

# Cultivating Cohesion: Analyzing the Path to an Integrated Social Protection System. A Content Analysis.

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## ABSTRACT

Social protection systems play a significant role in promoting social inclusion and mitigating the impact of various vulnerabilities on individuals and communities, which derive from demographic changes, global economic uncertainty, and vulnerability to shocks such as global pandemics and natural disasters. The integrated social protection system is pivotal in providing a cohesive and coordinated framework to address issues of poverty, vulnerability among persons with disabilities, the ageing population, underprivileged society, unemployment, and healthcare. In line with SDG 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels" this paper meant to explore the need and emphasis on the integrated social protection system for a better social inclusion. This study employed a qualitative design by content analysis approach as a methodology to analyze the key components and mechanisms involved in highlighting the implementation and need for a more holistic database and system. Various important government documents and reports published in Malaysia on social protection have been analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. Five main themes emerged from the analysis which are, data driven, efficiency, identity, integration, and socio-economic development. It is proven that by integrating various social protection programmes and services and, most importantly, the database, this effort would be able to create a more efficient and effective approach to safeguarding the well-being of citizens across diverse demographic groups at both the federal and state levels. By implementing a comprehensive and coordinated approach to social protection, it advocates for the development and enhancement of integrated systems that can adapt to the evolving needs of societies, promoting sound financial governance and sustainable development for social protection institutions and nations.

**Keywords:** social protection, integrated system, database, social wellbeing, social inclusion

## INTRODUCTION

The discourse on social protection has gained prominence recently, particularly in light of the global health challenges that emerged in 2020, notably the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis highlighted the vulnerability of individuals and societies to contemporary challenges, encompassing demographic changes, public health issues, workplace safety risks, and uncertain economic conditions (Ayub et.al., 2022; Daud S., 2021; Lim et al., 2021). Additionally, socio-economic vulnerability leading to poverty is dynamic, often stemming from events such as the loss of income due to death, accidents, job losses, and other unforeseen circumstances.

Social protection programmes are essential for fostering social inclusion and reducing the effects of a variety of vulnerabilities on people and communities. The provision of a coherent and well-coordinated framework to handle issues of poverty, vulnerability among individuals with disabilities, the ageing population, impoverished society, unemployment, and healthcare is made possible by an integrated social protection system. In keeping with SDG 16, which states, “Build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels; promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development”, thus implementing an effective and well governed social protection system is a must.

In Malaysia, three primary branches of social protection – social insurance, public assistance, and labor market intervention programs – are available to address such challenges (Mansor and Rabi, 2023). However, these services are dispersed across various organizations, ministries, and agencies operating independently, contributing to weakened social inclusion and resulting in redundancy and targeting errors, and Malaysia is no exception (Samad, 2018; Nooh et.al., 2020). The fragmented implementation by different entities leads to inefficient resource utilization, with the misidentification of target groups and ineffective aid distribution. Consequently, this paper aims to explore the emphasis on the Integrated Social Protection system addressed by various documents in Malaysian government by using a content analysis approach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Social Protection Concept

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in global attention towards social protection. Throughout 2020 and 2021, nearly 4,000 social protection measures were implemented by countries worldwide to address its economic impact. Cash transfers alone have benefited around 1.4 billion people, equivalent to one in six people globally. As of March 2023, the World Bank provides \$26 billion in financing for social protection and job programs across regions and income levels, including \$16.4 billion through International Development Association (IDA), their fund for the poorest (World Bank, 2024).

Social protection refers to policies and programs that aim to ensure human rights, prevent and reduce risks, and provide support to meet essential needs. This protection covers various areas of human rights, such as health, social security, social assistance, employment security, and other aspects related to economic and social well-being (ILO, 2021). Social protection policies and programs are crucial in uplifting the underprivileged, fostering fairness, equality, and inclusion, and cultivating social cohesion and solidarity (UNRISD, 2010).

Social protection systems are crucial in enhancing human capital and enabling self-sufficiency. They aid individuals and families in coping with crises, finding employment, investing in health and education, and safeguarding the elderly. Well-designed social protection systems can reduce inequalities, develop resilience, and end the cycle of poverty across generations. These programs are cost-effective, with

countries spending only 1.5% of GDP on their implementation (Thimmappa et.al, 2021).

