



# ADDRESSING POVERTY AND THE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUALITY...

## ... because we will leave no one behind

With the COVID-19 pandemic driving one of the greatest social and economic crises in the history of the United Nations, UN DESA's work in 2020-2021 sought to shape solid recommendations and drive transformative action for inclusive social and economic policy, and people-centred development.

## UN DESA...

- Provided detailed analysis and solid evidence for promoting economic security and strengthening social protection.
- Provided solutions for driving rural development, in the World Social Report 2021.
- Worked in Latin America to strengthen national capacities to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Drew critical attention to ageism and its impact on older persons lives.
- Examined successful practices and continuing obstacles to realizing indigenous peoples' rights to lands and territories.
- Supported ECOSOC in examining racial equity and in promoting access to COVID-19 vaccines.

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# Addressing poverty and the root causes of inequality

*The COVID-19 pandemic has had its greatest impact on those already furthest behind. It has highlighted the need for social, economic and financing policies and governance strategies that promote equity and inclusion. UN DESA's work in 2020-2021 sought to provide governments the support they needed to shape an inclusive recovery from the pandemic and get themselves on track to realize the goals of the 2030 Agenda, for all.*

## Promoting economic security and expanded social protection

While the pandemic and other global trends are increasing people's exposure to economic shocks, their ability to cope and recover has not improved accordingly. Economic insecurity disproportionately affects people in or near poverty, members of ethnic or racial minorities, women, migrants and youth, and it is likely to push members of these groups further behind. To address these concerns, UN DESA convened a series of online dialogues with experts and issued policy briefs on an evolving and pressing challenge in the context of the pandemic economic insecurity.

UN DESA's analysis demonstrated how often public institutions, services and social protection systems struggle

to adapt to rapidly changing needs. However, policy innovations in both developed and developing countries, that have come about as a response to the pandemic, demonstrate the capacity of social protection systems to adapt to changing circumstances. Since their release, the policy briefs have had notable reach, receiving 14,579 combined downloads through 31 August 2021.

## Building national capacity for disability inclusion

UN DESA conducted a series of virtual and face-to-face workshops aimed at building national capacity to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Central Asia, UN DESA supported governments to design national policies



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for implementing the Convention, including through establishing accessibility standards. In particular, the Department supported Kyrgyzstan's Accessible Country Programme and Tajikistan's national action plan in support of implementation of the Convention.

In Latin America, UN DESA supported inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market by designing special training programme and reviewing national legislation. In Ecuador, the Department supported preparation of two good practices guidelines, one on inclusive education for youth with disabilities aimed especially at educators in higher education, and the other aimed at employers, to support labour inclusion for youth with disabilities. Forty-three workshops will be implemented across different provinces in the country.

UN DESA further supported the Peruvian Government to prepare training modules for municipal, regional, and local officials, representatives of NGOs and youth disability organizations in Arequipa, Trujillo, Ica and Huancayo. The modules are centred on successfully reaching the labour market, raising awareness in the work environment for disability inclusion, and contextualizing the legal framework for reasonable accommodation at work. Two workshops were conducted in June 2021 to launch the online platform, serving more than 300 participants. More than 9,300 visitors have accessed the modules since launched.



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## STRENGTHENING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

### Improving national capacities for managing social protection systems

The UN DESA/ILO project, *Achieving SDGs and Ending Poverty Through Universal Social Protection*, continued its support to the governments of Cambodia and Pakistan to improve national capacities for developing and implementing inclusive social protection measures and schemes.

The project, which started in January 2019, ran through June 2021. The project provided technical support at country level to strengthen the capacity of public institutions and practitioners in areas identified as critical for social security governance in each context, including better coordination, improved data management, and better enforcement of social security laws.

UN DESA prepared comparative research on governance of social protection systems to provide better technical information for policymaking and undertook related in-country studies, that helped to inform in-country efforts.

Hundreds of civil servants and other stakeholders were trained in governance, administration, and management of social protection systems. ICT support was provided and databases for enhanced data collection, analysis and service provision were created. The project also supported increased visibility and coverage of programmes, while building a broader advocacy base for universal social protection. In Pakistan, more than 550,000 workers were registered during a coverage campaign, with two provinces moving towards universal coverage.



