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**Human Rights Council****Fifty-fourth session**

Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General****Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development****Rights of the child and inclusive social protection****Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights\****Summary*

The present report was prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 49/20, requesting the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: to prepare a report on the rights of the child and inclusive social protection, in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including children; make the report available in an accessible and child-friendly format; and present it at its fifty-fourth session.

The report highlights systemic and structural barriers to States for meeting their human rights obligations and providing universal social protection for children, particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination and in vulnerable situations. It details the core components of child rights-compliant inclusive social protection to ensure universal and sustainable social protection systems and contains recommendations for States on designing and implementing such an approach, including through international cooperation.

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\* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 49/20, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders and including through consultations with children, to prepare a report on the rights of the child and inclusive social protection. The Council requested that the report be made available in an accessible and child-friendly format and presented at its fifty-fourth session.

2. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) solicited contributions and received 66 responses from States, national human rights institutions and regulatory bodies, United Nations entities and civil society.<sup>1</sup> There were also contributions from approximately 600 children. The present report builds on the work on social protection and the rights of the child undertaken by OHCHR.<sup>2</sup>

3. Social protection is critical to preventing and alleviating poverty and inequalities by supporting households in accessing health care and income security when confronted with contingencies that should be addressed collectively by society, such as sickness, maternity, disability, unemployment, employment injury, old age and family bereavement. Social protection can be provided in cash benefits and in-kind benefits, including goods and services. It is central to realizing children's rights and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Well-designed and well-functioning social protection systems mitigate the detrimental effects of socioeconomic situations on children's physical and mental health, development and well-being.

4. Even though social protection is essential for realizing certain human rights and carries significant benefits for children, families and society, more than 1.77 billion of the 2.4 billion children worldwide have no access to social protection, with significant regional disparities.<sup>3</sup> This affects the realization of their human rights, including to life, education, health, an adequate standard of living, including food, housing, clothing, water and sanitation, and rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities.

5. In the decades prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, significant progress in extending social protection to children had occurred. Some positive models of child rights-compliant social protection had emerged, particularly regarding the extension of national child benefit systems to protect migrant and forcibly displaced children. Well-developed social protection systems in countries such as Germany and Latvia have provided support to Ukrainian families, demonstrating how systems can scale up rapidly and effectively in crises.<sup>4</sup>

6. The COVID-19 pandemic, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, conflicts, economic downturns and cost-of-living concerns have underlined the need for resilient, inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems anchored in children's rights. The pandemic revealed the devastating impact of inadequate social protection, but also demonstrated that States can take decisive and essential action to alleviate poverty and mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of crises through social protection. Some countries, including Bangladesh, scaled up social protection, particularly cash transfers, to alleviate the immediate impacts on households.<sup>5</sup> By 2022, 3,856 social protection and labour measures had been planned or implemented by 223 economies.<sup>6</sup> Measures included social protection for informal workers, migrants and vulnerable populations; increased gender-responsive measures; increasing digital means; and legislative reform to support employees and the self-employed. Social protection can have both direct and indirect benefits

<sup>1</sup> All submissions from these entities are available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-rights-child-and-inclusive-social-protection>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/social-security/about-right-social-security-and-human-rights> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/children>.

<sup>3</sup> See International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *More than a Billion Reasons: the Urgent Need to Build Universal Social Protection for Children* (2023).

<sup>4</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/fa7a2f3c-efbd-5950-bfac-4b2b4bfc8cad>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

for children and their rights. For example, gaps in social health protection directly affect children's access to health care and gaps in unemployment protection for parents/caregivers indirectly affect children's well-being.<sup>7</sup>

7. Upscaling and improving social protection to ensure it becomes truly inclusive and upholds fundamental rights is essential to building resilient, sustainable child rights-compliant societies. The benefits for children's rights should also include preventing violence, child labour, early, forced and child marriage, family separation and trafficking.<sup>8</sup> Inclusive social protection is a critical tool for all children, including those facing multiple forms of discrimination or in vulnerable situations, to enjoy the ensemble of their rights.

8. Child rights-compliant inclusive social protection systems specifically focus on ensuring equal access, coverage and benefits for all children through addressing inequalities, discrimination and barriers to access. They are based on universality, non-discrimination and equality, and reaching those furthest behind, guaranteeing comprehensive coverage and ensuring children's participation and empowerment.

## II. Legal and institutional framework concerning the rights of the child and inclusive social protection

9. International human rights law provides a comprehensive and robust normative framework with legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights, including to social security.

10. The human right to social security is enshrined in numerous human rights instruments.<sup>9</sup> Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States parties shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of children's right to benefit from social security, including social insurance. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes everyone's right to social security, including social insurance. It further requires States to ensure the widest possible protection and assistance for families. Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children.<sup>10</sup> Social protection measures should be available, adequate and accessible.<sup>11</sup>

11. In line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, it is critical that States take steps to the maximum of their available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights in the Covenant by all appropriate means, both individually and through international assistance and cooperation (art. 2). Furthermore, States have a minimum core obligation to ensure, at the very least, the minimum essential levels of each of the rights in the Covenant.<sup>12</sup> The Covenant further imposes various obligations which require immediate effect.<sup>13</sup>

12. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has provided detailed guidance on social protection, emphasizing its importance in guaranteeing a life of dignity for all.<sup>14</sup> It must be directed towards ensuring protection from a lack of work-related income caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age or family bereavement, unaffordable health care and insufficient family support, particularly for children.<sup>15</sup> In its statement on social protection floors the Committee on Economic, Social

<sup>7</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, arts. 9 and 10; Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 26; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 28; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 11; International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, art. 27; and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Articles 9 and 10 (1) and (3).