Numerous countries have implemented social protection programs such as safety net schemes to utilize human capital. These safety nets offer supplementary income to struggling families enhance access to information and services, improve productivity, safeguard the elderly, and support job seekers. The report “Protecting All: Risk-Sharing for a Diverse and Diversifying World of Work” suggests that the rapidly changing nature of work globally necessitates a fresh approach to social protection and labour policies (The World Bank, 2019). It proposes a worker protection and social security plan that is better suited to the increasingly diverse and fluid world of work. These concepts are discussed in greater depth in the 2022 strategy update, “Charting a Course Towards Universal Social Protection: Resilience, Equity, and Opportunity for All” (The World Bank, 2022).

## 2. Current social protection in Malaysia

Worldwide, social protection programs have become a key tool for policymakers. These programs are executed to achieve multiple objectives such as fighting poverty and hunger and increasing the resilience of the poor and vulnerable groups towards various shocks (Abdoul-Azize & El Gamil, 2021). It also helps individuals and families in coping with crises, finding work, increasing productivity, investing in their children’s health and education, and protecting the elderly population. A report from the World Bank has acknowledged four pillars of social protection in the industry which are: Income Security, Social Health Protection, Shock-responsive Social Protection and Complementary programmes. The World Bank has an aim for universal social protection that ensures all people receive the support they require, and no individuals or groups are left behind. It is the foundation of inclusive social policies.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the aim has yet to be carried out because the plan is spread across multiple organizations, ministries, and agencies operating independently, contributing to weakened social inclusion and resulting in redundancy of benefits and programmes for the people and targeting wrong participants (Choong & Firouz, 2020; Nooh et al., 2020; Samad, 2018). The programmes are also being operated or offered by many different organisations or bodies, which may result in resource waste and duplication of benefit distribution. Therefore, these social protection organizations require some level of integration and must be proactive and forward-thinking in terms of social protection concerns in order to ensure effective governance, transparency, and responsibility for widespread implementation (Samad & Md Shahid, 2018).

Social protection schemes in Malaysia can be categorised as social assistance, social insurance, employer liability, and active labour market programmes. However, the government currently has expanded the three social protection schemes previously introduced (social insurance, public assistance, and labour market intervention) to ensure non-standard workers and those who have traditionally been excluded from Malaysia’s division social protection system are adequately supported during the crisis, particularly in response to the pandemic covid-19 that previously hit the country (Gentilini et al., 2020). For instance, the Government expanded social protection coverage to e-hailing, taxi drivers, tour guides and tour bus drivers received one-off cash assistance during the pandemic. These efforts are commendable, but the number of gig workers registered with these schemes has remained low, and with the rising cost of living due to inflation, the current social safety net will be insufficient to protect more citizens from falling into poverty, making recovery even more difficult as we slowly recover from the effects of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted labour markets, resulting in high rates of unemployment that require Malaysia to have a fairly comprehensive social security system offering universal healthcare, a pension program, unemployment, and more (Khalid, 2023).

From the governance structure of social protection policies in Malaysia, the public assistance programme is implemented by several ministries and agencies at the federal and state levels. In Malaysia, social protection is the responsibility of both the federal and state governments. At the federal level, the target audience and

focus are determined by the portfolio of each ministry. However, the National Welfare Department, which is part of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, is particularly involved in social protection projects. It shows that social insurance is clearly administered by social protection institutions as agents for the central government, and this is standardized throughout the nation. Meanwhile, the application of public assistance differs in every state, depending on the state’s abilities where the programmes are under the Federal Assistance Scheme and State Assistance Scheme. Figure 1 below shows the schemes available in Malaysia.

Risk Areas	Children/ Youth	Working-age adults			Elderly
		Public	Private	Self-employed	
<b>PROMOTIVE</b>	Capabilities	Government-funded training schemes (e.g. HRDF) and job-seeking services (MOHR)			
	<b>Core Risk Areas (Guided by Convention No.102)</b>				
<b>PREVENTIVE</b>	(1) Medical Care	Insurance	Insurance		
	(2) Sickness	Insurance, LTAT	EPF, SOCSO	EPF	
	(3) Unemployment		SOCSO, EIS		
	(4) Old-age	Pension, LTAT	EPF, SOCSO, WCI*	EPF	
	(5) Employment Injury	Insurance, LTAT	SOCSO, WCI		
	(6) Family				
	(7) Maternity	Maternity benefits	Maternity benefits		
	(8) Invalidity	Pension, LTAT	EPF, SOCSO, WCI		
	(9) Survivors	Pension, LTAT	EPF, SOCSO, WCI		
<b>PROTECTIVE</b>	Basic Needs/Poverty	Targeted benefits for the poor such as cost-of-living cash allowance, welfare aid, housing assistance, and care services			
		Universal schemes such as subsidies for food, utilities, petrol, healthcare and education			

Fig. 1 Social Protection Schemes Available in Malaysia

### 3. Issues in SP in Malaysia

In Malaysia, despite the establishment of numerous policies and programs on social protection by various agencies which serve distinct purposes, issues related to social protection remain a focal point of ongoing debates.