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## SUPPORTING COUNTRIES IN SPECIAL SITUATIONS

### Exploring the expansion of social protection in Africa

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many African countries expanded their use of social protection measures to curb the socioeconomic impacts. In its March 2021 policy brief, **Social Policy**

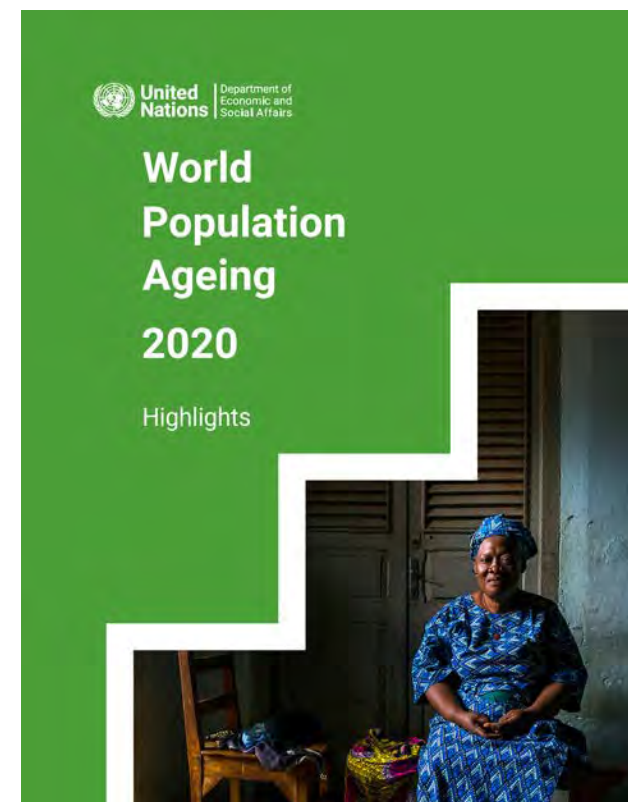
**and Social Protection Measures to Build Africa Better Post-Covid-19**, UN DESA highlighted the critical need for further investments in social protection to help African nations to build back better and stronger, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and urges development partners to support these efforts, particularly for the poorest countries with limited fiscal space. A commentary on the brief and its findings was featured in the UN's African Renewal magazine.

## Addressing ageing, ageism and the rights of older persons

The world's population is growing older, with women comprising the majority of older persons. In 2021, one out of ten people or about 752 million persons were aged 65 years or over worldwide. That number is projected to more than double by 2050, reaching over 1.5 billion persons, or one in six globally. In 2020, UN DESA's **World Population Ageing Highlights** continued its strong tradition of highlighting the trajectory of population ageing based on projections of the **World Population Prospects** and outlining the potential impacts on development policy and practice. The report provides a meaningful reference for policymaking on ageing and older persons.

The 2020 report placed strong focus on the role of age in the COVID-19 pandemic. Older persons are at much higher risk of dying from the disease than any other age group. It also highlighted how older persons' living arrangements impact their chances of getting infected with -and dying from- COVID-19.

The Department also contributed to the first **Global Report on Ageism**, released in partnership with the World Health Organisation, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, and the United Nations Population Fund. Directed at policymakers, practitioners, researchers, development agencies and members of the private sector and civil society, the report defines the nature of ageism, presents evidence on the scale and impacts of ageism, and provides recommendations for action to address ageism and ensure a world for all ages.



## Promoting the rights of indigenous peoples

UN DESA's **State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Volume V** offers a wide-ranging perspective on indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories, and resources through analysis of legislation and agreements at the national and international level, and through customary law. It examines successful practices and continuing obstacles to realizing indigenous peoples' rights to lands and territories and suggests ways forward.

Indigenous peoples' relationship to their lands, territories and resources are at the heart of their identity, well-being, and culture. Preservation of the environment transmitted through traditional knowledge passed down through

generations is at the centre of their existence. The report continues to inform discussions in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues and serves as an important reference for policy makers and civil society for effectively supporting inclusion of indigenous peoples and the upholding of their collective rights.

## Bringing the voices of youth to the table

At the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum (7-8 April 2021), youth leaders from around the world had the opportunity to engage with government representatives, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in civil society and the private sector to discuss bold solutions and initiatives for steering a resilient recovery from COVID-19 and setting the world



## FACILITATING MULTILATERAL ACTION AND DECISIONS

### Reimagining equality

In February 2021, the Economic and Social Council put a spotlight on structural racism through its special meeting, Reimagining Equality: Eliminating racism, xenophobia and discrimination for all in the Decade of Action for the SDGs. UN DESA, in collaboration with

OHCHR, led the substantive preparations of the meeting. The meeting underscored the need for an ambitious whole-of-society approach with greater urgency to dismantle biases and systems that perpetuate racism and inequalities. Through a Presidential Statement, the meeting called for inclusion, justice and dignity for all.

### Promoting vaccine equity

Vaccine equity was at the top of the Economic and Social Council's agenda in April 2021. The Special Meeting of the Council on *A Vaccine for All* revealed deep concerns about vaccine nationalism and restrictions on exports, intellectual property rights, lack of resources and capacities. UN DESA mobilized high-level Member State and UN system participation, and convened key stakeholders to address various dimensions of vaccine equity. A clear message from the meeting was that the response to the pandemic provides an opportunity to strengthen health systems and advance towards universal health coverage to help countries be better prepared and become more resilient against future pandemics.

