



**END CHILD
POVERTY**
GLOBAL COALITION



ENDING CHILD POVERTY: A policy agenda



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This policy brief builds upon an earlier Global Coalition to End Child Poverty brief, published in 2017





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AN AGENDA TO END CHILD POVERTY



Key messages: A policy agenda to end child poverty

While contexts vary, experience shows that a core agenda for action to address child poverty includes:

1. Build national support making child poverty reduction an explicit national priority in national budgets, policies and laws, and ensuring that child poverty is measured and routinely monitored.
2. Expand child sensitive social protection, including towards universal child benefits, to reduce child poverty directly and support the effectiveness of other policies and basic service provision for children.
3. Improve access and prioritise funding of quality public services, especially for the poorest children, including access to quality health and education services. Ensuring these services reach the poorest and most excluded children through pro-active measures is an important strategy to reduce child poverty.
4. Promote a decent work and inclusive growth agenda to reach families and children in poverty, including specific interventions for families with children and for poor and disadvantaged young people as they enter the labour market.

To tackle child poverty is to invest to fulfil human potential. It is to promote child rights and wellbeing and to address the needs of fast changing societies. It is to intervene to prevent the intergenerational disadvantages that cost societies dearly.

The combined crises compromising the climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic, increased conflicts, food prices and inflation crisis, highlight that urgent action is needed to halt worsening outcomes for children.¹ It is estimated, for example, that it will take at least seven to eight years to recover and

return to pre-COVID-19 levels of monetary child poverty.² In addition, many other child outcomes, such as educational attainment, immunization, hunger, and nutritional deficits are at risk of drastically worsening.³

The scale and depth are different, but the impacts of child poverty are alike across the globe, tackling child poverty is a global issue which high-, middle- and low-income countries all need to prioritise. Children living in monetary and multidimensional poverty experience a range of deprivations including in nutrition, learning, and health. Poverty

1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021](#), p.3

2 UNICEF (2021) Preventing a lost decade: [Urgent action to reverse the devastating impact of COVID-19 on children and young people](#). UNICEF, New York, 2021.

3 ibid

This briefing note draws on evidence and the experience of over 20 organizations working together in the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty. The Coalition [SDG Guide to End Child Poverty](#) harnesses knowledge and experience to support national processes to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on Ending Poverty

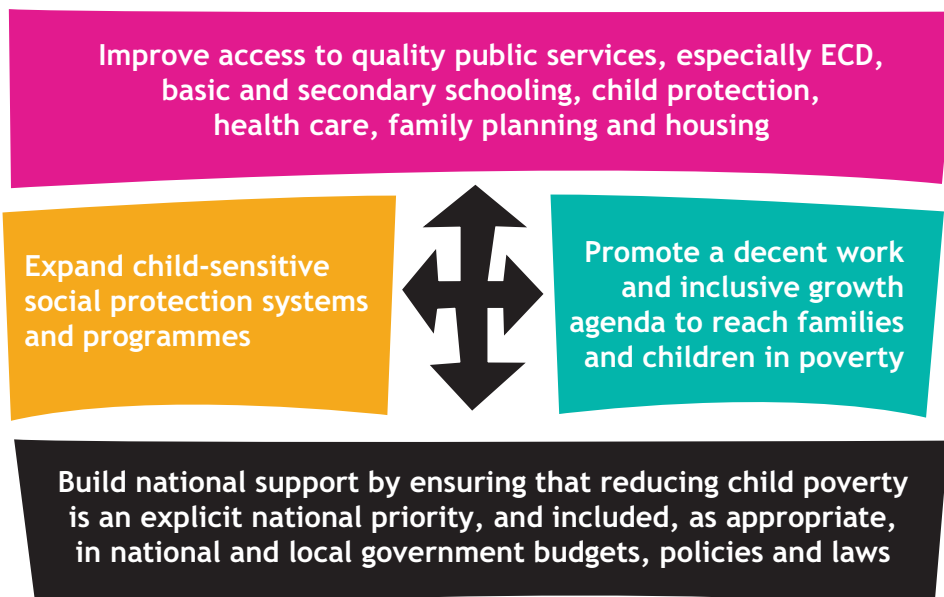
the policies needed to end child poverty are multisectoral and require a coordinated approach. And the policies needed to mitigate against child poverty vary vastly across regions and countries. However, consistently across countries it can be seen that children are more vulnerable to poverty than adults and that, no matter the context, allowing child poverty to remain high will cost states dearly in the future as well as impinge on the human rights and flourishing of children.

in childhood can lead to greater exposure to violence and exploitation and is often accompanied by stigma. Ultimately, all of these deprivations undermine children's later life chances.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty understands child poverty as multidimensional and impacting a wide range of aspects of a child's life. Therefore,

Where policies are strongly inclusive alongside quality and decent employment, backed up by effective provisions for quality basic public services and child sensitive social protection - child poverty will be reduce

What works to End Child Poverty? Key national building blocks



Crucially, there are specific solutions to address child poverty. Child poverty is not inevitable nor immune to efforts to address it. Ending child poverty is a policy choice. There is considerable evidence on the effective public policies which can reduce child poverty in its multiple forms and lead to more cohesive societies and communities. This Coalition brief outlines this core policy agenda.

SDG Goal 1, End poverty in all its forms, is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The global goals include an explicit commitment to end extreme child

poverty by 2030 and to reduce by at least half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. In addition, the 2030 Agenda declaration makes the ambitious pledge to Leave No One Behind in the realisation of the Goals which puts further emphasis on prioritizing disadvantaged and marginalized children (see Box 1). Further commitment to the Leave No One Behind agenda of the SDGs is needed, if the goals endorsed by States, international organisations, and communities are to be achieved by 2030.

Box 1: International Commitment to Leave No One Behind:

“As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first” (UN declaration on Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, United National General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, 2015)

The “Leave No One Behind” pledge in Agenda 2030 emerged from the recognition that those who are most marginalised or disadvantaged in each country should benefit from social progress and improved socio-economic conditions. The commitment moves the policy focus beyond national averages to spotlight at-risk groups in policy implementation, including through policies to reduce child poverty.



ODI highlights three important elements of the leave no one behind agenda:

1. **Progressive universalism:** This can be understood in two ways. The first interpretation is that the poorest and most disadvantaged are prioritised in access to new services or social protection; then as coverage increases, access extends to the rest of the population. The second interpretation is that services or social protection measures are delivered universally from the outset, but at-risk groups receive additional supports.
2. **Addressing discrimination:** Improving equity requires tackling horizontal (group-based) inequalities, going beyond the provision of equal opportunities because the capacities of people and communities to realise opportunities is circumscribed by structural disadvantages and discrimination.
3. **Recognition of intersectionality:** Individuals may experience discrimination or disadvantage arising from more than one characteristic of their identity, location and/or experience. Foregrounding intersectionality in policy discussions **can ensure** that measures to improve equity capture the nuances associated with multiple types of disadvantages. This can be challenging to integrate into a universal strategy. Successful approaches include providing comprehensive tailored services which can support children and families across various domains but the forms of support are tailored to the individual family, for example some families may require extra support in accessing health services, while others require support in applying for income supports, and many may require multiple services.

Implications for reducing child poverty:

Reducing child poverty is central to the Leave No One Behind agenda as states and policy makers focus on which children are systematically excluded from fully participating in progress, either because they belong to one or more groups that are discriminated against, or the policies and programmes put in place are not effective at reaching them.

Strategies and solutions need to focus both on universal provision of services and protections - potentially starting with those most at risk - and on additional supports to left-behind groups. The evidence points not only to the effectiveness of such policies, but also suggests that they can be particularly important when implemented in the early years of life.

Source: [Leave no one behind - five years into Agenda 2030 Guidelines for turning the concept into action](#)

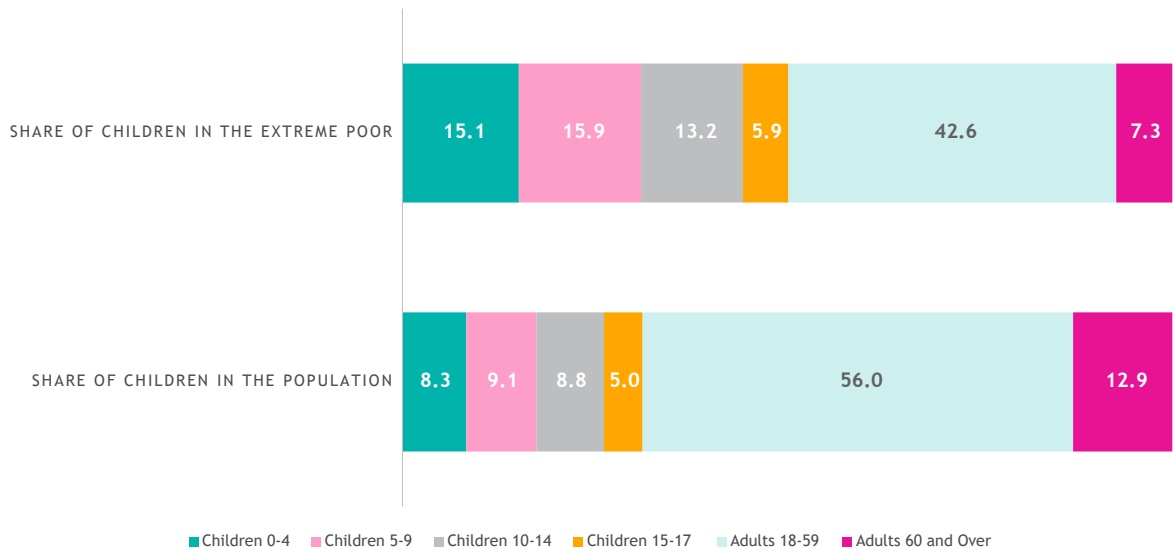
CHILD POVERTY ESTIMATES

Prior to COVID-19, one in six children lived in monetary extreme poverty, that is 356 million children (17.5%) struggling to survive on less than \$1.90 (PPP) a day. Children are twice (17.5%) as likely to live in a household in extreme poverty compared to adults (7.9%).⁴

And a staggering 1.3 billion children live below the higher international poverty line of \$5.50 (PPP). The share of children in extreme poverty is considerably higher than their share in the general population, and this is particularly the case for younger children.

Figure 2

Share of Children in Extreme Poverty and Share of Children in the Population:



Source: UNICEF and World Bank Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update (2020)

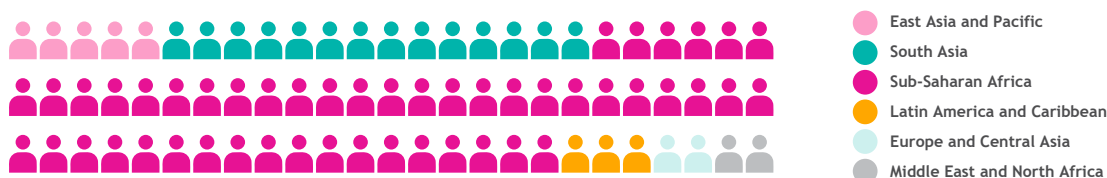
Extreme child poverty is increasingly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 2

out of 3 extreme monetary poor children in the world live (figure 3).

4 World Bank and UNICEF (2020) [Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update](#).

Figure 3

Extreme child Poverty by region, as of 2017:
 Extreme child poverty is increasingly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: UNICEF and World Bank Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update

However, child poverty is a global challenge - children live in poverty in richer and poorer countries alike. In the European Union countries, in 2021 an estimated 24.4% of children under 18 years were at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 21.7% of adults.⁵

Poverty is about more than the income to purchase goods and services, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and manifests itself in poor nutrition, poor health, poor education and limited capability to maintain livelihoods or participate in society. Recognizing this, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a definition of child poverty as the following: *“Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their*

full potential and to participate as full members of the society”.⁶

The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) provides disaggregated child poverty estimates for over 100 developing low- and middle-income countries⁷, and the most recent estimates show that some 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty, half of which - 644 million - are children. This means that whilst 1 in 6 adults live in multidimensionally poor households, 1 in 3 children do.⁸ Additionally, almost half a billion (481 million) multidimensionally poor people live in a household where a school-aged child is not currently attending school.

Prior to COVID-19 we witnessed a steady decline in monetary and multidimensional child poverty reduction, for example the global MPI shows 689 million children living in multidimensional poverty in 2017, down to 644 million children in 2020.

5 Eurostat (2021) [At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys](#)
 6 United Nations General Assembly, The Rights of the Child (Resolution A /RES/61/146, 23 January 2007), para 46.
 7 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2021) [Global MPI 2021 Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 8 See: <https://ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/>

However, as highlighted, climate change, conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic are causing unprecedented reversals in poverty reduction that are further exacerbated by rising inflation and food prices. The World Bank estimated that these combined crises led to additional 75 million to 95 million people living in extreme poverty in 2022 - compared to pre-pandemic projections (as per \$1.90 dollar a day)⁹. More than half of those additional people falling into poverty are likely to be children.¹⁰ Likewise, UNICEF and Save the Children projected that at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, 150 million additional children were living in multidimensional poverty¹¹, and it may take between seven and eight years to return to pre-COVID-19 child poverty levels.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic had set progress in reducing Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) values back by 3-10 years, according to simulations produced in 2020 by UNDP and OPHI.¹³ Updated MPI data indicate that the setback at the global level is likely to be on the high end of those projections.¹⁴ Without action, the reversal trend is likely to continue way beyond 2022. This is a deeply worrying sign for the fulfilment of the commitments in the SDGs.

