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**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family**

## Promoting social integration through social inclusion

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution [72/142](#). The report is focused on reducing inequalities through the empowerment of all and the promotion of social, economic and political inclusion, social protection, inclusive and lifelong learning and other measures for advancing social integration. Highlighted in the report are good practices in inclusive policymaking at the national and international levels.

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\* [A/74/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is issued in response to General Assembly resolution [72/142](#). In the resolution, the Assembly welcomed the fact that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through relevant Sustainable Development Goals and associated targets, reflected the cross-cutting nature and importance of social inclusion and acknowledged that its promotion was required to achieve sustainable development in all of its dimensions.

2. There is an international consensus that social integration policies should reduce inequalities in order to ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive, participatory and representative. The provision of adequate social protection is also vital for social inclusion, as is the promotion of inclusive and lifelong learning opportunities for all, as skills development and good-quality training are essential means of inclusive participation and integration in society.

3. It is also important to create or strengthen national institutions or agencies that promote, implement and evaluate social inclusion programmes and mechanisms at the national and local levels. Furthermore, it is essential to maintain a gender perspective in inclusion strategies and initiatives, in particular to advance the economic empowerment of women and the promotion of a gender-sensitive policy environment in the workplace (see resolution [72/142](#), para. 12).

4. The present report is focused mainly on national policies and programmes and good practices relating to social integration and social inclusion. Highlighted therein are efforts by Member States to promote social and economic inclusion, the provision of social protection and inclusive learning. Much emphasis is put on the social inclusion of young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants.

5. Also highlighted in the report are the importance of a gender perspective in social inclusion efforts and the initiatives of United Nations entities in the areas of social protection and financial and digital inclusion. The last section of the report contains conclusions and recommendations on advancing social integration through social inclusion in the future.

6. In accordance with the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 16 of its resolution [72/142](#), the Secretariat sought information from Member States and relevant actors of the United Nations system. The Secretariat received responses from the Governments of Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Georgia, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Serbia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In addition, inputs were provided by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union.

## II. Social integration strategies at the national level

### A. Reducing inequalities through the empowerment of all and the promotion of social, economic and political participation and inclusion

7. Broad participation in political life and an equitable distribution of power, voice and agency in a society are key to ensuring that no one is left behind. Participation in such processes generates relationships and networks that can lead to collective action and the building of social capital, which can, in turn, have an impact on the ability to

gain access to employment, income, health and education, thus contributing to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals.

8. In their responses to the Secretariat's request for information, Member States identified promoting the inclusion of all, in particular those in vulnerable or marginalized groups or situations, including young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants, as a challenge that required removing multiple types of barriers, including discriminatory laws and policies, as well as behaviours, values and beliefs, and taking steps to ensure that various systems, institutions and practices did not allow such barriers to reappear.

9. The promotion of social, economic and political inclusion has several benefits that make a country more creative, dynamic, prosperous and resilient. Social integration and social cohesion are outcomes of systematic inclusion policies and a culture of inclusion.

10. Some countries, such as Canada, have undertaken two types of strategies. The first type provides a structural approach to inclusion, through economic, social, cultural and political reforms, policies and programmes that are designed to leave no one behind. The second type provides attitudinal approaches, including efforts to foster a public culture of inclusion, through public education, awareness-raising campaigns (e.g., anti-racism campaigns) and the promotion of civic engagement and community participation.

11. In several countries, strategies for social inclusion that include specific goals and targets have been enacted. For example, in Romania, the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015–2020 is aimed at improving the functionality and financing of social services, including through investing in basic services and social infrastructure, assessing the real needs of the people and prioritizing them and integrating social assistance benefits, social services, employment and other services. It is also aimed at strengthening the capacity of social assistance structures at the local level by developing and consolidating the services network and setting up public social assistance services in localities where such services do not yet exist, in rural areas in particular.

12. The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion of Ecuador focuses on promoting the rights of groups in vulnerable situations, as well as social mobility, to eliminate poverty. The Ministry oversees several programmes, such as Less Poverty, More Development (*Menos Pobreza, Más Desarrollo*), that provide cash assistance and health insurance to more than 78,000 recipients.

## **Youth**

13. The current generation of young people is the most interconnected in history, which has created a unique paradigm shift with regard to social inclusion. Young people have often been excluded from traditional avenues of civic engagement, sometimes distrust societal structures and have often disavowed conventional forums and paths. Indeed, various age-related limits, such as for candidates for parliament, and other types of barriers reduce political opportunities for young people and prevent them from using their ideas and energy to address complex issues affecting society at large. For example, research conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union shows that young people under the age of 30 years represent about 2 per cent of the world's members of parliament, while in more than 80 per cent of the world's upper houses of parliament, there are no members of parliament under 30 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See [www.ipu.org/our-work/youth/data-youth-participation](http://www.ipu.org/our-work/youth/data-youth-participation).

