



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 April 2024

Original: English

2024 session

27 July 2023 to 24 July 2024

Agenda item 19 (f)

Social and human rights questions: human rights

Economic, social and cultural rights

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights details recent efforts to promote the indivisibility of human rights and provide support to Member States and other stakeholders to promote the operationalization of economic, social and cultural rights.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141, in which the Assembly established the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The report provides information on the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with a focus on economic, social and cultural rights. The report covers the activities carried out between June 2023 and April 2024.

2. In the report, the High Commissioner underscores the critical role of economic, social and cultural rights in addressing the unprecedented global challenges witnessed over the past few years, including escalating inequality, poverty and income and wealth disparities, evidenced by the concentration of wealth among a select few.¹ The High Commissioner calls for a holistic approach that acknowledges the indivisibility and interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, along with the right to development and the right to a clean and healthy environment. He outlines how approaches that are geared towards the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights under the human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, provide pathways towards overcoming these challenges.

II. Promoting the indivisibility of human rights

3. The mandate of the High Commissioner encompasses advisory services, technical assistance and financial support, fostering dialogue on human rights issues, promoting international collaboration on human rights and coordinating efforts across the United Nations system to protect, promote and fulfil human rights. Since its establishment in 1993, OHCHR has endeavoured to assist Member States and other stakeholders in overcoming legal, policy, structural and other barriers and addressing challenges to ensure the complete protection, promotion and fulfilment of all human rights.

4. OHCHR advocates the recognition of the universality, indivisibility and interconnectedness of all human rights throughout its operations, in line with the letter and spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and other international human rights instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights without any distinctions, hierarchy or categorization. Nonetheless, an artificial divide and hierarchy have been created between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights.² Such a division and hierarchy are detrimental to the realization of human rights, including the right to development, as all human rights are inextricably linked, with the fulfilment of one right often reliant on that of the other rights. Unfortunately, the perceived, artificial division and hierarchy have consistently hindered comprehensive and holistic efforts in human rights protection, promotion and fulfilment, with some Member States investing more in one set of rights than the other. OHCHR strongly promotes the indivisibility of all rights in both its normative development and its operational work and has consistently called upon all States and other duty bearers to pursue the realization of all human rights equally.

5. The work of OHCHR relating to economic, social and cultural rights is multifaceted. The Office contributes to standard setting, awareness-raising and global, regional, national and local policy development. It provides technical assistance and capacity-building for Governments and other stakeholders and helps them implement their human rights commitments to ensure that rights holders can claim their rights. This work includes specific mandates given by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly and work done under the independent mandate given by the Assembly to the High Commissioner. In addition, OHCHR undertakes a wide range of activities, including providing thematic and

¹ See Patrick N. Osakwe and Olga Solleder, “Wealth distribution, income inequality and financial inclusion: a panel data analysis”, Working Paper, No. 4 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023).

² Sandra Fredman, *Comparative Human Rights Law* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 3.

context-specific support to Governments, regional and national institutions, United Nations partners and civil society on economic, social and cultural rights, research, analysis monitoring and reporting relating to the situation of human rights. It also provides expert advice and substantive support relating to the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, provides support for the progressive development of international law, engages in intergovernmental processes and strengthens partnerships with United Nations entities, cities and local governments, national human rights institutions and civil society.

6. The work of OHCHR on economic, social and cultural rights is focused on the development and implementation of law, policy and practice involving specific rights, such as the rights to education and health, including access to medicines and vaccines and mental health, and the rights to work, social security, food, housing and water and sanitation.³ Other activities are aimed at supporting populations that are often marginalized and left furthest behind. These include activities to promote and protect the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of women, young people, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ persons, Indigenous Peoples, minorities, people of African descent and others in situations of vulnerability or marginalization. This work puts people and the realization of their rights, including the right to development, at the centre.

7. At the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner presented the vision of the Office for reinforcing its work in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.⁴ The vision is aimed at enhancing the engagement of OHCHR with Member States and various stakeholders on the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights as part of an integrated, indivisible and interrelated approach to human rights. It complements the Office's existing workstreams at the thematic, normative and policy levels, as well as its support function at the country and regional levels.

8. In the report on the vision of the Office, the High Commissioner acknowledged the importance of economic, social and cultural rights and the need for the development of strategies that could effectively overcome obstacles to their realization.⁵ As set out in that report, the vision of OHCHR is focused on actions in the following five key areas: (a) expanding fiscal space and supporting the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights; (b) addressing inequalities; (c) ensuring an enabling environment; (d) addressing the role of international financial institutions; and (e) harnessing data to protect economic, social and cultural rights and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the report, the High Commissioner drew attention to operationalizing economic, social and cultural rights and acknowledged the power of cultural rights to foster a sense of belonging and pride, promote social inclusion and cohesion and reduce discrimination, marginalization and conflict.

9. In its resolution 54/22, the Human Rights Council expressed grave concern about the significant gaps faced by OHCHR in terms of capacity and resources for its operations to support States to promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights and requested OHCHR to enhance its work in that respect. Also in that resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to scale up the capacity of OHCHR through additional regular budget-funded posts.

