

## Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions

Contribution by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

### Inputs from a Child Rights Perspective\*

1 March 2024

*"The 2030 Agenda remains our commitment to the children and youth of today so that they may achieve their full human potential, as critical agents of change and torchbearers of the 2030 Agenda for current and future generations."  
– 2023 Political declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup>*

The eradication of poverty – and first goal of the 2030 Agenda – is acknowledged as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.<sup>2</sup> At current rates, only 30 per cent of all countries will achieve SDG 1 on poverty by 2030 and hunger has increased and is back at 2005 levels.<sup>3</sup> Millions of children continue to face the harsh realities of poverty, inequality and social exclusion.<sup>4</sup> The risk of the 2030 Agenda not being reached for all children, especially children from marginalized groups, is real.

Turning this trajectory requires a rights based-approach. This aligns with Member States' reaffirmation at the 2023 SDG Summit that the Goals seek the realization of human rights for all.<sup>5</sup> Innovative ways to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda and eradicate child poverty must be based on intentional targeted interventions and be guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including recognizing the value of developing relevant interventions in consultation with children.

Strengthening social protection is both an obligation under international human rights law and is recognized as [one of the six key transitions](#) that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs.<sup>6</sup> Ensuring access to social protection was also reaffirmed in the 2023 Political declaration of the HLPF.<sup>7</sup>

In pursuit of the twinned objectives of the Goals and the advancement of children's rights, OHCHR recommends for inclusion in the 2024 HLPF Ministerial Declaration and HLPF discussions, including as a way to inform the 2024 Summit of the Future and its outcome document:

**KEY MESSAGE: Eradicate child poverty and hunger through a comprehensive child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection.<sup>8</sup>**

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\* The present report is submitted following a request of the Human Rights Council for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to contribute to the work of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), by providing comprehensive input from a child rights perspective to its yearly thematic reviews of progress. See [A/HRC/RES/37/20](#).

This is reinforced by recommendations to accelerate progress on Goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17:

1. **Commit to prioritize and maximize investment in children, particularly those in vulnerable situations and facing multiple forms of discrimination**, to fulfil the promise of leaving no one behind. This includes by developing an intersectional, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and culturally sensitive response to ensure that children in all their diversity have social protection.<sup>9</sup>
2. **Create human rights-based care and support systems that are gender, disability and age-responsive**, by recognizing the rights of those giving and receiving care and support, valuing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and support work, rewarding paid care workers, and ensuring representation of voices of those giving and receiving care and support, including children, in transforming care and support systems.<sup>10</sup>
3. **Increase investment in social, economic and cultural rights**. Take concrete actions, using the maximum available resources, including through international assistance and cooperation, to progressively achieve the right to social security, including a child rights-compliant social protection system that leaves no child behind.<sup>11</sup>
4. **Empower children as active agents of sustainable development**. Ensure that the full diversity of voices is heard in decisions that affect them at all levels, from local to global.<sup>12</sup>
5. **Commit to making the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment a reality for all people**, with a particular focus on protecting children from environmental degradation and its human rights impact.
6. **Invest in preventing violence against children in public and private spaces**. Integrating child protection principles into social protection planning, programming and measures to expand social protection coverage and bolster the capacity of social protection systems to protect children from physical and psychological violence, exploitation and abuse.
7. **Create a more equitable international financial architecture**. Reform global economic governance, create lasting solutions to debt issues, and reshape international public finance to ensure child rights-compliant financing of integrated, multi-stakeholder social protection systems and the allocation of sufficient and adequate human and financial resources for their effective implementation.<sup>13</sup>