Income inequality has been a notable issue in Malaysia for decades. According to Asher and Nandy (2005), Malaysia has experienced varying degrees of economic development, and income disparities among different segments of the population have been a concern. The gap between the rich and poor has widened, leading to disparities in access to social protection measures. Some key factors contributing to income inequality in Malaysia include urban rural locality, disparities of skills and ethnicity, gender wage gap and many more.

Next, the issue of informal employment has become a serious concern recently. A significant portion of the Malaysian workforce is engaged in informal employment, including jobs in the gig economy such as rider for food panda and grab food. According to Cooke and Jiang (2017), many informal workers may not have access to formal social protection, such as health insurance and retirement benefits like formal employment do even though their job involves high-risk activities.

Nowadays, the cost of living has risen in parallel with the increase in general prices of goods and services. This issue will badly affect the retirees on how they need to secure their fund on their retirement period. The aging population in Malaysia poses challenges to the sustainability of pension and retirement systems (Samad and Mansor, 2013). There may be concerns about the adequacy of pension funds and the ability of the elderly population to maintain a decent standard of living.

In addition, the issue of access to healthcare also contributes to the social protection problems. While Malaysia has made progress in healthcare, there are still issues related to access, especially for vulnerable populations. Affordability and coverage may be concerns for some individuals, impacting their access to necessary medical services (Riley, 2012).

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure that social protection programs are inclusive, effective, and responsive to the evolving needs of the population (Gentilini and Omamo, 2011). Moreover, these challenges occur due to the issues of effectiveness, accessibility, and adequacy in addressing the needs of specific vulnerable groups. Additionally, economic and social changes may impact the overall effectiveness of social protection over time. It's crucial to consider the evolving nature of social protection policies and their adaptation to current societal needs.

If we overlook the issues being discussed above, the absence or inadequacy of social protection in Malaysia can give rise to a range of problems that affect individuals, families, and society as a whole. The effect would be worse if responsible bodies or agencies do not properly mitigate the problems on social protections. Among them are poverty and inequality in Malaysia will consistently be the highest rate. Barrientos (2011) explains that without adequate social protection measures, vulnerable populations may be at a higher risk of falling into poverty. The absence of a safety net can exacerbate income inequality, with disadvantaged groups facing greater challenges in meeting their basic needs. The number of criminals will spike due to poor conditions and people strive to have basic necessities such as food, clean water and shelter.

Besides, lack of social protection can lead to barriers in accessing healthcare services. Without health insurance or subsidization programs, individuals may delay seeking medical attention, leading to the exacerbation of health issues, progression of diseases, increased severity of conditions, and poorer health outcomes. Health-related issues stemming from limited access to healthcare can have economic repercussions (Riley, 2012). Productivity losses may occur due to illness or disability, and the costs associated with treating advanced-stage diseases can be higher than the costs of preventive or early intervention measures.

In the recent crisis of COVID-19, vulnerability to economic shocks definitely will create a serious issue in social protection. In the absence of unemployment benefits or other social safety nets, individuals who suddenly lose their jobs may face immediate financial crises. Following to Tey et al., (2017) this vulnerability can be particularly acute during economic downturns or times of crisis. Economic shocks create an atmosphere of uncertainty, making employees more vulnerable to job insecurity. Fear of potential layoffs or downsizing can affect morale and job satisfaction, contributing to stress and anxiety among workers. Individuals who are self-employed or work in the informal sector may be particularly vulnerable during economic shocks. They often lack job security and social protections, thus may face challenges in sustaining their businesses. The risk of unemployment during economic shocks can have psychosocial consequences, including stress, depression, and a decline in mental well-being (Van Hal, 2015).

The absence of robust pension and retirement systems can leave elderly individuals without sufficient financial support in their retirement years. This may force them to rely on family members or face a decline in their standard of living. Also, health-related expenses tend to increase with age, and inadequate retirement savings may lead to challenges in covering healthcare costs. This could impact an individual's ability to afford medical treatments, medications, and long-term care. Concerns about financial security during retirement can lead to stress and anxiety. The study from Hezri and Alizan (2015) reveals the fear of running out of money or facing unexpected expenses can negatively affect mental health and overall well-being.