10. Operationally, the work of OHCHR is structured around six pillars: (a) peace and security; (b) development; (c) non-discrimination; (d) participation; (e) international human rights mechanisms; and (f) accountability. Each pillar covers all rights (civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and the right to development). These pillars will be maintained in the 2024–2027 office management plan, which is currently being finalized.

11. Results linked to economic, social and cultural rights are contained in each pillar. The development pillar, in particular, is relevant to rights such as health, housing, land and property rights, with its focus on a human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/economic-social-cultural-rights>.

⁴ A/HRC/54/35.

⁵ Ibid., para. 17.

The non-discrimination pillar includes several expected results on addressing inequalities and touches upon the root causes of existing violations and failures to fulfil economic, social and cultural rights. The accountability pillar comprises strengthened accountability and redress to victims of violations of human rights, including economic and social rights. The participation pillar includes reference to the strengthened voice of those who face discrimination and meaningful, inclusive and safe participation in public affairs. The peace and security pillar has an enhanced focus on the prevention and root causes of conflict.

12. The commitment of OHCHR to effectively responding to a dynamic global environment is reflected in the strategic directions that it has identified as priority areas of work for the period 2024–2027. They are to provide a coherent direction across all of the Office’s work. The strategic directions are: (a) supporting the strong global movement for human rights; (b) putting human rights at the centre of prevention and peacebuilding; (c) making governance responsive through full participation and by ending impunity; (d) including children and youth in decision-making; (e) transforming economies with equality and sustainability at the core; (f) grounding environmental action in human rights; (g) using technology and science to advance human rights for all; and (h) strengthening the human rights system.⁶

13. Through the concept of the human rights economy, the High Commissioner has called for human rights to be at the centre of national and global economies, so that they serve all people and the planet.⁷ He has urged States to use human rights as the path to a more peaceful, equal and sustainable world.⁸

14. OHCHR has adopted a systemic approach at both the normative and the operational levels to implement the framework on economic, social and cultural rights, offering context-specific and tailored support to Governments and various stakeholders. Over the past few years, the Office has facilitated knowledge-sharing and provided technical assistance, capacity-building and advisory services, contributing to the realization by States and other stakeholders of economic, social and cultural rights on the ground. OHCHR needs continuous and sustained political and financial support to maintain and expand these activities and successfully bring about change to the lives of people.

III. Strengthening the operationalization of economic, social and cultural rights

15. Significant normative progress has been achieved in the field of economic, social and cultural rights over the six decades since the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. With over 170 countries ratifying the Covenant and many national constitutions incorporating economic, social and cultural rights, either as fundamental rights or as guiding policies of the State, there has been notable recognition of the importance of economic, social and cultural rights. All countries have ratified at least one of the nine core human rights treaties, as well as at least one of the nine optional protocols thereto, and 80 per cent of Member States have ratified four or more.⁹ However, in practice, economic, social and cultural rights are still treated as second-class rights. Even in cases where they are recognized in national constitutions, respect for economic, social and cultural rights remains extremely limited. It is, therefore, crucial not only to continue to work towards the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights as being on an equal footing to other human rights in the national framework but also to actively respect and enforce these rights through judicial and non-judicial means, as well as in economic and business decisions, to bring about measurable improvements to people’s daily lives.

16. The efforts of OHCHR to support the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights obligations by States and other duty bearers acknowledge the constrained financial

⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/hc-visionstatement-2024.pdf>.

⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/02/turk-calls-human-rights-economy>. See also A/HRC/54/35, para. 23.

⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/outcome-documents/human-rights-path-solutions>.

⁹ See <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

space that many countries face, both historically and in the recent past as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts are aimed at encouraging and supporting Governments to take immediate measures to address the challenges that they face in realizing economic, social and cultural rights. They include taking appropriate steps to ensure the progressive enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, avoiding retrogressive measures and prohibiting discrimination.

17. In the context of its current office management plan, OHCHR has made a commitment to strengthen its work on the fight against corruption. In 2023, OHCHR developed an office-wide strategy on anti-corruption and human rights to ensure that policies, laws and anti-corruption responses are victim-centred and consistent with States' human rights obligations. In implementing the strategy, OHCHR has adopted a multipronged approach that includes providing support to the Human Rights Council and, at countries' request, dedicated country-level projects. It also support rights holders through research and analysis, case studies and awareness-raising. OHCHR is putting a particular focus on prevention, the effective administration of justice and securing redress for the victims of human rights violations caused by corruption-related offences and anti-corruption responses, as well as the repatriation of funds.