From previous crises we have seen how economic recession can impact children.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, for example, child poverty increased as austerity measures were introduced in many countries.¹⁵ The economic fallout of the pandemic, as well as the global implications of the war in Ukraine, the food prices and inflation crisis, and the increasing climate-related disasters means that if urgent action is not taken to protect the gains made in several policy areas and further commitment to achieving the SDGs by 2030 is not made, there could be a lost decade for children. Recovery will also need to prioritize the most marginalised and deprived children in order for member states to truly meet the SDG commitment to Leave No One Behind.

The increase in fragility in many regions caused by increased levels of conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic is a major concern, the numbers of people living close to a conflict has risen steadily and doubled in the past 10 years. Furthermore, the number of forcibly displaced people has more than doubled since 2017, exceeding 70 million in 2017.¹⁶ The OECD estimate that in 2020, 222.7 million primary school-age children were out of school in fragile contexts - 107.5 million of them girls - and projections suggest that 36 million more children were living in households in fragile contexts by the end of

9 Gerszon Mahler, Yonzan, Hill, Lankner, Wu and Yoshida (2022) [Pandemic, prices, and poverty](#). World Bank Blogs.

10 Children are disproportionately more likely to be in households living in extreme poverty measured by the \$1.90 dollar a day poverty line

World Bank and UNICEF (2020) .

11 UNICEF and Save the Children (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on multidimensional child poverty <https://data.unicef.org/resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-multidimensional-child-poverty/>

12 UNICEF (2021) [Preventing a lost decade: Urgent action to reverse the devastating impact of COVID-19 on children and young people](#). UNICEF, New York, 2021.

13 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and OPHI (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative). 2020. Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2020: Charting Pathways out of Multidimensional Poverty: Achieving the SDGs. New York

14 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and OPHI (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative). 2022. Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty: Achieving the SDGs. New York.

15 Cantillon, Chezhen, Handa, and Nolan (2017) [Children of Austerity Impact of the Great Recession on Child Poverty in Rich Countries](#). UNICEF and Oxford University Press.

16 Corral, Paul, Alexander Irwin, Nandini Krishnan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, and Tara Vishwanath (2020) [Fragility and Conflict: On the Front Lines of the Fight against Poverty](#). Washington, DC: World Bank



2020, unable to make ends meet¹⁷. Children living in fragile contexts are at greatest risk of being left behind and not meeting the targets of the SDGs, 76% of children living in extreme poverty globally live in fragile contexts.¹⁸

Although we only have a brief insight so far into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child poverty, it is clear, it has made the task to end child poverty much more difficult and urgent. To tackle the complex multifaceted nature of poverty a comprehensive and varied strategy is needed, which combines income supports, access to quality public services, well-regulated decent employment opportunities, as well as greater political

and social representation of marginalised groups. For marginalised social or ethnic groups, girls, and women, children with disabilities, and for children on the move, poverty can often go hand in hand with discrimination and exclusion from services or jobs. Poverty can leave children exposed to rights violations such as child marriage and harmful labour. Countries keen to tackle child poverty cannot ignore barriers to the realisation of equal rights and tackling poverty can also often make an important contribution to reducing rights violations by improving people's opportunities. Box 2 outlines which children are most at risk of poverty globally.

Box 2: Which Children Are Most at Risk of Poverty?

The profile of children living in poverty varies across countries. However, surveys such as the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster survey, and household income or expenditure surveys can identify national and sub-national patterns. At the global level some clear patterns emerge which show that certain children are at greater risk of living in poverty.

Children in certain ethnic or language groups can be particularly vulnerable in many countries. OPHI found that people that are part of marginalized ethnic groups tend to have a higher risk of living in poverty, nearly 128 million people belong to ethnic groups in which 70 percent or more of the population is multidimensionally poor. In the nine poorest ethnic groups globally more than 90 percent of the population is multidimensionally poor. ([UNDP and OPHI, 2021](#)).

Family structure is often an important determinant of poverty. Children in large families are often very vulnerable to poverty, more than 20% of children in large households (six or more members) live in extreme poverty versus 6% of children in households with 3 or fewer members. Children in larger families or with fewer earners, including lone parent and child- or female headed families, are often at a high risk of growing up poor, for example 25.9% of children in female headed households live in extreme poverty, compared to 17.7% in male headed households. ([World Bank and UNICEF, 2020](#))

¹⁷ OECD (2020), States of Fragility 2020, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020.

¹⁸ World Bank and UNICEF (2020) [Global Estimate of Children in Monetary Poverty: An Update](#).

Households raising **children with disabilities** are at greater risk of poverty mainly due to disability associated costs and the lost earning opportunities as a result of additional caring responsibilities. Nearly 240 million children - 1 in 10 children worldwide, have some form of disability. And although not all of them live in poverty, children with disabilities experience a greater number of deprivations (in education, health etc.) than children without disabilities and children with disabilities in monetarily poor households can experience worse health outcomes than those in richer households due to the greater financial burden of accessing care. ([UNICEF, 2022](#))

Gender. In many societies poverty increases the vulnerability of girls, women, and LGBTQI+ people to rights violations such as sexual exploitation, violence, and child marriage. Girls and women are more likely to live in poor households (below the international poverty line) than boys and men, and women are disproportionately represented in informal jobs that are vulnerable during times of economic upheaval.

Conflict and fragile contexts. Children living in humanitarian contexts, including those affected by climate, conflict, and displacement are particularly at risk. Millions of children live in complex/protracted contexts that experience a layering of shocks such as violent conflict, recurrent climate shocks, and displacement thus keeping them locked in a downward spiral/never-ending cycle of poverty. It is estimated that 42% of children in fragile contexts are in extreme poverty versus 15% of those in non-conflict contexts. ([World Bank and UNICEF, 2020](#))

Refugees and Internally Displaced People: Many more people are on the move as a result of increased instability in many regions. Between 2005 and 2021, the global number of child refugees under UNHCR mandate more than doubled from four million to more than 10 million ([UNICEF, 2022](#)). The prevalence of poverty amongst refugees and internally displaced people is stark, for example it has been found that 9 out of 10 families in the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon lived under the extreme poverty line in 2021. ([UNHCR, 2021](#)). Climate change is another factor contributing to an increase in forced migration and displacement

Children growing up outside households. Surveys usually sample households at fixed addresses. Such surveys can miss out those living in severely deprived and vulnerable situations including children living on the streets, those migrating, or growing up in institutional care. Evidence based policy requires the insights that surveys provide but should recognize and make efforts to obtain qualitative and additional information on children outside of households.

In short, the scale of child poverty is staggering and the threats to child poverty reduction have never been greater. The good news is that prior to COVID-19 child poverty had reduced in most parts of the world and with concerted efforts we can make child

poverty a part of history. This requires a broad range of public policies to ensure that no child is left behind.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty core agenda to end child poverty is being



re-committed, as the urgency to tackle child poverty has greatly intensified and progress gained over recent years is at risk if countries do not take urgent action to prioritise children. In addition, the evidence on what works to reduce child poverty, including the role of universal child benefits, has increased. Given the multidimensional nature of poverty and the long-term consequences of deprivations across dimensions, it is essential that countries take a multisectoral approach to tackling child poverty and improving children's wellbeing. This core agenda outlines key considerations and

current evidence regarding child sensitive social protection, public service provision, and decent parental employment. This is not an exhaustive list and there will be context specific measures which are not covered in the Coalition agenda, but these policies are the building blocks of a national strategy to tackle child poverty. The process of building a national strategy to tackle child poverty ensures policies are developed as a coordinated set of measures rather than in an ad-hoc manner and builds cohesion between the stakeholders needed to achieve the targets.

1. BUILD NATIONAL SUPPORT BY ENSURING THAT CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION IS AN EXPLICIT NATIONAL PRIORITY

Key Messages:

- Building national support to tackle child poverty is essential, this does not only require Government leadership but also requires engagement with multiple stakeholders, including civil society, community leaders, adults and children living in poverty, implementing agencies, trade unions, non-government organisations, and employers. This broad participation is essential to ensure there is commitment and political and social support behind the plans and policies to tackle child poverty.
- Comprehensive strategies to tackle child poverty have been successfully used in some countries, outlining the extent of child poverty, bringing key stakeholders together and agreeing on a path forward with explicit targets and monitoring on progress.
- Building national support for tackling child poverty may require challenging myths about why poverty persists.
- National statistical capacity is key to tackling child poverty for a variety of reasons; the measurement of poverty to increase our understanding of the issue, the evaluation of the impact of policies, and the data and systems to allocate resources and implement public policies to tackle child poverty.

Building national support by ensuring that reducing child poverty is an explicit national priority, child poverty is measured and routinely monitored, and including child poverty reduction as a priority in national budgets, policies, and laws - is crucial. A comprehensive strategy to tackle child poverty requires policies and plans to reduce and prevent child poverty but also actions to mitigate against the consequences of child

poverty such as material deprivations and barriers to access many public services.¹⁹

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty [SDG Guide to End Child Poverty](#) outlines the importance of having a clear sense of intention around child poverty and is organized by an indicative set of Milestones to guide work, as follows:

¹⁹ OECD (2022), [Evolving Family Models in Spain: A New National Framework for Improved Support and Protection for Families](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

1. Building national support for addressing child poverty as part of the broader Leave No One Behind agenda. National support requires not only Government leadership but campaigners and opinion formers, coming together.
2. Measuring child poverty. Adequate measurement of child poverty identifies which children are at greatest risk including appropriate data disaggregation.
3. Putting child poverty on the map. The greater understanding that measurement brings can be used by policy makers and advocates to identify better policy and programmes.
4. Influencing specific policies and programmes to reduce child poverty. The paper articulates policy areas known to have important potential to reduce child poverty. It is up to national discussion to identify the best policy options.
5. An integrated approach to ending extreme child poverty and at least halving child poverty by national definitions, as part of a funded, implemented and evaluated national plan. Measuring child poverty enables countries to set a clear target. Central Government has a key role to set a direction, but regional and local tiers can contribute to delivering progress.

Building national support for tackling child poverty may require challenging myths about why poverty persists. To be poor in many countries is often to experience shaming, stigma, and exclusion. Poverty is frequently argued to arise from individual failings of not working hard enough, investing insufficiently in education, or having low aspirations. Judgements are often made of how families in poverty bring up children, with

Box 3: Measuring Child Poverty

To effectively eradicate child poverty in all its forms, policies and interventions require a sound evidence-base to identify and target children living in poverty. Child poverty is measured in different ways across the world.

Measures of extreme low income, such as living in households with per capita incomes below \$1.90 PPP per day, are used to indicate access to bare necessities, this is known as the global estimate of extreme monetary poverty. The World Bank and UNICEF produce child poverty estimates at various poverty line levels. Equivalent metrics are produced at country level based on nationally defined poverty lines.

Relative income poverty measures typically count children as poor where they live in households with per capita or per adult equivalent incomes below 50-60% of the median. Such relative measures are intended to identify whether children and households are likely to be able to afford goods and take part in activities common within society. These measures are commonly used in high income countries where extreme low income is rare, but relative poverty persists.

Monetary poverty measures, nonetheless, do not capture the many serious non-monetary deprivations that many children do sadly experience. There is thus growing emphasis on using multidimensional poverty measures, which operationalise the recognition that poverty should - in line with the SDGs - be conceptualised, measured, and alleviated in all its forms and dimensions. Monetary measures of child poverty do not accurately predict deprivations across other important dimensions of child well-being, such as access to quality education and healthcare, safe drinking water, shelter and care, or adequate housing. Multidimensional measures such as the global and many National Multidimensional Poverty Indices (MPIs) as well as closely related Bristol method and the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analyses (MODA) make visible the overlapping deprivations that constitute children's poverty and guide policies to the de-clustering of children's disadvantages.

assumptions made that care givers who are poor do not parent well. The reality is often starkly different with parents working hard and sacrificing their own needs to support their children, but poverty still constrains

the opportunities children face. Challenging myths is an important part of building public support for policies that tackle the barriers facing those who are poor, see box 4.

Box 4: Dismantling Myths about Poverty and Social Protection

1. Poverty is not caused by bad behaviour

Poverty is primarily caused by structural factors, such as low wages, a lack of jobs, a lack of access to land, the lack of state provision to adequately compensate those engaged in unpaid work - particularly caring work, etc. Repeated studies have shown that the primary cause of poverty is not the 'bad' behaviour of the poor.

