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## The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty

### A Call to Action to expand social protection and care systems and promote decent work to address child poverty

A staggering 333 million children live in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than \$2.15 per day, and more than 800 million children subsist below a poverty line of \$3.65 per day.<sup>1</sup> Beyond income metrics of poverty, half of the 1.1 billion people experiencing multidimensional poverty (MPI) are children, even if their share of the global population is only around 30 percent.<sup>2</sup> Approximately one billion children are deprived of their basic rights and needs in areas such as health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and housing.<sup>3</sup>

Two critical policy levers for reducing and ending child poverty are i) the expansion of inclusive social protection, including child benefits and paid parental leave, and ii) access to decent work for adults to enable them to provide for children in their household. It is therefore timely that the theme of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty for 2023 touches upon these key points, namely: *'Decent Work and Social Protection - Putting Dignity in Practice'*. The importance of the theme is undisputable:

- **Social protection** - from child benefits and school feeding programmes, to social insurance including health insurance, to parental and caregiver leave benefits, affordable, quality childcare, and social welfare services - social protection is an essential right for every child and caregiver,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-poverty-trends>

<sup>2</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/MPI>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/reports/unicef-75-preventing-a-lost-decade>

enshrined in several human rights instruments<sup>4</sup> and key for reducing child poverty and living a life in dignity.

- **Decent work** refers to work that is not only economically productive but also respects workers' rights, provides safe and healthy working conditions,<sup>5</sup> and contributes positively to their overall well-being and dignity. Social protection and family-friendly policies, such as paid parental leave and breastfeeding breaks, are integral to the decent work agenda. Decent work also means fair income and secure employment, preventing and ending child labour, and the creation of new jobs that are adapted to the changing labour market, including in times of climate change, as well as skills trainings that prepare youth for those jobs - all which are essential to ending child poverty.
- **Dignity** - Decent work, social protection, and dignity are closely linked. Decent work provides meaningful employment that upholds the dignity of families and their children. Likewise social protection contributes to families and children feeling dignified, by increasing their autonomy, helping them meet basic needs, reducing inequalities, promoting social inclusion, and enhancing well-being.

**Why are social protection and decent work important for reducing child poverty? What are the current gaps?**

### (Universal) child benefits and child-sensitive social protection

- The positive impacts of social protection for children are beyond question - for reducing poverty and enhancing household income security, impacting positively on children's health and nutrition, access to education, skills development, and child protection. Social protection also increases household resilience by reducing food insecurity, strengthening household productivity and individual capacity to earn. It also reduces the intergenerational persistence of poverty, contributing to a more secure future for families. Child benefits with widespread or universal coverage are a key element of child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection systems and are pivotal to reducing the risk of leaving vulnerable or marginalized groups of children behind, ensuring that benefits reach those who need them.<sup>6</sup>
- Despite this, social protection coverage for children is severely lacking - approximately 1.7 billion children below the age of 18 years currently have no access to social protection, and alarmingly, progress in increasing effective global coverage has stalled since 2016.<sup>7</sup>
- Children with disabilities or in households with family members with disabilities face heightened vulnerability to poverty due to significant financial barriers and limited access to social protection. These families shoulder extra costs for care, while their income often remains low due to caregiving responsibilities. Universal child disability benefits are crucial and can form an affordable initial step towards expanding access to child benefits when more resources become available.

### Decent work

- 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 available for parents to spend with their children.
- The issue of the 'working poor' is a global concern highlighting the paradox of individuals who are employed but struggling to secure a decent standard of living. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive efforts, including fair wage policies, improved job opportunities, social protection measures, the right to join a union, and initiatives to enhance skills and education.

