in a format that is comprehensible to all citizens.

The consulting company also provided ten training sessions on content management of the Social Security Portal. The secure online Social Security Portal is available in three languages (Portuguese, Tetum, and English) at <https://segurancasocial.gov.tl/index>.

A local IT consultant was contracted to assist in capacity-building sessions and training for the National Institute of Social Security IT Team. With funds supplied by the Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC), it became possible to extend the contract of the IT consultant and thus continue supporting the National Institute of Social Security IT Team in managing and updating the contents of the Portal after its deployment and the completion of the project.

The ILO through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the ACTION/Portugal projects also supported the National Institute of Social Security to prepare the official launch of the Social Security Portal by creating a promotional video about the Portal, and issuing invitations, an agenda and a booklet for the event. A message from the SOCPRO Director was recorded and broadcast at the event. However, with the installing of the new Government and the ensuing replacement of decision makers, including the President of the National Institute of Social Security, the official launch was postponed with the intention of holding it on 23 February 2024.

Besides the foregoing, the project supported the purchase of:

- 15 tablets, which were presented to National Institute of Social Security .
- One laptop, one printer and one external hard disk, which were delivered to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion.

OUTPUTS: Overall delivery assessment ⁸			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Highly satisfactory Implementation of almost all (>80%) outputs is on schedule as envisaged in the implementation plan and almost all (>80%) indicator milestones have been met.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfactory Implementation of the majority (60-80%) of outputs is on schedule as envisaged in the implementation plan and the majority (60-80%) of indicator milestones have been met.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unsatisfactory Some (40-60%) outputs are being implemented on schedule as envisaged in the implementation plan and/or only some (40-60%) indicator milestones have been met.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very unsatisfactory Few (<40%) outputs are being implemented on schedule as envisaged in the implementation plan and/or only a few (<40%) indicator milestones have been met.

⁸ This is a self-assessment.

Summary of outcome(s)

OUTCOME ACHIEVEMENT ⁹				
Indicator	Baseline (before project start)	Indicator Milestone (compare planned against actual)	Target (end-of-project goal)	Immediate Outcome Summary
Outcome 1: In Timor-Leste: Improved national capacities and knowledge base to monitor social protection and inform social protection financing and digitalization				
Output 1: Improved national capacities to implement and monitor the National Strategy for Social Protection (NSSP) 2021–2030		MSSI and other relevant stakeholders improved their capacity to implement and monitor the NSSP 2021–2030		Fully on track: all milestones met
Approval of the first Implementation Annual Plan 2022–2023 of the National Strategy for Social Protection	The Implementation Annual Plan 2022–2023 was drafted	The Implementation Annual Plan 2022–2023 was consulted and adopted and training delivered to key government staff	The Implementation Annual Plan 2022–2023 was consulted and adopted	
Update of the Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) for the NSSP 2021–2030 of Timor-Leste	The Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) in Excel was used for cost estimate of major reforms approved under the NSSP 2021–2030	The Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) was updated and transferred to an online version and training delivered to key government staff	The Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) was updated and transferred to an online version	

⁹ Based on the M&E plan

Output 2: Improved national capacity to produce statistics of social protection		Basic indicators and statistics of social protection are produced, shared and used		
The basic statistics and indicators of social protection are disseminated through the Bulletin of statistics of social protection	No regular dissemination of basic statistics and indicators of social protection	Validation and harmonization of statistics are ongoing. 2023 annual data compiled.	Regular publication of the of statistics in annual bulletins	
Translation, adjustment, and deployment of the online Social Security Inquiry (SSI) for its application in Timor-Leste	SSI available in English	SSI available in Portuguese and 2023 data collected and stored in the online SSI resource to support the World Social Protection Report	SSI available in Portuguese and data collected and stored in the online SSI resource to support the World Social Protection Report	
Output 3: Improved knowledge base and capacities to inform on sustainable financing social protection		Knowledge base and capacities to inform on sustainable financing social protection is improved		
Policy Note on sustainable financing of social protection produced for national dialogue	No detailed data on fiscal space for social protection is available	A policy note on fiscal space for social protection in Timor-Leste was prepared and shared with key Government staff	A policy note on fiscal space for social protection in Timor-Leste was prepared	

Output 4: Strengthened digital national tools and systems		National digital tools and systems are strengthened		
Web-based solution to provide open social protection data sharing	No national platform/website exists to share information on social security	A Social Security Portal was developed, tested and deployed in three languages (Portuguese, Tetum, English) on the National Institute of Social Security server of	A Social Security Portal was developed, tested and deployed on the National Institute of Social Security server	

► **Gender and non-discrimination**

There is no specific activity focused on gender and non-discrimination. However, in terms of statistics on social protection, efforts have been made to obtain disaggregation of data by sex and indicators of social protection, which may thus aid in analysing coverage and adequacy of social protection benefits throughout the life cycle.