2. Poverty is not destiny

In countries with good levels of social protection research shows that there is virtually no one who is born into poverty, grows up living in poverty and remains poor for their entire lives. Poor children are of course more likely, than their richer peers, to become poor adults but this is largely due to structural reasons rather than any 'cycle of poverty' or 'transmission' of poverty (Townsend, 1974; Scoon et al, 2012). Research has shown that poor adults and children do not have a 'culture of poverty' and tend to have similar aspirations as the rest of the population.

3. Social protection does not create dependency

One of the oldest debates about the extent provision of social protection is how this provision of comprehensive supports will impact on work incentives. There is little evidence that universal programmes have large disincentive effects, whereas means-tested programmes have potentially higher disincentives effects (ODI/UNICEF, 2020). Even more so with benefits aimed at children, work incentive effects should not be the primary issue of concern, and therefore the policy case for them is very clear and has very few trade-offs. In low- and middle-income countries the evidence shows that cash transfers in general whether universal or means-tested do not tend to have adverse impacts on the labour market and may actually improve people's labour market status ([Addressing the Myths](#)).

UNICEF finds that across a wide of research there is no evidence that cash transfers increase irresponsible spending ([Addressing the Myths](#)).

4. Social protection does not increase fertility

A common concern about cash transfers is that they will increase fertility rates. The vast majority of studies show either no impact on fertility, reductions in fertility and/or changes in factors which can reduce fertility ([Addressing the Myths](#)). Evidence suggests that programme design that limits the size of transfers to larger families will not affect fertility but may have negative outcomes on children by reducing transfer size.



Using participation and evidence to inform a national plan to end child poverty

Which policies to prioritise first, how to progressively increase the level of support and coverage, and how to design these programmes and policies to address child poverty requires evidence and participation. Key sources of evidence come from the participation of a broad range of actors including people and children living in poverty, local civil society groups, and social actors such as trade unions, cooperative groups and employers. A process which has been used across many contexts, is to combine these two elements to develop a child poverty strategy which outlines the context of child poverty within the State and consults and works with relevant actors to set targets and indicators for progress over a defined period of time.

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child grants children the right to be heard and participate. The General Comment No. 12 notes that over recent decades the term ‘participation’ has come to describe a multi layered process which include ‘information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes’.²⁰ Participation in the policy process by people who access services, experience certain disadvantages, or are part of particular community has gained more recognition over recent years. In addition,

an increased focus on the importance of children’s participation is important, as there is greater recognition of a child’s capacity to reflect on their own living conditions and their role as a complete social actor in society.²¹ In a framework to support a better understanding of how to implement Article 12 of the CRC, the Lundy notes that this requires four separate concepts; voice, space, audience and influence.²²

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to
- Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

Research focusing on how participation has been organised and its impact on policy outcomes, shows that in many cases the extent to which participation and consultation influence decisions remain in doubt. This may be particularly true when it comes to the participation of children and young people, for example a recent study from Sweden shows that although national policy states that children should be consulted when social assistance is granted to a family, at the local level there are no institutional or organisational structures which facilitates this, and social workers appear to be sceptical at the idea of children’s participation.²³

20 United Nations (2009) [Convention on the Rights of the Child GENERAL COMMENT No. 12 \(2009\) The right of the child to be heard](#)

21 David Pålsson, Stefan Wiklund, (2022) [A Policy Decoupled from Practice: Children’s Participation in Swedish Social Assistance](#), The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 52, Issue 2, March 2022, Pages 964-981.

22 Laura Lundy (2007) ‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, British Educational Research Journal, 33:6, 927-942

23 David Pålsson, Stefan Wiklund, (2022) [A Policy Decoupled from Practice: Children’s Participation in Swedish Social Assistance](#), The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 52, Issue 2, March 2022, Pages 964-981.

Box 5: Participatory approaches involving children and their families living in poverty:

The Merging of Knowledge participatory method:

The Merging of Knowledge methodology can be used to identify the hidden dimensions of poverty and develop measures to address them. It is a technique to help people, children and families facing extreme poverty and social exclusion dialogue with policymakers, business leaders, social workers, and teachers. The goal is to overcome differences in speaking and thinking, life experience, and perspective so that constructive discussions can occur. In this methodology, the different stakeholders, including children, meet in groups of peers, where they are offered the conditions they need to express their opinions freely on a specific topic/problem. Afterward, the information and the analyses generated are merged, through joint meetings of all the stakeholders in order to arrive at a consensus. (Example of Merging of Knowledge methodology and results in a research conducted in Bangladesh with a group of children.)

The Tapori Approach:

To build a world where persistent poverty and discrimination will not have a place anymore, the contribution of the children the most affected is indispensable. They have a clear understanding and specific experiences of what it means to be deprived of their rights and to fight for them, but they also have aspirations. Truly listening to the children and taking them seriously requires rigorous conditions to learn from their experiences and their knowledge.

Tapori International is a movement that offers a methodology, tools, and training based on decades of experience. Through activities and the stories of other children who have the experience of poverty, children learn to express their thoughts, listen to one another, understand each other, make decisions together, and elaborate knowledge built from different perspectives. These conditions enable children to become agents of change, able to articulate their hopes and struggles within their communities and initiate joint actions to improve their conditions.



Research across various countries show that impeding factors for children’s participation often include the time constraints of caseworkers, the frequency of staff turnover in key position such as social workers, the attitudes of professionals who are in charge of implementing children’s participation, and the view of many professionals that children are vulnerable and are in need of protection.²⁴

However, evidence shows²⁵ that when stakeholders adopt a participatory approach, there are multiple benefits including:

- **Child participation shifts the narrative**, so children are no longer perceived as objects to protect but agents of change who are champions for children’s rights.
- **Children are empowered by an enabling**, supportive environment that allows them to meet and share their views. Child participation forums can be inclusive, encourage diversity and remove barriers to participation. Democratic and respectful environments provide opportunities for those who are often denied a chance to speak, particularly girls.

Children improve programs and policies because they are experts about their own lives, needs and experiences. Children possess knowledge from their unique lived experience that may not be understood by the adult decision-makers in their lives. “To do something for a child, without that child, is to do it against that child” Martine, Democratic Republic of Congo.²⁶ One way to ensure children’s voices are included in the planning, and evaluation of policies is for States to engage and support child-led

initiatives and youth-led organisations. It is key to assess the barriers to inclusion including stigma and discrimination and then to systematically organise participation of young people with a strong focus on those who are most marginalised and least likely to have their voices heard, such as children with disabilities, girls and children from ethnic minorities, and children on the move.²⁷

Children and families can provide essential information for policy and provide much greater nuance on how people experience the policies and services intended to support them. Civil society groups can often act as a supportive structure through which to organise participation. As well as this form of policy participation, political engagement of marginalised families is important prerequisite for reducing inequality, in many States a major reason for poverty and widespread inequality, is the lack of political power and representation of highly marginalised people. Ensuring political voice and power is more evenly distributed is integral to long-term structural change.

Joint planning

As well as the participation of children and people living in poverty, the participation of social actors as well as all relevant ministries and departments is essential. Child poverty is a multidimensional problem where various dimensions can be mutually reinforcing. Significant progress is unlikely to be delivered by one policy or sector area only. Joint planning across Government Ministries as well as across the levels of Government (national, subnational, local) is integral

24 Ibid

25 World Vision International (2017) [Child Led Mobilisation An essential approach for ending violence against children](#)

26 Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore, (2020) [Children’s Voices at the Centre: Lessons from World Vision’s child participation models](#). Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Blog.

27 UNICEF (2020) [Engaged and Heard Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement](#). UNICEF, New York, 2020.

to improve coordination and governance. Options include establishing joint units across sectoral Ministries or involving the Ministry of Finance to drive joined up action. Integration of services is important, though particularly challenging where service delivery is weak. Partnerships between national or local government and civil society organisations has a strong potential to improve the impact of policies and programmes. There may be pragmatic options within existing delivery mechanisms that can be improved upon. In particular, rising school enrolment creates an opportunity for schools to act as a platform for interventions to improve nutrition, health, or access to information. National consultations and engagement in social dialogue with trade unions, employers and non-governmental organisations is essential for a sustainable approach to reducing child poverty.

Building strong public statistical agencies which can collect, store, and analyse public data in a timely manner is integral to designing better policies and services. Representative and quality data will allow for essential public policy planning, as noted previously, at the core of any national statistical system should be a civil registration and vital statistics system.

National statistical data also allows for the measurement and monitoring of poverty, measuring poverty allows States to answer the following questions;

- What is the nature of child poverty in the country?
- What is the size of the challenge to end child poverty?
- Are policies benefiting the poorest families and children?
- What impact could a new policy have on child poverty?²⁸

This data can be used to deliberate and debate about the best way forward and used by civil society to advocate States to prioritise certain policies or programmes. Therefore, monitoring poverty is also an important way of bringing discussions of poverty and inequality into the political space. For data on poverty to be part of democracy and political discussions, the data needs to be understandable to non-experts, clear, timely and publicly available.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty note in their SDG guide that it is not the aim to create the perfect plan to end child poverty but to find a plausible pathway of progress and the milestones on the way, as well as the activities that can help these milestones be reached. In this way the aim is to build a shared understanding across a wide range of stakeholders of the overall goal and steps to achieve this goal, key to building this pathway is consultation, participation of children and families, and good quality public data and measurement on child poverty.

28 Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017) [Child Poverty Sustainable Development Goals Guide: Milestone 2 Measuring child poverty.](#)

2. EXPANDING CHILD-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND PROGRAMMES

Key Messages:

- Social protection is key to reducing both monetary and multidimensional poverty, and reduce inequalities. The importance of social protection has been confirmed by many international treaties, agreements, and international law.
- States have a legal obligation to ensure everyone has access to social protection.
- Child-sensitive social protection encompasses policies and programmes that address or at least recognize and respond to the specific patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability. It also recognizes the longer-term developmental benefits of investing adequately in children.
- Just 26.4 per cent of children globally receiving a child or family benefit, and there are significant regional disparities, and in addition headline regional figures can mask major differences in coverage within regions and within countries.
- The gaps in coverage of social protection for children stems from major underinvestment in social protection as a whole and particularly for children. Globally, just 1.1% of GDP is spent on child related social protection.
- Cash plus programmes have been implemented successfully across a number of countries and regions and have shown to achieve promising outcomes in reducing monetary and multidimensional child poverty. Cash plus is important entry point to build multisector systems for public service provision.

As highlighted, in almost every country in the world children are more vulnerable to poverty than adults, and households with children can be particularly exposed to shocks and suffer from income losses. At the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, for example, in a study across 35 low-income countries, 2 out of 3, or 76% of households with many children (3 or more) reported experiencing total income

loss, versus 55% of households with no children.²⁹

Social protection is essential to reduce both monetary and multidimensional poverty and reduce inequalities. The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board defines social protection as 'a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social

²⁹ Save the Children (2020) [Child Sensitive Social Protection An Essential Foundation for Achieving Children's Rights and Poverty Reduction](#). Save the Children, 2020.

exclusion throughout their life-course, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups'.³⁰ The importance of social protection has been confirmed by many international treaties, agreements, and international law. Social protection has not only been recognised as standalone target in the SDGs but also is considered as an accelerator of results across other sectors and SDGs targets.

States have a legal obligation to ensure everyone has access to social protection. Article 26 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirms every child's right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and confirms every State's obligation to take all necessary steps to realise this right.³¹ Furthermore, ILO Recommendation No. 202 includes income security for children as one of the five elements that constitute a social protection floor. In keeping with the principle of progressive realisation and nationally defined systems, Recommendation No.202 is not prescriptive of how income security for children should be achieved, however the most common forms of social protection for children are child and family benefits. But child-sensitive social protection goes beyond programmes targeted at children and young people, at the core of child-sensitive social protection is the life-cycle approach to provision, which ensures that children will be reached directly, as well as the adults that they are dependent on.³² The majority of social protection spending goes on schemes that are not directly targeted at children and thus making all social protection policies and programmes child-sensitive is essential.

Child-sensitive social protection encompasses policies and programmes that address or at least recognize and respond to the specific patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability. It also recognizes the longer-term developmental benefits of investing adequately in children. Child-sensitive social protection offers a framework to for guiding all aspects of design and implementation of social protection through a children's lens.

The objectives of child-sensitive social protection are

- **Protective:** child-sensitive social protection aims to safeguard household income and consumption levels so that children's basic wellbeing can be maintained.
- **Preventative:** child-sensitive social protection seeks to provide households with alternatives to potentially negative coping strategies which might otherwise increase child risk, such as dropping out of school, child labour or inadequate adult care.
- **Promotional:** child-sensitive social protection supports active investment in critical aspects of children's development, including schooling and health.
- **Transformative:** child-sensitive social protection addresses structural and societal power imbalances that might otherwise create or sustain child vulnerabilities, while also encouraging greater equity and empowerment.³³

30 Social Protection.org (2022) [Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board](#),

31 United Nations (1989) [General Assembly resolution 44/25 Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

32 UNICEF (2019) [UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework](#). United Nations Children's Fund New York.

