

## Ep. 16 | The trade-offs of targeting

**Jo Sharpe:** Hello and welcome to the Social Protection Podcast. I'm your host, Jo Sharpe. In today's episode, we are talking about one of the toughest and most contested aspects of social protection policy-making, targeting. Who should receive support from social protection systems? How do we identify the right people and reach them? The way countries choose to target programmes involves weighing up a complex set of issues. While our targeting toolkit is still made up of just a handful of fundamental methods and approaches each with their individual strengths and weaknesses when it comes to the critical task of selecting and reaching people in need.

In this episode, I'll introduce some of the key considerations and trade-offs often invoked when making decisions about how to target social protection. And I'll ask my guests about the latest thinking on how to reconcile these perennial dilemmas. My guests today are Rachel Sabates-Wheeler from the Institute of Development Studies and Matthew Wai-Poi from the Poverty Global Practice at the World Bank. Rachel is the co-author of a new paper on key considerations for targeting social assistance in situations of protracted crises. And Matt is a co-author of a new book from the World Bank called *Revisiting Targeting in Social Assistance: A New Look at Old Dilemmas* and what dilemmas they can be. Welcome, Rachel and Matt.

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** Thank you. Good to be here.

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** Hi Jo. Hi, Rachel, looking forward to this.

**Jo Sharpe:** So Rachel, can you set us up as we embark on this wide-ranging and complex topic? Can you give us an outline of the basic typology of the options for targeting social assistance schemes?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** So targeting specifically targeting social assistance, whether it's cash or food or assets. Targeting refers to a process by which we identify those people or households who are eligible to receive some kind of assistance. It could be humanitarian or development assistance or welfare. And so targeting is usually necessary because funds available are often really limited. And so therefore you can't necessarily include everybody who's in need.

So what actually has to happen is you identify some kind of threshold above which someone or a household will be ineligible and below which a household would be eligible. And so how would you actually measure those thresholds there's different ways. So if you've got fantastic data, say you are living in a country with great administrative data or data from my income, my work, you can use something called means testing. And it's really quite straightforward to tell if I'm relatively wealthy or not, but in many countries, we don't have that data available. And so we have to use other mechanisms.

There's one called the proxy means test, essentially it's a way of saying let's choose some indicators that might proxy or approximate poverty in this population and try to use some

statistical techniques to figure that out. But of course, there's other ways maybe you are interested in reducing child malnutrition in a population, or maybe you think older people in a population are particularly vulnerable to poverty. And you might say, you know what, it's just gonna be easy for us to say, let's target everyone over a certain age, or let's target all households with children under a certain age because that's why we think poverty is mostly concentrated. So they're called sort of categorical targeting or you could think, well, actually there's an area in this country or this region that's most affected by crises or shocks and there's more poverty there. Let's go for geographic targetings.

And then you have something called Community-Based Targeting (CBT), where you work with a community to say: "well, who do you think is poor here?". And we will distribute to those people. And then finally there's probably lots of other ones, but there's self-targeting where you might ask people themselves to identify themselves in need. You might require them to show up and do some hard public work or show up and queue up for food that isn't particularly great food, but because they're hungry, they'll queue up. So that's kind of just a really quick whistle top store tour of what targeting looks like and how complicated it is.

**Jo Sharpe:** I'm gonna lead into one of the considerations or trade-offs that you started by talking about there Rachel. That kind of trade-off between cost and coverage. And I think accuracy often comes into this as well. So as you say, if resources are constrained and they usually are in some way, shape, or form, it feels intuitive. It feels right that they should be concentrated on the people who are most in need. And that's generally understood to be the poorest families or the poorest individual.

But then the actual task of identifying and selecting who is poor in a given population is by no means straightforward. The methods we have, the tools we have to evaluate people's economic status are imprecise, to say the least, and in this conversation, the specters of exclusion era comes up really quickly. So that's the number of people who should be eligible for a programme, but who are just not being picked up by the methods that we are using to identify people and that's particularly true of programmes that are using poverty targeting.