14. The access of young people to employment and professional training is considered essential for their economic inclusion. In Azerbaijan, new legislative measures have been taken to ensure the access of unemployed persons to employment and social protection. In cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the country developed a programme for the period 2016–2020 that is focused on decent work for young people and persons with disabilities and that invests in women’s entrepreneurship.

15. In the United Kingdom, the Government introduced the Youth Obligation programme in 2017. The programme supports young people in improving their job search, application and interview skills. Young people also receive work-focused coaching and referral to additional support from a variety of locally available provisions. In Monaco, the economic inclusion of young people and their integration into the labour market is a national priority.

### **Youth and older persons**

16. In Bulgaria, support provided to older persons is implemented in several priority areas, including the expansion of opportunities and access to training, and incentives for businesses that offer jobs to people of pre-retirement age and support the transition from employment to retirement. Individualized services are offered, including vacancy reviews, involvement in training programmes and support provided by psychologists and case managers to older persons who have lost their motivation to work. Investments have also been made in healthy and safe working conditions and flexible employment and other suitable organizational forms of work.

17. In Poland, since 2017, a programme is aimed at increasing care services for older persons at their place of residence. Townships obtain financial support to provide specialist care services for people living alone who are 75 years of age and older. Similarly, long-term care is provided for the most part by local authorities and tends to be close to the beneficiary’s local community.

18. The Fuller Working Lives strategy, a partnership approach in the United Kingdom, demonstrates how working longer can benefit businesses, individuals and the economy and sets out key actions that the Government is taking to support older workers to remain in, or return to, the labour market. The strategy is focused on promoting flexible working arrangements, skills development and job search support. In Monaco, investments have been made in services for older persons, including nursing homes and specialized hospitals.

### **Persons with disabilities**

19. In Bulgaria, the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2019 ensures equal access to education and vocational training, employment in an open, specialized and sheltered work environment and adequate support for working persons with disabilities and their employers. The Act also provides for the public financing of projects that include activities to establish an accessible environment through the removal of obstacles and barriers. A national programme for an accessible housing environment and personal mobility supports persons with disabilities in relation to mobility issues. In this connection, owners of buildings and installations are eligible to receive funding to build accessible infrastructure.

20. To protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Romania, a set of policies, strategies and initiatives has been designed to remove barriers so that no person with disabilities is discriminated against, marginalized, excluded or abused. Entitled the “National strategy: a barrier-free society for persons with disabilities, 2016–2020”, it is aimed at improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their participation, with full rights and equal opportunities, in society.

21. In the United Kingdom, more than 10,000 employers have signed up for Disability Confident, a scheme developed by persons with disabilities, employers and disability organizations that encourages employers to improve the recruitment and skills development of employees with disabilities. The Work and Health Programme in that country supported the entrance of 220,000 persons with disabilities into the workforce in the past five years. In addition, a voluntary reporting framework launched in 2018, covering mental health, disability and staff well-being, encourages employers to report the steps that they are taking to support the well-being of employees with disabilities in the workplace.

### **Ethnic minorities**

22. In some European countries, ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, are at great risk of poverty and social exclusion and face discrimination in the labour market. At the regional level, the European Social Fund is aimed at promoting social inclusion by improving access to employment. The European Commission and the member countries of the European Union, in partnership, set the Fund's priorities and decide how it spends its resources. The Fund's project in Latvia, entitled "Promotion of diversity", is implemented by the Society Integration Fund, in cooperation with numerous partners in the country. The aim of the programme is to promote the employment and socioeconomic inclusion of the groups that are the most discriminated against, including ethnic minorities such as Roma, as well as to foster an increase in the level of understanding in mainstream society of issues relating to discrimination and social exclusion.

23. In Latvia, the action plan for the implementation of the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy, 2012–2018, provides guidance on social integration activities. Minority advisory councils, annual national minority forums and national minority culture festivals all help to facilitate consultations between civil society representatives of minorities and government institutions on effective policy measures on integration and inclusion.

24. Moreover, a set of national integration policy measures in Latvia is focused on improving the access of Roma to education, the labour market, social services, housing and health care. The Latvian Roma platform project, implemented by the Ministry of Culture within the framework of Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme of the European Union, supports Roma non-governmental organizations and disseminates information on their access to the European Social Fund, which supports a number of programmes.

## **B. Social protection for social inclusion**

25. Social protection is a human right and is defined as the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle.<sup>2</sup> It plays a key role in the achievement of sustainable development and contributes to the promotion of social justice and the realization of the human right to social security for all.

26. Social protection policies are vital elements of national development strategies to reduce poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle and support inclusive and sustainable growth because they raise household incomes, foster productivity and human development, boost domestic demand, facilitate the structural transformation of the economy and promote decent work.

<sup>2</sup> ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva, 2017).

27. Under Sustainable Development Goal 1, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, target 1.3 is to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Correspondingly, social protection programmes have been expanding in many countries to address development challenges and offer coverage to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society.