33 Adapted from The African Child Policy Forum and ODI (2013)

Box 6: Practical Ways to Ensure Social Protection is Child-Sensitive

- Avoiding any negative impacts (such as public works programmes which in some countries have led to child labour, affected school attendance, and interfered with infant care and feeding practices)
- Maximising the positive impacts (e.g. by protecting pregnant women and addressing the different needs and risks for girls and boys throughout their childhood; and by linking benefits to health and education systems, so that with the income support they receive, children and families have access to essential services and information for decision-making)
- Listening to and acting on the views of children and their caregivers when designing, monitoring, and evaluating social protection measures, to ensure that programmes continue to effectively meet their needs and respond to their concerns
- Making special provision to reach children who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including children without a home or registration, with no parental care, and those who are marginalized within their families or communities due to their gender, disability status, race or ethnicity, HIV status, or other factors.
- Measuring the impacts of social protection both at household level, and within the household - for children of different ages, both girls and boys, and paying attention to those with special needs and the effects of gender inequalities or social exclusion.

Source: [A call to Action for Governments to Expand Children's Access to Child-Sensitive Social Protection in the Wake of COVID-19](#)

UNICEF's social protection framework³⁴ outlines what a child-sensitive social protection system should offer every child:

1. **Live in a household with sufficient income to develop and fulfil their potential:** For many households paid employment can provide sufficient income but many will also require additional supports to access quality, decent employment. For households with insufficient income social protection supports such as social transfers or insurance can help to reduce economic barriers.
2. **Have access to quality basic social services regardless of income or personal characteristics:** Sufficient income plays an important role in supporting access to services as well as additional programmes that make services accessible such as health insurance, school feeding programmes etc. The delivery of programmes that ensure marginalised children have access to services are also central to a child-sensitive approach.

34 UNICEF (2019) [UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework](#). United Nations Children's Fund New York.

3. **When needed, have direct contact with an outreach worker who can support families and empower them to access key services and information.** Tailored, individualised services which support families to access their rights through advocating on their behalf, providing information on different programmes.

How Child-Sensitive is Social Protection Around the World?

Various frameworks can be used to assess the how child-sensitive a national social protection system is, see appendix 2 for an overview of various assessment approaches. At the global level it is possible to assess the coverage and expenditure on social protection

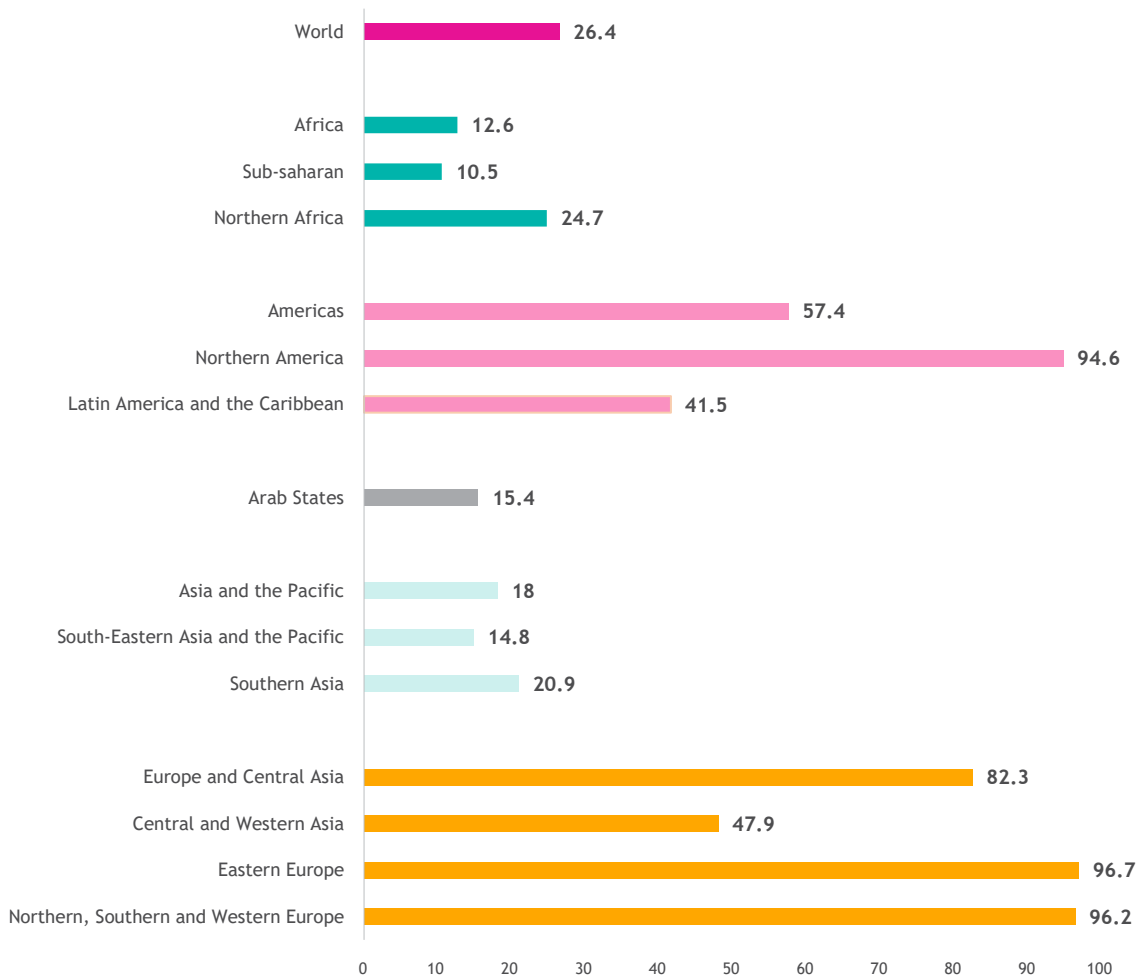
for children, as well as some of the other dimensions of policy design which shape the child-sensitivity and inclusiveness of social protection such as the accessibility and the implications of different targeting methods, as well as the role of conditions in social protection. Just 26.4 per cent of children globally receiving a child or family benefit, and as the figure below shows there are significant regional disparities and sometimes the headline regional figure can mask major differences in coverage. For example, in the Europe and Central Asia region 82.3% of children are effectively covered by a child or family benefit however this masks that there is a considerable difference between Europe (where over 95% of children are covered) and Central and Western Asia where less than 50% of children are covered.³⁵

35 ILO (2021) [World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future](#) International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2021.



Figure 4

SDG Indicator 1.3.1 effective coverage for children and families:
 Percentage of children and households receiving child and family benefits,
 by sub region, as of 2020



ILO World Social Protection Database, as of 2020

As well as coverage of child and family benefits, many other social protection benefits impact children’s wellbeing, there are still 4 billion people who currently do not have access to any social protection benefits, with many people working in the informal sector having no access to social protection.

The gaps in coverage of social protection for children stems from major underinvestment in social protection as a whole and particularly for children. Globally, just 1.1% of GDP is spent on child related social protection. The level of total global social protection expenditure varies widely across regions, with countries in Europe and Central Asia spending

on average 17.4 per cent of GDP on social protection and just 7.5% of GDP in Asia and the Pacific and 3.8% of GDP in Africa is spent on social protection. It is estimated that an additional investment of 1.2 trillion USD is

needed, annually, to expand social protection floors in low- and middle-income countries, social protection floors include the provision of universal health care and basic income security across the lifecycle.³⁶

Table 1

Region	Total Expenditure on social protection (excluding healthcare)	Expenditure on social protection floors by broad age group		
		Children	Working Age	Old Age
Africa	3.8	0.4	1.1	2.2
Americas	16.6	0.7	2.6	6.6
Arab States	4.6	0.1	1.4	3.8
Asia and the Pacific	7.5	1.1	1.7	5.1
Europe and Central Asia	17.4	1.5	7.7	10.7
World	12.9	1.1	3.6	7.0

ILO World Social Protection Database, as of 2020.

Cash Plus: Integrated service provision through social protection systems

As noted previously, it is well evidenced that cash transfers can have positive impact on various outcomes particularly in the short-term, but social outcomes are multisectoral and are not solely driven by income but also access to a wide range of services and supports in education, healthcare, nutrition,

and protection. Cash plus are a critical entry point to develop integrated and multisector social protection systems. They provide the way to showcase how complementing cash transfers with additional services (directly or via referrals and links to external service provision can support accelerating support long-term, sustainable positive outcomes.³⁷ In practice cash plus programmes can be delivered in a number of ways and combine different elements of support. Cash plus

³⁶ Durán-Valverde, F., Pacheco-Jiménez, J.F., Muzaffar, T., Elizondo-Barboza, H. (2020). Financing gaps in social protection Global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond (Geneva, ILO)

³⁷ Keetie Roelen, Stephen Devereux, Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai, Bruno Martorano, Tia Palermo and Luigi Peter agno (2017). [How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors](#), Innocenti Working Paper 2017-10, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence

Box 7: Universal Child Benefits:

Child Benefits take various forms, even within universal child benefits there are different models used by various countries. A recent ODI and UNICEF report defines a full universal child benefit as ‘a cash payment or tax transfer made on a regular basis to children, independently of their socioeconomic or other characteristics’, in most countries child cash and tax benefits are part of a package of supports for children and families which may include in-kind benefits, subsidies or exemptions from charges.

Universal child benefits and quasi universal child benefits have a long-established history in OECD countries. They are less common in countries outside the OECD, latest ILO data shows 22 countries have universal child benefits, 3 countries have quasi-universal child benefits, 8 countries deliver affluence tested quasi-universal child benefits, 4 countries coordinate the quasi-universal child benefit through the social insurance and tax system, 77 countries deliver other forms of child benefits, and 67 countries have no national statutory social protection scheme.

Public investment on child benefit packages varies widely and is about 0.4% of GDP in low income and middle-income countries, whereas in high income countries it averages about 1.7%.

In OECD countries child benefits are one of the key public policies that reduces child poverty alongside other social protection benefits. There is also evidence of the strong impact of universal child benefits or grants in reducing poverty in low- and middle-income countries, for example in Mongolia, the Child Money Programme led to a 12% reduction in the national poverty headcount, and 21% reduction in the poverty gap. Simulations of the impact of UCBs on poverty in various countries show the likelihood of large-scale positive results, for example, Evans shows that a UCB costing 1% of GDP could have a significant effect on reducing total and child poverty. Furthermore, the low likelihood of exclusion errors and non-take-up mean that universal child benefits are likely to be very effective, and administratively relatively straightforward to distribute.

The political economy of child benefits is an important consideration, child benefits can enhance state-citizen relations, trust in government, social cohesion, and stability and this can increase the feasibility and sustainability of the scheme. Generally, there are high levels of support for income supports and services for children.

In practice it is rare that a full universal child benefit is introduced for all children in one step, varied trajectories towards universal child benefits have been followed. Progressive realisation of a universal child benefit starting with a certain age group and incrementally increasing the age entitlement until all children are covered is one approach which some countries have pursued.

Source: [ODI/UNICEF \(2020\) Universal child benefits: policy issues and options](#). London: Overseas Development Institute and New York: UNICEF.

programmes generally combine cash transfers with one or more types of complementary support, these complementary supports include elements that are integral to cash transfers such as provision of additional benefits/in-kind transfers, information or behaviour change communication (BCC), or psychosocial support and elements that are external to cash transfers but offer explicit linkages into services provided by other sectors, such as through direct provision of access to services, or facilitating linkages to services.³⁸ There is no ideal type of cash plus programme and each scheme will need to determine the exact combination of supports which meet the needs of the recipients and can be implemented at the local level. In the long run, they should help to facilitate the effective and sustainable link between different systems, going beyond a package of interventions.

Roelen et al outline a number of key lessons learned from the implementation of cash plus programmes in various countries.³⁹ These lessons span three levels: the policy level, the programme level and the supply-side level. As the policy level the importance of political champions is clear, political commitment is essential especially in order to develop institutional agreements between different ministries and implementing actors which are core to cash plus programmes. At the programme level, it is important that all parties involved in the programme are engaged with during the planning and implementation, this improves the coordination between actors. Other programme features that are important for successful cash plus schemes include a skilled workforce and the greater availability of

resources. Lastly, supply-side factors that shape how effective cash plus programme can be include whether greater resources are invested in the services included in the cash plus programme, to ensure that any new service-users can access quality services.

As highlighted above the implementation of cash plus programmes can be complex and pose governance and coordination challenges, but the potential impact of them means that they are key components of delivering rights-based, transformative social protection.

The evidence suggests that tackling child poverty is essential for future of economic and social prosperity, and it is clear from a vast array of countries across all regions of the world that social protection can effectively do this. However, coverage remains low in many regions of the world.⁴⁰ Therefore, a strong expansion of social protection coverage and investment is needed over the coming years if considerable progress on the Leave No One behind Agenda is to be achieved.

Shock Responsive Social Protection:

As noted earlier in this paper, fragility is rising globally, leading to an increase in poverty and vulnerability to poverty. To combat increased fragility and protect people from recurring and intense shocks, social protection systems need to be more shock responsive by extending the types of risks covered to include 'additional challenges which often impact many households at once such as natural hazards, economic crises, and conflict'.⁴¹ It is key to embed child sensitivity

38 *ibid*

39 *ibid*

40 ILO (2021) World Social Protection Report 2020-22: [Social protection at the crossroads - in pursuit of a better future](#). International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2021.