3. Collaboration and partnerships

The presence of a Senior Social Protection Technical Officer in the ILO office in Timor-Leste has allowed for the building of solid relationships and strong engagement with:

- key Government partners, in particular the National Institute of Social Security (INSS), Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI);
- social partners, namely the worker representative organization, the Konfederacao Sindicato De Timor-Leste (KSTL), and the employer representative organization, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Timor-Leste (CCI-TL);
- donors – and also with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the EU.

The ACTION/Portugal project funded by the Government of Portugal has been the main project supporting the strengthening of the social protection systems in Timor-Leste and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) since 2015. The ACTION/Portugal project's third three-year phase commenced in August 2022.

The ILO is active in the following activities:

It is leading the Decent Work Country Programme 2022–2025 for Timor-Leste through which it has contributed to improving the national social protection system and its measures and procedures. The ongoing provision of technical assistance on social protection to Timor-Leste, marked by strong cooperation with the Government, has enabled the ILO to lead and coordinate UN support and to integrate assistance from other development partners with social protection in Timor-Leste.

It co-leads with UNDP work on Outcome 2 in the Results category of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025 (UNSDCF), and which is focused on 'sustainable economic opportunities and decent work for all'. It represents the core of the UN development system reform in Timor-Leste.

It is an active member of the Development Partners Coordination Working Group on Social Protection. This Group has been an important platform for the sharing of information, creation of synergies and integrating support from several development partners and donors that work towards the enhancing of the social protection system in Timor-Leste.

4. Main challenges and corrective actions

Despite the Government's commitment to the activities mentioned in this report, lack of national capacities in social protection are often an impediment towards achieving the desired results. Such lack of capacity is usually associated with inadequate qualifications, mismatch of skills and poor competences.

Any technical assistance provided or activities implemented require a sustained component of capacity-building. The most qualified staff tend to be at the Director-General and National Director levels, and the small number of these national leaders are usually occupied with their main commitments.

Areas of strategic planning, statistics, costing, monitoring and evaluation are quite new and unfamiliar for most of the counterparts. Inexperience of these areas within a setting marked by very low capacity can present a significant challenge. Thus, while there is opportunity to continue providing technical assistance, offer training and transfer knowledge, these are conversely very time consuming and require the presence of a strong capacity-building component, as well as regular support and constant follow-up on activities in order for them to progress.

Another challenge is the recruiting of national consultants. The lack of adequate qualifications and competences for task profiles that require more analytical work is a difficult problem to surmount. One way of addressing this issue is commonly to recruit a national junior consultant and an international consultant to work together on the task while building national capacities.

Yet another challenge is the high turnover in staff, with frequently no replacements to fill resulting vacancies. This happens at both technical and decision-maker levels, making the capacity-building process and transfer of knowledge difficult.

With the change in Government that occurred in July 2023, it became very challenging to persuade technical staff to engage in the activities and no one was willing to engage in disseminating them. The new structures of the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) and the National Institute of Social Security (NISS) were announced in September 2023 and it was only after this date that new senior management staff were appointed.

Furthermore, despite Tetum and Portuguese both being the official languages, they are not spoken by everyone. Therefore, there is always a need to translate documents (or interpret at events) in more than one language, including in English if a coordination with international development partners and donors is required. This is a complicating factor in the process, making it take longer than expected and very expensive.

5. Summary and outlook

In addition to technical assistance and advisory services provided to ILO tripartite constituents, there is a huge demand for training and capacity-building at policy and technical levels owing to the limited skills of national constituents. Therefore, any such future project and its activities will need a strong capacity-building component supported by international and local staff in order to ensure the transfer of knowledge and sustainability of its results.

Ensuring that there is sufficient time for communication and dissemination of the results achieved under the project is also essential, as this would contribute to fostering ownership by national constituents.

Finally, a joint seminar where all countries supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) might share their achievements would be useful in achieving greater visibility for the project.