A. Human Rights 75: focus on economic, social and cultural rights

18. In 2023, OHCHR commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of both the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action and the establishment of the Office. To commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, OHCHR launched Human Rights 75,¹⁰ a year-long initiative with the overarching goals of promoting universality and indivisibility, looking to the future and strengthening the human rights ecosystem. In his opening remarks at the high-level event held in Geneva on 11 and 12 December 2023 at the conclusion of the initiative, the High Commissioner issued a call for action and urged all Member States and stakeholders to come together to resolve the huge challenges faced.¹¹ At the conclusion of the high-level event, the High Commissioner reaffirmed that human rights created bridges across geopolitical divides and were a blueprint for solutions to the greatest challenges of humankind and for multilateral cooperation, because they were grounded in values that spanned divisions and were rooted in the universality of the human condition.¹²

19. The high-level event on the human rights 75 initiative brought together world leaders and other dignitaries who, in a unified stance, reaffirmed the equal rights of all individuals, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³ They recognized that the full potential of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular in the economic and social fields, remained unfulfilled.¹⁴ The Office received over 770 human rights pledges from Member States, United Nations entities, businesses and civil society organizations. The pledges reflected the commitment to protecting and promoting human rights and a renewal of commitments to addressing several global challenges, including promoting the realization of economic, social and cultural rights by promoting employment equality, tackling extreme poverty and improving access to education, health care and social protection.¹⁵ OHCHR plans to support the implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights pledges when additional allotted resources become available.

¹⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75>.

¹¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/12/turk-opens-global-human-rights-event-call-hope-and-action>.

¹² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/12/turk-promises-we-will-build-ambitious-agenda-change-can-meet-challenges-our-time>.

¹³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/events/2023/human-rights-75-high-level-event>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75/pledge>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/02/opening-human-rights-council-turk-launches-new-human-rights>.

20. Following the completion of the human rights 75 initiative, the High Commissioner issued a vision statement entitled “Human rights: a path for solutions”.¹⁶ He warned that instrumentalizing human rights for political ends or disregarding them cynically would not only threaten social cohesion but also undermine international cooperation. The High Commissioner called for more effective international cooperation on tax policies and combating illicit financial flows, technology transfer, knowledge-sharing and financing.

B. Support to the Human Rights Council

21. Throughout the year, OHCHR undertook a series of activities on global policy development on economic, social and cultural rights and contributed, through periodic and thematic reports, to the development of human rights norms and standards. It also organized expert meetings and events. Such efforts build upon its research, advocacy, capacity-building, technical assistance and engagement with various stakeholders at the country, regional and global levels.

22. In December 2023, OHCHR convened a one-day workshop to review and promote the tools for the dissemination of information on and possible methods of implementation of an approach to the protection, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage that promotes universal respect for cultural rights by all, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 49/7. Participants emphasized the critical role of cultural rights as a response to global challenges and the importance of integrating a human rights-based approach into cultural heritage.¹⁷

23. In March 2024, OHCHR organized a panel discussion on challenges and good practices in the realization of the right to social security and the provision of quality public services. Drawing on the experiences of Member States and civil society organizations, the panel explored ways to provide universal social security systems and quality public services.

24. In his report on economic, social and cultural rights submitted to the Economic and Social Council in 2023,¹⁸ the High Commissioner addressed challenges in relation to access to medicines that arise in the existing system for pharmaceutical innovation, its associated business models and current pricing practices. OHCHR organized an expert workshop on key challenges and new developments in the area of access to medicines, vaccines and other health products in February 2024. Participants in the online, multi-stakeholder workshop highlighted the multifaceted challenges in ensuring equitable access to adequate health-care infrastructure. The conclusions of the workshop echoed the findings of the High Commissioner set out in his report. Also in the report, the High Commissioner highlighted that high prices, driven by patents and intellectual property rights, were among the challenges preventing access to medicines, vaccines and other health products.

25. In February 2024, OHCHR organized a panel discussion on the root causes of digital divides, including power imbalances that reinforce inequalities. The panellists highlighted the importance of human rights data and indicators in measuring good governance and responses to bridging digital divides, including gender digital divides, and expressed concern over the lack of economic resources, skills and physical access to the information and technology domain. They explored opportunities for using digital information and technologies to prevent and address corruption and how such measures should be designed and implemented in the context of bridging digital divides.

26. Also in February 2024, OHCHR organized an expert meeting on the obstacles to repatriation of funds of illicit origin to the countries of origin and their impact on the enjoyment of human rights. Experts discussed the main legal, practical and institutional barriers to the repatriation of illicit funds to the countries of origin, and the challenges encountered by countries of origin and recipient countries in overcoming those barriers. They

¹⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/un-human-rights-chief-lays-out-path-solutions-years-come>.

¹⁷ See also A/HRC/17/38.

¹⁸ [E/2023/74](#).

also highlighted the main elements of a human rights-based approach to eliminating existing barriers.