So Matt, is there a right science for poverty-targeted programmes that balance cost and the need to concentrate resources on the poorest people, but also weigh up these issues around exclusion risk?

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** It's a really important question, Jo. Because I actually think the size of a programme matters a lot more to the targeting outcomes than the targeting method you use itself. So at one hand, clearly you can be too small. So when the programme is smaller, even than the number of poor people in the country that you're trying to target in the first place by definition, you have exclusion error, but even if the programme is larger than the number of people, the target population, small programmes can still have quite a bit of exclusion error because it's hard to distinguish between someone who's in say the poorest 10% of the country and someone who's in the poorest 40% of the country.

And poor countries these households all look very similar. And so your programme might be trying to target the poorest 10% or 20%. And even if it's a little bit larger, like 30% that's still not a lot of quota to be working with to really be trying to find the poorest 10%. So at some

point, you're too small. You don't have enough quota to cover everyone who's needed. At some point and this is quite a bit further up the scale. You can get too big. You're no longer reducing exclusion error very much. And you're starting to have quite a high inclusion error. You're starting to have quite a few rich households even within your programme.

And I think this is not all inclusion error are bad. So let's say we have a programme that's targeting the poorest 20% of a country and it includes someone who's in the 21st percentile. So just above the poverty line. Technically, they're an inclusion error as most people calculate it. But is that such a bad social outcome? If this person clearly not well off is being included in the programme. So in a sense, there is a sweet spot and we discuss this in the book. You don't wanna be too small. You don't wanna be too big. Realistically, the programme should be quite a bit larger than the target. So I think the gap sometimes between those who support poverty targeting and those who support more universal coverage is sometimes smaller than it seems. I think all of us think that programmes and most countries are probably, should be a little larger than they often are.

**Jo Sharpe:** Staying with you, Matt, and particularly on perhaps one of the most thorn and contentious tools we have in our toolkit. The proxy means test, a PMT. The PMT is much maligned in social protection. It's also widely used, it's been around for decades. It's not going away anytime soon. How other tools evolving when it comes to this kind of measurement? And are they making much difference in addressing these kinds of errors?

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** PMT is widely used. The basic idea is, well, I can't see what the income or consumption of a household is. I can see certain characteristics that I think are correlated with what their true income is. So I might look at, do they own their house or not? Do they own a motorcycle or an air conditioner or a refrigerator? I might look at the quality of their housing construction. Do they ever dirt floor? What's their roof made of? And so forth. How many children do they have? Poorer households often tend to have more children.

And so based on those proxies, which is why it's called a proxy means test you have a statistical model that predicts what you think their income or consumption is. I do wanna say first PMT is definitely not the only targeting option. There are some contexts in which PMT may be a good option, some contexts in which it may be a poorer option and there's various considerations, but you are right. PMT is a bit of a workhorse in the targeting toolkit. And so it's been a lot of effort to improve it. So you can use new data in the PMT formula. You can also use new data to screen out households from having the PMT formula flight to them in the first place. And the other thing you can have is new algorithms, new ways of coming up with that formula. And a lot of the attention in the last 5 or 10 years has gone on machine learning, which is the buzzword in this area.

So let me start with those new data, the new proxies. So the key challenge, of course, is finding indicators that predict income that are reasonably observed. Because that's what we're trying to do, but they're also difficult to cheat on. Originally those indicators came from household surveys. There's lots of new data that has been improving PMT. You've got community information on local services that are available, the economic infrastructure that's available. That can say something about the likelihood that at a household is going to have a reasonable livelihood. There's great new geospatial data on natural disasters. Both

whether they've happened or the risk that they're going to happen in the future. There's also data on mobile phone records, which are at an individual level that can tell you something about a household.

The big evolution has been the use of administrative data. Data on formal household income, which has always existed. It's been in social security databases. It's been in personal income tax databases, but it's often been difficult to access and difficult to match to the data being used to identify households as poor or not for social assistance eligibility. So that matching is becoming a lot easier with unique identification numbers in countries. And with electronic ID and so, yes, you can use that and it tells you something about part of the income of some households, but you can also just say: "well, look, I know they have this income and it's not everything". And then I can use PMT to predict the missing income. And this is hybrid means test, which is increasingly becoming used as more data become available, particularly in parts of Europe and Central Asia.