Similarly, workers engaged in the informal sector, including those in the gig economy, may lack access to

formal social protection, such as workers’ compensation, health insurance, and retirement benefits. This leaves them financially exposed in case of accidents or during periods of low income. Cooke and Jiang (2017) stress that informal workers may lack legal protections, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe working conditions. This includes issues related to workplace safety, fair wages, and protection against unfair dismissal. Likewise, informal workers, including gig economy workers, may not be covered by existing labor laws and regulations that safeguard the rights and interests of formal employees. This leaves them without legal recourse in case of workplace disputes or unfair treatment.

In conjunction with this, education gaps on social protection are crucial for ensuring equal access to education. Without adequate support, economically disadvantaged individuals may struggle to afford expenses on education thus hindering their ability to break the cycle of poverty through education. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach to social protection policies, including the development of safety nets, healthcare coverage, and support systems for vulnerable populations. It also involves creating an inclusive and equitable social protection framework that considers the diverse needs of the population.

#### 4. Best practices on Integrated social protection in other countries

Other nations’ experiences, such as Australia, Germany, Albania, and Indonesia, for example, have demonstrated that they implement integrated social protection. Social health protection schemes in Germany are incorporated into plans for municipal infrastructure and health development. A comprehensive and integrated social protection framework that is in line with the global policy agenda and broader sustainability objectives is becoming more prominent in addressing social inclusion issues (Aleksandrova & Costella, 2021). Albania administers the administration of unemployment benefits through the State Employment Service, which is under the ministry. It also closely coordinates with social workers to provide social services and aid. The three main areas of focus for the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection are social care services, disability allowance, and financial aid (Review of the Social Protection System in Albania, 2021). Indonesia has outlined a roadmap for a national social security board and ministry of health-run integrated social health protection system. It is known that the Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (JKN) programme incorporated a number of disjointed health schemes. It currently ranks among the biggest single-payer systems in the world (World Social Protection Report 2020–2022, 2021). While “Services Australia,” an executive agency of the Australian Government, plays a very significant role in delivering a range of social welfare and social insurance programmes and other support services to eligible Australian citizens and permanent residents (Casu and Meyerhoff, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach in answering the research questions. Four national documents have been referred to as sources of data in analyzing the need for an integrated social protection system in Malaysia, namely the National Social Wellbeing Blueprint published by the Social Wellbeing Research Center, University of Malaya, the 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, the Economic Planning Unit under the Prime Minister Department published by Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, the Malaysia Voluntary National Review 2021 published by Economic Planning Unit under the Prime Minister Department, and Building Resilience Towards Inclusive Social Protection in Malaysia published by Khazanah Research Institute. Table I below provides details of the sources of documents.

Table I: Primary National Document on Social Protection

No	Title of document	Publisher	Year of publish
1	National Social Wellbeing Blueprint	Social Wellbeing Research Center	2023

2	12 <sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan	Percetakan Nasional Berhad	2021
3	Malaysia Voluntary National Review 2021	Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department	2021
4	Building Resilience Towards Inclusive Social Protection in Malaysia	Khazanah Research Institute.	2021

There is no social protection policy in Malaysia. Thus, the selection of these documents is based on the focus of the document in addressing the issues of social protection in Malaysia. It is also a credible resource as they were published by the responsible organization for social protection. The Economic Planning Unit under the Prime Minister Department is the responsible body planning for the direction of social protection implementation in Malaysia, while Social Wellbeing Research Center is the prominent Research and academic center focusing on social well-being. Khazanah Research Institute is a well-known Institute at the forefront of national social economic issues.

The information and quotes on the government initiatives and concerns on integrated social protection system are filtered by using three main keywords associated with social protection terms, which are, integration, integrated and integrate. By using key keywords technique in Portable Document Format (PDF), 31 quotes have been found and analyzed.

Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis by identifying a few themes through the grouping and categorizing of the statements and quotes written in the documents that explained on the integrated social protection. This analysis employed the ATLAS.ti version 23 software. Figure 2 below depicts the process of methodology for this study.