28. Notably, social protection can be an effective tool for promoting social inclusion as well as for reducing income inequality. There is evidence that social protection assistance paid to families is effective in reducing the rates of poverty and extreme poverty across a range of countries. Research also indicates the positive impact of social protection on the reduction of inequalities. Furthermore, a growing body of research indicates that social protection is most cost-effective when offered to families with young children, 0 to 3 years of age. Notably, investments in early childhood development reduce the need for social spending later in life.<sup>3</sup>

29. Some social groups receive better coverage than others. For example, there has been a notable increase in the pensions of older persons in the past decade. Yet recent data indicate that, while 68 per cent of older persons receive a pension, only 28 per cent of persons with disabilities receive disability benefits. Family benefits are offered to 35 per cent of children. As for unemployed workers, only some 22 per cent of them receive unemployment benefits.<sup>4</sup>

30. Public expenditure on social protection for older persons, including pensions, varies among regions and is influenced by projected levels and trends in the numbers and the share of older persons in the population, as well as by variations in the policy mix between public and private provision for pensions and social services.

31. Many countries have taken steps to increase social protection coverage, whether through the establishment or expansion of non-contributory pension schemes that provide a basic level of protection for many older persons or through the expansion of contributory schemes to previously uncovered groups, such as the self-employed, domestic workers, farmers and other low-income groups.

32. Access to social security among older persons is closely associated with existing gender inequality. On average, older women fare notably worse than older men, both in access to contributory pensions and in the level of benefits that such pensions provide. Women participate less than men in paid employment, spend more time away from paid employment owing to childbirth, often take care of children or other family members in need and tend to earn less than men while in employment. Over time, they contribute less to pension schemes and, in turn, receive lower payments as older persons, although their life expectancy is longer than that of men. This group includes those who are most at risk of being left behind, notably widows, older women with disabilities, older women living in rural areas, older migrant women and those in emergency situations.<sup>5</sup>

33. Notwithstanding the progress made in many countries, access to social protection remains a challenge for much of the world's population. This is especially true for young people, in particular those in low-income countries, where they are

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, "Key findings on families, family policy and the Sustainable Development Goals: synthesis report" (Florence, Italy, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> *Report on the World Social Situation 2018: Promoting Inclusion through Social Protection* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.IV.2). Data on benefits as of 2015.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.aarpinternational.org/File%20Library/Unassigned/AARP\\_UN\\_CSW60BriefingSeries\\_ConceptNote.pdf](http://www.aarpinternational.org/File%20Library/Unassigned/AARP_UN_CSW60BriefingSeries_ConceptNote.pdf).

overrepresented in the informal employment sector, making access to employment-related elements of social protection extremely challenging.

34. The national social protection plan of Argentina, which is aimed at strengthening vulnerable communities and families, has the broader objective of promoting social inclusion in urban settings. Family assistance programmes help to develop human capacities in the areas of health and nutrition, education, work and housing. Through community development programmes, civil society and religious organizations work to strengthen social protection nets at the local, national, provincial and municipal levels.

35. In Colombia, social inclusion through poverty reduction has been achieved through the work of the National Agency for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. The Agency's strategy includes several models, urban, ethnic and rural, to address the needs of the respective populations. Through the Families in Action programme (Programa Familias en Acción), economic assistance is offered to all families with children.

36. In the area of social protection, under the National Social System of Inclusion and Equity (Sistema Nacional de Inclusión y Equidad Social), the Lifetime Plan (Plan Toda una Vida) in Ecuador is aimed at transforming the living conditions of its population through sustainable employment, the reduction of risk factors and the strengthening of human capacities in an integral way. Through the main programmes under the plan, investments are made in early childhood, young people and older persons and in the elimination of barriers for vulnerable groups.

37. The social protection system in Georgia is seen as a vehicle for reducing social risks caused by poverty and ageing. The system includes support and assistance programmes for various social groups in vulnerable situations, including older persons, persons with disabilities, households under the poverty line and orphans, among others. Cash assistance is offered in the form of State pensions for retired individuals, State compensation for special groups, social packages for persons with disabilities and non-financial social assistance. Moreover, social services in the country are focused on supporting families with children in crisis situations by investing in shelters for victims of domestic violence and trafficking in persons. Other areas of support include early childhood development services, child rehabilitation services, day-care centres for children with disabilities and foster homes.

38. In Mexico, social protection is seen as a principal instrument of public policy to reduce inequality and poverty, thus contributing to inclusive growth and overall social inclusion. Social programmes are aimed at women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, labourers and farmers.

39. In Poland, social assistance plays a large role in efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion. Benefits, including cash support and in-kind services, are provided primarily at the local level. Special child benefits, such as the Family 500-Plus programme, have recently been expanded to cover all children under 18 years of age. Other types of social assistance cover nutrition supplements, homelessness, violence prevention and vocational training for persons who have been excluded socially or are at risk of exclusion.