<sup>11</sup> [A/HRC/49/28](#), para. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 3 (1990), para. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 19 (2008).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 2.

and Cultural Rights notes that social protection floors form a set of essential social guarantees and constitute a core obligation of States. They ensure universal access to basic income security and essential health services, comprise both cash and in-kind benefits, such as child benefits, and are essential to the enjoyment of several economic and social rights.<sup>16</sup>

13. International social security standards are integral to the international social protection framework. International Labour Organization (ILO) Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) establishes minimum standards for child/family benefits through periodic cash benefits, in-kind benefits (including food, clothing or housing) or a combination of the two. ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) envisages universal social protection through national social protection floors and other measures to ensure higher levels of protection for all as soon as possible.

14. In all actions concerning children, their best interests must be a primary consideration. The guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are based on this premise, along with the rights to equality and non-discrimination, life, survival and development, and to be heard and participate in relevant decision-making processes.<sup>17</sup> These principles must form the foundation of a child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection.

15. The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains provisions for children requiring more care, support or assistance due to their status or situation, including children with disabilities, asylum-seeking and refugee children, children engaged in child labour, children in alternative care and children in armed conflict.<sup>18</sup> Migrant children are entitled to social security on an equal basis with nationals, under domestic and international legislation, and to emergency social assistance regardless of migration status.<sup>19</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that all children are equally entitled to special assistance (art. 25 (1)).

16. The rights to the highest attainable standard of health care, education and an adequate standard of living,<sup>20</sup> including food and nutrition, housing, clothing and water and sanitation, are closely linked to children's social protection, as are other rights. While parents/caregivers hold the primary responsibility for children's upbringing, States must provide them with the appropriate support, institutions, facilities and services to care for children.<sup>21</sup>

17. OHCHR, the special procedure mandate holders and human rights treaty bodies have all highlighted concerns regarding the limited realization by States of social protection and issued guidance and recommendations on a human rights-based approach to social protection. For instance, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights established the case for a global fund for social protection.<sup>22</sup>

18. Social protection is instrumental to Sustainable Development Goal 1, especially target 1.3 to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and universal measures, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable. Social protection is equally central to Goal 10, particularly target 10.4, which urges States to adopt social protection policies. It is integral to other Goals, including ending hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and decent and economic work.<sup>23</sup>

19. Growing momentum towards and an institutional prioritization of universal social protection has led to initiatives, frameworks and policy guidance. These include the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights and Our Common Agenda, which call for

<sup>16</sup> E/C.12/2015/1, paras. 1 and 7.

<sup>17</sup> See articles 2, 3, 6 and 12.

<sup>18</sup> See articles 22, 23, 25, 32 and 38.

<sup>19</sup> Joint general comment No. 4 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, para. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 24, 27, 28 and 29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 18.

<sup>22</sup> See A/HRC/47/36 and <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Poverty/covid19.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8.

a new social contract founded on inclusion, participation and protection for all. Achieving universal social protection, including universal health care and basic income security, adequate housing, lifelong learning and decent work, are central to this social contract, grounded in human rights at the national level and supported through international cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

20. Multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at universal social protection include the ILO Global Flagship Programme on building social protection floors for all (2016–2030),<sup>25</sup> the 2016 Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>26</sup> and the 2021 Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.<sup>27</sup>

21. In line with international human rights law, all children should have access to, at least, basic social protection, including health care, income security, nutrition, education, care and other necessary services.

### III. Children's views

22. Approximately 600 children aged 5 to 17 from 24 countries across five regions contributed to the present report through written submissions, focus group discussions and online consultations implemented in partnership with Child Rights Connect, a non-governmental organization. While these contributions do not represent all children worldwide, they provide an insight into children's barriers to social protection, examples of support for children and solutions they propose to achieve inclusive social protection for them. This process gives children without social protection a voice and engages them in processes that concern them.

23. Children identified several barriers to social protection, primarily insufficient government financial support, particularly when parents/caregivers could not work due to ill health, disability, unemployment or care responsibilities, including childcare. The children consulted felt that they were not always prioritized in social protection laws, policies and programmes. Children and parents/caregivers were not always aware of the social protection support available and information was not always accessible or child-friendly.

24. Children highlighted the consequences of inadequate social protection for their rights, such as an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, housing, safe drinking water and sanitation. A 14-year-old girl in France stated that: "There is a big problem with malnutrition. Food is becoming too expensive because of inflation." Children identified a lack of or limited access to affordable, quality health care and free, quality education, safety and rest and leisure, or the possibility of engaging in play and recreational activities. They expressed concern that these impacts detrimentally affected their physical and mental health and school attendance and performance. A 12-year-old boy from Mozambique stated: "In my community there are children who can't afford to enrol in school or buy school supplies, giving priority to other rights such as food and delaying their school year."

25. Children in both developed and developing countries emphasized that poverty and increased inequalities were crucial challenges. These inequalities, heightened by the rising cost of living, were evidence of inadequate social protection. Children said that not having enough money affected their development, rights and social opportunities, and limited their access to decent work later in life. A 16-year-old girl in Turkey stated: "There are economic problems. This affects the parents, which then passes on to the children. Most troubles are financial troubles."

26. Further consequences of inadequate social protection included pressures on parents/caregivers, sometimes leading to family problems and violence, which made children

<sup>24</sup> See [A/75/982](#) and [A/HRC/47/36](#).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/technical-cooperation-projects/building-social-protection-floors-for-all/lang--en/index.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> See <https://usp2030.org/>.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://unglobalaccelerator.org/>.

feel stressed and unsafe. Children also noted that, when there was insufficient income, they could be forced into child labour, early, forced or child marriage or prostitution, into committing crimes or being trafficked.

27. Children from all contexts stated that, even where social protection existed, it was often insufficient and not always inclusive. Some children faced multiple forms of discrimination or were in situations that rendered it harder to access social protection equally. Those included children with disabilities, children in rural areas, Indigenous children, asylum-seeking, migrant and refugee children, children in alternative care, those without legal documentation, those whose parents were unemployed or lacking decent work and children in street situations. Children noted that these vulnerabilities were often compounded in emergencies, such as conflicts and humanitarian disasters.