There's also data, not only on income but things like "do you own property and what is it worth? Do you own vehicles and what are they worth?" And they're being used for affluence testing. So it's not going to tell me very much if you're poor or not, it is going to tell me if you're rich and whether I should not bother running a PMT or you in the first place. So it doesn't directly reduce the exclusion error. It reduces the inclusion error, but every rich person that you don't put in the programme is another opportunity to bring a poor person in.

The second one is different algorithms. These machine learning approaches, can they help us in targeting? Our main conclusion on this is the new algorithms can produce better results? It's not clear before you try running them, which of the algorithms are going to work better and in what circumstances they are going to work better. So what we see is the context matters. And when you did find improvements, improvements often weren't large. So our main conclusion is you do want more data. You do want more proxies. This is where a lot of the gains have come in the last 20 years and the fancier algorithms, they do help, but they don't think they're as important as new data.

You do also have to be careful there's bias in this new data. If you don't have a phone, you can't access payments and so forth, but you're also not appearing if you're using phone data records, but there's also quite a lot of documented bias and machine learning racial bias, gender bias in the way in which these data are used and way in which they're trained. So there's, in addition, just basic data privacy and protection. Do you have the regulations in place? Do the institutions in place to look after this? So I also would like to make a word of caution that we do have to be careful how we use them and how we build that data ecosystem.

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** What Matt said about context matters. I couldn't agree with more. We tend to talk about these targeting methods and obviously it just so depends on the population you're working with, the political situation you are in, the context, and the shock you are dealing with.

I've been involved in the nuts and bolts of doing proxy means test in Kenya and different simulations in Rwanda some years ago. And to be honest, the simpler, the better, even though the more variables you add, the kind of more statistically accurate, it might be when it actually comes to talking to government officials, statisticians sitting in welfare ministries, community people on the ground they're like, we can't really get it. We don't really know what's happening.

Then I would say that it would be, it's very helpful if targeting is understandable to a community that's being targeted. I would have to say that's probably a very big deal where I work, because particularly in context, where I'm more recently working where you've got protracted crises, often you're going into an environment where there's a lot of need. Targeting's required, but there's also distrust of public institutions and to come in and just say, well, here's a computer printout of who's vulnerable, who's not just doesn't go down particularly. Well, you can obviously combine this with some community-based verification. You can combine different methods so that people find it more acceptable. But I would say acceptability locally of a targeting mechanism is critical.

**Jo Sharpe:** Rachel, just to take a step back. What is known about how different kinds of targeting methods enable or disable inclusion or participation of particular groups given that is often actually what we're trying to achieve?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** There are certain ways in which people are disempowered through targeting. And it might be say, you've got a context of displacement, and a population is required to have proof of residency or citizenship. If that's a requirement for targeting, they're excluded. If you've got a digital platform for distributing your cash and some populations don't have access to mobile or electronic technology, then they are just excluded. So those sorts of things, you've gotta keep a really good eye on.

And similarly, if you are working with the government, then if you are in a context where there's ethnic tension or conflict happening, of course, politics becomes critical in who gets targeted. And you will find that there is exclusion that happens or inclusion that's highly politically charged. In terms of participation, also sometimes we think we're quite enlightened development professionals that we should target women and girls because we think they're more vulnerable, but actually sometimes depending on if they have to travel to a pay point to get cash or assistance that can actually increase their vulnerability. We have a number of studies in the paper that I co-authored, which identifies places where they become vulnerable to exploitation either around sexual favors or cash that they have to pay.

