

Request for UNICEF inputs: Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)

In 2020, UNICEF continued addressing child poverty, including through the expansion of social protection systems alongside improving the equity of public expenditure, so that disadvantaged children are better covered by government investments in health, education and social protection – as outlined in the key actions steps of the UN Plan of Action for the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

Poverty in childhood has lifelong impacts on a child's physical, cognitive and social development, and has consequences on the full range of children's rights, diminishing their life chances and ability to realize their full potential. Failure to protect children from poverty has devastating effects on children themselves, but also serious implications for future generations and societies.

1. Expanding Social Protection

- As of 2020, 142 UNICEF country offices worked on child poverty related activities, ranging from policy advocacy to social policy programming, including social protection. According to UNICEF's 2020 monitoring, 66 countries had established routine measurement and reporting on multidimensional child poverty, and 79 on monetary child poverty.
- The rippling socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 has had devastating impacts on the lives of children across the globe, in particular the poorest and most disadvantaged. Generating rapid evidence and knowledge to inform policies and programmes was and is instrumental in determining social protection priority needs and fiscal responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, UNICEF was able to quickly assess the rippling impact of the pandemic with over 70 socio-economic impact assessments and 62 country-level child poverty analyses.¹
- Social protection in general, and cash transfers in particular, has been the leading response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. UNICEF efforts towards building inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems supported emergency responses in 115 countries. Over 130.7 million children in 93 countries were reached through UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes in 2020.
- UNICEF also significantly scaled up efforts to make social protection systems more inclusive. UNICEF Country offices promoting gender-sensitive or responsive programmes or systems more than tripled compared to 2019, from 29 to 90 countries. UNICEF produced a strategic vision for gender and social protection, outlining an organizational shift towards gender-responsive and transformative programming², and published a Technical Note on Gender-Responsive Social Protection during COVID-19 in 2020³. Work on disability-inclusive social protection accelerated with 48 countries now working to make their social protection systems more responsive to disability in 2020 with UNICEF's support, up from 36 in 2019.
- UNICEF and partners are at the forefront of promoting the global debate on expanding child benefits towards universality. In June 2020, UNICEF and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) launched the report, *Universal Child Benefits: Policy Issues and Options*, as part of the *Universal Child Benefit Initiative*, a collaboration to promote evidence-based decision making on

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty/covid-19-socioeconomic-impacts>

² United Nations Children's Fund. 2020. The game-changer potential of social protection.

³ United Nations Children's Fund. 2020. 'Gender-Responsive Social Protection During COVID-19', Technical note www.unicef.org/documents/gender-responsive-social-protection-during-covid-19

policy and programmatic instruments linked to the design and implementation of universal child benefits.

- **Inter-agency collaboration:** UNICEF remained an active partner across interagency social protection groups and programmes in 2020, with coordination and joint work becoming increasingly important in the context of COVID-19 response.
- UNICEF led the Social Protection Interagency Committee – Board (SPIAC-B) in developing the interagency joint statement on the COVID-19 response and co-authored the social protection pillar of the Secretary General Socio-economic response to COVID-19. UNICEF also continued contributing to the interagency sub-groups on gender-responsive social protection and co-chairing the group on shock responsive social protection, both of which supported interagency publications and brought together stakeholders and practitioners towards a common social protection response.
- With a strong country presence and track record chairing or co-chairing social protection development partner groups, UNICEF has played a critical role leading and coordinating social protection responses at the country level, participating in 33 of 36 social protection initiatives selected by the SDG Fund. The SDG Fund has allowed partners to contribute to a more systems-focused, coordinated, innovative and effective response with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable families disproportionately impacted and often left behind.
- UNICEF partners with ILO on social protection, including on a joint programme and social protection and public finance and towards universal social protection. With WFP, UNICEF supports countries' shock-responsive social protection, including a major joint programme in the Sahel.
- Beyond UN inter-agency collaboration, UNICEF and the World Bank collaborated for the reporting of SDG 1.1.1 providing updated global estimates on children living in extreme poverty, highlighting that 356 million children lived in extreme poverty prior to COVID-19.⁴
- UNICEF worked with the World Bank to provide real time global updates on social protection response. As part of the Universal Social Protection partnership, UNICEF and ODI launched a global report on Universal Child Benefits, connecting the role of universality in rapid social protection and scale up with COVID-19 response.
- UNICEF also partnered with Save the Children for projections on the impact of the crisis on child poverty, highlighting that up to 142 million children may be pushed into monetary poverty⁵ (according to national definitions) by end of 2020, due to the pandemic. The analysis received wide media coverage and reception, signaling the need for concerted government action to protect children and their families from being further thrust into poverty.
- UNICEF continued co-chairing, alongside Save the Children, the [Global Coalition to End Child Poverty](#) a 20+ member Coalition. A key Coalition advocacy objective in 2020 was to highlight the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on children and their families in poverty/vulnerable to poverty – as well as the policies to mitigate the impact (including universal child benefits).