41 UNICEF (2019) [Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems](#). UNICEF, New York, 2019.

in the development of shock responsive social protection systems, including analysing and addressing the specific barriers faced by children in times of crisis.⁴² Integrating shock responsiveness into policy, programmes and implementation will be key to protecting people over the coming years.

Key policy considerations to enhance child sensitive social protection:

- Explore the possibility of introducing a universal child benefit, which could be introduced initially to cover young children with a progressive increase in coverage overtime to reach all children.
- Ensure income support is adequate for particularly vulnerable families or children such as single parents and families with children with disabilities.
- Ensure social protection income supports account for the number of children in the household
- Provide unemployment benefits/ minimum income benefits for working age adults that lose their job or earn below a certain threshold.
- Ensure social protection programmes are predictable and sustained in order to avoid adverse consequences
- Consider carefully the recipient of the benefit and other design features, in compliance with the SDG Leave No One Behind agenda
- Adopt a multi-sectoral approach and more integrated planning to child-sensitive policies and policy implementations

42 UNICEF (2019) [Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems](#). UNICEF, New York, 2019.

3. IMPROVE ACCESS TO UNIVERSAL QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES, ESPECIALLY FOR THE POOREST CHILDREN

Key Messages:

- The provision of accessible and quality public services are a key component of reducing child poverty and tackling long-term structural inequalities.
- Education and healthcare, as well as child protection and nutrition services are essential to ensure children receive appropriate support early in life to ensure they can reach their full potential. Children from low-income households may have less access to services where coverage is low, and frequently experience lower quality services or different treatment.
- Education is an essential public service for children and society:
 - Early years education and care has shown to have a very strong impact on later life outcomes, however coverage and investment in the sector is low.
 - Universalism in education requires strong regulation and governance from the State and is key to long-term poverty and inequality reduction.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to schooling and learning, with 1.6 billion students affected by full or partial closure of schools around the world. Furthermore, certain groups of children are more likely to never attend school or drop out early, these include girls and children with disabilities.
- Poor health presents serious risks for children - to their own survival and health, and due to the costs of illness impacting on their households.
 - There has been major progress made on certain health indicators for children including a strong reduction in the under 5 mortality rate, however progress on access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and immunization services have all been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and this poses stark risks for millions of children's health outcomes.
 - Healthcare costs can push vulnerable families into poverty.
- Other public policies such as birth registration and housing provision and supports are vital for reducing child monetary and multidimensional poverty and enhancing family's access other services and decent employment.

The provision of accessible and quality public services are a key component of reducing child poverty and tackling long-term structural inequalities. Education and healthcare, as well as child protection and nutrition services are essential to ensure children receive appropriate support early in life, and throughout their childhood, to ensure they can reach their full potential. Children from low-income households may have less access to services where coverage is low, and frequently experience lower quality services or different treatment. Background disadvantages, such as the need to work, may undermine children's ability to benefit from services. Addressing concerns of coverage, equity and quality is important to improving the action of public services for poor children and to reducing multidimensional poverty.

Child poverty is multidimensional in itself, as well as in its causes and consequences. Lack of access to public services is often used among the many indicators of multidimensional poverty. Access to decent water, sanitation and electricity, pre-school, schooling and training, health and housing policies are all important. Such policies are usually delivered in sectors but there are interdependencies, across the life course and between service areas.⁴³ Joint planning of services with children at the centre can help identify 'roadblocks' where the weaknesses in one service undermine another and, by extension, improvements in one sector can help overcome barriers in another.

Over recent decades, there has been an enhanced focus on the role of service

provision in tackling poverty, there is growing scientific evidence of the return to investment on sufficient public spending in the early years of life in healthcare, education, and nutrition.⁴⁴

Filgueira and Rossel note that apart from child income supports, the most dynamic areas of family policy over recent decades have been major expansions in early childhood education and care and parental leave policies.⁴⁵ This section will outline some of the essential public services to end child poverty such as education and early childhood care and education, healthcare, housing supports, and birth registration.

Education and Early Childhood Care/ Education Provision

Pre-pandemic estimates showed that 258 million school-aged children were out of school.⁴⁶ Furthermore, there was large disparity in learning outcomes of children across high, middle, and low-income countries.⁴⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to schooling and learning, with 1.6 billion students affected by full or partial closure of schools around the world.⁴⁸ While the Millennium Development Goals focused heavily on increasing enrolment rates in primary education the Sustainable development Goals have placed a heavier focus on outcomes and completion rates. Although education has become more accessible, major disparities remain. Data from 2020 show that the gap between girls and boys participating in

43 Dornan, P and Woodhead M, 2015, How inequalities develop through childhood, Life course evidence from Young Lives, UNICEF Office of Research https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/idp_2015_01%282%29.pdf

44 Filgueira and Rossel (2020) 'Family Policies Across the Globe' in eds. Nieuwenhuis, R. and Van Lancker, W [The Palgrave Handbook of Family Policy](#). Palgrave Macmillan

45 *ibid*

46 The World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (2021). [The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery](#). Washington D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

47 *Ibid*

48 *Ibid*

education was 39 per cent, between rural and urban areas was 76 per cent, and the difference between the richest and poorest households participating in education was 86 per cent.⁴⁹ This shows that there remains a lot of work to do in order to achieve Target 4.1 that ensures all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, as well as the other targets under Goal 4 on access to pre-primary care, literacy and numeracy, affordable technical and vocational education, and discrimination.

UNESCO note that in societies with high levels of inequality ensuring equality of opportunity in education becomes more difficult, this can manifest itself in a number of ways such as increased levels of corruption, higher levels of discrimination based on gender, disability, or ethnicity and financial exclusion.⁵⁰ It is essential the ‘publicness’ of public education is upheld; UNESCO highlight that States have the key responsibility for financing and regulating the education ecosystem to ensure that the system meets the needs for all people living within the given territory.⁵¹

There is growing recognition of the important role of early education and care as a foundation for later learning and education, how it makes education systems more efficient and effective, and equitable pre-primary education is an effective strategy for promoting economic growth. The evidence suggests that the impact of quality early education and childcare programmes are

very positive for children and young people and the effects are particularly strong for children from disadvantaged families.⁵² The commitment in the SDGs under Target 4.2 to achieve universal pre-primary education coverage by 2030 is a bold ambition, in 2017 50% of children had access to pre-primary education.⁵³ There is a very large disparities in coverage between countries and even within regions, for example in Ghana in 2017 coverage of pre-primary education reach 115% and in Burkina Faso it was just 2%.⁵⁴ Although coverage is an important indicator it does not capture quality or take-up of these services.

Young Lives longitudinal research also demonstrates the important of investment in the early years of children’s lives, they note age-appropriate nutrition, quality preschool, maternal wellbeing and maternal education are all key factors that make a difference in early childhood.⁵⁵ Some countries and policymakers have promoted the first 1000 days approach to supporting children, which comes from the growing evidence base that suggests the pregnancy period until the child is 1000 days old are particularly influential for the long-term development and future outcomes of the child.⁵⁶ Countries that have used this approach generally deliver intensive supports to combat family poverty, reconcile work and caring, support for parental mental health, improve the quality of childcare, reduce family stress and improving awareness of good nutrition practices.⁵⁷

49 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021](#).

50 UNESCO (2021) [Reimagining our future together; A new social contract for Education](#). UNESCO, Paris, 2021.

51 Ibid

52 OECD (2022), [Evolving Family Models in Spain: A New National Framework for Improved Support and Protection for Families](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

53 UNICEF (2019) [A World Ready to Learn, Prioritising quality early childhood education](#). UNICEF, New York, 2019.

54 Ibid

55 Boyden, J., Dawes, A., Dornan, P., & Tredoux, C. (2019). *Tracing the Consequences of Child Poverty: Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam* (1st ed.). Bristol University Press.

56 OECD (2022), [Evolving Family Models in Spain: A New National Framework for Improved Support and Protection for Families](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

57 Ibid



Access to secondary education particular for the poorest children is a key element in improving their future employment opportunities and can be a key pathway out of the informal labour market. UNICEF note that due to the global focus on increasing primary school enrolment this has placed pressures on secondary schools and many of the most marginalized adolescents have fallen out of secondary school systems.⁵⁸ Improving access to secondary education has the potential to reduce global poverty, UNESCO show that if all adults completed secondary school the global poverty rate would be halved.⁵⁹ Data shows that out-of-school adolescents are disproportionately from poor and rural households, those affected by conflict and migration and adolescents with disabilities, furthermore, adolescent girls from marginalised families are more likely to be out of secondary school than boys.⁶⁰ As well as access to secondary education, the quality and learning outcomes while in secondary education must be prioritised.⁶¹

Vocational training and education is another essential part of the education system to ensure that students and young people can access quality employment and break the cycle of poverty. For the training and vocational education sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced a transition to remote learning which very few institutions were prepared for, furthermore, part of the unique feature of many TVET courses is access to work-based learning as well the acquisition of practical

skills and this has been greatly hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶² It must be a priority to ensure continuation of education services for all children, with a focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged, and implement remedial measures to address learning losses that may have occurred since schools closed. In addition, essential services that support children's socio-emotional needs are integral such as school meals, psychosocial support and child protection services.⁶³

Despite the widespread recognition that education is a human right and key to reducing inequality, children with disabilities are still falling behind in education, they are more likely to never attend school or drop out due to multiple barriers.⁶⁴ Common barriers facing children with disabilities in accessing education include, stigma, lack of trained staff, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities.⁶⁵ UNICEF data that covers a large number of countries shows that children with disabilities are more likely than children without disabilities to be out of primary school, with the largest disparity showing between the poorest and richest 20% of households.⁶⁶ About 30% of children with a disability among the poorest 20% of households do not attend primary school whereas just 7% of children with disabilities from the richest 20% of households do not attend primary school.⁶⁷

Other barriers to access education that children can face include social barriers

58 UNICEF (2020) [Secondary Education Guidance Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#). UNICEF, New York, 2020.

59 Ibid

60 Ibid

61 UNICEF (2019) [Transitions from School to Work](#). New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2019.

62 ILO (2021) [Skills development in the time of COVID-19: Taking stock of the initial responses in technical and vocational education and training](#). International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2021

63 The World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (2021). [The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery](#). Washington D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

64 UNICEF (2022) [Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities](#)

65 Ibid

66 Ibid

67 Ibid

such as discrimination against girls, financial barriers such as school fees, and practical barriers such as the long distance to the nearest school.⁶⁸ Tackling these barriers may require system wide reforms, for example by abolishing fees, or targeted measures, for example to improve accessibility of schools for children with disabilities, or in many cases a combination of both. This is an example of tailored universalism, in that on top of universal provision extra supports are provided to those who need them most.

Disparities in school attendance in high-income countries is considerably less stark than in middle- and low-income countries, however, strong inequality in learning outcomes can be observed between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. The OECD PISA survey tracks educational outcomes in many countries, and it reveals that many children from disadvantaged families are less likely to reach the minimum competencies in subjects such as reading and mathematics.⁶⁹

School feeding programmes can play an important role of improving educational attendance and attainment as well as supporting better health outcomes. It is estimated that 388 million children receive school meals, making it a very important form of social protection and education policy.⁷⁰ As well as many other negative consequences school closures meant many children lost access to the school feeding programme, it is seen that strong and sustained school

feeding and nutrition programmes will be a cornerstone of efforts to ensure students return to education after the pandemic.⁷¹

There is a growing evidence base showing the impact of cash transfers on educational attendance and attainment. For example, in a recent evaluation focused on Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia it was found that cash transfers led to positive changes in schooling in all three countries, for example, school attendance increased by 8 per cent in Tanzania due to the provision of cash transfers.⁷² In a review of multiple papers analysing the impacts of cash transfers it has been found that cash transfer consistently delivers positive impacts on educational outcomes such as secondary school enrolment and increased spending on school related inputs.⁷³

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights notes that there is a strong relationship between public investment in education and mobility out of poverty especially in developing countries, however the Education 2030 Framework for Action benchmark for countries to spend at least 4% of GDP on education has not been met in many low- and middle-income countries or maintained in many high-income countries.⁷⁴ Strong public investment in services for those in their early years and in families with young children are extremely effective ways of reducing inequality, this includes quality early education and care, parental supports for some vulnerable families, information

68 UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF (2016) [Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All. Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children](#).

69 *ibid*.

70 World Food Programme (2020) [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020](#). World Food Programme, Rome, 2020.

71 *ibid*

72 Jacobus de Hoop and Valeria Groppo (2020) [How Do Cash Transfers Affect Child Work and Schooling? Surprising evidence from Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia](#). Innocenti Research Brief. , UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti

73 Nyasha Tirivayi, Jennifer Waidler and Frank Otchere (2021) [Cash transfers: Past, present and future Evidence and lessons learned from the Transfer Project](#). Innocenti Research Brief.