**Jo Sharpe:** Let me move on to the second set of considerations that comes up around this topic, which relate to political economy. So there's kind of a counter view that maybe it's not a great idea to try and concentrate resources on poor people. And in fact, you should try and spread them around a little bit more to include the vulnerable, the middle-class. And the theory here is that you get a weight of public support behind social protection policies, and then that translates into more sustainable financing, higher benefits, better services. And this is often used as an argument in favor of more kind of categorically targeted programmes like child grants, social pensions for the elderly. And it does kind of push back on this idea of

social protection spending, being fixed or finite, remembering budget allocations like everything else are political as well as technical decisions.

Rachel, what do you think? Is this a valid argument? Is this something we should be considering or is it a bit oversimplified?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** It's a tough one. I think that statement by Amartya Sen that benefits meant exclusively for the poor often end up being poor benefits in some of the contexts I work in, I would probably say that's true. Working in the field over the last 20 years, I've been in a number of countries where there's a notion that why should we give poor people money? They're just lazy. You know why I don't want to do that. They either have to work like we do, or I'm not going to support that. That's been a prevalent idea in some countries I've been in.

And then there's other cases, for example, some years ago in Namibia, there was a discussion on piloting a social pension for the poorest older people, but there was a big sort of "no, no, no, it should be for all old people". So there was some big discussion like "oh, okay, well we're gonna have to do this, otherwise it's not going to get traction. We're gonna have everybody, even though the richest older people are gonna be using that money to pay for their club membership." But interestingly, when it came to the actual delivery of the pension, the designer said "okay, we are gonna make this self-targeted. So we're gonna drive around the country with like a mobile ATM machine. You're gonna have to queue up and get your pension outside." So only the poorest of people who really needed that would show up because the otherwise there's no way they were going to stand in line.

I do think this whole fixation on targeting and preference for targeting versus universal is often a reflection of the residual role assigned to social policy and development. We often think, okay, we've got a target. We've gotta deal with the poor they're out there as this sort of group. But if social policy is often not seen as an integral part of our development, economic growth path, it's kind of seen as this add-on. And that's why we don't really take a universal approach very seriously. We talk about it a lot, but we don't actually build it into our budgeting.

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** The other thing, just to say quickly on this idea of the political economy and benefits for the poor being, being poor benefits, the salience of that argument is going to be different at different levels of income, high-income countries spend on health education, social protection, pensions, 24% of GDP on those categories. Middle-income countries spend about 10% to 14% on average. Low-income countries spend just 4.4% on all of those combined. Over half of that goes on education. A fifth goes on health. What's spent on social protection transfers in a low-income country is 0.2% of GDP.

So you've got very limited social spending. You may have a social consensus that says, look, everyone should get these programmes. It's not going to wish the programmes into being it's not going to make the budget space in low revenue, low fiscal space. Countries and if you were asking the social consensus, would it be for universal programmes or would it be for universal primary education? Would it be for universal health? So there are really difficult choices. These countries are making, and that's why targeting is a tool. And you see this in

the data and you see this on what countries spend on. They do choose to target the social protection.

**Jo Sharpe:** Let's head into the third set of considerations I wanted to touch on today and that's about the dynamism of poverty and vulnerability, which we have already brought up. So people's needs change. They weren't poor. Now they are poor. They've been affected by a disaster. A person has become pregnant or become elderly and their needs change and an effective social protection system needs to be able to respond to those changes. Link to this is the idea of administration. If again, you want a system that can be realistically be updated and responding in real-time. In many contexts, you need to have data requirements that are not too onerous for individuals, for families, for officials, especially in countries where administrative capacity is fairly low.

This is a big issue increasingly in social protection programmes. And as a result, there's been a lot of emphasis on building these large-scale social registries that include data on a lot of people, even if they're not all actually receiving programmes.

Matt, I'm going to ask you about this first because the World Bank amongst others is prominent in providing support in many countries for establishing these kinds of systems. I'm interested in knowing whether there's evidence that they are working better to respond to people's needs because they are also very complex and potentially difficult to implement.