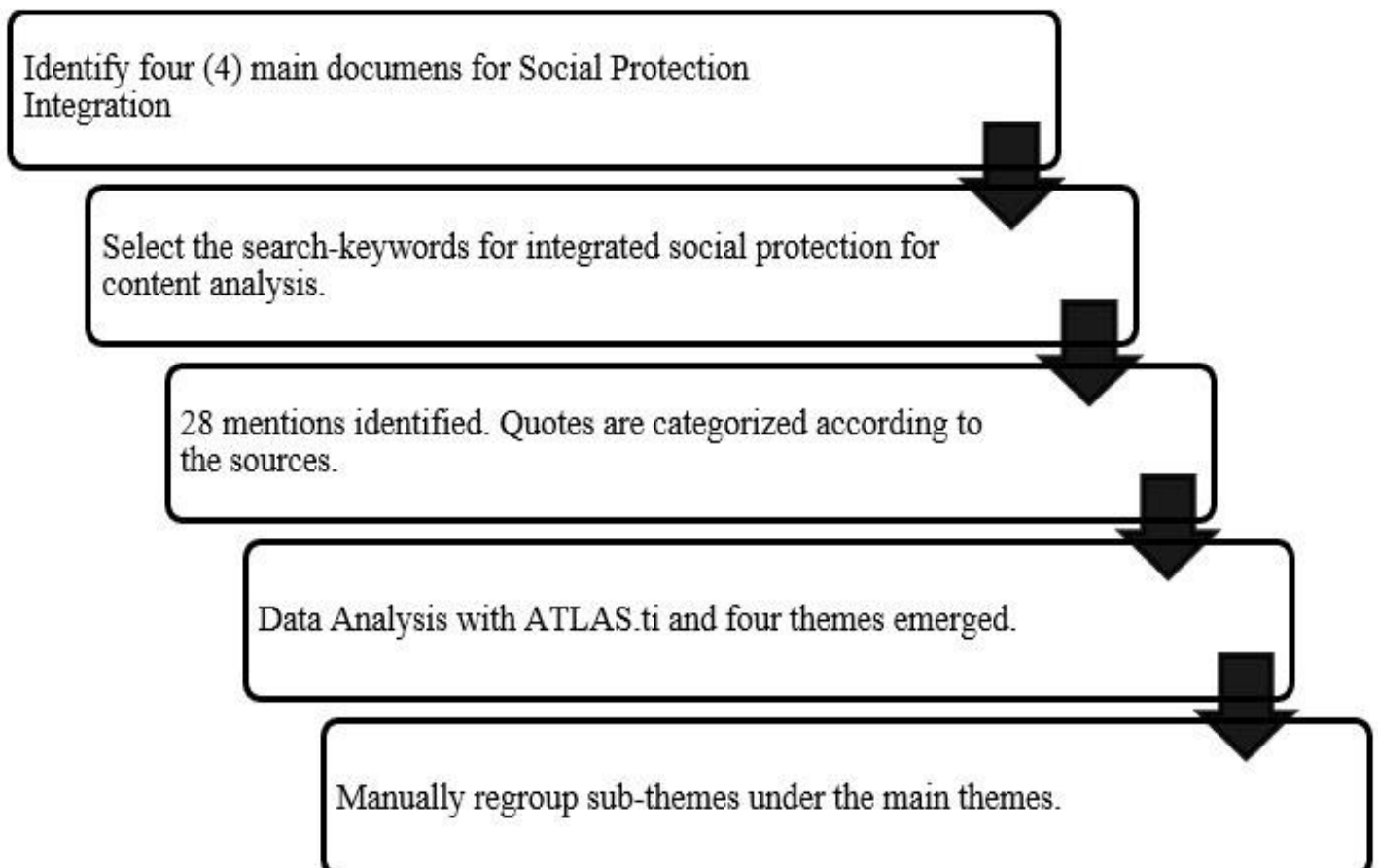


Fig.2 Flow Process for Methodology.

## ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Based on the analysis, Table II below extracts the quotes related to integrated social protection from the four documents referred to.

Table II: Quotes on Social Protection Integration from Various National Documents.