27. In August 2023, OHCHR organized an expert meeting on enhancing capacity-building for local governments. The participants, a diverse group of experts, discussed their work and shared promising practices, challenges and opportunities. The discussions highlighted a lack of awareness among local government officials regarding human rights norms, standards and mechanisms, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary to translate human rights norms and standards into practice.¹⁹

28. OHCHR continued to advocate, in national and multilateral forums, stronger legal protection for and the promotion of the human rights of older persons, as well as the inclusion of the rights of older persons in the support and care agenda. The High Commissioner has called for a legally binding instrument to provide better protection of the rights of older persons. OHCHR continues to build advocacy and partnerships with various Governments and stakeholders on the basis of its work on normative standards and obligations in promoting and protecting the human rights of older persons.²⁰ This work is complemented by concrete, actionable recommendations and solution pathways, drawn in essence from the multi-stakeholder meeting on the human rights of older persons that was held on 29 and 30 August 2022.²¹

29. In November 2023, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 77/317, OHCHR, jointly with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), organized a high-level event in New York to celebrate the first International Day of Care and Support. In addition, in 2023, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 54/6, its first-ever resolution focusing on the human rights dimension of care and support, addressing the human rights of women, persons with disabilities, children and older persons. Those developments were complemented by a draft resolution recommended by the Commission for Social Development for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, on promoting care and support systems for social development.²² OHCHR provided technical support to the respective mechanisms and bodies. Moreover, OHCHR contributed to the United Nations system guidance on transforming care systems.²³

30. OHCHR organized the sixth intersessional Human Rights Council meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda, which was held on 18 January 2024 on the theme “Integrating human rights into the international financial architecture reforms: a cornerstone for realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a human rights economy”.²⁴ In his opening speech, the High Commissioner suggested six points of action to anchor human rights in the reforms of the international financial architecture.²⁵ OHCHR prepared a report containing recommendations on applying a human rights lens to the reform of international financial institutions, maximizing available resources for promoting economic, social and cultural rights and leaving no one behind at a time of growing debt distress, and on using human rights to combat illicit financial flows and corruption through international tax cooperation and financial transparency.²⁶

¹⁹ See [A/HRC/56/32](#).

²⁰ See [A/HRC/49/70](#).

²¹ See [A/HRC/52/49](#).

²² [E/CN.5/2024/L.5](#).

²³ See <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-10-2023-who-ohchr-launch-new-guidance-to-improve-laws-addressing-human-rights-abuses-in-mental-health-care>.

²⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/sixth-intersessional-meeting-human-rights-and-the-2030-agenda>.

²⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/01/integrating-human-rights-international-financial-architecture>.

²⁶ See [A/HRC/56/35](#).

C. Technical support for and engagement with Governments and stakeholders

31. In addition to contributing to the development of international human rights norms and standards, OHCHR engaged in various activities designed to enhance the understanding, implementation and enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights.

32. The Office has made deliberate efforts, through an approach anchored in economic, social and cultural rights, to engage with economic policies, also linking those efforts to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and securing the right to development. In particular, the Office has continued its surge initiative, an OHCHR team that brings together specialists on economic, social and cultural rights and on sustainable development with a team of economists. These efforts have, for example, focused on the rights to decent work and social security for disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups, including workers in the informal economy, and the rights of persons with disabilities. In doing so, the Office has been supporting Governments, United Nations entities and other stakeholders to ensure that their national legislation, budgets, policies and programmes are in line with human rights norms and standards.

33. In November 2023, the Office, in collaboration with ILO, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Ethiopia, organized a national policy dialogue on the protection and promotion of the rights of domestic workers in Ethiopia. The policy dialogue was informed by a study. Before the policy dialogue, domestic workers and their associations, trade unions and civil society organizations participated in a rights holders workshop, during which they discussed the main challenges in exercising their rights to work and social security. These efforts will feed into the drafting of a law to ensure the protection of domestic workers and workers.

34. In December 2023, the Office, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Interior of Colombia and civil society organizations, organized the first consultation on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas for the Latin American and the Caribbean region. The two days of thematic discussions with stakeholders, including representatives from peasants' organizations, civil social organizations, national human rights institutions and regional authorities, offered an opportunity to take stock of challenges and gains in the realization of the rights contained in the Declaration. The consultations will inform the future work of the Office at the national, regional and global levels related to the Declaration and will enable further engagement with the various stakeholders invited to the consultation.

35. In Cambodia, OHCHR, in collaboration with ILO and other United Nations entities in the country, supported the Government's efforts to develop the National Social Protection Policy Framework Vision 2030 by providing technical advice during the drafting process. OHCHR also analysed legal and policy frameworks to identify gaps in the protection of the right to social security of workers in the informal economy, including street vendors, domestic workers, waste pickers and tuk-tuk drivers. In addition, a survey was conducted to assess the ability of those workers to contribute to social insurance schemes, with the aim of formulating specific policy recommendations for the Government to expand the coverage of schemes for them.

36. In Timor-Leste, given that only 30.6 per cent of the population is effectively covered by at least one area of contributory and non-contributory social security schemes, OHCHR examined the accessibility of social protection measures for women working in the informal sector, in particular domestic workers, market vendors and those in the agricultural sectors. A human rights-based macroeconomic analysis, including of the budget, complemented the study. On the basis of its findings, OHCHR developed recommendations for policy and strategy options to include more employees and self-employed persons, with a focus on women, in social security schemes. The recommendations included transitioning from temporary measures of social assistance to a sustained social insurance system.