28. Some children were aware of social protection measures, such as financial assistance for households needing extra support or for housing and health care, or additional support for children with disabilities and refugees, and reducing or removing students' public transport costs. They also identified as social protection measures free school meals, health care, vaccinations and menstrual hygiene products, early childhood support and municipal children's activities to strengthen access to rest and leisure and provide the opportunity to engage in play and recreational activities.

29. Children asked that Governments aim to ensure that all children grow up happy, healthy and well-supported, financially and through other means. Children from all regions said that every child should benefit from social protection without conditions. A 12-year-old girl from Ecuador recommended that Governments "increase budgets to expand the coverage of social protection programmes and guarantee access to education, health and food for vulnerable families".

30. Children emphasized that additional support should be available and accessible for children facing multiple barriers. A 17-year-old girl from the United States of America stated that: "Governments must accurately fund programmes for children by assessing their exact needs, ... listen to the asks of the people and prioritize the well-being of all children." Other solutions proposed by children focused on addressing poverty and removing barriers, ensuring that all children had adequate, nutritious food, housing, free quality education and health care, and sufficient money allocated to children and children's services in budgets. A 10-year-old boy in South Africa recommended "lower[ing] ... housing, food items, school fees, public transport, and uniforms and provid[ing] free education to all children".

31. Children further advocated for Governments to provide other essential services, including financial, educational and material support for parents/caregivers, affordable and accessible childcare, training on positive parenting, parental leave and decent work. Children in all regions requested that Governments strengthen both children's and adults' knowledge of children's rights and involve children in relevant decisions. "Parliament and all other decision-making platforms should include children's representatives so that children can actively participate in budgeting and resource planning" recommended a 15-year-old girl from India.

#### IV. Challenges for children to access social protection

32. Social protection remains beyond the reach of many children globally.<sup>28</sup> Analysis of the age-related social protection expenditure by States demonstrates that children receive disproportionately less than other groups.<sup>29</sup> Current public expenditure for children's social protection ranges from 0.1 per cent of gross domestic product in low-income countries, to 0.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries to 1.2 per cent in high-income countries. That also reflects significant variations in coverage between regions. The global average of government spending on essential services is approximately 53 per cent, ranging from 62 per cent for advanced economies to 44 per cent for emerging and developing economies.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Reference is to all social protection measures of relevance to children.

<sup>29</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*.

<sup>30</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 29.



Even though investment in early childhood provides strong foundations and can end intergenerational poverty transmission,<sup>31</sup> States allocate significantly less expenditure to social protection in early childhood.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, households too often face limited or no access to support for young children, including early childhood education.

33. Seemingly high, immediate costs influence decision-making about financing children's social protection. Such investment is key to fulfilling State obligations regarding the realization of economic, social and cultural rights and has long-term economic, political and social benefits, especially for children.<sup>33</sup> Economic downturns, austerity, inflation, high levels of debt service, corruption and illicit financial flows all affect the capacity of States to allocate the necessary funding for adequate and sustainable universal social protection. The increasing debt burden on developing countries, delays in debt restructuring and limited access to affordable debt refinancing restrict their ability to create the necessary fiscal space.<sup>34</sup> Limited transparency in donor support<sup>35</sup> and donor fatigue are also of concern.

34. Where social protection measures are available, children may face systemic barriers in claiming their rights, owing to an absence of effective social protection laws, policies and systems designed on reliable data and evidence, and due to inadequate implementation. That leads to inadequate coverage, protection and safety nets, restricted access, lack of accountability for violations and systemic discrimination, and results in increased poverty, malnutrition and inequalities, including between children. This negatively affects children's enjoyment of their rights and their long-term physical and mental health and cognitive and emotional development.<sup>36</sup>

35. Intersecting forms of discrimination disproportionately impact some children's access to social protection, including children with disabilities; internally-displaced, refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children; Indigenous children; child labourers; girls and children in street situations; children in alternative care and care-leavers; children deprived of their liberty; children in rural areas; children affected by conflict and natural disasters; and children whose parents/caregivers cannot work.

36. An absence of comprehensive, disability-inclusive, child rights-based social protection systems in many countries means the additional needs and support requirements of children with disabilities are frequently not met. For example, in the Philippines, children with disabilities require 40–80 per cent higher expenditure than children without disabilities while poverty rates are 50 per cent higher in households with children with disabilities.<sup>37</sup> Traditional care and social protection systems often do not consider the additional costs related to disability, which increase care and support needs and expose children with disabilities and their families to higher risks of poverty and exclusion.<sup>38</sup>

37. Significant gender gaps continue to exist in social protection coverage, adequacy and comprehensiveness, particularly in lower-income countries, despite increasing awareness of the need for gender-responsive measures. Worldwide, girls and women disproportionately undertake care responsibilities, mostly unpaid or underpaid. That perpetuates long-term

<sup>31</sup> See joint submission by Child Rights Connect, Hope and Homes for Children, Save the Children International, Make Mothers Matter and Terre des hommes fédération internationale.

<sup>32</sup> See submission by UNICEF.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, [A/HRC/50/38](#) and [A/HRC/52/52](#). See also ILO working paper No. 43, "Investing better in universal social protection. Applying international social security standards in social protection policy and financing", (January 2022).

<sup>34</sup> See [A/75/281](#) and <https://unctad.org/news/blog-world-lacks-effective-global-system-deal-debt>.

<sup>35</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 57.

<sup>36</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, p. xi.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, *Social Protection in East Asia and Pacific: from Evidence to Action for Children*, p. 209.