74 Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (2021) [The persistence of poverty: how real equality can break the vicious cycles](#). Delivered to the 76th session of the General Assembly



provision, and building partnerships with parents to support children. These services can ensure that the intergenerational persistence of poverty is reduced and increase the likelihood that children can better benefit from other services later in life, such as primary and secondary education.⁷⁵ Inclusive education systems affirmatively focuses on providing more opportunities for more disadvantaged children, by ensuring there are extra-curricular activities, the provision of school meal programmes, reduce the role of selection on academic performance alone and that learning practices are not biased against low-income households.⁷⁶ Removing fees and financial barriers to education is essential to increase access to education especially for the children from the poorest families. Lastly, integrated schools where wealthier and low-income students attend the same schools are key to building social cohesion and ensuring the quality of the overall public education system. This universalism requires strong regulation and governance from the State and is key to long-term poverty and inequality reduction.

Healthcare

Poor health presents serious risks for children - to their own survival and health, and due to the costs of illness on their households. Under 5 mortality has reduced significantly since 1990 when the global under-five mortality rate per 1000 live births stood at 76 and in 2019, it had reduced to 38 deaths per 1000 live births.⁷⁷ However, lack of access to safe

sanitation and drinking water remains a major health risk for many children, especially in low-income countries.⁷⁸ Furthermore, loss of momentum in immunisation due to the COVID-19 pandemic may put some of this progress at risk.⁷⁹ Children from disadvantaged backgrounds across nearly all countries are more likely to experience poor health outcomes. The OECD, for example, estimate that 25% of disadvantaged 11, 13, and 15-year-olds are considered overweight or obese based on the World Health Organization's definition, compared to 16% from the most advantaged households.⁸⁰

The World Health Organisation and the World Bank estimate that in 2017 health expenditures pushed 6.7% of the world's population below the international extreme poverty line of \$1.90 per day, this marked a substantial decrease since 2000. However, when applying the relative poverty line, 15% of world's population are pushed into poverty as a result of health expenditure.⁸¹ The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to considerably worsen this situation, due to the combined health and economic impacts of the pandemic, there is likely to be a strong increase in foregone care due to financial barriers and for those seeking care an increase in catastrophic spending due to higher rates of out-of-pocket expenditure.⁸² These impacts will have both short- and long-term impacts on health, wellbeing, and economic outcomes.

As well as the increase in financial hardship, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused numerous

75 *ibid*

76 *ibid*

77 UNICEF, WHO and World Bank (2020) [Level and Trends in Child Mortality](#)

78 UNICEF and WHO (2015) [Progress on sanitation and drinking water - 2015 update and MDG assessment](#)

79 UNICEF (2021) [Preventing a lost decade: Urgent action to reverse the devastating impact of COVID-19 on children and young people](#). UNICEF, New York, 2021.

80 Clarke, C. and O. Thévenon (2022), "[Starting unequal: How's life for disadvantaged children?](#)", *OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities*, No. 06, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2022.

81 WHO (2021) [Global monitoring report on financial protection in health 2021](#). WHO, Geneva, 2021.

82 *ibid*

other disruptions to health services and provision. Primary care has been majorly disrupted, for example, a survey in Kenya revealed that across all essential medical areas there has been major disruption with the largest decline (49% reduction) in service provision for children.⁸³ Children's immunization is another area which has been very badly affected by the pandemic, the percentage of children who received three doses of the vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP3) fell 5 percentage points between 2019 and 2021 to 81 per cent.⁸⁴

Birth Registration

The Sustainable Development Goal target 16.9 - "provide legal identity for all, including birth registration" is essential to fulfil the aspiration to leave no one behind. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, gives all children the right, without discrimination, to be registered after birth, to have a name, the right to acquire a nationality, and to the extent possible, to know his or her parents and to be brought up by them. Proof of legal identity is key to access basic services and exercise their rights and responsibilities, and the poorest have poorer access to the legal identities.

The World Bank estimate that 1 billion people globally cannot legally prove who they are due to a lack of legal identification. The UN's 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Report

shows that the average birth registration rate globally was just 73 percent.⁸⁵ Less than half of all children under 5 in sub-Saharan Africa (46 percent) have had their births registered.⁸⁶ Although the majority of children without birth certificates live in low- or middle-income countries, some specific groups of children in high-income countries are also excluded from formal identification procedures such as Roma children, children of refugees and migrants, people who are homeless, and people's whose identities have been erased due to serving a prison sentence or perpetrator of fraud.⁸⁷

In many countries there are considerable barriers to accessing a birth certificate, which can include complex and time-consuming procedures, financial fees and costs, long distances to registration sites, traditional customs and practices, lack of knowledge or trust of the registration procedure and institutional procedures or discrimination.⁸⁸ For example, ATD fourth World volunteers in the Philippines estimated that it took one applicant 33 hours over a 10-day period to access a birth certificate for their child, this means that for many families it is simply not possible to access a birth certificate.⁸⁹

There is evidence to suggest that combining birth registration with the provision of healthcare to children and mothers can increase rates of registration significantly.⁹⁰ Widespread information provision and reducing the complexity of the application

83 ibid

84 UNICEF (2022) [COVID-19 pandemic fuels largest continued backslide in vaccinations in three decades](#). UNICEF Press Release.

85 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019) The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019.

86 Zoran Doković, Irina Dincu, and Jenna Slotin (2019) [The Compendium of Good Practices in Linking Civil Registration and Vital Statistics \(CRVS\) and Identity Management Systems](#).

87 ATD Fourth World (2017) Ensuring Access to Birth Registration. Contribution by ATD Fourth World to the OHCHR study in follow-up to Resolution A/HRC/34

88 UNICEF (2017) [A Snapshot of Civil Registration in sub-Saharan Africa](#) and ibid

89 ATD Fourth World (2017) Ensuring Access to Birth Registration. Contribution by ATD Fourth World to the OHCHR study in follow-up to Resolution A/HRC/34

90 UNICEF (2017) [A Snapshot of Civil Registration in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

procedure are essential. But ultimately a holistic approach to civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) is needed, this means placing the CRVS system at the core of the identity management system of the State, building ad-hoc once of registries for particular uses will not support the long-term, inclusive system of identity management. Recent research suggests that there are five key elements to ensuring there is a conducive environment for a holistic identify management system; firstly, political commitment from key government actors that all vital events from birth to death are registered in a timely manner, secondly, a legal framework that enable data sharing, a data privacy and protection framework, as well as technology ownership from the outset, and ultimately create a system that citizens can trust.⁹¹ As shown above the poorest children are less likely to have access to formal identification and this further reduces their access to essential public services and transfers, it is essential that the barriers to access identification are removed.

Housing Support

Housing has a major barring on child poverty via two important channels, firstly the home is the primary environment for a child when growing up, low quality or insecure housing can have major impacts on mental wellbeing, educational outcomes, and physical health and safety. Secondly, if the cost of housing is high, this can strain household's financial resources and reduce expenditure on

other essential goods and services, as well increasing the level of stress within the household. Lack of access to affordable, quality housing is a policy problem that spans low-middle and high-income countries.⁹²

The issue of unaffordable, poor-quality housing intersects strongly with the increasingly urbanisation, it is estimated over half of the world's children now live in urban areas. It is estimated that over a billion people live in slums globally and approximate 350 to 500 million are children.⁹³ There is a general perception that those living in urban areas have advantages and better access to good and services. However, poverty is becoming increasingly urbanised.⁹⁴ The urban future is happening rapidly in many regions, UNICEF notes that the growth of many cities is happening in an unplanned way, 'characterized by fragmented urban development, inadequate infrastructure, increased pollution and waste, lack of climate resilience, low compactness and walkability, congestion, and poor quality housing'.⁹⁵ The urban population is projected to grow by an estimated 2.5 billion over the next decades especially in low-and middle-income nations, mainly in Asia and Africa.⁹⁶ Therefore, it is a global imperative to develop policy solutions and programmes for children living in urban settings including slums and informal settlements to ensure they have access to essential public services such as water, sanitation, waste collection, roads, schools, healthcare, education, police protection and emergency services. Decentralisation and local government can be an important aspect for preparing cities for growing populations,

91 Zoran Doković, Irina Dincu, and Jenna Slotin (2019) [The Compendium of Good Practices in Linking Civil Registration and Vital Statistics \(CRVS\) and Identity Management Systems](#).

92 OECD (2020), [Housing and Inclusive Growth](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

93 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (2018) [2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects](#)

94 UNICEF (2018) [Advantage or Paradox? The challenge for children and young people of growing up urban](#)

95 Ibid, p.7

96 Bartlett, S, Satterthwaite, D and Sabry, S (2021) Cities for children: an overview of relevant issues. [Cities for Children and Youth research series](#), edited by Sarah Sabry. Global Alliance - Cities 4 Children,

as well as increased investment in urban areas. The participation of urban dwellers young and old, will be key to developing local pragmatic solutions facing urban communities across countries, in particular the poorest and most disadvantaged children.

Housing is increasingly a key determinant of poverty in high-income countries. The OECD demonstrate this by showing how much child poverty would reduce in certain countries if housing benefits were redistributed to all poor children, in Luxembourg this would lead to a 6.5 percentage point reduction in child poverty and in Denmark, Iceland and Ireland this measure would see about a 5-percentage point reduction in child poverty.⁹⁷ Family homelessness is estimated to be on the rise across many European States, particularly after the 2008 Financial Crisis.⁹⁸ The impact of COVID-19 on family homelessness in Europe is yet to be fully observed, during the initial phase of the pandemic the measures taken by public authorities and homeless services were largely successful in containing the virus and protecting people experiencing homelessness, and many States introduced eviction bans which sheltered many from the risk of eviction, however, as the pandemic eases and emergency protections are lifted an increase in homelessness may occur due to the difficult economic conditions in many States.⁹⁹ Particularly concerning are the specific risks of homelessness faced by single parent households, however in many circumstances this is a hidden form of homelessness because families rely on informal supports such as staying with family or friends.¹⁰⁰ The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTA) highlights

three forms of prevention against family homelessness in high income countries. Primary prevention includes the provision of social housing, housing benefits, systems of welfare that account for family size, accessible debt counselling and support. Secondary prevention measures focus on providing families at high risk of homelessness a number of supports to avoid them getting evicted such as home visits, strengthened tenancy rights, debt management options, and advocacy supports.¹⁰¹ Lastly, tertiary supports aim to ensure the period of homelessness experienced is as short as possible, for example rapid re-housing or the provision of temporary accommodation services.¹⁰²

In conclusion, a key consideration regarding ending child poverty that spans all types of service provision is equity of access and how the State regulates and organises public service provision. Large out of pocket expenditure for healthcare and education is likely to increase inequality and reduce quality.

Key policy considerations to increase access to and finance of quality public services:

- Bring children to the centre of socioeconomic policymaking
- Prioritise building universal systems of provision, under which service providers are regulated by the Government
- Safeguard critical social spending and minimise the impact of the economic crisis on people especially children. Ensure

97 OECD (2018) [Policy Brief on Child Wellbeing: Poor children in rich countries: why we need policy action](#). OECD Publishing, Paris.

98 European Observatory on Homelessness (2017) [Family Homelessness in Europe](#). EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness Brussels - December 2017

99 European Observatory on Homelessness (2021) [European Homelessness and COVID 19](#). FEANSTA, Brussels, 2021.

100 ibid

101 ibid

102 ibid



- social spending is effective, efficient, and inclusive by removing wasteful expenditure and implementing efficient public finance practices. Create fiscal space for child-sensitive programmes and interventions and implement child-sensitive budgeting.
- Provide universal access to education to increase inclusion, including:
 - Remove school fees and hidden fees to access education.
 - Provide cash transfers to families to support increased school attendance and attainment
 - Deliver free school meals on a universal basis.
 - Provide tuition free early education and care. Services could be delivered through public services or regulated by the State, perhaps first to low-income families and slowly increasing coverage to ensure all children can access early education and care.
 - Provide additional learning and educational services within the public system for children with disabilities or other learning difficulties
 - Focus on improving access to secondary school education by removing financial barriers, investing in secondary education system, and developing flexible routes for students to enter secondary education
 - Provide universal health coverage for children, particularly for children under five years old including,
 - Widespread immunisation campaigns for all children and target misinformation.
 - Provide maternal and newborn survival and health to all children in line with Every Newborn Action Plan and UNICEF and WHO guidelines.
 - Ensure children do not die of preventable infectious diseases by promoting breastfeeding, vitamin supplements, immunisation, clean drinking water, sanitation and access to antibiotics.
 - Ensure every child's birth is registered and families can freely and easily access a birth certificate for their children, paying particular attention to the poorest and most disadvantaged.
 - Introduce housing income supports through the social protection system which prevent housing expenditure reaching unsustainable levels. Ensure these supports are accessible to low income households.
 - Reduce spatial segregation by developing holistic urban planning processes centred on local governance which include the development of affordable, quality housing and other essential services such as public transport, sanitation, and water.