37. In the Congo, OHCHR has engaged with high-level institutional and constitutional bodies, such as the National Assembly, the Court of Audit and Budgetary Discipline and those in charge of youth, persons with disabilities and civil society organizations, to create a

dialogue on the integration of human rights norms and standards into their work, with a particular focus on economic, social and cultural rights and sustainable development, linked to strategic entry points, such as the upcoming national development plan, and education, health and budget policies. The project is aimed at increasing the knowledge and capacities of these institutions in terms of how they can improve their strategies and policies by ensuring that their work contributes to the realization of human rights. Among the principal deliverables of the project are a guide for the Court of Audit and Budgetary Discipline on how to evaluate public policies through a human rights lens and strengthening the capacities of the ministries' Directors of Studies and Planning to monitor and evaluate public policies using recommendations made by United Nations human rights mechanisms.

38. In Jordan, OHCHR has worked alongside the resident coordinator's office and the Economic and Social Council of Jordan on placing people's rights at the centre of public finance policies, including through the development of a policy brief entitled "Domestic revenue collection: a human rights-based approach to tackling inequalities".²⁷ In the policy brief, the importance of maximizing available resources to invest in economic, social and cultural rights and repositioning public expenditure to prioritize people's needs and rights is highlighted. In follow-up to that work, OHCHR is contributing to an evidence-based policy dialogue at the municipal level on the role of public finance and fiscal decentralization in addressing inequalities and advancing human rights.

39. In Zambia, OHCHR conducted a study on the progressive realization of the rights to food and education in its legal, policy and administrative systems. The assessment was accompanied by an in-depth analysis of fiscal and budget policies, including the potential impacts of a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund, debt restructuring policies and austerity measures on the ability of the Government to deliver on its obligations relevant to the realization of the rights to food and education. The study also fed into the human rights 75 initiative, under which States were called upon to make flagship pledges to advance human rights. The Government of Zambia pledged to create a universal school feeding programme before 2026.

40. In Kenya, OHCHR has supported citizens' engagement in budget design at the subnational level to ensure participation, transparency and accountability. The work is designed to strengthen human rights-enhancing budgeting and public participation in governance processes and to ensure that marginalized groups are seen and heard in the budget-making process at the subnational level.

41. In June 2023, the Office organized a multi-stakeholder consultation on gender, technology and the role of business.²⁸ At the regional and national levels, the Office supported activities promoting knowledge of stakeholders through the Business and Human Rights Africa Project, which helped accelerate the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

42. In Peru, OHCHR supported the intersectoral protection mechanism for human rights defenders coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. In the Pacific region, OHCHR continued to collaborate with civil society organizations and partners to strengthen their capacity to advocate a human rights-based approach to climate change, through various workshops and webinars. In Mexico, OHCHR provided training to over 100 public officials in the environmental sector on the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), with a special focus on Indigenous rights. The OHCHR office in Mexico promoted the access and active participation of Mexican Indigenous environmental defenders, especially women, in the Escazú Agreement process during the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement and the Second Annual Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

²⁷ See <https://jordan.un.org/en/224081-domestic-resource-mobilization-human-rights-based-approach-tackling-inequalities>.

²⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/business/b-tech/B-Tech-gender-multi-stakeholder-consultation.pdf>.

43. In addition, as part of the surge initiative, OHCHR is currently implementing seeding change projects in Armenia, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eswatini, Guyana, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Nepal, North Macedonia, South Africa and Zambia, as well as in Central Asia and South-East Asia. These activities are undertaken in close collaboration with government authorities, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The projects are aimed at further defining and contributing human rights pathways for a renewed social contract in line with the High Commissioner's vision for strengthening the work of OHCHR on economic, social and cultural rights and the six transition pathways identified at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in New York on 18 and 19 September 2023. This includes, for example, activities aimed at expanding the fiscal space for economic, social and cultural rights and investing in quality public services, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals and combating economic and other inequalities.

D. Knowledge-sharing, training, capacity-building, constituency-building activities and development of economic, social and cultural rights tools and guidance

44. In its resolution 54/22, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to establish a knowledge hub on economic, social and cultural rights. Work has begun on the conceptualization of a knowledge hub for the collection, consolidation and transmission of knowledge on economic, social and cultural rights, the provision of training, capacity-building and technical assistance in the field of economic, social and cultural rights and the updating and dissemination of tools and methodologies that would help the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

45. OHCHR has expanded its collaboration with national human rights institutions, in particular those in the Arab region, to build the capacity of such institutions and other actors to operationalize economic, social and cultural rights. It plans to launch a new training programme on economic, social and cultural rights for national human rights institutions in the Arab region in 2024. In addition, the Office provided support for the establishment and/or strengthening of national human rights institutions in over 20 countries, enabling them to promote and protect human rights in national jurisdictions. The support included capacity-building and a fellowship programme for staff members of regional human rights organizations such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the East African Court of Justice and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

46. OHCHR provided thematic support, including in economic, social and cultural rights, through its field presence and provided technical support and capacity-building activities on violence against women and girls with disabilities (Barbados), victim assistance and awareness-raising in a disability rights context (Cambodia), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for legal professionals (Cameroon), forced labour and disability (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), disability and international human rights instruments (Ethiopia), care and support systems in the context of the European Union care strategy (European Union), the development of disability action plans (Maldives and Kosovo²⁹); care and support systems (Republic of Moldova); disability-inclusive budgeting (Montenegro); deinstitutionalization (Ukraine and the State of Palestine); and LGBTI+ persons with disabilities (Uganda).

47. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples supported the participation of 115 Indigenous representatives from 49 countries in 14 United Nations processes. In the context of its Indigenous and Minorities Fellowship Programmes, OHCHR recruited and placed 32 senior Indigenous and minority fellows in 27 OHCHR field presences

²⁹ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

and United Nations country teams and at its headquarters, in Geneva. In June, the Office launched a Portuguese-language component of the Indigenous Fellowship Programme.

48. In February 2024, OHCHR organized, in collaboration with the Faculty of Public Health of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Global Network for Academic Public Health, the Groningen Centre for Health Law, the European Public Health Association and other partners, a webinar on climate change and the right to health. The webinar was part of a series of capacity-building initiatives for students of public health and was attended by prominent academics in the field of health and human rights, as well as the climate change and environment lead in OHCHR. The webinar was aimed at building understanding, competence and capacity for human rights-based approaches to good public health policy and practice.

49. Since 2018, the Office, in partnership with the United Nations University and the University for Peace, has organized online training to operationalize the right to development in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.³⁰ Between 2018 and 2023, 12 rounds of training were held, with a total number of 1,179 participants from 161 countries. About 60 per cent of the participants were women.

50. Ahead of World Mental Health Day in 2023, OHCHR and the World Health Organization (WHO) published “Mental health, human rights, and legislation: guidance and practice”. This new resource seeks to support countries’ legislative reform to bring mental health services into line with human rights. The publication includes a practical checklist for countries and other stakeholders to evaluate whether legislation contains a human rights-based approach.

51. The Office has made ongoing efforts to build and expand its constituency in the field of economic, social and cultural rights. In 2023, the Office and the International Federation of Social Workers agreed to collaborate to ensure that the work of social workers was anchored in human rights norms and standards. The Office developed and conducted briefings and training sessions for members of the Federation.

E. Inter-agency collaboration to promote the realization of economic, social and cultural rights

52. The Office has intensified its efforts to achieve synergy in its work in the field of economic, social and cultural rights through cooperation with other United Nations entities. In August 2023, the Office held a strategic institutional engagement dialogue with ILO to cross-fertilize knowledge and create synergies between the global initiatives taken by the two entities. In January 2024, the Office joined the ILO Global Coalition for Social Justice to explore synergies between the new initiative and the human rights economy concept, launched in April 2023.

53. OHCHR, as a UN-Water member, has been actively involved in the development of the draft United Nations system-wide water and sanitation strategy, which contains human rights framing at its core. The strategy, mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 77/334, marks a significant contribution of the United Nations system towards global efforts to address water and sanitation challenges and accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6 in the years leading up to 2030. OHCHR led the renewal of the road map of UN-Water for the integration of human rights into water and sanitation for the period 2024–2025. Its objectives are to raise awareness and provide human rights normative guidance. The road map seeks to ensure that the response of the United Nations to the challenges to the realization of the rights to water and sanitation, water scarcity, water quality, pollution and the impacts of climate change are effective and help Governments and other stakeholders to build resilient water systems and promote sustainable practices and infrastructure development.

54. OHCHR strengthened its engagement and expanded its partnerships and outreach activities with United Nations entities and other relevant stakeholders to promote

³⁰ See <https://www.upeace.org/e-course-right-to-development-and-the-sdgs/>.

anti-corruption efforts that are aligned with human rights. Since November 2022, OHCHR has been a member of the steering committee of the Global Network for Anti-Corruption, Transparency and Accountability in Health, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Development Programme, WHO, the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, the World Bank, the International Anti-Corruption Academy, the United States Agency for International Development and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. OHCHR has also become a member of the Anti-Corruption for Development Global Partnership. The Office participated in a range of international forums on anti-corruption, including the tenth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, at which it co-organized events.

55. In the context of the negotiations to conclude a binding agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response under the umbrella of the World Health Assembly, OHCHR continued to advocate for the inclusion of human rights norms and standards. To this end, OHCHR gave a briefing to Member States on possible pathways to strengthening human rights content in the draft agreement and provided drafting proposals and key messages as part of its contribution to the process. On 19 March 2024, the High Commissioner issued an open letter to all Member States calling upon them to strengthen human rights norms and standards throughout the revised draft of the pandemic treaty. In the letter, the High Commissioner also outlined possible pathways under which human rights provisions, including non-discrimination, gender equality, inclusion and participation, along with provisions on social security, the right to health and the right to work, could be strengthened.³¹

56. In the context of Human Rights 75, OHCHR designated September 2023 as the month of social protection, sustainable development and the right to development.³² The spotlight on social protection highlighted the centrality of the right to social security for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. At the regional level, the OHCHR Regional Office for Europe focused its “Human Rights Talk” series on minimum income schemes in collaboration with Member States, national and regional policymakers, ILO, United Nations entities and civil society organizations. In Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Office organized a dialogue between the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and United Nations entities in the region on the nexus between the right to social security and the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, individual stories collected from different countries demonstrated the real impact of social security.