<sup>38</sup> See [A/HRC/52/52](#).

gender inequalities.<sup>39</sup> Crises disproportionately affect girls' social protection, yet only 12 per cent of pandemic-related measures were fully gender-responsive.<sup>40</sup>

38. Social protection is integral to eliminating child labour. Inadequate social protection can force children into work to support themselves and their families. Globally, almost one in 10 children is engaged in child labour, 79 million of whom conduct hazardous work.<sup>41</sup> In such instances, social protection is often not provided through employment. Furthermore, the number of children engaged in child labour increased by 8.9 million between 2020 and the end of 2022 due to increasing poverty.<sup>42</sup>

39. Eradicating poverty is central to child rights-compliant inclusive social protection. Children remain twice as likely as adults to live in poverty. Of the 2.4 billion children globally, over 800 million live on less than \$3.20 a day and more than 1 billion live in multidimensional poverty.<sup>43</sup>

40. With 24 per cent of the world living in fragile places<sup>44</sup> and increasing global challenges, integrating child protection and emergency response into social protection systems is essential to protect children's rights. Social protection can provide an immediate financial lifeline and economic and social stability, can mitigate negative impacts and uphold human rights. More than 200 countries or territories adapted existing or introduced new social protection measures at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>45</sup> Child rights-compliant inclusive social protection systems must be able to respond quickly and scale up their operations in emergencies, including through cash transfers, and ensure that health-care and educational facilities remain accessible and available to provide vital and immediate relief for children. Existing high social protection coverage and universal coverage are crucial as they remove administrative load, increase the resilience of countries to emergencies and empower them to respond effectively. If universal child benefits had existed widely before the pandemic, it would have been possible to rapidly reach two thirds of households globally with critical financial support and links to services.<sup>46</sup>

41. A lack of legal identity, nationality and identity documentation can bar children from social protection. Identification documents are typically required for individuals applying for social protection, yet approximately 1.1 billion people globally lack legal identity documents.<sup>47</sup> An estimated 166 million children aged under five have never had their births registered and 237 million children aged under five lack a birth certificate.<sup>48</sup> Stateless, refugee and migrant children are likely to experience legal exclusion due to lack of required documentation.<sup>49</sup>

## A. Access to benefits

42. The benefits, including universal child benefits, that children and their parents/caregivers receive are often inadequate to meet children's individual needs, especially those furthest behind. Universal child benefits are programmes that are anchored in national legislation and provide for regular cash payments to support children and/or

<sup>39</sup> Lifelong barriers to women's inclusive social protection, caused by the disproportionate care burden, lack of decent work and the gender pay gap, also affect children and their rights. See ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–2022. Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future*, pp. 88 and 101–107.

<sup>40</sup> See submission by UNICEF.

<sup>41</sup> See [https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS\\_797515/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS_797515/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>42</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>43</sup> Poverty based on income and lack of access to essential services, including health, education and nutrition. See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, p. iii.

<sup>44</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *States of Fragility 2022*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, p. iii.

<sup>46</sup> See submission by Save the Children International.

<sup>47</sup> A/HRC/50/38, para. 32.

<sup>48</sup> UNICEF, "Birth registration for every child by 2030: are we on track?", pp. 16–18.

<sup>49</sup> A/HRC/50/38, para. 36.



families. These should be non-contributory.<sup>50</sup> Universal child benefits could be an effective means to reduce child poverty and support children's development. Of 183 countries or territories, 66 do not have statutory child or family benefits that are established in and regulated by law and administered by the government. Of 117 countries that have statutory periodic child/family benefits, 31 have contributory child/family benefits and 45 have means-tested non-contributory benefits, which reach only limited numbers of children. Twenty-six countries provide full universal child benefits anchored in national legislation, including Belgium and Montenegro.<sup>51</sup>

43. While cash benefits are effective and contribute to reducing poverty and financial barriers and removing some discriminatory barriers,<sup>52</sup> complementary interventions, access to essential services and in-kind benefits, such as free school meals, vital community and youth support, and independent living services, also improve children's social protection, but are often absent.

44. Implementing universal child benefits is the fairest and most inclusive approach and avoids the challenges associated with targeting benefits. Accurate, comprehensive means-testing and targeting is difficult.<sup>53</sup> Targeting is less efficient at reaching those furthest behind and requires more complex systems, which are costly to administer and can generate errors. Consequently, certain children, especially those furthest behind, are often excluded from targeted benefits, causing considerable human rights protection gaps.<sup>54</sup> For example, targeting methods in Nepal excluded more than two thirds of eligible children in poverty from social protection; universality would have more effectively reached them and reduced poverty.<sup>55</sup>

45. Other benefits received by the household are equally important to consider in the context of the social protection and household income security of children and their parents/caregivers. For example, 1.7 billion persons globally in the workforce are not legally entitled to sickness cash benefits and 179 million unemployed cannot access unemployment cash benefits.<sup>56</sup>

46. While social protection benefits for children are limited, including inclusive social protection schemes, those available are often not taken up by children or their parents/caregivers. Parents/caregivers hold the primary responsibility for raising children and where barriers to take-up exist, which also affect children's rights, States have an obligation to remove those barriers. As widely documented, several factors impede the take-up of children's social protection.<sup>57</sup> They include conditionalities, including around children's behaviour and school attendance; administrative inefficiencies and barriers, including complex eligibility criteria, procedures and documentation requirements; physical accessibility, specifically geographical disparities and office locations; digital concerns, including digital illiteracy, connectivity and the accessibility of digital services for persons with disabilities; financial barriers, especially administrative costs and travel to centres; staff shortages and delays; fear of sanctions for migrants; and social isolation.<sup>58</sup>

47. On the one hand, a lack of integrated systems and poor coordination in design, implementation and monitoring across government departments, public authorities and service providers responsible for social protection affect the effective implementation of social protection obligations. That causes unclear or duplicated responsibilities, incoherent

<sup>50</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *Towards Universal Social Protection for Children: Achieving SDG 1.3* (2019) and *More than a Billion Reasons*.

<sup>51</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> See <https://odi.org/en/publications/cash-transfers-what-does-the-evidence-say-a-rigorous-review-of-impacts-and-the-role-of-design-and-implementation-features/>.

<sup>53</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org/media/72916/file/UCB-ODI-UNICEF-Report-2020.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> A/HRC/51/9, para. 23.

<sup>55</sup> See UNICEF policy brief, "Why a universal child grant makes sense for Nepal" (November 2016); and A/HRC/50/38/Add.2, para. 77.