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<sup>4</sup> Including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international and regional instruments.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/universal-child-benefits-ucbs-foundation-end-child-poverty/>, [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_869602/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_869602/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_869602/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_869602/lang--en/index.htm)

- Many low-income countries hope that they will reap a 'demographic dividend' as large child populations reach working age to boost their economies. Unfortunately, few countries have adequate job creation investment and employment support. The failure to create jobs at a sufficient pace as young people reach working age is a recipe for political instability and increased youth poverty.
- Today's global youth unemployment rate is 14 per cent - three times higher than the global adult rate. Without the urgently required investment in education and skills training, the rapidly growing population of young people will be largely unprepared for the workforce.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly concerning for young women and adolescent girls since double the number of adolescent girls 15- 19 compared to boys are not in any form of education, employment, or training (NEET).<sup>9</sup>
- It is estimated that 152 million children are engaged in child labour, with almost half, 72 million, working in hazardous child labour. During the last two decades we have seen a decline in child labour by 94 million<sup>10</sup>, however the ongoing polycrisis threatens to slow or even reverse recent progress.

### Inclusive childcare, parental leave, and paid care work

#### Parental leave

- As a minimum standard, maternity leave not only supports the well-being and safety of both mothers and children but also helps create a more inclusive and equitable society by ensuring that women can fully participate in the workforce while caring for their families. Yet, estimates from the ILO in 2022 indicated that 649 million women globally were not adequately covered by maternity protection, including maternity leave.<sup>11</sup>
- Paid parental leave ensures that both parents have the necessary time to bond with their young children, whether born to them or adopted, and to meet children's critical health, nutritional, and developmental needs. When parental leave is shared it can enhance gender equality in the household and in the workforce by distributing caregiving responsibilities between parents. Yet only 1 in 10 potential parents live in countries that provide paid parental leave.<sup>12</sup>
- Caregiver leave for those caring for children with disabilities or supporting persons with disabilities is equally critical to the welfare of the household. These additional responsibilities and related costs can be offset by access to inclusive social protection and care and support systems, including reasonable leave for acute and long-term care needs.

#### Childcare services

- Care work, including childcare, is highly gendered and predominantly shouldered by women and adolescent girls, usually without (or with low) pay. This can hamper girls' education and women's economic prospects, confining them to the domestic realm and contributing to a growing gender employment gap which reinforces harmful gender norms and practices and inequalities. Improving access to quality affordable childcare can increase women's labour participation, which benefits the economy. It is estimated that increasing the number of women in the workforce would raise GDP in OECD countries by 12 % by 2030 and that increased early childhood development, can result in a 7% return to society on investment, often higher in some countries.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, children who receive quality early childcare are healthier, learn better and stay in school longer, with long-term benefits including higher earnings as adults. Yet, the ILO estimates that only 2 in 10 potential parents live in countries where there is a statutory provision of childcare for children

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/goal-8-decent-work-economic-growth/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/media/146091/file/Adolescent\\_Girls\\_Programme\\_Strategy\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/146091/file/Adolescent_Girls_Programme_Strategy_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/goal-8-decent-work-economic-growth/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_838653.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/documents/family-friendly-policies-redesigning-workplace-future>

aged 0-2 years. While in high-income countries this goes up to 6 in 10 potential parents, in low-income countries, it is zero.<sup>14</sup>

- Universal childcare services are unlikely to be the solution in all country contexts. Providing adequate financial support to those taking care of their children at home or through community-based care and support structures is also important, particularly where access to public or private services is limited.
- Caring for children with disabilities often requires additional costs and time, highlighting the need for targeted financial support and specialized care and support services, including for households with children and persons living with disabilities.

## **On the International Day for Eradication of Poverty, and on every day, the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty calls on Governments, businesses, and the International Community to:**

### **1. Expand access to inclusive social protection, including child benefits**

- Accelerate progress towards universal social protection coverage for children as a critical step towards ending child poverty and promoting child development, including ensuring sustainable and equitable financing of social protection systems. Governments can pursue diverse paths toward achieving universal coverage, for example starting with prioritizing coverage for children in their early years and extending it gradually. Alternatively, countries can target high-deprivation areas for initial coverage or work on closing coverage gaps, particularly for marginalized children, using a combination of taxpayer-funded and employer-employee contribution-based programs.
- Guarantee adequate benefit levels to generate meaningful change in children's lives and consider both the direct and indirect benefits for children, to enable a more comprehensive and sustainable impact on children's development and well-being.
- Provide a comprehensive range of benefits that support children and families throughout their lives, specifically ensuring inclusion of children living in poverty, girls and young women of reproductive age, children with disabilities, displaced/migrant children and other disadvantaged children facing other vulnerabilities.
- Build social protection systems that are rights-based, inclusive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, informed by social dialogue and able to effectively respond to multiple shocks and crises, including conflict and climate shocks, that deliver for children and families and consider using new financing instruments, including climate action funds for enhancing such systems.
- Governments and the international community should support the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions<sup>15</sup> to mobilise political, technical, and financial support at both international and national levels.