40. In Portugal, since 2016, the measures that promote cohesion and social equality are focused on efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion and the provision of basic public goods in the areas of health, education, transportation and housing. Priority is given to vulnerable groups. Some of the most significant measures that have been improved or introduced since 2016 include a social insertion income; a solidarity supplement for older persons; family benefits, which consist of a family

allowance and various parenting benefits; unemployment benefits; a pension; and an increased guaranteed minimum monthly income.

41. In Qatar, National Vision 2030 includes several goals linked to social protection, including building an effective social protection system, developing a sound social structure by establishing effective public institutions and active and strong civil society organizations and fostering a just and coherent society based on sound moral values. Social policy in Qatar is aimed at ensuring that the activities of the Government and civil society promote social and human development in an economically and environmentally sustainable welfare society, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

42. Serbia has enacted social security reforms, and it issues national reports on poverty reduction and social inclusion every three years. Its Law on Social Protection stipulates the competencies of the Government and local entities in meeting the social needs of citizens. The Strategy for Social Protection in Serbia for the period 2019–2025 covers poverty, children’s well-being and support for older persons and those with disabilities.

43. In the United Kingdom, Universal Credit has replaced a complex system of six main benefits with one monthly payment. It provides support regardless of employment status, removing the distinction between in-work support and support for those who are not working, helping to ensure that low-income or unemployed persons are better off in work than on benefits and reducing the risks associated with workforce entry. It provides claimants with support to prepare for work, move into it or earn more income if already in work. Universal Credit recipients are moving into work faster than under the previous system.

### **C. Inclusive and lifelong learning**

44. As noted in paragraph 4 of resolution [72/142](#), inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially for older persons and persons with disabilities, and of skills development and quality training, are essential means for achieving inclusive participation and integration in society.

45. While many countries have made progress in removing the barriers to education over the years, 64 million children of primary school age are still out of school, in addition to 61 million adolescents and another 138 million young people of upper secondary school age. Girls continue to face barriers to education in most regions.<sup>6</sup>

46. Research has demonstrated the positive effects of education on overall social integration and participation. Good-quality education leads to the improved capacity of individuals to participate in social, economic and political life.<sup>7</sup> Education is also strongly associated with robust civic and social engagement and a reduction in crime.<sup>8</sup>

47. Education and lifelong learning empower individuals, increasing their knowledge and their cognitive, social and emotional skills. They improve their habits, values and attitudes towards active citizenship. Access to good-quality education offers an ideal environment in which children can develop healthy habits and participatory attitudes. An open classroom climate, classes requiring practical

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/new-education-data-sdg-4-and-more>.

<sup>7</sup> *Report on the World Social Situation 2016: Leaving No One Behind – The Imperative of Inclusive Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.1).

<sup>8</sup> OECD, *Improving Health and Social Cohesion through Education* (Paris, 2010).



involvement in civic matters and a school ethos promoting active citizenship are conducive to stronger civic participation.<sup>9</sup>

48. According to an adult skills survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), adults with high proficiency in literacy are more likely than those with low proficiency to believe that they can influence the political process or participate in volunteer or associative activities. Moreover, they tend to have high levels of trust in others, which is indispensable for building real engagement with others, whether Government representatives or public institutions.<sup>10</sup>

49. Public education can support social inclusion and social integration. In Canada, an overwhelming majority of the population sends its children to the public schools, where, from an early age, children work and play together with classmates from different classes and ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. This approach to education also facilitates the integration of immigrant children into Canadian life. Beyond this integrative socialization function, a strong public school system can also intentionally promote social inclusion through its curriculum and inclusive design, which accommodate children of diverse abilities.

50. In Ecuador, the National Institute of Popular and Solidarity Economy promotes various inclusive learning strategies, including capacity development. Leadership programmes are also offered by the Institute.

### **Youth and older persons**

51. Youth is recognized globally as the life stage at which social norms, self-concept and self-efficacy are formed and individuals make a series of transitions on the basis of decisions that will affect their lives and their communities. The choices are directly influenced by the quality and relevance of the knowledge, skills and competencies that one possesses in that specific moment, as well as by the information, counselling, support and opportunities provided. Education should lead to relevant and effective learning outcomes, with the content of school curricula being fit for purpose, but also for the opportunities and challenges that rapidly changing social and development contexts bring. In addition, indigenous young people, young people with disabilities, young women and young people from various marginalized groups face additional challenges to gaining access to inclusive education that respects their diverse needs and abilities as well as reflecting and embracing their unique realities and identities.

52. Guarantees of the right to education for older persons are in place in many countries, although notable differences have been observed among the legal and policy frameworks stipulating that right. The right to education, as recognized in constitutions and national legislation, is considered as the legal basis that guarantees that right for all citizens in many countries, although older persons are generally not specifically mentioned. In some cases, legal and policy frameworks on education and lifelong learning may explicitly refer to older persons. Employment regulations are also often relevant to the right to education, training, lifelong learning and capacity-building for older persons because they regulate capacity-building and training in the labour context.