<sup>56</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>57</sup> See A/HRC/50/38 and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/social-security>.

<sup>58</sup> See A/HRC/50/38 and ILO and UN-Women *Fiscal Space for Social Protection. A Handbook for Assessing Financing Options* (2019).

policies and messaging and confusion for beneficiaries, and weakens implementation. On the other hand, rigid and unfragmented systems negatively affect intergenerational equity, children's development and health, educational and employment outcomes. Additionally, stigma and discrimination may contribute to distrust, fear and non-take-up. Stigma is linked to marginalization; lack of privacy, particularly the public allocation of cash and in-kind benefits, such as free school meals; humiliating interactions with institutions; and conditionalities.<sup>59</sup>

48. Many States lack high-quality, disaggregated data about children's inclusive social protection and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. That hinders identification of gaps in coverage, efficiency and effectiveness, and makes social protection systems less dynamic or able to respond quickly to evolving needs and to adapt based on evidence. When monitoring and evaluation systems are not comprehensive, the most marginalized children are often invisible.

49. A lack of clear, accessible, child-friendly information about social protection systems, the entitlements available, eligibility criteria and the ways to apply affects social protection take-up, reach and effectiveness. Closely related is a failure to engage children concerning social protection laws, policies and programmes, in line with obligations. Globally, much progress remains to be achieved to ensure children's experiences and views are considered in decisions concerning them. Children and parents/caregivers often cannot access accountability mechanisms in cases of unfair denial of benefits. Unclear or lengthy appeals or complaints processes have very real impacts on beneficiaries' lives and rights, especially when they result in a lack of social protection in the interim.

## **B. Lack of broader social protection measures for children**

50. It is critical that States deliver accessible and quality public health care, inclusive education, care and support systems, protection and social services for children, but that is not always the case. The absence of such broader essential services central to inclusive social protection impacts directly or indirectly on children's rights. The pandemic pointed up the limited investment in public services and significant coverage and adequacy gaps. While many countries strengthened health and social protection systems, such short-term emergency measures failed to address the inherent fragilities of those systems.

51. Inadequate social protection undermines children's effective access to health care in many contexts. They face unequal access to essential, preventative, rehabilitative and sexual and reproductive health care. Maternal health care, including pre- and post-natal care and breastfeeding support, is not universally available. Income level, disability, employment or migration status, nationality, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic factors affect children's equal access. For example, 2.7 billion people are not covered by health insurance.<sup>60</sup>

52. Millions of children worldwide lack access to quality, inclusive, free education, with an estimated 244 million children out of school.<sup>61</sup> Economic and social barriers include no money for school fees, uniforms, supplies, digital technology and transport to education; pressures on children to work; care responsibilities; distance from schools; and documentation requirements. Children with disabilities additionally lack individualized support, assistive technology, trained personnel to support learning and accessible school transportation and infrastructure.

53. Social protection is integral to an adequate standard of living for children, yet worldwide they continue to lack adequate, nutritious food; adequate housing; clothing; and clean water and sanitation.<sup>62</sup> This is due to limited or no complementary State interventions and fragmented and underresourced services in terms of funding, personnel and technology.

<sup>59</sup> See [A/HRC/50/38](#).

<sup>60</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>61</sup> See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382577>.

<sup>62</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), paras. 30, 34 and 39.

In many contexts, the nexus of food, energy, water, sanitation and environmental crises have increased household costs.<sup>63</sup>

54. Food insecurity and hunger statistics increased by 179 million, to an estimated 768 million people between 2015 and 2021. Children continue to experience malnutrition and stunting.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, limited social protection hinders household capacity to cover rent, mortgage payments and other housing-related expenditure, leading to inadequate housing.<sup>65</sup>

### C. Lack of support for parents/caregivers

55. Children's social protection is intrinsically linked to parents/caregivers' social protection. Where parents/caregivers lack sufficient income, decent work, job security or the knowledge, skills and resources to raise their children, children cannot fully enjoy their rights. Non-existent or inadequate maternity and parental leave provisions significantly limit the ability of parents/caregivers to spend time with and support their children without experiencing income loss. In 2022, of 119 countries more than one third did not provide maternity leave meeting ILO standards.<sup>66</sup> An estimated seventy-one-million mothers with newborns do not receive maternity cash benefits.<sup>67</sup>

56. Children and parents/caregivers often cannot access the resources, knowledge and skills accorded under the right to care. Parental care is affected by a dearth of parental education and support to equip parents/caregivers with positive parenting approaches, skills and resources regarding children's development, health, nutrition and well-being. This failure of broader social protection and lack of inclusive care and support systems negatively affects children's development and rights, especially those with disabilities.<sup>68</sup>

57. A shortage of accessible, including affordable, and quality childcare significantly impedes children's rights, although investment in such services benefits both children and carers. Barriers include socioeconomic status, limited services and geographical location, and vary between and within countries. Childcare was largely absent in pandemic responses, despite periodic closures of early childhood centres and schools. Only 12, mainly high-income, countries provided additional childcare allowances.<sup>69</sup>

## V. Child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection

58. Inclusive social protection for children places their rights and State obligations at the centre of legislative and policy frameworks concerning social protection. Anchored in human rights, it recognizes children's specific vulnerabilities and needs according to their different levels of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. While social protection systems are tailored to the specific social, economic, cultural and political contexts of the country concerned, the core elements of a child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection apply to all States.

### A. Ensuring inclusivity

59. Universal and comprehensive benefits are fundamental and consistent with child rights obligations and provide children with full social protection for the enjoyment of their rights. They ensure that all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, have

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., para. 77.

<sup>64</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 30.

<sup>65</sup> See <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/key-issues/relationship-with-other-human-rights/housing/> and <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/08/children-cities-and-housing-rights-and-priorities.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 33.

<sup>67</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>68</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 63.

<sup>69</sup> See submission by ILO.

the necessary support for a fair and equal start in life. Given multiple global crises and increasing inflation, universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory social protection systems are the fairest and most inclusive approach.<sup>70</sup> Providing base income security directly to all families from birth through social protection reduces inequalities, vulnerabilities, poverty and direct and indirect barriers affecting children's rights.

