

High Level Political Forum Official Side Event:

The role of child-sensitive social protection in the sustainable and resilient recovery from Covid-19

July 7, 2021

7.30 – 9am EDT

An Inter-generational Dialogue organized by Save the Children and UNICEF, co-sponsored and co-hosted by the Governments of Indonesia and Guatemala

UNICEF and Save the Children, in collaboration with the governments of Indonesia and Guatemala, will host the HLPF side event: The role of child-sensitive social protection in the sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19. The event will facilitate an engaging debate around Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) and engage children and young people in the discussion. Child poverty has sky-rocketed as a result of COVID-19, inflicting devastating damage on children's development and undermining the realization of their rights, as well as productivity, economic growth and social cohesion. We want to explore the role CSSP can play in the sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 in order to lift children out of poverty, build human capital, reduce inequality, protect them from future crises, and as a pathway to achieving the SDGs.

Confirmed Participants:

- Moderator: Andrea Rossi, UNICEF Regional Advisor for Social and Economic Policy in East Asia and Pacific
- Youth Moderator: Luis Miranda, 19, Chile
- Child Advocates: Thalia, 16, Peru; Kirey, 17, Indonesia; Thilivali, 17, Zimbabwe
- Government of Indonesia: H.E. I Gusti Ayu Bintang Darmawati, S.E, M.Si, Minister of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, The Republic of Indonesia
- Government of Guatemala: H.E. Ms. Keila Gramajo, Ministry of Planning of Guatemala
- Government of Colombia: Lina Arbeláez, Director General, Colombian Family Welfare Institute, Government of Colombia
- Save the Children: Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children International
- UNICEF: David Stewart: Chief, Child Poverty and Social Protection
- Equity for Children, The New School: Alberto Minujin, Senior Fellow, Executive Director

Objectives:

- To demonstrate why it is critical and economically sound to invest in CSSP, including the progressive realization of Universal Child Benefits and child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection.
- To amplify UN Secretary-General's recent call to action to ground recovery efforts in human rights and the principles underpinning 2030 Agenda, including the pledge to Leave No One Behind.
- To provide a vital opportunity to share and interrogate new thinking on CSSP, and the role it can play in a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19, including its role in achieving the SDGs in close collaboration with governments.
- Provide good practices from country initiatives carried out to support economic resilience through social protection responses to COVID-19 and investments in social protection systems in the longer term.

Background:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has hit children and families hard around the world and is having devastating impacts. While global poverty rates have steadily declined over the past twenty-five years, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a huge setback.¹ According to projections by Save the Children and UNICEF, the pandemic might have pushed the number of children living in monetarily poor households up by 122-142 million in 2020.² Indeed, while progress on ending chronic poverty was already slowing prior to COVID-19, it has been knocked further behind, as the global extreme poverty figure rose for the first time last year in 20 years. We also looked ahead to 2021, and while this comes with significant uncertainty, analysis suggests that the spike in poverty will not necessarily subside in 2021.
- The COVID-19 crisis presents new challenges for childcare and for parents both in the short- and in the longer term. In many countries around the world, the crisis adds a large sum of difficulties on top of existing economic crises. The loss of household incomes will add pressure for children, particularly adolescents, to drop out of school because of the need to generate income at home. UNICEF and ILO estimate that, in some countries, a one percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 percent increase in child labour in certain countries.³ Violence against children, mental health disorders and disruptions in education will be particularly increased. This includes humanitarian, fragile and low-income settings.
- Regarding the abrupt loss of household income, Save the Children's research has estimated that 59% of families in Colombia, for example, are facing moderate to severe food insecurity as a result of COVID-19 and that 73% have not received cash transfers, food, or other forms of government support. Meanwhile in the Philippines, a quarter of families surveyed reported that they were not sure if their children would ever return to school.⁴
- As governments face a decrease in income and greater pressure to spend in response and to recover from the pandemic, COVID-19 has severely impacted children, adolescents, and their families while challenging their access to social services. The impacts that the pandemic has had on their well-being and integral development and for sustainable development widen existing gaps. As we recover from the pandemic, there is an opportunity for transformative thinking about investments in children, putting it at the centre of strategic development priorities.
- The reach of social protection schemes for families and children varies widely. According to Save the Children analysis based on ILO/WHO/UNESCO data, social protection systems reach about 35% of children and families globally. Across different regions, the reach of social protection schemes varies widely; around 15.9% of children and families in Africa receive child and family social protection; 28.1% across Asia and the Pacific; 87.5% in Europe and Central Asia; and around 70% in South America.⁵
- While achieving high levels of coverage is important, this alone is not sufficient to address child poverty and its consequences. The nature and adequacy of the support given through child benefits – both in terms of the income component and guarantees to access to complementary services – must take into consideration and address the specific needs of children according to their age and their life context. For child and family benefits to achieve their purpose, benefit levels need to be adequate, based on the local cost of living and indexed to inflation to maintain purchasing power over time.

¹ The World Bank, Understanding Poverty. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>

² <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/children-in-monetary-poor-households-covid-19s-invisible-victims/>

³ UNICEF & ILO (2020) [COVID-19 may push millions more children into child labour](#)

⁴ Save the Children Child Inequality Tracker, GRID: Covid-19 dashboard. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/grid>

⁵ A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future, pp. 21.

- Save the Children’s analysis based on ILO/WHO/UNESCO data shows that, in the East Asia and the Pacific, 0.32% of GDP is spent on social protection for children; 1.2% in Europe and Central Asia; 0.38% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 0.39% in Middle East and North Africa; 0.57% in South Asia; and 0.21% in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶ Many of the levels of investment across regions are woefully low, and out of proportion with both the level of need and the substantial economic and social returns that greater investment in children would achieve.
- Faced with this challenge, urgent action is needed to progress towards universal and comprehensive social protection systems that are sensitive to children. The debate on universal child benefits takes on special relevance in this discussion, due to the impacts of the pandemic, its potential impact on poverty and inequality, and the progress around the world.
- As indicated by the United Nations Secretary-General, a universal transfer per child might be considered as a step towards a universal basic income as a policy option for recovery.⁷
- Looking at emerging trends in child poverty, we hope to explore with children, partners, private sector, and governments why it is critical and economically sound to invest in CSSP, and why children’s rights must be at the front and centre of response and recovery from COVID-19.
- We will examine the potential of these key modalities to lift children out of poverty, to guarantee their right to social protection, to build human capital, to protect them from future crisis and reduce inequality, as well as share learnings and challenges.
- In recognition of their role as critical agents of change, we want to engage and learn from children around the importance, design, and impact of CSSP, including the role it has in protecting from future shocks such as climate change.

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⁶ A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future, pp. 22.

⁷ United Nations (2020), [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean](#), New York.