53. In the United Kingdom, the National Retraining Scheme is aimed at responding to changes in the economy and supporting people in redirecting their careers. The scheme is underpinned by a career strategy that sets out a long-term plan to build a career system in order to help young people and adults to choose the careers that are right for them.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills* (Paris, 2013).

### **Persons with disabilities**

54. In two targets under Sustainable Development Goal 4, there is explicit mention of disability: target 4.5, to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, and target 4.a, to build and upgrade educational facilities that are disability-sensitive and provide inclusive learning environments for all.<sup>11</sup>

55. A growing number of countries have been working to guarantee that their educational systems are inclusive of persons with disabilities, removing barriers and addressing discrimination on the grounds of disability. Many countries have included related protections in their constitutions, laws or policies.

56. Of 193 Member States, 34 guarantee the right to education for persons with disabilities or, in their constitutions, protect persons against discrimination in education owing to disability. In 2017, 88 per cent of 102 countries surveyed had a law or policy mentioning the right of children with disabilities to receive an education, up from 62 per cent in 2013. In the same year, a majority of countries, 65 per cent out of the 88 surveyed, also provided curricula that included children with disabilities, as compared with only 42 per cent in 2013.<sup>12</sup>

57. Progress has recently been made towards promoting inclusive education through awareness-raising, improving the physical and virtual accessibility of schools, offering financial support for inclusive education, building the capacity of teachers and monitoring the implementation of inclusive education.<sup>13</sup> For example, in Canada, guidelines for schools on inclusive education were developed in 2014 to encourage educational institutions to be equal and inclusive to all, including students with disabilities.

58. In Malta, the Pathway Programme at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology facilitates the integration of students with mild disabilities after they have completed their compulsory education. Breaking down cultural barriers and building an inclusive society that values diversity is a priority in Malta. To this effect, the needs of learners are evaluated to ensure that the educational system promotes a culture of dialogue and democratic values.

59. In Serbia, inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, young people and adults by increasing their participation in learning in public schools and reducing and eliminating segregation and exclusion. Children with developmental disabilities attend public schools, and the categorization of children on the basis of disability has been abolished.

### **Ethnic minorities and immigrants**

60. Educational systems have a crucial role to play in helping immigrants to integrate themselves into their new communities.<sup>14</sup> The social integration of children occurs primarily at school, through the acquisition of new skills and interaction with other students. Adult migrants tend to encounter education-based integration

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<sup>11</sup> See *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 19.IV.4). The report represents the first United Nations system-wide effort to examine disability and the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. Data, policies and programmes are reviewed and best practices are identified, and that evidence is used to outline recommended actions to promote the realization of the Goals for persons with disabilities.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> OECD, *Immigrant Students at School: Easing the Journey towards Integration* (Paris, 2015).

informally, at work or in social settings. New immigrants can also acquire language skills and receive job training in formal introduction programmes.<sup>15</sup>

61. Education is a pathway to integration into the labour market, assisting immigrant children and adults in acquiring language and occupational skills.<sup>16</sup> Access to apprenticeships, vocational education, dual systems, lifelong learning paths and permeability between systems should all be part of integration policies because they widen the opportunities to gain the competencies and skills needed in the labour market. An equitable educational system can, to some extent, equalize the effects of broader social and economic inequalities.<sup>17</sup>

62. More broadly, education develops a cultural understanding between the host and migrant communities. Education sites facilitate empowerment and inclusion, as the host and incoming populations can learn with, and about, one another.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, language proficiency enables refugees and migrants to participate in the cultural life of the host society, integrate in the social fabric and develop a sense of belonging. Promoting non-segregated and welcoming learning environments and opportunities for all is of utmost importance.

63. In Latvia, the Information Centre for Newcomers is a national institution that was created to support the social integration of third-country nationals and their inclusion in the country. The project is financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Commission and co-financed by Latvia. The Centre provides consultation, translation and training services to immigrants.

64. In Malta, inclusion is addressed through the development and implementation of different educational policies, including its National Curriculum Framework for All (2012), which is aimed at instilling values that respect diversity, and the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, which empowers marginalized communities through lifelong learning as part of an integrated strategy to invest in talent and provide fair opportunities for enhanced labour market integration and social cohesion. The country's new Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools has been drafted with the aim of being launched during the 2018/19 scholastic year together with a national inclusive education framework. The policy brings together educators, practitioners, learners, families and community members to ensure an environment that is conducive to inclusive learning.

65. The Ministry for Education and Employment of Malta has taken numerous measures in connection with the implementation of that country's 2017 Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan: Vision 2020. Within the Ministry, the Migrant Learners' Unit promotes the inclusion of newly arrived learners into the education system. In accordance with that strategy, special skills kits for cultural orientation courses are offered, through which local students learn about other cultures and the value of diversity.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Spencer and Betsy Cooper, "Social integration of migrants in Europe: a review of the European literature 2000–2006", OECD, 28 September 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform, "Integrating refugees and migrants through education", position paper (Brussels, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Janet Hannah, "The role of education and training in the empowerment and inclusion of migrants and refugees", in *Comparative and Global Pedagogies: Equity, Access and Democracy in Education*, Joseph Zajda, Lynn Davies and Suzanne Majhanovich, eds. (Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2008).