No	Page	Quotes
<b>National Social Wellbeing Blueprint</b>		
1	21	Malaysia's productivity slowdown raises concerns about the nation's growth towards developed country status. Such growth must be driven by productivity gains emphasising; up-skilling, greater innovation and higher integration of digital technology, and not solely by capital accumulation and more labour inputs.
2	55	A possible solution is an integration of a social pension (which will be discussed later), which will provide old-age protection for low-wage earners, including those in government service.
3	103	Data analysis using multiple datasets will require consistent classifications and definitions of data fields to enable data sharing and integration across the varying Social Protection Agencies.
4	42	Second, since zakat distribution is not integrated with the national social assistance programmes at the Federal level, households may receive these two types of financial assistance simultaneously.
5	77	The vertical dimension accounts for the progressive achievement of higher levels of protection within the integrated and comprehensive social security mechanism currently in Malaysia.
6	77	Through better coordination and with emphasis on creating synergies between contributory and non-contributory programmes, the overall integrated system will be more effective, not only in reducing inequality but also in enhancing economic security for the entire population while maintaining incentives for saving and participation in the labour market within Malaysia's overall fiscal envelope.
7	115	Data sharing: Micro-level data is important for formulating and monitoring programmes in an integrated social protection system.
8	118	The main objective of the MySPC is to ensure that social protection for all citizens is provided in an integrated and comprehensive manner.
<b>12<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan</b>		
9	11-8	"Enhancing social protection and wellbeing for households, in particular the B40 households, a framework for an integrated and comprehensive social protection system will be established. The implementation of social protection programmes across different agencies will be coordinated through a central council.
10	4-18	Enhancing Data Sharing and System Integration A national digital identification policy will be introduced to enable a trusted, secured and transparent movement of data. Under this policy, all systems related to population registration will be integrated to allow data sharing among relevant agencies.
11	5-12	Agencies involved in providing social protection have been working in silos, without a centralised and integrated database, resulting in mistargeting groups and double-dipping of benefits.
12	5-22	Policies and initiatives will be streamlined, while an integrated approach will be adopted in providing assistance to various target groups.



13	5-24	The eKasih system will be reviewed and strengthened in identifying, implementing and monitoring poverty alleviation programmes to enhance transparency and accuracy of the data. Evidence-based policies will facilitate the process of identifying target groups and developing the profile of poor households. Databases related to poverty eradication and social assistance will be integrated through the development of <i>Pangkalan Data Perlindungan Sosial (PDPS)</i> to eliminate redundancies as well as inclusion and exclusion errors.
14	5-29	Data collection and data sharing among stakeholders will be enhanced to facilitate the establishment of an integrated data warehouse. In addition, TERAJU will create a single gateway in providing information and services related to education and training, entrepreneurship as well as equity and property ownership of Bumiputera.
15	4-29	Engagement sessions at national, state and community levels will be intensified, including through town hall and dialogue sessions, to encourage discussions on unity and national integration.
16	5-38	The registration of PWDs in SMOKU will be improved through strategic collaboration among various agencies and CSOs as well as through the integration with the Malaysian Government Central Data Exchange (MyGDX) system.
17	7-9	Meanwhile, the lack of data integration, as well as ineffective coordination between agencies in these states and relevant agencies in Peninsular Malaysia have also resulted in fragmented development planning and monitoring.
18	4-11	There is also poor integration of health databases among the public healthcare institutions.
19	c.c6	Holistic efforts and integrated implementation in addressing poverty and building an inclusive society will steer Malaysia to become a developed, inclusive and prosperous nation by 2030.
20	c-3	Integrated efforts will be implemented to accelerate the reduction in rural and urban development gap.
Malaysia Voluntary National Review 2021		
21	137	A coherent system that ensures long-term sustainability can be achieved by a well-coordinated mix of contributions by employers, employees and the government (from general public revenue pool) in an integrated social protection system.
22	142	With regards to the former, Malaysia is already a step ahead with the formation of the Malaysia Social Protection Council (MySPC) in 2016 and reactivated in 2020 as the authority to coordinate a holistic and integrated social protection agenda. The council is well positioned to push for reform initiatives as four strategic core areas are rightly under its purview: (1) social assistance, (2) social insurance, (3) labour market policy and (4) data integration and governance.
23	143	In the future, the services by the income tax agency (i.e. LHDN) can also be integrated to enable people to declare their incomes alongside their application for social security benefits. Technology holds tremendous capabilities to integrate data for various schemes; the MyKad, for example, can be maximised given that it already accords Malaysians with a unique identification number that allows for seamless data integration. Improved integration of service delivery is practical and cost-saving.

24	xviii	Additionally, we propose establishing a National Social Protection Registry to centralise the information of every member of the population and enable a more efficient channelling of social security and services. Since multiple databases are already available, digital technology can be utilised to improve the efficiency of information flow by integrating these databases. The MyKad number can be used as a single unique identification code to enable integration of data from various institutions.
<b>Building Resilience Towards Inclusive Social Protection in Malaysia</b>		
25	16	There are various initiatives undertaken to increase income and improve well-being, such as provision of infrastructure and basic amenities, capacity building and enhancement, better access to employment, as well as integrated support for entrepreneurship and social safety net.
26	41	Among them were provisions for infrastructure and basic amenities, capacity building and enhancement, better access to employment, income generating activities as well as integrated entrepreneurship support and social safety nets.
27	72	This Blueprint will create more opportunities for economic integration across all sectors and improved cost efficiency through a shared economy. A digitally enabled government would provide integrated end-to-end online government services that are more efficient, effective and transparent. The Blueprint has listed specific targets to be achieved by 2025.
28	80	Among approaches to be explored, include unifying existing provision systems, and integrating social assistance and insurance as far as possible.