### **2. Promote inclusive childcare and parental leave**

#### **Parental leave**

- Governments should ensure paid parental leave for both parents, treating paternity and maternity leave equally, while safeguarding job positions. This should include caregiver leave for those caring for children and persons with disabilities. A minimum of 18 weeks paid maternity leave and 6 months of paid parental leave should be provided by governments and businesses.

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_838653.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/>

- Extend paid parental leave to parents in all employment sectors, both formal and informal. This can be supported through contributory and non-contributory social protection or other systems available to those working in the informal sector, regardless of whether they have a formal sector employer.
- Prevent discrimination based on gender, pregnancy and family-related factors and enforce protections.

### Affordable, accessible, and quality childcare services

- Governments should create comprehensive cross-sector policies for childcare services, in cooperation with businesses and civil society when relevant, addressing the needs of working families in formal and informal sectors.
- Ensure accessible and quality childcare from the end of parental leave to a child's school entry. Funding should involve public resources, private sector contributions, and subsidies for home-based, center-based, and community facilities - with a focus on reaching children living in poverty. Inclusivity and support for children with disabilities, and other marginalized groups, should be prioritized.
- Governments should allocate public funds, engage the private sector when relevant, and when needed seek donor support to strengthen the childcare workforce's capacity and sustainability.

### 3. Promote a decent work agenda

- Promote and enable adequate living wages to provide sufficient income for economic, social, and family needs.
- Invest in the creation of productive work (opportunities) and quality jobs that address the challenges and potential gains posed by evolving job markets, due to increased digitization, artificial intelligence, climate change and other disruptions. The promotion of 'green jobs' and sustainability-focused industries should be a priority to address climate change while providing new avenues for employment, with a focus on those living in poverty.
- Ensure every worker has access to social protection relevant to their needs and evolving nature of work (e.g., including for freelancers, gig economy workers, and informal workers).
- Provide young people with adequate and relevant education and training programmes that align with the changing demands of the job market to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment and help address the gender employment gap.
- Enact and enforce labour laws that protect workers' rights and gender equality, promote workplace safety, and prevent exploitative practices such as child labour.

By focusing on these points, policymakers can contribute to the reduction of child poverty as well the creation of a more equitable and productive workforce, promoting both economic growth and social well-being and upholding children rights and dignity.

#### For further reading:

On Care systems and policies:

- [Family-friendly policies summary brief](#) (UNICEF)
- [Family-friendly policies for informal workers brief](#) (UNICEF)
- [Family-friendly workplaces: Policies and practices to advance decent work in global supply chains](#) (UNICEF)
- [Transforming the Care Economy Blueprint](#) (UN Women)
- [Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work](#) (ILO)
- [How to get people to take the care economy seriously? Some top \(evidence-based\) tips](#) (Oxfam)

On UCBs and child-sensitive social protection:

- [A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future](#) (Save the Children)
- [More than a billion reasons: The urgent need to build universal social protection for children](#) (ILO and UNICEF)
- [Universal child benefits - Policy Issues and Options](#) (ODI and UNICEF)
- [Child sensitive social protection](#) (Global Coalition to End Child Poverty)
- [Unlocking Potential: How Social Protection Can Improve Disadvantaged Children’s Foundational Cognitive Skills](#) (Young Lives)

On Decent Work:

- Chapter 4 on ‘Promote a decent work and inclusive growth agenda to reach families and children in poverty: [ENDING CHILD POVERTY: A policy agenda](#) (Global Coalition to End Child Poverty)
- [Decent Work](#) (ILO)

**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.