## D. Gender perspective in social integration and social inclusion efforts

66. As noted in paragraph 12 of resolution 72/142, the gender perspective is imperative in social inclusion strategies and initiatives, in particular in terms of the economic empowerment of women and the promotion of a gender-sensitive policy environment in the workplace.

67. Gaps in social protection for groups in vulnerable situations can be seen as one of the symptoms of discrimination, disadvantage and exclusion. This is related to the limited impact of those groups on decision-making owing to barriers to participation and information. Women are disproportionately affected by such barriers.<sup>19</sup>

68. Gender-based discrimination results in the systematic exclusion of girls and women from services and opportunities, including barriers to equitable education, health care, nutrition and economic assets. Girls are still subjected to harmful sociocultural practices, such as child marriage, early unions, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence, which further aggravate lifelong outcomes and limit their opportunities for learning and growth.

69. Women have less access to social protection than men. This is a result of many factors, including the heavier burden of household and care responsibilities leading to lower labour force and political participation. Furthermore, mothers often have inadequate access to capital or decision-making power in the household, which leads to the perpetuation of cycles of social exclusion and poverty. Other barriers to adequate social protection coverage include persistent gender-based discrimination, the overrepresentation of women in informal and vulnerable work and sizeable gender pay gaps.

70. Social protection mechanisms, such as decreasing gender inequality in educational attainment, promoting positive attitudes towards girls in families and communities, strengthening the financial inclusion of women and promoting the equitable distribution of unpaid care work among women and men, are thus instrumental in addressing gender-based barriers to achieving critical objectives.

71. In some instances, the very design of social protection programmes deepens gender-based divisions. For example, conditional cash transfers often rely on mothers as caregivers to fulfil the conditionalities, such as ensuring health-care visits and school attendance of children. Those formal responsibilities tend to reinforce traditional divisions of labour within households and further limit women's access to employment-based social protection schemes. It is then imperative that social protection systems take into consideration sociocultural contexts and how they affect women and ensure that they refrain from worsening gender inequalities.<sup>20</sup>

72. In Monaco, recent legislation recognized the right of female government and municipal employees to be considered heads of households, which entitles them to receive family allowances. Legislative changes to ensure gender equality in the acquisition and maintenance of nationality have also been enacted.

73. In Ecuador, Mission: Women (Misión Mujer) is aimed at promoting the full autonomy of women throughout their lives, with the strategic objectives of reducing violence, providing educational support to adolescent girls, ensuring reproductive health and preventing adolescent pregnancy, and ensuring women's access to economic resources.

74. The Observatory of Political Participation of Women in Mexico, together with 31 local observatories as of 2018, are attempting to raise awareness of the political

<sup>19</sup> *Report on the World Social Situation 2018*, executive summary.

<sup>20</sup> *Report on the World Social Situation 2018*.

participation of women at the federal, state and municipal levels to facilitate women's participation in political life.

75. In Qatar, several laws and decrees were promulgated to promote women's rights and recognize the role of women in the legislative process, including Royal Decree No. 22 of 2017, which guarantees the appointment of four women to the national consultative council, as well as the Human Resources Management Act, which guarantees equal rights, duties, wages and leave entitlement for men and women.

76. Romania adopted the National Strategy on Promoting Gender Equality and Prevention and Combating Domestic Violence for the period 2018–2021. The current Government also proposes, through its Operational Action Plan, to promote gender-neutral values and principles in education, health, employment policies, the reconciliation of work and family life and the integration of women in vulnerable groups into the labour market.

77. Through the Girls' Education Challenge programme of the United Kingdom, the new Leave No Girl Behind initiative has been launched, aimed at supporting the engagement of an additional 500,000 of the most marginalized adolescent girls in education, employment and training.

#### **Economic empowerment of women**

78. The global labour force participation rate for men and women aged 15 years and up has been declining and stood at 61.8 per cent in 2018, down by 1.4 percentage points since 2009. Underlying this trend are considerable differences in the access of women to the labour market depending on the country and its stage of development. The gap in participation rates between men and women is narrowing in many developing and developed countries but continues to widen in emerging countries, where it stood at 30.5 per cent in 2018, an increase of 0.5 per cent since 2009. This trend is expected to continue into 2021, with women's participation rates declining at a faster pace than men's.<sup>21</sup>

79. On the other hand, women's participation rates are gradually approaching those of men in many developed countries, with the gender gap standing at 15.6 per cent, the lowest recorded since 1990, and projected to narrow further by 2021. Much of the progress achieved over the past decades in developed countries is due to the narrowing of the gender gap in educational achievements and the dismantling of restrictive gender-based social norms regarding paid work.<sup>22</sup>

80. Public policies are also important in this area. For example, work-life balance policies and the right to paid leave and to return to equivalent work after maternity leave, as well as affordable childcare services for working parents, have all contributed to increasing the labour participation rates of women, in particular mothers.