## BOOSTING PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

### Promoting inclusive multilateralism

The implementation of an agenda as ambitious as the 2030 Agenda requires unprecedented engagement of all actors, and NGOs are a key stakeholder for successful implementation. UN DESA supported the engagement of an increasing number of NGOs in the work of the Council and major groups and other stakeholders in the HLPF in an effort to maximize the impact of their contributions. There were some 396 written statements by NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC to the 2021 ECOSOC High-level segment, more than double the number submitted in 2020. UN DESA also continued to support the process for NGOs to obtain consultative status with the Council through the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. Currently, 5,882 NGOs are in consultative status with ECOSOC; 546 new applications have been received for the 2022 cycle. The Department has stepped-up the advice and support provided to NGOs on how to best contribute to the work of the UN, helping to enrich debates, increase ownership of UN work, and accelerate action towards realizing the SDGs by 2030.



back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In its virtual format, the Forum attracted more than 19,000 participants, an exponential increase over the 1000 who participated in 2019. Co-organized by UN DESA and the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), the Youth Forum also provided a platform for young people to express their concerns about how the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and weak and biased social and economic systems across the globe. They highlighted how young people have been adversely affected by the growing uncertainty, lack of decent work, educational turmoil and increasing digital inequalities. They called for ensuring their meaningful participation in decision making at all levels, reducing discrimination and promoting the rule of law. Their concerns and recommendations were heard and discussed by the more than 400 government representatives present, including 61 high-level officials at the ministerial level and 25 senior officials from Youth Ministries and National Youth Councils.

### Supporting coordinated action on poverty eradication

The inter-agency system-wide plan of action for the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027) continues to guide coordinated UN-system action on poverty eradication. The Department reviewed the progress made, including by the United Nations system, in implementing the Decade, examined gaps and challenges and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The review assesses the derailing effect of the pandemic on the implementation of the Third Decade and highlights the increasing social inequality brought on by the current crisis. It shows how the United Nations has mobilized to save lives and promote better recovery in the face of the pandemic,

including through technical assistance to Member States and policy advice. The recommendations stemming from the review, encourage strengthened multilateralism, partnerships, and coordination among multiple stakeholders to move forward the types of future-focused policies necessary to build resilience within individuals and communities and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### Addressing detrimental rural-urban divide

Rural areas are home to 80 per cent of the world's extreme poor, have fewer education, health, and other public services, and are witnessing severe degradation of natural resources. Rural populations are also more likely to face human rights abuses, gender inequality, poor working conditions, and the violation of indigenous land rights. UN



DESA's **World Social Report 2021** urges all to seize the opportunities presented by new technologies to finally end the rural-urban divide. The Report argues for moving the task of rural development to the centre of attention and adopting an approach that raises the average living standard of rural people to that of urban people, without migration, and that also avoids urban slums and squalor. With the revamp of the World Social Report in 2019, the report has continued to grow its reach. Downloads in 2020 reached 10,952, some 19% more than 2019 and 34% more than 2018.

### Addressing access to water and sanitation

UN DESA is supporting UN Member States to implement the International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028. The Water Action Decade aims to accelerate efforts towards meeting water-related challenges. In March 2021, UN DESA supported the High-level Meeting on Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda convened by the

President of the General Assembly. 161 countries signed a cross regional statement on water, which highlights actions in support of promoting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights to water and sanitation.

In follow-up to the 2020 launch of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, UN DESA and UN-Water co-chaired a special event on Goal 6 at the High-level Political Forum 2021, to review the progress in implementation. The event launched the SDG 6 Capacity Development Initiative, which is co-coordinated by UN DESA and UNESCO and is tailored to national capacity development needs and undertaken in collaboration with the UN system and other development partners at various levels of operation.



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## PLACING WOMEN AT THE CENTRE

### Addressing adolescent fertility to support inclusion of young women and girls

Levels and trends of adolescent fertility depend on the opportunities and constraints that young women and girls face in different contexts. Staying in school longer and having access to reproductive health-care services and information helps to keep adolescent fertility low.

In 2020, UN DESA published a pre-pandemic global report on childbearing among adolescents which showed that while adolescent fertility in many countries had fallen significantly since 1990-1995, there are disparities across and within countries and between population groups. Low levels of adolescent fertility were prevalent in countries that had adopted pragmatic policies and strategies to avoid teenage pregnancy and parenthood, including the promotion of sex education and contraceptive use through mass media and schools.

## DRIVING INNOVATION

### Implementing the UN Legal Identity Agenda

In 2020 the United Nations adopted the UN Legal Identity Agenda – a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management – as a recommended model for ensuring universal registration of all vital events, translated in regular, comprehensive and accurate vital statistics and legal identity for all.

As a co-chair of the UN Legal Identity Agenda Task Force, UN DESA helped drive development of a system that encompasses different government infrastructure components and establishes interoperability between:

- health institutions delivering their responsibilities of informing on the occurrence of births and deaths;
- national civil registration systems responsible for issuing legal tenders;
- national statistical systems in charge of producing reliable and regular vital and population statistics;
- the population registers that serve as a constantly updated list of people in the country; and
- the national identification system responsible for issuing legal identity credentials throughout the lifetime of an individual.



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