57. On Human Rights Day in December 2023, under a framework of cooperation between WHO and OHCHR, the High Commissioner and the Director General of WHO published a joint opinion piece on the protection of rights in times of crisis.³³ This was to be followed, on 8 April 2024, by a high-level dialogue between the High Commissioner and the Director General on conflict, climate change, the human rights economy and universal health coverage.

58. OHCHR is a member of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. In particular, it is supporting the work under pillar 4 of its strategy, under which the Task Force committed to promoting a human rights-based approach to the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases and mental health by 2025. Since March 2023, OHCHR has led the newly established Human Rights Team within the Task Force. OHCHR has coordinated collaboration with human rights mechanisms and has focused on strengthening the capacity of Task Force members to include human rights in their work on non-communicable diseases. It has produced key messaging and guidance on how human rights can be used in the response to non-communicable diseases at the national level.

59. In addition, throughout the year, OHCHR continued to support United Nations agencies in mainstreaming human rights. It organized training of trainers that created a pool of 20 additional United Nations and OHCHR trainers on a human rights-based approach to

³¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/2024-03-18-HC-open-letter-pandemic.pdf>.

³² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75/monthly-themes#September>.

³³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/opinion-editorial/2023/12/conflict-and-crisis-expose-failure-advance-right-health>.

assist resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in mainstreaming human rights into their initiatives to support Governments. The Office also rolled out a newly developed common country analysis and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework online checklist on leaving no one behind and sustainable development, in collaboration with United Nations country teams, with the objectives of ensuring a human rights-based approach in common country analysis and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes.

60. As part of its ongoing support of rights-based implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, OHCHR supported the presentation of the human rights and voluntary national presentations guidance note aimed at better leveraging human rights work in mainstreaming human rights in voluntary national presentations and reducing reporting burdens.

F. Promoting economic, social and cultural rights through the work of treaty bodies and human rights mechanisms

61. OHCHR supported States, United Nations entities, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, including through technical cooperation, monitoring, reporting and capacity-building on legal and policy reform and follow-up to the recommendations of human rights mechanisms, in Albania, Brazil, Burundi, Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Lesotho, Liberia, Mongolia, Nepal, Panama, Peru, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Viet Nam.

62. OHCHR facilitated the exchange of good practices related to national mechanisms for reporting, implementation and follow-up. The Office rolled out the newly redesigned National Recommendations Tracking Database in six additional countries. OHCHR supported Governments in the establishment and strengthening of national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Cuba, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mozambique, the Philippines, Sao Tome and Principe, and Uzbekistan, as well as through a regional event in the Middle East and North Africa region.

63. The special procedures of the Human Rights Council continued to engage with Governments, the United Nations and other stakeholders to promote and protect human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. The mandate holders submitted a joint declaration at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit that underscored the critical role of human rights as a tool for urgent transformative change to achieve all the Goals by 2030.

64. The report of the Secretary-General on the conclusions and recommendations of the special procedures³⁴ shows the power of human rights as transformative tools that offer solutions to global problems. In the report, the Secretary-General establishes a clear link between the work of the special procedures and his call to action for human rights in making the human rights system responsive in confronting human rights challenges and enhancing synergies between human rights and all pillars of the work of the United Nations. For example, he cited the report of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, in which the Special Rapporteur had argued that water created a strong foundation for peace, twinning and cooperation, if countries followed the human rights-based approach to the sustainable management of transboundary water.³⁵

³⁴ [A/HRC/55/19](#).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

IV. Human rights economy: a policy to advance the operationalization of economic, social and cultural rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

65. The Office is currently further developing the concept of a human rights economy, which has as its principal goal and mission the protection and fulfilment of all human rights and the protection of the health of the planet. A human rights economy places people and the planet at the centre of all economic, social and environmental laws, policies and programmes. It is aimed at ensuring that all development, economic, social, industrial and trade laws and policies, investment decisions, consumer choices, business models and business operations are firmly guided by human rights norms and standards. It fosters the equal, active, free and meaningful participation of all and is aimed at intentionally implementing economic, social and cultural rights, addressing systemic discrimination and reducing inequalities. In a human rights economy, as an important guarantor of social cohesion and solidarity among communities, economic, social and cultural rights are upheld on an equal footing with civil and political rights.

66. In a human rights economy, the intentional and sustained integration of all human rights norms and standards into economic policies is called for. A firm integration of human rights into economic and fiscal policymaking will yield better outcomes for all. Also called for is the measurement of economic success beyond growth as measured by gross domestic product, focusing instead on whether the economy has delivered for all people and promoted the realization of all human rights.

67. In a human rights economy, the importance of reducing inequalities through investing in economic, social and other rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, is emphasized. This requires placing equality and non-discrimination at the heart of economic policy to identify entrenched patterns of structural and systemic discrimination through, for example, assessing the actual or potential discriminatory effects of policies before they are adopted. It also requires strengthened data collection and analysis to make existing patterns of discrimination visible.