81. Meanwhile, most developing countries show a smaller gender gap in participation rates (11.8 per cent in 2018), which is expected to remain stable during the period 2018–2021. Women in that group of countries have one of the highest rates of participation (69.3 per cent).<sup>23</sup> However, a significant proportion of women are in informal and vulnerable work and experience high levels of working poverty.

82. In the past decade, Governments, together with employers and workers, as well as their representative collective organizations, have implemented some measures to

<sup>21</sup> ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global Snapshot* (Geneva, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

address the challenges that women face in the world of work. Relevant progress includes family support provisions, the formalization of key areas of female-dominated informal work (such as domestic work) and efforts to address vertical sex segregation (where it is difficult for women to obtain employment above a particular rank), in particular in areas where reform has the potential to reduce gender-based discrimination.

83. Bulgaria has taken several actions to ensure the full-fledged participation of women in the labour market and their economic empowerment and non-discrimination. Its National Action Plan for Promotion of Gender Equality 2019–2020 is focused mainly on promoting women’s participation in the labour market and ensuring an equal level of economic independence.

84. In Ecuador, efforts are under way towards the economic empowerment of women in rural areas. The Family and Peasant Agriculture programme (Agricultura Familiar y Campesina), facilitates the certification and direct delivery of agricultural products from small producers, the majority of whom are women, to consumers.

85. In recognition of the need for disaggregated data in order to measure the impact of inclusive policies and programmes effectively, in 2018 Statistics Canada established the Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion statistics.

### **III. United Nations system initiatives**

86. Under the programme Sustainable Development Paths for Middle-Income Countries, ECLAC works with Governments to consider social, gender and labour inclusion as objectives of technological and industrial policies, promote new technologies to reduce inequality and enhance the quality of social, gender and labour policies. ECLAC also collaborates with the Kids Online network to analyse and expand digital citizenship among younger generations, attempting to improve their labour inclusion with skills and employability in accordance with the new challenges of the labour market.

87. Currently ECLAC, in conjunction with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, is implementing a Development Account project entitled “Policies and programmes for young people with disabilities in Latin America”. It involves capacity-building workshops and seminars aimed at enhancing the inclusion of young people with disabilities in national programmes and policies on social integration and inclusive development.

88. In 2018, UNICEF joined ILO and others in issuing a joint statement entitled “Towards inclusive social protection systems supporting full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities”. Building on that statement, UNICEF and ILO are, through the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, working closely to address social protection issues in 10 countries.

89. The cash-transfer programmes of UNICEF increasingly contain windows or considerations for children with disabilities. Consequently, some countries reach significant numbers of children with disabilities through social protection programmes. In 2018, more than 400,000 children with disabilities globally benefited from UNICEF-supported cash-transfer programmes.

90. Adults and children with disabilities have the right to good-quality, inclusive education. In 2018, 93 countries reported having made progress in supporting the access to education of children with disabilities. According to information provided by UNICEF, in 2018, 61 countries reported having made significant progress towards

making schools more accessible, often through the installation of ramps at entrances and sanitation facilities.

91. At the regional level, in Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF has developed training modules for teachers on interpersonal communication and community engagement to address teachers' biases, negative attitudes and beliefs with regard to disability, strengthen their interpersonal communication skills and reach out to community stakeholders in order to promote inclusion.

### **Financial and digital inclusion**

92. In terms of financial inclusion, young people's level of access to and use of adapted and responsibly provided financial services and products is much lower than those of adults. The provision of youth-friendly financial products and services increases the capacity of young people to leverage various types of opportunities, such as becoming an entrepreneur.

93. Digital inclusion is essential for all, in particular young people, to gain access to new jobs requiring relevant digital skills. Young people's access to opportunities to build an inclusive digital economy and society is a challenge, as there are tremendous inequalities in access to information and communications technology (ICT) education and infrastructure.

94. ITU and ILO are leading the Digital Skills for Jobs Campaign to increase young people's employability and address skills shortages in the digital economy through digital skills training, including through programmes designed specifically for girls and young women. Launched in 2017 as part of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, and endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the goal of the campaign is to equip 5 million young people with job-ready transferable digital skills by 2030.

95. The Digital Inclusion Programme of ITU, in addition to awareness-raising, is developing capacity and key resources to support Member States in accelerating the process of implementing digital inclusion and to support reducing inequalities through the empowerment of all citizens, regardless of age, gender, ability, location or financial means. Its ModelICT Accessibility Policy report includes guidelines on ICT accessibility and how to include persons with disabilities in public spaces.

96. Because the provision of accessible public websites is a global priority for many countries, ITU also has available an in-country national programme on web accessibility, which provides the know-how necessary to help countries to ensure that all citizens, including persons with disabilities and older users, can access online information and communication. In 2018, ITU published the Digital Skills Toolkit, a resource to help countries to design national digital skills-development strategies that are inclusive and gender-responsive.