60. Ideally, universal child benefits should not be subject to conditions or unemployment requirements and, where possible, no means- or income-testing is preferable. They should be comprehensive; fixed at an adequate amount that should be regularly monitored for adequacy and adjustable to increase in line with inflation, as necessary; and paid in a timely manner to ensure stability. To achieve universal protection, non-contributory schemes are essential, especially concerning children, because of their limited ability to contribute to social security.<sup>71</sup>

61. Non-discrimination should guide the formulation and implementation of inclusive social protection systems: all children should have equal access to social protection.<sup>72</sup> Services and benefits that are inclusive, adaptable and tailored to children's specific needs increase access for those furthest behind. When designed appropriately in an inclusive, equitable manner, social protection reduces gender inequalities and gendered policy; limits discrimination against the most marginalized; removes barriers to social protection and other rights for multiple groups; and contributes to their fuller participation in society.<sup>73</sup> Implementing gender-responsiveness as a cross-cutting element in social protection, such as social transfer, maternity benefits, care policies, parental leave and newborn care is essential.

62. Special attention is critical for those furthest behind, requiring interventions beyond universal benefits to reach them. These can include additional benefits, expanding systems to include legally excluded populations and birth registration. For example, in 2019 Guyana extended its social protection system to make migrant children and their families from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela eligible for family cash benefits.<sup>74</sup>

63. Inclusive social protection for children with disabilities means equal access to all eligible, mainstream social protection schemes, including child grants, social assistance and disability-specific schemes, such as flexible leave and working. That also includes universal child and disability benefits for the additional costs related to disability, such as personal assistance services, sign language interpretation, assistive technology, transport subsidies and adequate housing. Some countries have universal disability benefits.<sup>75</sup>

64. Beneficiaries require direct access to social protection services, benefits and information, including child-friendly systems and physical in-person and digital means to access them. Examples of attempts to broaden access during the pandemic include the removal by Austria, Egypt and Guatemala of behavioural conditions on child benefits to remove barriers and benefit take-up.<sup>76</sup>

65. Timely, high-quality, transparent and disaggregated data on children, covering all grounds of discrimination prohibited under human rights law, is integral to inclusive social protection. Establishing comprehensive and transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to analyse social protection systems, identify gaps and inform evidence-based legislative and policymaking can ensure that social protection systems become truly inclusive. That could include child rights impact assessments and evaluations in legislative, policy and programme design.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>70</sup> See UNICEF and ODI, *Universal Child Benefits. Policy Issues and Options* (June 2020).

<sup>71</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 19 (2008), para. 23, and [A/HRC/49/28](#), paras. 16–31.

<sup>72</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 2 and 26.

<sup>73</sup> ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, pp. 73 and 74.

<sup>74</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>75</sup> See ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–2022*.

<sup>76</sup> ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 4. See also <https://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ENOC-2020-Position-Statement-on-CRIA-FV-1.pdf>.

## B. Financing social protection systems

66. Strong, sustainable and equitable financing anchored in human rights is the cornerstone of effective social protection programmes and measurably enhances universal enjoyment of human rights. Consistent with human rights obligations, a sufficient level of budget allocation, ring-fencing of social protection budgets and combating corruption and illicit financial flows are key to effective inclusive social protection for children and the progressive realization of their right to social security and other rights.

67. Conducting child rights-based budget analyses to align budgets with children's rights obligations is key to effective, child rights-compliant inclusive social protection and ensuring no child is left behind. The Committee on the Rights of the Child provides authoritative guidance on how to enhance children's rights by focusing public budgeting through a child rights lens.<sup>78</sup> The UNICEF public finance toolkit and public finance for children framework can assist in child rights-related budgeting. Investing in child rights-compliant inclusive social protection is cost-effective, efficient and attainable for developing and developed States alike. All countries must be able to afford it and can make efforts in this direction, including through mobilizing resources. For example, Mongolia and Zambia use mining and gas taxes to fund child benefits.<sup>79</sup>

68. The use of austerity adjustment measures in previous crises caused economic damage, widened inequalities and exacerbated negative human rights impacts. Children were among those most affected by austerity measures.<sup>80</sup> The ring-fencing of investments in children and their social protection in debt financing is central to implementing a child rights-compliant social protection system grounded in human rights obligations.

69. Ample evidence exists that Governments can increase fiscal space for social protection.<sup>81</sup> In higher-income countries, universal child benefits have been cost-effective long-term in addressing child poverty. A simulation for 14 middle-income countries shows that 1 per cent of gross domestic product expenditure on universal child benefits would reduce overall poverty by 20 per cent and that child poverty reduction would be equal to that or even greater.<sup>82</sup> Guidance on creating fiscal space for social protection is available.<sup>83</sup> Options include reallocating public expenditure, generating new resources and higher social security contributions. States should address tax avoidance, corruption and illicit financial flows. Increasing tax revenues through progressive taxation can be crucial in the short- and long-term as countries look to build forward better and prioritize human rights.

## C. Realizing broader social protection measures for children

70. Child rights-compliant inclusive social protection improves children's long-term development. A broad social protection policy that ensures their effective access to free, quality, inclusive education, high-quality health care and social services on an equal basis, and addresses risks throughout the life-cycle, is critical. It also realizes their right to an adequate standard of living. Examples of child rights-compliant social protection include adequate, nutritious school feeding programmes,<sup>84</sup> affordable housing policies and good planning, ensuring access to water and sanitation, and free school uniforms, materials and after-school care.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 19 (2016).

<sup>79</sup> See <https://phmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GHW6-chapter-C1.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> See [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RightsCrisis/E-2013-82\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RightsCrisis/E-2013-82_en.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> See ILO and UN-Women, *Fiscal Space for Social Protection*.

<sup>82</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*, pp. 56 and 57.

