

# Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Tajikistan

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2018





**Tajikistan's economic growth picked up after the difficult first decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.** Recently, the country has made the transition to a lower middle-income country status. Because of high fertility and relatively low life expectancy, Tajikistan's population is comparatively young.

**The mountainous terrain of the country severely limits the availability of arable land. Tajikistan also is considered the most vulnerable country to climate change in the Europe and Central Asia region. It is particularly prone to natural disasters, extreme temperatures and erratic rainfalls<sup>1</sup>.** These conditions significantly affect poor households, which are most affected by environmental degradation given that many depend on agricultural land for their livelihoods. This vulnerability also impacts the country's agricultural production, an extremely important factor given agriculture's key role in the economy. This sector employs more than half of the labour force, but it lags behind other sectors in its contribution to GDP. The labour market is characterized by a labour surplus and decreasing economic activity of the working-age population. Low wages and the lack of productive employment opportunities have driven much of the working-age population to seek employment in the Russian Federation or Kazakhstan, resulting in Tajikistan being one of the world's most remittance-dependent countries.

**Tajikistan has the worst food security and nutrition indicators in the region, with poverty and behavioural patterns being important underlying factors.** The Tajik population suffers from the double burden of malnutrition: undernutrition (including micronutrient deficiencies) and overnutrition. Both chronic and transitory food insecurity is prevalent. Although wasting and anaemia have been decreasing since 2005, underweight and stunting have been growing since the economic crisis of 2008. In fact, the prevalence of underweight among children under 5 has doubled between 2008 and 2015<sup>2</sup>. Stunting figures show significant disparities between rural and urban regions, and most stunted children belong to poor households. One third of the Tajik population is affected by poverty, a predominately rural phenomenon. Poverty rates are correlated with the seasonality of agriculture and remittance inflows. For example, the poorest households finance a substantial share of their consumption through remittances: 50 percent and 80 percent for urban and rural households, respectively. Urban-rural and regional inequalities are observed, and female-headed households are at a higher risk of poverty relative to male-headed households.





**Comprehensive social protection systems can be an adequate answer to the problems faced by the Tajik population.**

Social protection measures can help people break the vicious cycle of poverty and food insecurity. Besides poverty, behavioural factors also play a role in malnutrition, manifesting in conditions such as micronutrient deficiency or overweight and obesity. Introducing nutrition-specific or nutrition-sensitive programmes can further enhance positive impacts on food security.

**Tajikistan has a relatively comprehensive social protection system, which includes elements of social insurance, social assistance and social services.**

Remittances, as a form of informal protection, play an important role. Existing social protection programmes have limited impact on food security, especially due to the low coverage and adequacy of the social assistance system. The country is now reforming its social assistance system. The current cash compensations will be replaced by the Targeted Social Assistance programme from the beginning of 2018, which is expected to improve the situation. A key issue remains the low coverage and adequacy of social assistance. The government plans to gradually increase the share of the poor and vulnerable population covered by social assistance transfers.

**Institutional and implementation challenges persist in Tajikistan.**

Acknowledging that there is a lack of promotive social protection measures, shock-responsive safety nets and nutrition-sensitive social protection in the country is the first step toward providing adequate support. Addressing existing challenges will require consideration of the following elements:

- **Policy dialogue** on future strategies should be underpinned by a set of minimum standards for social protection, food security, nutrition and healthcare.
- **Improving policy design and policy implementation**, and ensuring sound public financial management of social protection, are key for the future development of an effective social protection system in Tajikistan.
- **International development partners**, particularly the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, and the United Nations Children's Fund, can play a major role in addressing these issues and supporting the government.

1 WFP (2016). Country Programme Tajikistan 2016-2020. Dushanbe: World Food Programme  
2 FAO(2017). FAOSTAT Database. <http://fao.org/statistics>





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