68. In a human rights economy, diverse types of economies are recognized; this considers historical and political factors, including by acknowledging the enduring negative consequences of colonialism, racism, slavery, patriarchal systems and inequalities between and among nations. OHCHR is currently identifying key pathways for action. Taking rights-based action in these areas can help countries transition towards a human rights economy. This includes the following: (a) taking renewed action to implement economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development; (b) grounding fiscal policies in human rights; (c) accelerating efforts to counter discrimination and inequalities; (d) reinforcing human rights in business operations; (e) encouraging human rights; (f) enhancing investment and trade policies; (g) ensuring that human rights are at the core of industrial policies; (h) investing in care and support systems anchored in human rights; (i) reconciling economic growth with environmental action; (j) measuring economic success beyond gross domestic product; and (k) fostering consumer and political participation and fiscal transparency.

69. Realizing a human rights economy requires work in a range of areas. The need for a renewed commitment to realizing economic, social and cultural rights and to addressing inequalities are foundations for this work. In addition, the concept is focused on the need for further efforts relating to fiscal policies, including taxation, the role of businesses, trade and investment, industrial policies, and care and support systems. The human rights economy is also focused on sustainability, and advancing the right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment is at its core. Finally, in the human rights economy, high priority is given to fiscal transparency and participation by people in economic policymaking.

70. Priority actions needed to transition to a human rights economy include but are not limited to significantly scaling up investment in economic, social and cultural rights, more specifically in public health, education, housing, social security and the protection and promotion of culture and the rights of workers and older persons. This also includes increased investment in care and support systems anchored in human rights. Increasing investment and financing and sharing technology for climate mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, just

transition, the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity and regulation and remediation of pollution are urgently needed. Anchoring multilateral frameworks for investment and trade agreements and industrial policies in human rights to safeguard the policy and regulatory space for States to advance economic, social and cultural rights and drive long-term structural transformation for more just and equitable economies is also critical.

71. High levels of debt restrict countries' abilities to ring-fence social spending. There is an urgent need for a more transparent and inclusive multilateral framework for debt relief and restructuring. Such a framework should ensure transparency in financial commitments and loan conditions, while also guaranteeing that developing countries have a voice in the decision-making processes. Support from the international financial system for countries to prioritize social spending and sustainable development over debt servicing is essential for upholding economic, social and cultural rights and promoting equitable growth.

72. International financial institutions play a crucial role in shaping the global economic landscape. There is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating States' human rights obligations into their operations, sovereign debt measures and financial assistance programmes. This includes treating human rights obligations as legally binding parameters in the support and advice provided to countries, similar to any other legal aspect prevalent within the domestic framework. Moreover, incorporating human rights into the diagnostic tools, policy advice and measurements of international financial institutions – especially in debt sustainability analyses – is critical.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

73. **The examples highlighted in the present report illustrate the work of the Office to implement its mandate, in particular in the field of economic, social and cultural rights. They also demonstrate the positive and concrete impact of the Office's work on relevant laws and policies and on people's lives across the globe.**

74. **The report highlights the important role of the Office in promoting economic, social and cultural rights. It points to the important progress made through the Office's work in countries to, among others, create and broaden fiscal space, apply a rights-based approach to social security systems, promote the right to health, address corruption from a human rights perspective and incorporate gender considerations into policy responses by adopting right-based approaches to economic policy making. These efforts have been fruitful; however, they require ongoing commitment and sufficient time and support to facilitate change. There is a clear need for further development in several areas, including the establishment of baselines, indicators and tools, as well as guidelines for the implementation, assessment and evaluation of progress and obstacles in realizing economic, social and cultural rights.**

75. **The importance of economic, social and cultural rights cannot be overstated, in particular in the current testing time in which people face socioeconomic hardships, cost-of-living crises, food and fuel crises, skyrocketing inequality and deepening income and wealth gaps. States should go beyond their formal commitments and take genuine and intentional measures to realize economic, social and cultural rights to bring about measurable changes in people's lives. Accelerating progress on economic, social and cultural rights is also inextricably linked to the prevention of crisis and conflict.**

76. **The introduction of the concept of a human rights economy presents an additional avenue and opportunity for States to align their economic policies with human rights obligations, in particular by ring-fencing economic, social and cultural rights during financial crises.**

77. **Building a human rights economy necessitates a foundation of solidarity, international cooperation and assistance, and mutual support. These are central tenets not only of the right to development, but also of economic, social and cultural rights. Efforts must be coordinated at both the national and the international levels, involving States and the global community alike. The private sector's adherence to human rights principles is equally crucial.**

78. The increased interest from Member States, civil society and other stakeholders in partnering with OHCHR on its work on economic, social and cultural rights is testimony to the success of this work. OHCHR urges Member States and other stakeholders to continue to provide it with the support necessary to enable it to respond positively to countries' requests for technical assistance and capacity-building. In this regard, it welcomes the strengthening of the Office's capacity on economic, social and cultural rights by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 54/22, while noting that the full operationalization of the strengthening of OHCHR capacity on economic, social and cultural rights is hampered by the regular budget liquidity situation relating to the United Nations Secretariat as a whole.