<sup>83</sup> See [https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/books-and-reports/WCMS\\_727261/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/books-and-reports/WCMS_727261/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>84</sup> See [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000147507/download/?\\_ga=2.88893403.1582100888.1689280290-1606793045.1689280290](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000147507/download/?_ga=2.88893403.1582100888.1689280290-1606793045.1689280290).

<sup>85</sup> See ILO and UNICEF, *More than a Billion Reasons*.

71. Establishing a strong foundation in early childhood, including early childhood education, regular health checks and vaccine access, is an essential element of child rights-compliant inclusive social protection. For example, the child grant in Mozambique, targeting children aged 0–2, demonstrates that cash transfers, combined with nutrition information and case management services, can reduce poverty and improve children’s well-being.<sup>86</sup> Early investment in children could also include universal, publicly funded child trust accounts.

#### **D. Parental support**

72. Stronger parental support systems and capacity-building are essential for child rights-compliant inclusive social protection. That includes income support, health protection, sickness, disability, employment injury protection and unemployment benefits, as well as pensions for parents/caregivers.<sup>87</sup> Access to decent work and job retention and creation are equally important.

73. Family and maternity benefits, including parental leave, are imperative and avoid new mothers having to restart work before they or the child are ready. Support for pregnant women and new mothers is crucial, including pre- and antenatal care. Further parental support interventions include parenting education and comprehensive childcare policies, establishing accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare, including income support subsidies, where appropriate. That is integral to supporting children’s development and rights, while enabling parents to work or study.

#### **E. Facilitating meaningful participation and accountability**

74. Meaningful consultation with and participation of children is key when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating social protection legislation, policies and programmes. This ensures that their lived experiences, needs and solutions can be reflected accurately and that the design and implementation of social protection systems reaches all children.

75. Awareness-raising and distribution of clear, accessible and targeted information on available social protection support, eligibility criteria and how to apply is key. Various outreach methods should be considered, including radio, television, pamphlets, text messages and the Internet. Communications and information must be age-appropriate, accessible and tailored to all children and their families, especially those furthest behind. In addition, effective, age-appropriate, accessible and available complaints, appeals and redress mechanisms<sup>88</sup> are instrumental for inclusive social protection systems.

#### **F. Whole-of-government approach**

76. A multidisciplinary integrated systems approach to child rights-compliant social protection is essential to make it inclusive, effective and sustainable.<sup>89</sup> Involving actors in diverse sectors, including child protection, education, finance, health care, labour and social welfare, in social protection design and implementation is key. That allows legislative and policy frameworks to be coordinated and messaging and programmes to be aligned, coherent and anchored in human rights obligations. Integrated social protection systems require effective governance, multisectoral collaboration and clear and transparent data- and information-sharing. Such an approach facilitates access for beneficiaries and ensures that human rights obligations are implemented in an integrated manner. For example, in the Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children’s Prosperity and the dashboard on

<sup>86</sup> See submission by UNICEF.

<sup>87</sup> See submission by ILO.

<sup>88</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 8.

<sup>89</sup> [A/HRC/49/28](#), para. 70.



children's well-being, Iceland has adopted an integrated systems approach to children's rights.<sup>90</sup>

### **G. Integrating care reform and social protection**

77. Care reform and social protection are mutually reinforcing, uphold children's rights and require transformation into rights-based, inclusive support and care systems. The long-term economic and social value of investing in such systems is clear.<sup>91</sup> Strengthening inclusive care and support systems strengthens society; investing in the care economy could create 280 million jobs worldwide.<sup>92</sup> A child rights-based approach to social protection is critical to preventing institutionalization and supporting children, families and communities. Inclusive social protection supports the transition from traditional care models to human rights-based care and support systems, which realize the rights of children and parents/caregivers. Support and care systems, with integral social protection systems that are age-sensitive, child rights-based, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive uphold all children's human rights and empower and enable them to participate more fully in society. Deinstitutionalization initiatives and community-based care must be well resourced and strengthened and meaningful access to disability-specific support ensured.

### **H. Integrating social protection and child protection**

78. Social protection and child protection systems are interlinked and mutually reinforce their respective child rights-related outcomes but also have distinct frameworks and objectives. Child protection focuses on promoting and safeguarding children's rights, well-being and long-term development through preventing and responding to child abuse, neglect and exploitation. Child protection and social protection systems intersect in multiple areas, including supporting children/families and monitoring children's health, education and social outcomes. Integrating child protection principles into social protection planning, programming and measures can expand social protection coverage and bolster the capacity of social protection systems to protect children from physical and psychological violence, exploitation and abuse.

79. In that sense, a shift in mindset is long overdue: it is critical for States to recognize the value of children's long-term development, maximize available resources to fully invest in inclusive social protection and foster international cooperation. The international community has long been aware of glaring gaps in social protection coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy, of the devastating impact of inadequate social protection and that a human rights-based solution is attainable. By making the bold and already legally mandated commitment to prioritize inclusive social protection and anchor economic decision-making in human rights principles, States can realize child rights-compliant inclusive social protection.

## **VI. Promising practices**

80. Governments, United Nations entities, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations are undertaking promising practices to realize children's inclusive social protection, some of which are elaborated below.

<sup>90</sup> See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/integrated-support-services-to-boost-wellbeing-of-children-will-pay-off-in-the-future-says-icelandic-minister>.

<sup>91</sup> [A/HRC/52/52](#).

<sup>92</sup> [A/78/80-E/2023/64](#), para. 64.