⁴ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966791603123453576/pdf/Global-Estimate-of-Children-in-Monetary-Poverty-An-Update.pdf>

⁵ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-in-monetary-poor-households-and-covid-19/>

2. Social Protection in humanitarian and fragile contexts

- Fragility, conflict and violence threaten efforts to end poverty and achieve SDG 1 in low- and middle-income countries. Updated UNICEF and World Bank estimates in 2020 show that children living in countries that experience conflict and fragility are particularly vulnerable to extreme poverty and nearly 58 per cent of them live in extremely poor households, versus 17 per cent of children in non-fragile countries.⁶
- Effective social protection policies and programmes respond to the varied needs of children and their families across the life course. UNICEF supports systems that include holistic and evidence-based policies, strategies and legal frameworks that responds to children's needs across the life course.
- UNICEF supports systems strengthening of national systems across policy, programmes, operations, shock responsiveness and inclusiveness, providing support across these areas at every level. Sixty-one countries now have strong or moderately strong social protection systems - almost twice as many as in 2017
- In response to the pandemic, UNICEF enhanced its support to countries to improve and expand national cash transfer programmes to reach more children and their families. Over 130.7 million children from 93 countries (a significant increase from 51.2 million children in 2019) in both humanitarian and development contexts were covered by UNICEF-supported social protection programmes.
- COVID-19 shed light to the importance of risk-informing social protection systems to respond to crisis. As of 2020, 79 UNICEF Country Offices are working on building shock responsive social protection systems, up from 56 in 2019. The number of countries with strong national systems readiness increased to 16, from 9 in 2019, surpassing the overall Strategic Plan target of 15 countries by 2021.
- This upward trend was partly influenced by the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) from UNICEF released in 2020, which, for the first time since its launch in 1998, includes sector level commitments on social protection. The CCCs will guide efforts towards strengthening social protection in humanitarian situations, including by linking direct provision of humanitarian cash transfers with social protection systems.

3. Human capability development – addressing the non-income forms of poverty

- At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF and Save the Children partnered to project the impact of the crisis on multidimensional poverty, where they projected that 1.2 billion children will be living in multidimensional poverty by end of 2020.⁷ Further, the analysis shows that not only is the pandemic deepening poverty across all dimensions of a child's life including health, nutrition, education, housing, water and sanitation, but the poorest children are getting poorer as well. In addition, families and children face further social exclusion and discrimination (explicit and implicit) linked to social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, disability, geographic location or migratory status. Such exclusion and discrimination further exacerbate poverty and inequality.

⁶ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966791603123453576/pdf/Global-Estimate-of-Children-in-Monetary-Poverty-An-Update.pdf>

⁷ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-multidimensional-child-poverty/>

- At least 463 million⁸ children were completely cut-off from education in 2020. The economic impact alone is expected to restrain domestic and international education investments, affecting the poorest and most vulnerable disproportionately. UNICEF's response to this challenge was its largest to date, resulting in over 301 million children accessing education through remote learning, and 43% of countries having equitable education systems for access.
- UNICEF and partners continue ensuring that essential high impact health interventions were accessible in 2020 to the most vulnerable communities, where a large number of “zero-dose” children who haven't received critical vaccines are clustered. As a result, despite severe disruptions in the immunization services globally, UNICEF and partners supported vaccination in 2020 of 66.3 million children with DTP3 in 64 priority countries.

4. Reducing inequalities

- Accelerating efforts to reduce poverty and inequality requires increased fiscal space to finance anti-poverty programs, including through progressive taxation and other public financial management approaches. Government budgets are the most powerful tool available to reduce poverty and inequalities.
- UNICEF's Public Finance for Children (PF4C) programme seeks to influence and support the mobilization, allocation and use of domestic financial resources to achieve greater, more equitable and sustainable results for children. If government budgets are insufficient, concentrated on better-off groups, or used poorly, the poorest children and their families are left behind.
- In 2020, governments face decreased revenues and increased pressure on spending for pandemic response. However, this crisis has also created an opportunity for transformative thinking about investments in children. To respond to the COVID-19 socioeconomic crisis, UNICEF developed a “Road map for Inclusive Recovery for Children”, calling for safeguarding and transforming social spending for children to ensure inclusive recovery for all.
- UNICEF also worked with governments, development partners and International Financial Institutions to ensure public finances reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including as part of the COVID-19 response. A total of 124 country offices – up from 120 in 2019 – worked on strengthening sufficiency, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and equity of social sector budgets, for child rights.
- Local governments play critical role in responding to the needs of communities and families and reducing geographical disparities and inequalities. UNICEF continued to work with partners to strengthen planning and budgeting processes at sub-national level, to ensure policies and programmes prioritize children and address poverty and inequality. As a result, 515 subnational and local governments in 31 countries across all UNICEF regions developed child-sensitive plans and budgets that take into account the needs of children and adolescents – a 25% increase over 2019.
- **Inter-agency collaboration:** Partnerships are at the core of UNICEF's(PF4C) programme, including those with UNDP, ILO and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund. 2020. COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies <https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>

along with the IMF, the European Commission and the International Budget Partnership. The SDG Fund is a new multi-partner initiative aimed at closing the financing gap to achieve the SDGs through concerted action by the United Nations system. UNICEF received US\$13.8 million in 43 countries to improve financing of social services, especially through the Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF) from Joint Programmes.

5. Accelerating climate action

- Climate change is one of the drivers of fragility, conflict and violence. Globally, by 2040 almost 600 million children are projected to be living in areas of extremely high-water stress⁹. Children are the least responsible for climate change yet will bear the greatest burden of its impact. They are the most vulnerable to vector-borne diseases that will increase as a result of climate change, and to air pollution, which is associated with climate change. Close to 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change is borne by children under 5 years of age. Climate change also affects a child's right to learn: extreme weather events destroy schools and extreme heat can affect a child's ability to learn. For children who are already disadvantaged, the risks of climate change are even higher.
- In 2020, to build resilience to the impacts of climate change, UNICEF supported governments develop child-sensitive climate and environmental action plans in 65 countries. These plans recognize the explicit links between safeguarding child rights and climate action, prioritizing the resilience of social services that children depend on and emphasize the education and engagement of young people as a key part of the long-term solution and policy development.

⁹ UNICEF. 2019. An Environment Fit for Children, UNICEF's Approach to Climate Change
<https://www.unicef.org/media/73331/file/An-Environment-Fit-for-Children-2019.pdf>