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** Great question. The idea of social registries is to bring all of the information on all potential beneficiaries into one data system. And so there's a couple of key benefits from that. The first is to reduce fragmentation. So different programmes using different beneficiary lists, different targeting methods, even when they are the same people. Not only some people don't get all the programmes that they are eligible for, or that are targeted to them. So if we think about, for example, free healthcare programmes and a cash transfer programme for the poor, but if you only get the free healthcare card, you may not be able to afford to take the public transportation to the public health clinic. You may not be able to afford to buy the medicine after your appointment. So not getting everything that's intended for you not getting that social protection package will undermine the impact of what you do receive.

Another key benefit is, you mentioned the administrative complexity and costs of targeting, maintaining the data system, and so forth. Within a social registry, which is designed to cover the full range of social protection programmes you are allowed to have economies of scale and to put all of your effort into a single quality database, and this can help reduce administrative costs. So targeting's often criticised for the high cost of data collection of the eligibility assessment. And it's not cheap, but we do look at some of these social registries and it's not easy to get data, but where we do.

The administrative costs for established social registry systems are on average only about 1% to 3% of the value of the annual benefits that have been paid out each year. So it's not cheap and it's not simple, but relative to the volume of the payments that you're making, it's actually, it's not expensive, but I do think one of the key benefits is exactly what you're saying. People's income and circumstances are dynamic, you may not be poor now, but you

may lose your job and, or fall sick and need support later. A social registry with a dynamic intake system means you can apply for the support when it happens. You often find programmes that just maintain their own database and exist outside of a social registry or where there is no social registry. They have very occasional new data collection. It might be once every three years and months, or once every five years, they may never update the initial list. And so if you're in the programme, great. But if you're not in that programme, because you were incorrectly assessed the first time, or if your circumstances change in the years to come, there's no real way of entering it. Similarly, if you do really well, there's no way necessarily for you to graduate out of those programmes. And that's where social registries can really help.

**Jo Sharpe:** Rachel, these systems that Matt's talking about are really designed to address dynamic need in contexts that are essentially stable. So how do they perform or how do social protection systems perform during times of real crisis?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** Okay, good question. So depending on the type of crisis or shock, you're going to have very different scenarios. So for example, if we think about, say a climate shock, a drought. It's really about how do you build a system that can flexibly minimally adapt up and down sort of scale-out and then scale back in after a shock? And we've seen some really good examples of this, and there's the HSNP, Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya. There's other ones where it's possible to identify people before a predictable shock happens.

So as long as your data's up to date, that's a bit of a big assumption you can say, okay, there's 20% of people. If this shock happens and it might be triggered by some weather event, we'll do a payout because we'll preregister all these people in their ePhone. They're going to get some e-money. Great. Okay. It all can work. And we've seen in COVID actually's some amazing innovations and scale-outs using existing social protection infrastructure, but then there's other shocks mainly to do with conflict where protracted crisis displacement crisis in particular, where the infrastructure, it becomes so damaged. If I think of Tigray in Ethiopia, that's where I'm actually working on a project right now. The productive safety net programme has just come almost to a complete standstill because it's not safe to work there. So you don't have a system in place to necessarily work with.

**Jo Sharpe:** Further to that then if there isn't a system in place or an established mechanism, that's going to work in a conflict situation, a displacement situation, protracted crisis of the kind that you've just described. What are your options for trying to target finite assistance in those sorts of situations?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** This is the kind of area of work that we are trying to all struggle with at the moment. But of course, you've got the classic humanitarian emergency response, but there's really strong, I would say global consensus that just needs to get better at linking up with longer-term social protection, social development. So if they are going to come in and do their work, maybe those sort of nascent systems they put in place targeting, registering of refugees or populations, it should be done in a way that's coordinated so that when things do become stable, they can share or hand over those nascent platforms so that we can build on them.



**Matthew Wai-Poi:** We'd been doing some work in Iraq, actually, where obviously large parts of the country were under ISIS control. The Government couldn't get there at all, but the international agencies were there and they're able to provide a lot of support and they had these large databases, and then once ISIS was defeated and the Government was able to move back into these areas, there was a question how useful are these beneficiary lists that the humanitarians had?