97. The Universal Postal Union collaborates with the UNI Global Union, an organization representing trade unions throughout the world, to explore the strategic role of the postal system in delivering social services. Strategically, postal systems are often in a strong position to provide such services, in particular where individual household delivery is coupled with a commitment to universal service coverage. However, a range of challenges exists relating to workers' rights, training and sustainable funding models. If such challenges could be overcome on a large scale, the delivery of social services through the postal system could have a significant impact on promoting mental health and well-being (Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4), providing access to essential health care services and medicines for all (target 3.8) and promoting broad social inclusion (target 10.2).

## IV. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Conclusions

98. The advancement of social integration can be seen as an outcome of systematic social, economic and political inclusion policies. Such policies focus for the most part on the empowerment of groups in vulnerable situations through the promotion of their economic, social and political participation and inclusion. They tend to bring many benefits that make societies more inclusive, equal, just, prosperous and resilient.

99. As illustrated in the present report, Member States have adopted various measures and activities to foster inclusive societies, many of which have been implemented under specific frameworks or action plans. In some countries, national institutions for social inclusion have been created or strengthened. For the most part, they promote, implement and evaluate social inclusion programmes and mechanisms at the national and local levels to ensure that no one is left behind.

100. In particular, Member States have continued to enact policies and programmes focusing on empowering groups in vulnerable situations, including young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants. Some Governments introduced national plans for social inclusion and poverty reduction. Here, expansion of social protection is regarded as key.

101. The provision, availability, accessibility and adequacy of social protection are seen as prerequisites to leaving no one behind. The availability and sustainability of social protection programmes require coverage for all, including all social groups throughout the life cycle. Strong legal and institutional frameworks are essential in this regard.

102. Research indicates that social protection is most crucial in childhood. Beyond the strengthening of individual policies, it is imperative that complementarity and coordination among them be enhanced. Guaranteeing social protection coverage for children in legal systems helps to improve coordination and coverage.<sup>24</sup>

103. Moreover, universal access without discrimination is ideal, but it should be acknowledged that special measures for disadvantaged groups, such as persons with disabilities, are necessary to level the playing field. In this area, the participation and consultation of potential beneficiaries is especially important. As for adequacy, in order to promote inclusion, social protection systems need steady investment and the enlargement of fiscal space for social spending. More needs to be done to mobilize domestic resources and optimize public spending.<sup>25</sup>

104. Many Governments focus their efforts on inclusive and lifelong learning, in particular for children with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants. Policies and programmes put in place by Governments to guarantee the access of groups in vulnerable situations to education are aimed at providing adult literacy initiatives, increasing participation in continuous education, ensuring the high quality and availability of education and providing guidance and information on appropriate educational and training opportunities.

105. United Nations entities continue their efforts regarding social and economic inclusion, placing special emphasis on persons with disabilities. Inclusive

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<sup>24</sup> *Report on the World Social Situation, 2018.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, executive summary.



education is a priority for relevant United Nations actors, such as UNICEF. Digital inclusion and the harnessing of new technologies that facilitate financial inclusion are also a priority for some United Nations agencies, as the development of digital skills for jobs can be seen as conducive to better economic inclusion.

106. The adoption of inclusive policies can be challenging because they require deliberate policy choices, at times against a backdrop of public debate and controversy. Moreover, a variety of forms of governance, in decentralized systems in particular, may pose challenges to the implementation of social inclusion policies. A human rights-based approach to inclusion is also vital, as it requires respect for diversity regardless of personal attributes.

107. A gender perspective in social inclusion policies requires the active promotion of gender-sensitive policy environments in the workplace, as well as the monitoring of gender-responsive progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level.

108. Notwithstanding some notable progress in the economic empowerment of women, more efforts are needed to ensure equal access to employment for women, equal pay for equal work and better work-family balance policies, including adequate paid parental leave, affordable childcare services and the right to return to work after maternity leave.

## **B. Recommendations**

109. Governments are encouraged to:

(a) Reduce inequalities through the empowerment of all and the promotion of social, economic and political participation and the inclusion of all, with special attention to groups in vulnerable situations;

(b) Improve access and coverage of social protection as a tool for effective social inclusion;

(c) Promote inclusive and lifelong learning opportunities for all, with special attention to young people, older persons, women and girls, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants;

(d) Promote financial and digital inclusion, in particular for young people and persons with disabilities;

(e) Further mainstream a gender and disability perspective into all social inclusion strategies, in particular in the areas of the economic empowerment and gender-sensitive and accessibility arrangements in the workplace;

(f) Continue to share good practices in socioeconomic policymaking, aiming at achieving greater social integration through social inclusion to ensure that no one is left behind;

(g) Improve the collection and use of data disaggregated by age, sex and other relevant criteria for the formulation of policies and the achievement of progress aimed at achieving social inclusion.