



Exchanging Experiences, Expanding Opportunities

Inter-American Social Protection Network (IASPN)

What is the IASPN?

The Inter-American Social Protection Network (IASPN) is a platform created by the Organization of American States (OAS) to facilitate knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer technical assistance, and cross-sectoral cooperation on social protection among OAS member states. Established in 2009, IASPN has enabled countries in the Americas to share best practices and methodologies for addressing social protection challenges, such as poverty reduction, inequality, and emergency response, by providing a collaborative space for policymakers, academics, and practitioners. The IASPN, through various tools and methodologies, promotes intergovernmental collaboration to strengthen social policies adapted to the context and needs of each country.

Key Takeaways



The IASPN has a proven track record of fostering knowledge exchange, capacity building, and multilateral partnerships in social protection across the Americas.



Reactivating IASPN is urgent after COVID-19 exposed the gaps of social protection systems and ongoing global trends that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations.



Unlike similar efforts, IASPN focuses on tangible policy outcomes through peer-to-peer technical assistance and a virtual community of practice.



Between 2024-2025, the IASPN will deliver three peer-to-peer learning cooperation projects, two virtual webinars, a revamped Diploma in Social Protection, and an online knowledge hub.



A History of Regional Cooperation: The IASPN

The IASPN was established by mandate of the [Fifth Summit of the Americas](#) and was officially launched in September 2009 at a high-level event in New York as a **cooperation mechanism and a community of practice to facilitate cooperation** between social development ministries, international organizations, NGOs, the private sector, and academic institutions to share useful information, exchange experiences, and transferring or adapting successful policies, programs, and practices to combat poverty and reduce inequality.

The IASPN was founded on the conviction that **countries can benefit from exchanging experiences in developing and implementing effective social protection systems**. Although the design of these policies depends on each country's specific context, it was crucial to create a mechanism to facilitate the exchange of promising practices and peer-to-peer technical assistance to enhance "tailor-made" social protection initiatives. Under this premise, RIPSOC was established around the following **objectives**:

- ✓ To **further political and technical dialogue** on social protection among OAS member states by bringing together key actors and institutions throughout the region;
- ✓ To **build capacity within social development agencies** and support efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities through peer-to-peer technical assistance;
- ✓ To **share promising practices** in social protection policy design and implementation through a community of practice;
- ✓ To **strengthen social protection systems** through the creation of an Inter-American cooperation mechanism and regional partnerships focused on addressing the needs and priorities of member states.



"Together, we will lift more young people and old alike out of poverty, give more children a chance at that better future, strengthen democracy, and deliver results for people who need us to do so"

Hillary Clinton

Message at the IASPN launching event, September 2009

IASPN Impact: 2010-2016

Before the Network reduced its activities due to financial constraints, the IASPN carried out a series of initiatives to improve institutional capacities to implement effective social protection and poverty reduction policies.



Capacity Building

- The Inter-American Commission on Women (IACW) and the IASPN created a **Participatory Gender Assessment** methodology applied in the Ministries of Social Development of Guatemala, Uruguay, and Paraguay.
- **5 sub-regional social protection workshops** for over 250 professionals across 29 countries.
- **3 editions of the Advanced Diploma in Social Protection for the Americas** that trained 61 government officials from 23 countries in advanced practices for designing, implementing, and evaluating social protection policies and programs.

- Closed **over 40 partnerships** with key social protection organizations, including UN agencies, research centers, and academic institutions.
- **Joint publications** on pressing social protection topics and joint declarations signed with the **ILO** on Social Protection and Decent Work, with the **FAO** on Food Security, and with **UNICEF** on the importance of implementing social protection programs for children.



Alliance Building



Knowledge Sharing

- **5 virtual seminars** under the Inter-American Social Protection Dialogues series with over 1,000 participants.
- **22 IASPN Digest Newsletters** shared with over 4,500 social protection practitioners.
- **IASPN Web Portal** as a knowledge hub for nearly 5,000 members from 165 countries serving as a space for sharing **over 2,500 resources** in the form of research findings and practical knowledge on social protection.

Social Protection at a Crossroads

During the most recent **Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Social Development in the Dominican Republic**, OAS member states reaffirmed their commitment to reactivate the IASPN as **the main regional technical cooperation mechanism for social protection**. The call to renew the IASPN came after decades of sustained poverty reduction in the Americas, partly due to the expansion of the national safety net programs.

However, the **COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the pre-existing inequalities and significant gaps in the coverage of social protection systems**. Additionally, to the socioeconomic effect of the pandemic, Latin America and the Caribbean are also prone to risks from **global macro trends¹** that test the capacity of social protection networks while disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable groups.

1. The main current global challenges to social protection and development include increasing socioeconomic inequality; the public health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; climate change; conflicts and forced displacements; humanitarian crises; misinformation and polarization undermining social cohesion and trust in institutions. (UN Global Challenges, 2024: <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues>).