And we were able to do a lot of work that would say, look, maybe you would start these people on the list and you could reassess them, but they've got a pretty high chance and you could have the humanitarian agencies referring them into the Government. Some of the lessons and we've got a couple of papers coming out on this, not just the technical, but what did you need to be in place for this sort of stuff to work? And a lot of it is trust. You'll certainly trust between the government, between the international agencies in terms of sharing data. And there's a lot of important restrictions on sharing humanitarian data, but you'll certainly trust on the part of the beneficiaries of these humanitarian programmes and a lot of conflict areas you may not trust the government to look after you may not want your name to be handed over to the government to say, look, I think this person's poor and you should bring them in.

**Jo Sharpe:** That's an excellent segue into the last set of things that I wanted to briefly touch on being trust and the social cohesion. And we talked a little bit about this earlier as well, Rachel, where there is a lot of need, the rationale and methodology for distinguishing the poor from the poor can be hard to understand. There are risks that this can lead to distrust of governments and other organisations providing assistance. Create social jealousy and tensions between individuals and groups. What are some of your options in order making sure it feels fair that you're not creating tensions and some of those challenges that can emerge in these situations?

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** I actually think we should worry more than we do about this issue of tension and perceptions of fairness in terms of targeting, especially in context, when obviously poverty and vulnerability is so high and so widespread. So there have been interesting new discussions around lotteries because a lottery system makes sense and it's just by chance whether you get the payment or not. And the little bit of work that I have reviewed in the paper from the Central African Republic and a couple of other places shows that people weren't too upset about it. They thought, okay, well that's fair. I didn't get included, but it was fair. I had just as much chance as anyone else. And anyway, you are actually inputting the same amount of money into the local economy.

So perhaps it's not something that people worry about as much as we think is a worry, I don't know. There's always been a discussion around the cost of targeting or doing a really sophisticated targeting versus like just flying a plane over and dropping cash, which is actually more efficient and effective. The other way, of course, is to think much more about how you bring a community into a decision-making process targeting. I lived and worked in Rwanda for a long time and looked at community-based targeting. And it worked pretty well because the community would get everyone along and decided who was poor.

It was very much based on identifying people on observable characteristics, but of course, just because a community does something doesn't mean it is without bias. And so we do also see that depending if you've got newcomers into the community, or if there's certain ethnic tensions, they might be excluded entirely from the targeting process itself. But I think if you commit and match your methods a bit, I think we need to be a little bit more flexible and adaptable of how we use methods. And not quite a lot of institutions get very wedded to one method and that's our method and we're going to apply it, whatever the situation. I think that's a bit of a non-starter.

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** Lotteries are an interesting thing. One thing to note is they're not usually used as the main device they're used as the secondary targeting device. So you have a public work programme. People who don't have a job who want to work at these relatively low wages turn up and there's still not enough jobs to go around. So you have a little bit of a lottery, but this idea of community tensions is really important. Some communities like proxy means tests because they don't require the community to select amongst themselves and to have those tensions be caused. It's some objective decisions come down from the government. But it is very context-dependent. You've got some places where local leaders won't post the PMT-selected beneficiaries because they'll feel like they're the ones who will be seen responsible for making these selections. So this tension is something to really pay attention to.

And so you want to think about how much you target within very poor communities, right? And it may be that the answer is not to target within very poor communities because of the tension that it raises. And it's just not with any potential benefits. You might be better to say. I'm going to, through my geographical targeting, identify the poorest 10% of villages and everyone get there, gets it to come back to Rachel's idea of flying a plane over and dropping the money out. Where do you fly the plane?

**Jo Sharpe:** A lot to unpack there. And as we've said many times, it really does depend a lot on context, on weighing up these different strengths and weaknesses of the different methods in different ways and places. This is a really contentious topic. People can have really strong views. So I'll be certainly interested to hear from listeners how they've reacted to this conversation.

Rachel and Matt, thank you so much for taking on this topic on the Social Protection Podcast today.