Based on the thematic analysis, five themes have been identified as shown in Table III below.

Table III: Results of Thematic Analysis

Data-driven	Efficiency	Integration	Socioeconomic development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Big data analytics</li> <li>· Data management</li> <li>· Digital technology</li> <li>· Digital transformation</li> <li>· Evidence-based decision-making</li> <li>· Metadata</li> <li>· Data harmonization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Capacity building</li> <li>· Collaboration &amp; coordination</li> <li>· Cost efficiency</li> <li>· Monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>· Productivity</li> <li>· Simplification</li> <li>· Targeting mechanisms</li> <li>· Governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Data integration</li> <li>· Economic integration</li> <li>· High-tech production technology</li> <li>· Inclusivity</li> <li>· Information and services</li> <li>· Security</li> <li>· Synergies</li> <li>· System integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Addressing poverty development</li> <li>· Labour force</li> <li>· Policy</li> <li>· SDG achievement</li> <li>· Social services</li> <li>· Societal development</li> <li>· Socio-demographic factors</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Data-Driven

The analysis from ATLAS.ti also found the data-driven as an important element in integrated social

protection. A few key elements such as big data analytics, data management, digital technology, digital transformation, evidence-based decision-making, metadata, and data harmonization have emerged to be significant in various reports.

It is time for integrated data usage to be implemented in social protection through more effective and precise digital transformation to streamline administrative processes, enhance accessibility, and foster transparency, ensuring social protection systems are more effective and reliable. For too long, social protection has been implemented in a fragmented manner by different providers at the federal, state, and civil society levels. Therefore, data management that connects is crucial in guiding providers of social protection to optimise resource allocation and designing effective social interventions. It can be used based on the evidence-based decision making from data harmonization to identify those who are really in need of protection. Big data analytics empowers governments to extract clean data from multiple resources facilitating the identification of vulnerable populations. The data management will be similar to the services provided in Australia and this will eventually achieve the World Bank's aims of ensuring all people receive the support they require.

## 2. Efficiency

A few sub-themes emerged under the heading of 'efficiency' from the analysis of the documents. Integrated social protection is claimed to be able to foster comprehensive societal well-being through a holistic approach that incorporates key elements such as capacity building, collaboration and coordination, cost efficiency, monitoring and evaluation, productivity, simplification, targeting mechanisms, and governance.

Capacity building ensures that the social protection providers and stakeholders at various levels are equipped with the knowledge, skills, innovation, and conflict resolution that is needed to effectively implement social protection programs, enhancing their impact on standardization, quality management and sustainability (Burchi & Roscioli, 2022). Collaboration and coordination among diverse agencies and stakeholders are crucial for avoiding duplication of efforts, eradicating error in targeting, optimizing resource utilization, and creating a unified approach towards addressing social exclusion issues. This has been implemented in Malawi with the National Support Policy which involves various sectors such as agriculture and disaster risk management (Holmes et.al, 2018).

This will also lead to a better productivity and Cost efficiency especially when benefits are awarded redundantly from multiple resources. This is important for maximizing the impact of limited resources from the government allocation for the benefits, allowing social protection programs to reach a broader population, smooth operation (Mansor & Rabi, 2023) and address diverse needs rooted in evidence-based decision-making, allowing for a more precise and equitable allocation of resources to those who are really in need. Simplification in its nature, the integrated system will be easily accessible by all related social protection service providers, thus speedier decisions in allocating resources to recipients.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the governance of the system which is guided by transparent, accountable, and participatory structures, ultimately fostering trust and confidence among the public towards the system. Once the system is accessible and transparent, it will reduce bureaucratic barriers. The integrated system will enable the monitoring & evaluation of programmes for a continuous improvement based on real-data and outcomes.

## 3. Integration

An integrated system is very crucial in many policy approaches (Antonia et al., 2022). Most of the time, the programmes initiated by the government have been implemented scattered and in silos. Social protection has three main branches which are social insurance, public assistance, and labour market incentive. The different nature of each programme leads to several challenges such as changes in labour market (Robert

et.al, 2022) waste of resources, mistargeting, unclear implementation etc. (Abd Samad, 2020). Thus, integrating the social protection system may overcome such challenges.