4. PROMOTE A DECENT WORK AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH AGENDA TO REACH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Key Messages:

- Economic growth and access to decent employment are essential elements of reducing poverty. Parental employment is a key determinant of child poverty, shaping various outcomes that are linked to poverty such as level of earnings, access to social security, and the amount of time parents have to spend with their children.
- The link between parental employment and child poverty is complex because employment alone is no guarantee against poverty, job quality is key. In 2019, two billion people, or 60 per cent of the globally employed, were in informal employment.
- Even for those who are working, this is no guarantee of decent work, with many workers earning low wages, having no access to social security, and having to work in poor conditions. Globally, 19% of all those employed, do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of extreme or moderate poverty.
- The issue of low-paid, low-quality employment spans all regions. In the EU the in-work-poverty rate is higher for households with children, and single-headed households are particularly at-risk of experiencing in-work poverty. The OECD estimate that if all parents in the OECD were in paid employment it would halve the poverty rate in families with children from an average of 11% to 5.4%.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented impact on various labour market outcomes such as unemployment and earnings. Informal workers have experienced an acute disruption to their livelihoods and the majority of informal workers are not eligible for social security benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the burden of care, especially for women, making a return to the labour market ever more challenging.

Research across various countries has shown that decent parental employment is a key determinant of child poverty.¹⁰³ Parent's employment shapes various outcomes that are linked to poverty such as level of earnings, access to social security, level of physical burden, and the amount of time parents have to spend with their children. The link between parental employment and child poverty is complex because employment alone is no guarantee against poverty, job quality is key. Over recent decades the pace and type of economic growth in many regions has not resulted in rising incomes across the income distribution.¹⁰⁴ Access to decent employment relates to many aspects of how economies and societies are structured and the extent of investment in key public policy domains. Education and training, industrial and economic policy, social protection and social dialogue policies, the care regime, geographic conditions, and infrastructure all influence the extent of decent employment available.

Goals 1, 8, and 10 of the SDGs relate to reducing poverty and inequality and

promoting decent employment opportunities. Economic growth and access to decent employment are essential elements of reducing poverty.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic it is estimated that 470 million people worldwide lacked adequate access to paid work or were not working their desired number of hours.¹⁰⁵ In 2018, the average GDP per capita in low-income countries was around US\$1,700 (using PPP exchange rates from 2011), which equals a daily per capita income of less than US\$5.¹⁰⁶ In 2019, two billion people, or 60 per cent of the globally employed, were in informal employment.¹⁰⁷ Even for those who are working, this is no guarantee of decent work, with many workers earning low wages, having no access to social security, and having to work in poor conditions. Globally, 19% of all those employed, do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of extreme or moderate poverty.¹⁰⁸ Women and young people are more likely to work and not earn enough to be lifted out of extreme poverty (see figure 5).

103 OECD (2022), [Evolving Family Models in Spain: A New National Framework for Improved Support and Protection for Families](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

104 ILO (2020) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020](#) International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2020

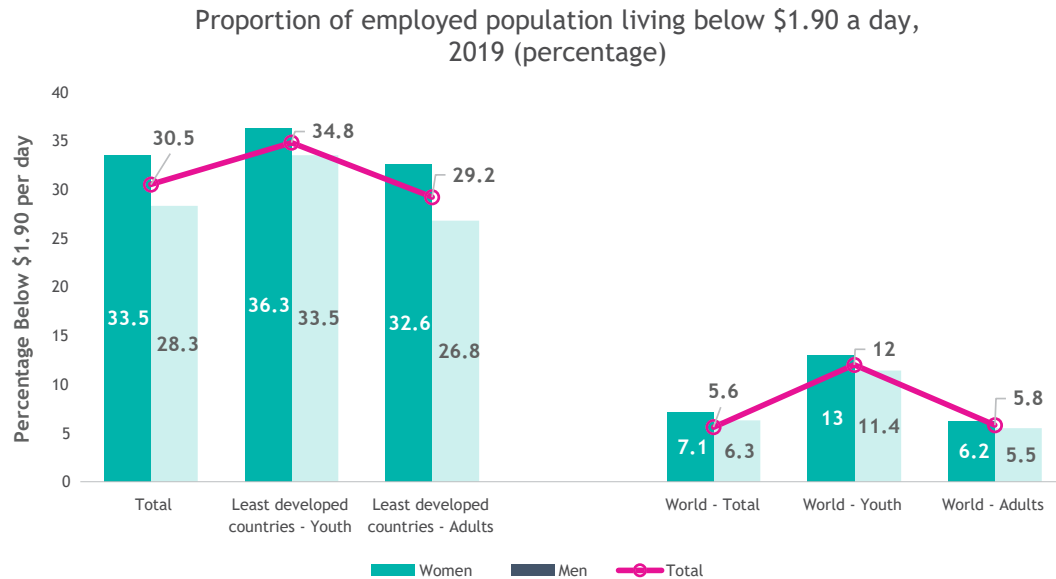
105 ibid

106 ibid

107 ILO (2022) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022](#). Geneva: International Labour Office, 2022.

108 ILO (2020) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020](#) International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2020

Figure 5:

UN Stats¹⁰⁹

These issues are also prevalent in middle- and high-income countries, with precarious employment increasing, this is signified by the increased number of part-time workers, short-term or temporary contracts, and low-wage jobs particularly in service sectors. Recent research from the United States shows that ‘precarious employment characteristics such as low wages, low skill levels, part-time work, or nonstandard schedules in the early years of a child’s life are strongly associated with precarious family economic conditions by the time the

child enters kindergarten’.¹¹⁰ In 2021, 8.7% of children in the EU lived in households where no adult was in employment.¹¹¹ The OECD estimate that if all parents in the OECD were in paid employment it would halve the poverty rate in families with children from an average of 11% to 5.4%.¹¹² Households with children in them are more likely to experience in-work poverty compared to households with no dependent children, the risk of in-work poverty is particularly high for households headed by a single adult, see figure below.

109 United Nations Statistics Division (2021) [SDG Goals: Goal 1](#).

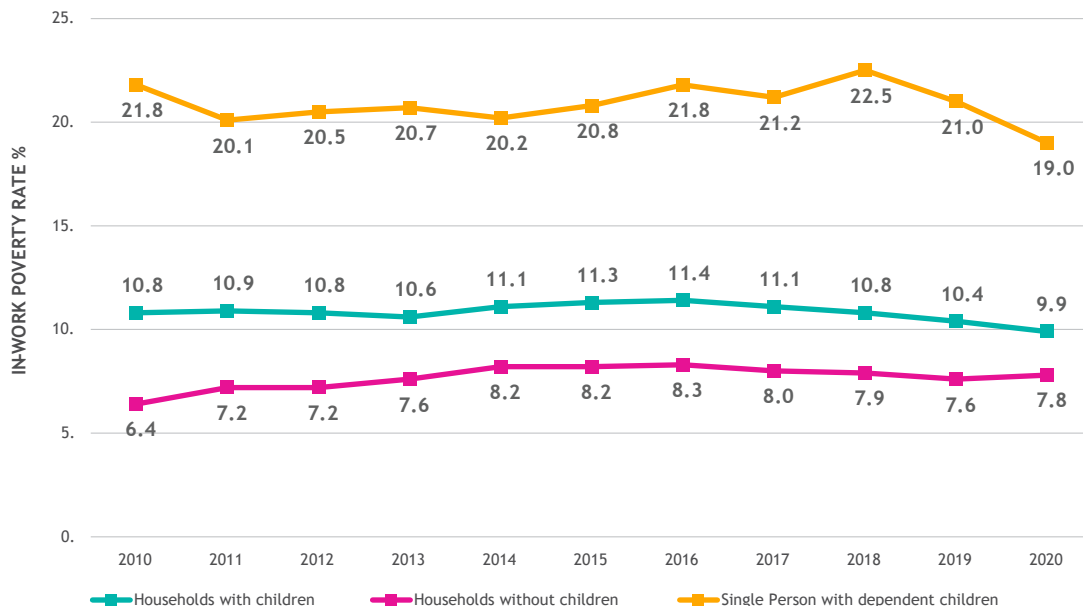
110 Han, W.J., Zhang, L. (2022) [Precarious Parental Employment Conditions and Family Poverty Experiences in the First Six Years of a Child’s Life](#). *J Child Fam Stud* 31, 1106-1120 (2022).

111 Eurostat (2022) [Statistics on employment characteristics of households](#)

112 OECD (2018) [Policy Brief on Child Wellbeing; Poor children in rich countries: why we need policy action](#). OECD Publishing, Paris.

Figure 6

In Work Poverty Rate European Union 27 2010-2020



In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by household type - EU-SILC survey¹¹³

One of the most important factors shaping labour market participation is care and the extent to which the State support care for children, including children living with disabilities, people with higher care needs, and the elderly, and the extent to which the burden of care is equally distributed between men and women. Before the pandemic, on average 93% of those non-employed because of family responsibilities in the OECD were women.¹¹⁴ This can also be seen at a global level; the ILO show that women with care responsibilities are more likely to work in the informal economy and less likely to contribute to social security compared to their counterparts without care responsibilities.¹¹⁵ Although there has been a

greater focus on newer types of jobs lacking social security coverage, such as jobs in the gig and platform economy, some of the oldest and largest job types still lack adequate regulation in most countries. For example, 2.3 per cent of employment globally is in domestic work and half of all domestic workers are not covered by any social protection benefit.¹¹⁶ There is growing evidence to show that social protection can contribute to gender equality through various channels including improving access to and attendance in education, better health outcomes and take-up of healthcare, reduced risk of gender-based violence and enhanced economic empowerment through higher wages, better quality employment, and

¹¹³ Eurostat (2021) [In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by household type - EU-SILC survey](#)

¹¹⁴ Fernandez, R., et al. (2020), "Identifying and addressing employment barriers in Belgium, Korea and Norway: Implementing the OECD Jobs Strategy", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 249, OECD Publishing, Paris.

¹¹⁵ ILO (2018) [Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work](#). International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2018.

¹¹⁶ ILO (2022) [Making the right to social security a reality for domestic workers: A global review of policy trends, statistics and extension strategies](#). International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2022.

better access to assets.¹¹⁷ All these channels have the potential to reduce the burden of care on women and increase the time available for individual empowerment.

Impact of COVID-19 on Employment Trends

These worrying trends could be observed before the COVID-19 pandemic; the pandemic has had catastrophic impact on labour markets around the world, in 2020 the hours equivalent to 255 million full-time workers were lost.¹¹⁸ The most heavily affected were informal workers, particularly woman in the informal sector. Informal workers are three times more likely to lose their jobs than those in formal employment arrangements and have suffered from disproportionate decline in their income.¹¹⁹ Perhaps most worrying is the uneven recovery taking place, with the fastest labour market recovery occurring in high-income countries. The ILO project that women's employment rate will not recover as fast and a sizable gap between male and female employment is likely to remain over the coming years.¹²⁰ For those people working in the informal sector who are covered, it is very unlikely that they are covered by unemployment insurance and more likely to be covered by the old-age pensions system or perhaps maternity benefits.¹²¹

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented impact on care, with

widespread school closures and the halting of other supporting services, therefore the level of care provided at home has risen rapidly.¹²² Before the pandemic, women did three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, and recent UN women surveys show that unpaid care and domestic work has increased since the beginning of the pandemic for both men and women, with women being responsible for more time-consuming tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and physical care for children.¹²³ Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) find through a survey of informal workers across various cities that increases in unpaid work has directly impacted informal workers ability to work, in mid-2021 35% of women and 22% of men reported that increase in any care responsibilities prevented them from working.¹²⁴ As well as the impact on earnings and work, the pandemic revealed the inequality in access to essential infrastructure such as internet, adequate housing, and food between those working informally and those with formal employment who had access to social security as well as other benefits.¹²⁵ In order to ensure the specific gendered implications of shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic are addressed, gender needs to be incorporated into the policy making process. This can be done using various approaches, for example, by including gender alongside age, disability and other marginalised groups in the needs assessment when designing policies, by considering how programme design can be tweaked to ensure they are inclusive (e.g., removing conditionalities), and by

117 UNICEF (2021) [Social Protection & Gender Equality Outcomes Across the Lifecycle](#)

118 United Nations Secretary General (2021) [Secretary-General's Policy Brief Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery](#)

119 ibid

120 ILO (2022) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022](#). Geneva: International Labour Office, 2022.

121 ILO (2022) [Making the right to social security a reality for domestic workers: A global review of policy trends, statistics and extension strategies](#). International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2022.