**Rachel Sabates-Wheeler:** Thank you. Great to be on.

**Matthew Wai-Poi:** Thanks, Jo. Thanks, Rachel. Yeah, it's been a great discussion. Really enjoyed it. Thank you.

**Jo Sharpe:** Before we go, we like to end each episode with some quick wins. We ask a guest to bring in some recommendations for research, news, or events to spark their interest and that we think you should know more about.

Today we have Nazanin Akhgar, who is a Social Policy Practitioner and Chief of Social Policy at UNICEF Iran. Welcome, Nazanin.

So in the interview, we just heard, we touched on the rise of integrated registries as a means to target and identify people for social protection programmes. And your first pick touched on the integration of Iran's social protection system, building on the Iranian welfare database, which is one of these very large registries that draw on many different data sources. Can you tell us a bit about that?

**Nazanin Akhgar:** Yes, Iranian welfare database is a rich source and a very good baseline for Iran's social protection to actually support the Government to identify vulnerable households for better social protection system. I'd like to highlight a recent webinar we had on Iran's welfare system, which was titled "Towards an integrated social protection system", which is available on [socialprotection.org](https://socialprotection.org). What is so interesting is that Iran's decade-long universal basic subsidies programme and the cash transfer, which are actually being reached to more than 90% of the total population is something, which is really a heavy-duty programme.

And while by the law, ultimately it will target the 70% of the population. We do also have some targeted schemes for malnutrition children for lactating mothers. But then again, the targeting still needs to be smarter. The good thing is that there is this political will make necessary reforms, which would make a system in long-run, more shock-responsive as well. Because the double impact of the COVID pandemic and also the socioeconomic shocks as a result of the, for example, ongoing sanctions in Iran was approved that the system need to be strengthened and it needed to be shock-responsive.

**Jo Sharpe:** And it's interesting to hear you talk about how you need to go from a new universal programme to something that is targeted along the lines of the life cycle. I understand you're also working on the dynamic challenge of identifying at-risk and out-of-school children, which would be a population that really changes a lot over time to receive cash plus programming to support their education. How does that work?

**Nazanin Akhgar:** Indeed what was also presented during the webinar as a successful model between the collaboration we are having currently is rolling out the cash plus and selected provinces based on multiple deprivations that the children in those provinces are having. And these are the provinces, which were highly impacted by COVID during the pandemic. And this is done in line with strengthening the social protection system through smarter targeting with the child sensitive lens, this programme, the model, and the design is such that in addition to the cash transfers, which the households receive it makes sure that other basic services such as physical support, psychosocial counseling, rehabilitation, disability items are provided to children.

And you mentioned how it is linked to reaching those children who are out of school, during the COVID around 3.5 million children based on official figures were deprived of the online education. Our cash plus pilot provided us an opportunity to reach these children, to have them retain back to school and also cover that period, which they were out of the school. Furthermore, we provided free skills training for adolescents between 15 to 17 in line with

our learning to earning portfolio through technical vocational training. And this is what we call integrated social protection system. Cash plus services targeted based on needs and not one size fits for all.

**Jo Sharpe:** And then to finish this off, you also brought in two recent papers from UNICEF that you wanted to share.

**Nazanin Akhgar:** Yes, these two guidelines, in fact, very beautifully unpack the concept and the importance of child-sensitive social protection system, because more than ever, children of the world need to be supported to be protected and also to reduce the intergenerational impact of the pandemic, which unless there is an agile and robust system, the children will suffer. So it really provides a very good insight on how we can move the needle in this regard.

**Jo Sharpe:** Thank you. And as ever we will put links to all of those resources in our show notes. Nazanin Akhgar, thank you so much for making the time to speak to us on the Social Protection Podcast today.

**Nazanin Akhgar:** Thank you so much to you, Jo, and all your colleagues in socialprotection.org for enhancing the knowledge and skills of all the social practitioners across the world and raising the awareness on the importance of social protection.

**Jo Sharpe:** And thank you for joining me for the Social Protection Podcast. We are a production of socialprotection.org from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. Follow us on Twitter at [SP\\_Gateway](#) and find us on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [LinkedIn](#). Subscribe to this podcast via your favorite podcast provider and leave a review. Back next month. See you then.