## **A. Member States**

81. Several States, including Australia and Mexico, emphasize early childhood care and education.
82. Argentina has a universal child allowance for children in alternative care.
83. Austrian benefits include family allowance, childcare allowance and family hardship compensation, temporary financial support for families or pregnant women in emergencies.
84. The Azerbaijani action plan for implementation of the children's strategy includes implementation of social protection measures for children, particularly in vulnerable situations.
85. Brunei Darussalam and Singapore will implement collaborative programmes on social work, social service and social protection, including concerning children.
86. In Denmark, children with disabilities receive reimbursement of additional disability-related costs and compensation for parents/caregivers' lost income.
87. El Salvador introduced early childhood vouchers for families with children aged 0–2; education vouchers for secondary students from poor and vulnerable households; and school feeding plans.
88. In Germany, measures include supporting parents to work, providing material security and educational and care opportunities through cash benefits, tax-free allowances and tax relief.
89. In Lithuania, monthly child benefits of 80.5 euros are provided to every child from birth to the age of 18 and up to 23 if they are in education, irrespective of family income. Low-income families raising one or two children, families raising three or more children and disabled children receive an additional monthly child benefit of 47.38 euros.
90. Luxembourg ensures free quality education, universal free school meals in term-time and free school meals for families earning less than twice the minimum social wage during holidays.
91. Malawi provided a COVID-19 urban cash transfer intervention to prevent malnutrition and mitigate the pandemic's impact on vulnerable households, including those with parental unemployment.
92. Nepal is making social security and protection sustainable, universal and accessible, including enrolling all citizens in a compulsory and universal social security system.
93. Paraguay launched the "Go!" social protection system in 2021, which integrates services protecting the population, including focusing on early childhood.
94. Slovakia has developed a national action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee, which comprises core social protection actions, including free, quality health care and education and adequate housing and nutrition.
95. Trinidad and Tobago provides a school supplies grant to assist primary and secondary children whose books and uniforms have been destroyed by disasters.
96. Zambia has introduced unconditional implementation of the social cash transfer to respond to increasing vulnerability and persistently high poverty levels, including of children.

## **B. United Nations entities**

97. In Côte d'Ivoire, ILO applies a supply chain approach to extend universal health coverage to cocoa farming households and has organized members of cooperatives in cooperation with the National Health Insurance Fund.
98. UNICEF has been working on demonstrating a proof of concept to support children's multidimensional needs through cash transfers in Lebanon.

## C. Civil society organizations

99. The child development grant programme of Save the Children Nigeria has reduced stunting and improved dietary diversity, the use of health and nutrition services and food security.

100. In the Dominican Republic, World Vision has partnered with local protection boards to ensure migrant children are not excluded from education.

## VII. Conclusions

101. **Universal social protection is an essential requirement to comply with obligations under international human rights law for all States, which also makes economic and social sense. It can enable all children to live in a safe, healthy, happy environment with access to sufficient nutritious food, affordable healthcare and free quality education. These are prerequisites for the full enjoyment of children’s rights and their long-term health, well-being and development. However, social protection, remains far from the reality for too many children worldwide. Failure to ensure universal social protection contributes to deepening inequalities and may become more systematic in the face of environmental, food and energy crises, conflicts and disasters.**

102. **The pandemic exposed systemic and structural causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination, and demonstrated that many countries, both developed and developing, need to establish, strengthen or implement human rights frameworks to meet their people’s needs. It delivered a powerful reminder of the instrumental role universal social protection has in addressing inequalities and poverty and building inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies that respect child rights. Investing in child rights-compliant inclusive social protection is a strategic choice. It benefits all children, enabling them to realize their human rights and potential and live in dignity, and is a central component of strong economies and healthy societies.**

103. **The world stands at a crucial moment where wealth continues to grow, as do wealth-related inequalities. Applying some of that enormous wealth to provide social protection for more than 1 billion children would open vast and positive possibilities for all children and the collective future of all. There is a window of opportunity to learn from and build on recent positive social protection interventions, including before the Summit of the Future. Considering the increasing global and institutional momentum towards realizing universal social protection, it is time for most States to move from ad hoc, inadequate short-term measures or even a lack of measures, to implementing inclusive, sustainable, well-financed, child rights-compliant systems. The pandemic has demonstrated that this is achievable and it is about prioritizing resources for long-term investment and gain.**

104. **Universal social protection that respects, protects and fulfils the rights of all children is attainable. The framework, guidance and resources all exist to expand social protection towards universal, inclusive social protection for children. It requires a policy shift, international solidarity, the political will to make the right choice and bold budgetary decisions that lead to more equitable outcomes for all. Social protection is essential to comply with human rights obligations. These are not optional and must be prioritized for the long-term future of people and of the planet. As the world marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and looks to a future built on trust, inclusion and participation, States have a critical role in delivering a social contract realizing children’s rights so that they can reach their full potential and participate fully in society.**

## VIII. Recommendations

105. As the world aims at a new social contract and builds a sustainable and equitable future for all, and in line with the child rights-based approach contained in the present report, the High Commissioner invites Member States to:

(a) Enact and implement the necessary legal and policy frameworks anchored in human rights, particularly child rights obligations, to establish a comprehensive child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection as part of a life-cycle approach. That involves an integrated systems approach, including universal and comprehensive child/family benefits, universal health care, access to free, quality education, affordable nutritious food and adequate housing, and financial and material support for parents/caregivers, including parental leave and affordable, quality childcare, and finally, a transformation from traditional care to human rights-based care and support;

(b) Take concrete actions, using the maximum available resources, including through international assistance and cooperation, to progressively achieve the right to social security, including a child rights-compliant social protection system that leaves no child behind;

(c) Pay particular attention to mitigating the disproportionate impact on children in vulnerable situations and facing multiple forms of discrimination, including developing an intersectional, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and culturally sensitive response to ensure that children in all their diversity have social protection;

(d) Ensure that children are engaged meaningfully in social protection decisions concerning them, that information on social protection is child-friendly and accessible to children in all their diversity, that a child rights lens is applied to public budgeting and that children and their families have access to effective remedies in case of rights violations;

(e) Leverage human rights to introduce the necessary revenue streams and ring-fence economic, social and cultural rights from creditors to ensure child rights-compliant financing of integrated, multi-stakeholder social protection systems and allocate sufficient and adequate human and financial resources to effectively implement them.

106. The High Commissioner invites United Nations human rights mechanisms, within the scope of their mandates, to continue to prioritize inclusive social protection and children's rights in their work.

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