122 UNICEF (2020) [Gender-Responsive Social Protection during COVID19: Technical note](#)

123 UN Women (2020) [COVID-19 and the Care Economy: Immediate Action and Structural Transformation for a Gender Responsive Recovery](#)

124 WIEGO (2022) [COVID-19 and Informal Work in 11 Cities: Recovery Pathways Amidst Continued Crisis](#). WIEGO Working Paper No. 43. Manchester, UK: WIEGO

125 ibid

considering the impact of changing the delivery mechanisms of social protection or services through a gender lens.¹²⁶

In light of the socio-economic crisis that COVID-19 has caused as well as the growing fragility as a result of climate change and conflict, the UN Secretary General has called for a renewed social contract built around universal social protection, decent and green jobs and gender equal societies.¹²⁷ Key elements of the global accelerator are major investment in rights-based social protection systems as well as a commitment to achieve a Just Transition to a climate neutral economic growth by investing in jobs that will support this transition. Public investment in the care economy can yield a triple dividend for recovery, by supporting women's re-entry to the labour market, reducing vulnerability among children, and creating more jobs than can compensate for less jobs in other sectors.¹²⁸ Another central element of promoting decent work and ensuring an equal recovery is strong investment and prioritisation of quality and accessible education and training for children and young people.

The OECD note that there are various policy levers which can support decent parental employment such as reducing barriers to work for people with low levels of experience or education, or other barriers to access such as health difficulties, as well ensuring that the tax benefit system makes work pay for families, providing quality affordable childcare, and improving learning and training opportunities to low-skilled parents.¹²⁹ In other contexts, the

issue more relates to the availability of decent employment and this requires both demand and supply side policies to increase the economic opportunities and greater regulation of the labour market to improve working conditions.

Key policy considerations:

- Extend social security coverage to informal workers by using two track approach; increasing formalisation in some sectors already close to the formal sector and for other workers and sectors extend social protection coverage
- Support workers to reconcile working and family responsibilities particularly for single parents by introducing parental leave, in-work income support to supplement low earnings, and affordable and quality childcare.
- Develop quality and accessible technical, vocational education and training and higher education system. Provide income supports for families and young people when needed.

126 UNICEF (2020) [Gender-Responsive Social Protection during COVID19: Technical note](#)

127 United Nations Secretary General (2021) [Secretary-General's Policy Brief Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery](#)

128 United Nations Secretary General (2021) [Secretary-General's Policy Brief Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery](#)

129 OECD (2022), [Evolving Family Models in Spain: A New National Framework for Improved Support and Protection for Families](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Box 8: A policy agenda to end child poverty: Country examples

1. *Build national support making child poverty reduction an explicit national priority in national budgets, policies, and laws, and ensuring that child poverty is measured and routinely monitored.*

Spain

In 2018 the Spanish Government adopted the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion to run between 2019 and 2023. The Strategy specifically highlights the issue of child poverty and outlines the groups of child and young people particularly at risk of poverty and deprivation. The Strategy makes explicit reference to designing policies that better support families with the challenges facing them both through service provision and income supports. Objective 3.2 under the Strategic objective 3 is to ‘promote a positive, healthy upbringing in all families by implementing family-friendly policies and providing support for vulnerable groups from the social, healthcare and education services. ([National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion](#)).

The strategy outlines several of the most concerning issues facing children and families particularly the changing nature of the family and the implications this has for child poverty, the complexity of balancing work and family care and the importance of childcare, the need for services to support families and parents during the first 3 years of their children’s lives, the need for universal school canteens to tackle hunger and other health issues such as obesity, and unique situation of children living in State care or unaccompanied minors and the need for high-quality, consistent services for these children.

The Strategy outlines the overarching objectives, and the operating plans breakdown each objective into concrete actions that need to be taken by different responsible institutions. An evaluation at the end of the strategy period is envisioned.



2. *Expand child sensitive social protection, including towards universal child benefits, to reduce child poverty directly and support the effectiveness of other policies and basic service provision for children.*

Kenya

Kenya has set out a strong vision for a universal social protection system and is now introducing several measures that show major progress in providing universal social protection across the lifecycle. In June 2018 Kenya introduced a universal social pension under which all over 70 years receive about 2,000 shillings per month. This is particularly significant because it is a fully Government funded scheme. Early results suggest that the social pension is having positive impacts on older people's sense of self-worth, ability to plan and save, and enhancing their sense of dignity because they could provide for their own basic needs ([Development Pathways, 2019, 'I feel more love' Autonomy, self-worth and Kenya's universal pension](#)).

In late 2021, a pilot of a universal child benefit started in a collaboration between the Kenyan Government, UNICEF, Save the Children, and the World Food Programme. The pilot is being run in 3 counties; Kajiado County, Embu County, and Kisumu County for children under 36 months ([CHASP, 2021, Process Report](#)). The purpose of the pilot is to inform the design of the long-term universal child benefit and contribute to advocacy and visibility efforts.

United States

Under the 2021 America Rescue Plan Act, the United States Government introduced the expanded child tax credit. The expanded child tax credit included various reforms which enhanced the level of support and improved its accessibility, for example the amount paid per child increased, made the tax credit fully refundable, more families on low incomes became eligible, the eligibility age was increased, and many families on low-income received direct payments between July and December 2021 instead of waiting until they had to file their taxes. ([Treasury Department, 2021](#)).

Evidence is emerging from various sources that the expanded child tax credit has led to an unprecedented reduction in child poverty, for example recent census data suggests that without the child tax credit expansion child poverty would have only fallen to 8.1 per cent rather than 5.2 percent which occurred with the policy in place, this equates to 2.1 million less children who lived in families with incomes below the poverty line. Child poverty rates vary widely along racial and ethnic lines, but the Child Tax Credit is shown to have narrowed the difference in child poverty rates, although large inequities remain. ([Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022](#)). The expanded child tax credit ended in December 2021 and there is an ongoing debate regarding whether it should be expanded going forward

- 3. Improve access and prioritise funding of quality public services, especially for the poorest children, including access to quality health and education services. Ensuring these services reach the poorest and most excluded children through pro-active measures is an important strategy to reduce child poverty.*

Ghana

Ghana has made impressive progress in the area of education over the last decade. The Ghanaian Government adopted a new education strategy '[Education Strategic Plan \(ESP 2018-2030\)](#)' which focuses on improving learning outcomes, enhancing accountability and equity at all levels of the education sector. Ghana is leading the way in Sub-Saharan Africa on provision of early years education, introducing two years of free early years education as part of the basic education provision. Building on the success of the introduction of the two years of kindergarten the Government of Ghana is now aiming to build on this and make the policy more inclusive and efficient. In 2021 a new Early Childhood Education Policy has been adopted which aims to set a policy framework to increase the quality of early years education by establishing a strong governance framework for the sector ([Early Childhood Education Policy](#)).

Since the 2007 education reforms in Ghana basic education has been free which includes 2 years of kindergarten and 6 years of primary education. In 2017-2018 the Ghanaian Government abolished fees for the Senior High School (SHS). This is a major step towards increasing the access of all levels of education to children across Ghana. Although it is too early to assess the full long-term impact of this reform, evidence is emerging to suggest it that the reform has led to longer attendance in school and greater enrolment in tertiary education. (Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer (2019) *The Impact of Free Secondary Education: Experimental Evidence from Ghana*, NBER Working Paper Series, 28937).

4. *Promote a decent work and inclusive growth agenda to reach families and children in poverty*, including specific interventions for families with children and for poor and disadvantaged young people as they enter the labour market.

Bangladesh:

Bangladesh has made significant efforts to reduce the economic vulnerability of families and enhance economic empowerment, through various channels including reducing the prevalence of child labour. In 2020 a new national action plan was developed to eliminate child labour, this plan runs until 2025. The national action plan shows that child labour is a multidimensional problem with varied and nuanced root causes that span economic, educational, sociological, psychological and natural issues (National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour (2020-2025)). The Strategy outlines five strategic clusters of intervention to eliminate child labour: reducing vulnerability to child labour, withdrawing children from hazardous and worst forms of child labour, increased capacity to protect children at the workplace, partnership and multi-sectoral engagement, and monitoring and evaluation of NPA implementation. Under strategic objective 1 to reduce vulnerability to child labour output 1.3 focuses on supporting households of the vulnerable children to achieve economic empowerment for example by providing safety nets to vulnerable families.

In March 2022 the Government of Bangladesh ratified the ILO's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) ([ILO, 2022, Bangladesh ratifies the Minimum Age Convention](#)). This ratification reaffirms Bangladesh's commitment to tackle child labour and comes at a crucial time due to rise in child labour that has been observed in many countries since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The multisectoral approach of the Government of Bangladesh to tackle child labour is particularly important and shows the need for coordination as well as widespread engagement with multiple stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

The combined crises compromising the climate emergency, the pandemic, rising food prices and inflation crisis have wreaked havoc on the lives of children living in poverty and those vulnerable to poverty, and urgent action needs to be taken by Governments and international actors to halt the worsening outcomes for children.¹³⁰ No one policy will eradicate child poverty. Drawing on the experience of research, advocacy, and programmes of 20 organisations, this paper has identified core building blocks which are important to reduce poverty and its impacts on children and create opportunities for growing out of poverty for children today and future generations. In summary the paper has argued:

1. **Build national support** by ensuring that reducing child poverty is an explicit national priority with the aim of bringing children to the centre of socioeconomic policymaking. Such political prioritisation is a prerequisite for mobilising domestic resources in a country and for building synergy among sectors that contribute to child poverty reduction and ultimately children's wellbeing. Building national support to end child poverty requires a deep understanding of child poverty in any given context, including national statistical data, social dialogue, and consultation, as well as participation of children and their families in the policy process. These are all key forms of evidence to build this strategy and national pathway to end child poverty.
2. **Expanding child sensitive social protection** is a critical underpinning for efforts to reduce poverty directly and supports the effectiveness of other policies and basic service provision for children. Universal child benefits can have a particularly strong impact on reducing poverty, improving social cohesion and cushioning shocks in an administratively simple way.
3. **Ensuring access and adequate financing of quality and equitable public services**, covering rights to social protection, education, health, nutrition and protection, are vital for all children. Ensuring these reach the poorest and most excluded children through proactive measures is an important strategy to reduce the impacts of poverty for girls and boys and children of all abilities and backgrounds alike.
4. **Access to decent work** is a critical underpinning for policy to reduce child poverty. There are specific interventions which may be of particular help for families with children and for poor and disadvantaged young people as they enter the labour market. Ensuring that markets work effectively for poorer families is also a way to improve opportunities and living standards.

Building the case for these policies and designing them to ensure they are effective requires evidence and dialogue. Participation of people living in poverty as well as dialogue with social actors are key sources of knowledge when designing policy and making choices. Furthermore, good data and measurement can frame the debate about child poverty, and support policy makers with valuable and updated information. The SDGs require national reporting of child poverty, which supports stronger monitoring of progress and evaluation of policies. The SDG reporting process can also be used to celebrate success and share best practice in how to put children at the centre of national and regional action to eliminate extreme poverty and the deprivations associated with it.

The process of generating this evidence can be used to ensure child poverty is part of the political and social debate. National poverty strategies have been used very successfully across low-middle- and high-income countries, to collectively develop a pathway forward to reduce child poverty. Both the policy reforms and the process of bringing child poverty into the spotlight are important to reducing child poverty.

Across these domains identifying the root causes of child poverty and childhood deprivations in each setting and designing relevant measures - including to influence social norms and attitudes in favour of children and eliminate forms of discrimination - is essential for policies to be effective in the national context.

Ultimately many of the actions identified in this briefing require state action - supporting parents and other caregivers to support children. While States have a central responsibility as main duty bearers, Governments are not the only actors who

should contribute to tackling poverty and deprivations among children: this is a shared challenge, for all of society:

- Opinion leaders such as community and faith leaders, civil society advocates, researchers and journalists can help make the case for greater action on child poverty. Making the challenge of child poverty clear and urgent helps Governments prioritise this issue.
- Alongside civil servants, politicians, researchers, civil society advocates and businesses may also contribute by identifying where existing policies do not serve children well and by suggesting innovative solutions.
- Businesses have a vital role in ensuring employees and suppliers have decent work. They can also help ensure that the poorest people have access to affordable goods and services, including by supporting financial inclusion. Private enterprise exists to generate a return on investments, but sustainability principles adopted by the best businesses recognise a wider responsibility, including to respect the rights of children and to invest in the capabilities of new entrants to the work force.
- Essential services are delivered not only by governments but by faith based, civil society and private sector organisations, sometimes in partnership with national or local Government. Such organisations can contribute by 'poverty-proofing' their actions by working to ensure inclusion, equity, and impacts for the poorest people. A recurring message from people living in poverty is they often do not feel treated with dignity. Identifying positive ways to empower those affected by poverty and to reduce

the psychological as well as physical and economic pressures they are subject to is a central contribution to supporting poorer children.

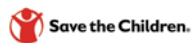
Ending child poverty will assure healthy and skilled future generations, and evidence shows that it is an investment that not only pays back, but more than pays for itself. Ultimately, however, the case for tackling child poverty is not financial: it is to fulfil the right of every child to achieve her or his potential.



About the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty

The Coalition is a network of like-minded organizations concerned at the devastating effects of poverty in childhood on children and societies. The Coalition promotes the need for countries and development actors to explicitly focus on child poverty and the solutions to it in national, subnational, regional and global policies, budgets and monitoring systems.

Coalition participants share a vision of a world where all children grow up free from poverty, deprivation and exclusion. Working together through the Coalition, as well as independently, Coalition participants aim to support the recognition of child poverty and the practical actions to alleviate it.



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