Integrated social protection emerges as a transformative approach as discussed by Laroque (2007) in terms of structures and mechanisms. In most countries, the implementation of social protection is sporadic and administered by different bodies. Thus, they used different systems and databases to manage their programmes. However, the study from Samad (2018) stated that social protection programs can be more effectively managed by having a single database by embracing key components such as data integration, information and services through the synergy of various organizations providing social protection programmes and services. This however requires a high-tech production technology in developing the integrated system (Letícia et al., 2018; Valentina & Barca, 2015).

Integrated social protection ensures inclusivity, guaranteeing that disadvantaged groups are not excluded from mainstream protection and that diverse needs are met through targeted interventions and timely responses to evolving needs (Abd Samad, 2018). Information and services are provided more efficiently, promoting accessibility and transparency. Synergies among different agencies required them to work together to form a unified system that optimizes resource allocation and ensures a seamless experience for both administrators and beneficiaries. These components come together through system integration, which offers a thorough and flexible approach that enables communities to deal with complex issues with flexibility, fairness, and efficiency (Letícia et al., 2018). The information and services provided not only created high-tech production technology but eventually will integrate the economics of the nations.

#### **4. Socio-economic Development**

The last theme identified in this study is socio-economic development which is responsible for addressing poverty, improving the labour force and social services, and strengthening the social protection-related policy which in the end would be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (Koehler, 2021).

Burchi & Roscioli (2022) has proven from the implementation of Tingathe Economic Empowerment Programme (TEEP) in Malawi that, integrated social protection becomes a powerful tool for poverty alleviation, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive targeted support to break the poverty cycle, social exclusion, and lack of access to basic services. By combining various social protection programmes provided by multiple agencies, this effort can provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing the needs of individuals and communities from diverse populations.

In the context of the labour force, integrated social protection can empower individuals and communities to be more resilient and productive workforce by addressing employment-related challenges and facilitating skill development, involving formal and informal sectors. It can be seen as an important approach for policy development and reforms, that balances economic growth with inclusiveness, social equity and shared economy (Burchi & Roscioli, 2022; Antonia et al; 2022).

The integrated system will be able to extract the socio-demographic factors which will help policymakers address societal development such as combating poverty. Combining the programmes and efforts provided by multisectoral social protection providers that are responsive to socio-demographic factors plays a pivotal role in enhancing social services such as healthcare, retirement, social welfare, and labour market initiatives are available, affordable, and accessible to all for the attainment of the of SDGs.

## **CONCLUSION**

An integrated system requires collaboration and coordination of social protection providers in delivering services to improve outcomes with existing resources. It is important that the whole system is developed

using low-cost budgeting but produces highly efficient services which enable multiple social protection providers to streamline the objectives of programs to be implemented.

In restructuring the existing system into an integrated network, providers should be able to identify data duplication to avoid waste of resources or multiple services given to a single recipient. Every social protection player is accountable to ensure the services provided meet the aims of the government in helping the needy. Every data should correspond to the legal requirement and the allocation of funds, again, to avoid waste of resources.

The government of Malaysia recognizes the importance of integration and integrated efforts in various aspects, such as productivity growth, social protection, data sharing, healthcare services, poverty alleviation, and national development. Integration is seen as a means to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and coordination among different social protection agencies and sectors. The establishment of MySPC in 2016 has proven the government of Malaysia's serious efforts in addressing social protection issues in the country. Therefore, integrated efforts from the government coupled with political will are crucial steps that need to be realized. Actions that can be taken include recognizing social protection as one of the country's main agendas by manifesting it through clear overarching social protection policies and establishing a leading authoritative agency capable of driving integrated social protection efforts. Efforts are being made to integrate data systems, policies, and programs to ensure a more holistic and comprehensive approach to address various issues and challenges in the country rather than these agencies working in silos. The government is also emphasizing the use of technology and digital platforms to facilitate integration and improve service delivery. Currently, Malaysia operates the e-Kasih, a national database designed as a repository for social protection information, albeit focused solely on social assistance. Hence, it is imperative for the government to develop a broader and more inclusive integrated social protection system. This integrated social protection is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, fostering social inclusion and overall well-being for all and the integrated system and database will be the potential solution.

Overall, the goal is to create a more inclusive, prosperous, and developed nation. The current research is all about content analysis of documents involved in social protection services, hence the results of the research should not be generalized. More comprehensive research should be conducted by obtaining data from every single type of social protection provider and the recipients to identify the exact services to be provided to the latter, which will help in building the integrated system.

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