This context has renewed the discussion on the **need for instruments that help contain the impacts of crises securing people's well-being**. Given the instrumental role of social protection systems in responding to and fostering social cohesion, political stability, democracy, and human rights, particularly economic, social, and cultural rights, reactivating **the IASPN has emerged as a priority for social development authorities in the region**.

Multiple Benefits from One IASPN

The IASPN lays the groundwork for greater dialogue, closer collaboration, and more effective results in several areas, including:

1. Practical training through virtual and in-person tools such as seminars, workshops, meetings, and distance-learning courses.
2. Providing technical support to member states by matching needs with expertise and facilitating technical cooperation on social protection.
3. Engage and collaborate with academic institutions to develop and disseminate knowledge products such as research papers, policy briefs, toolkit reports, newsletters, and other publications.
4. Coordination with other international agencies in the social protection field to integrate their specialized focus on decent work, gender equality, and human development.



Direct Benefits for member states

- ✓ The IASPN promotes the exchange and transfer of knowledge and experiences on social protection among OAS member states by developing tailored methodologies and tools to identify needs, challenges, trends, and effective solutions for poverty and inequality reduction in the region. Inspired by successful initiatives in other regions, IASPN facilitates **peer-to-peer technical assistance processes**, allowing member states to benefit from shared experiences in structural reform design and implementation. This peer-to-peer support is further bolstered by the OAS's Mechanism for Inter-American Cooperation for Effective Public Management (MECIGEP), which fosters intergovernmental collaboration on policy innovation and management, enabling countries to learn from promising initiatives across the region.



- ✓ Having constant access to a community of practice also supports a **more efficient use of public funds** due to the guidance on cost-effective ways to expand social protection coverage and improve program design. For countries with limited fiscal capacity – particularly low-income nations – the IASPN plays a key role in coordinating international support.

The Network's added value

- ✓ **Focus on Implementation:** While other international organizations actively address social protection issues, their approach is often based on research and training activities. The IASPN complements those efforts by placing social protection initiatives at the center of the national public agendas and achieving tangible outcomes via peer-to-peer technical assistance programs that leverage OAS's significant political influence and technical expertise.
- ✓ **Political Influence of OAS:** The OAS holds high-level policy dialogues and possesses an extensive legal framework, providing precise tools for policy formulation and implementation aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. Thus, the OAS serves as an appropriate forum to position social development at the core of the political agenda, highlighting its role not only technically but, critically, and politically. However, this can only be achieved with financial support from countries and relevant stakeholders.
- ✓ **Regional Scope:** Covering 35 member states, the OAS has a broader reach compared to other regional organizations, which have limited coverage in terms of member countries.

Looking ahead: Upcoming IASPN Activities

Following the renewed commitment of OAS member states established in the [“Plan of Action of the Dominican Republic 2022”](#), the initial reactivation phase of the IASPN is expected to last 24 months and will include several key activities between 2024–2025.



Knowledge Exchange and Peer-to-Peer Assistance

- 3 peer-to-peer learning cooperation projects between the technical staff from social development ministries.
- 2 virtual webinars on social protection policies to address pressing topics such as food security, results measurement, social cohesion, disability inclusion, and comprehensive care systems.



Reactivating the Advanced Diploma in Social Protection for the Americas

- Partner with a leading university to update the previous diploma and draft new content based on regional needs.
- A consultation with a steering committee of experts from social development ministries and OAS technical areas will review and determine the final content.



Redesigning the IASPN Portal within the OAS website

- The renewed portal will become a central hub for knowledge sharing and regional collaboration on social protection, including complete reports on technical cooperation projects, publications, research articles, reports, interviews, news, photos, among other content related to IASPN implementation and results.



Long-term sustainability

The first phase of the Network's reactivation (2024-2025) will be financed with a contribution from the United States Government. However, to ensure the Network's financial sustainability, member states, Permanent Observers, and other donors - including individuals or entities, public or private, national or international- are invited to contribute, financially or in kind, through the "**Social Development Fund**" following the General Standards for the Operations of the OAS General Secretariat.

The IASPN reactivation has been envisioned by OAS member states as "the main mechanism for hemispheric technical cooperation" on social protection. By renewing support for the IASPN and providing it with the necessary resources to fulfill its objectives, countries in the Americas can leverage this vital platform to strengthen their social protection systems, address both persistent and emerging challenges and work towards more equitable and inclusive societies. In this context, a strengthened IASPN is more crucial than ever to foster sustainable development in a region that continues to face the severe aftermath of COVID-19.



IASPN Technical Secretariat

Sara Mía Noguera

Chief of Equity Promotion Section

Department of Social Inclusion

Secretariat of Access to Rights and Equity

snoquera@oas.org

Clara Burjel Guidali

Consultant - IASPN activities coordination

Department of Social Inclusion

Secretariat of Access to Rights and Equity

cburjel@oas.org