## VOICES OF CHILDREN

### WISHING FOR LESS POVERTY AND MORE HAPPY FACES

These key messages were developed in consultation with children. In 2023, almost 4,000 children shared their opinions on human rights in a [global children's survey](#), facilitated by the United Nations Human Rights Office, Child Rights Connect, and partner organisations.<sup>14</sup> Children's diverse experiences, influenced by the additional vulnerabilities that many face, provide a rich perspective on the considerable and universal challenges that children and adults encounter in their lives. Their perspectives inform an invaluable shared vision to achieve a safer, fairer, better, and happier life for everyone through the realisation of human rights and pursuing sustainable development.<sup>15</sup>

Children in all regions shared experiences of living in poverty and economic insecurity. Too many children experience first-hand the impact of inadequate housing, go hungry and suffer from malnutrition because they cannot access adequate, nutritious food, and risk their health by having to drink or wash with unclean water. The rising cost of living poses a significant challenge for many children, both in developing and developed countries.<sup>16</sup> In some contexts, children linked inaccessible healthcare to high rates of child mortality.<sup>17</sup>

Children described how rising costs of living, unemployment, job insecurity, insufficient income, and inadequate financial support from the State significantly impact adults in their lives. These challenges are significantly exacerbated in contexts affected by poverty, which is already overwhelming and brings significant consequences. Children shared examples of how these challenges increase stress within families and communities, which can result in violence, neglect, and alcohol and substance abuse. These in turn affect children, both physically and mentally.<sup>18</sup>

When children were asked what the world will be like when human rights are realised for all, Marta, aged 12, from Croatia responded: “*There would be less poverty and more happy faces.*”<sup>19</sup>

## INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

**Provision of universal social protection is an integral component of any solution to eradicate poverty** in all its forms and dimensions and therefore an indispensable requirement for achieving sustainable development.<sup>20</sup> It can enable all children to live in a safe, healthy, happy environment with access to sufficient nutritious food, affordable healthcare and free quality education.

**Social protection is critical to preventing and alleviating poverty and inequalities** by supporting households in accessing health care and income security when confronted with challenges that should be addressed collectively and with solidarity by society, such as sickness, maternity, disability, unemployment, employment injury, old age and family bereavement. Well-designed and well-functioning social protection systems mitigate the detrimental effects of socioeconomic situations on children’s physical and mental health, development and well-being.<sup>21</sup>

**A comprehensive child rights-based approach to inclusive social protection involves an integrated systems approach**, including universal and comprehensive child/family benefits, universal health care, access to free, quality education, affordable nutritious food and adequate housing, and financial and material support for parents/caregivers, including parental leave and affordable, quality childcare, and finally, a transformation from traditional care to human rights-based care and support.<sup>22</sup>

Social protection is instrumental to SDG 1, especially target 1.3 to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and universal measures, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable. Social protection is equally central to Goal 10, particularly target 10.4, which urges States to adopt social protection policies. It is integral to other Goals (2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8), including ending hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and decent and economic work.<sup>23</sup>

Globally, only one in four children are covered by social protection.<sup>24</sup> This situation is a contributing factor to deepening inequalities which risk becoming more systematic in the face of environmental, food and energy crises, conflicts and disasters.

## LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

### TACKLING DISCRIMINATION THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

In nearly every geographical location, children surveyed emphasised the exclusion and inequalities that they experience because of who they are, where they live or what they believe. They shared examples of how they faced discrimination on many grounds, including gender, sexuality, nationality, race, ethnic identity, religion, disability, age, or appearance etc. As a result of discrimination, many of their other rights are not realised. This includes being denied access to education, quality healthcare, and even an identity, amongst many other rights violations.<sup>25</sup>

Children in nearly every country explained how deep-rooted inequalities and discrimination prevent adults they know from getting work, receiving equal pay, accessing adequate health services, being able to freely express themselves due to gender, race, religion, or sexuality, and other bases for discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

Across the globe, the most disadvantaged children are being excluded and those already marginalized children are likely to see their situation deteriorate.<sup>27</sup> Delivering on the pledge to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first is central to the realization of children's rights. It requires placing the elimination of discrimination and reducing inequalities at the forefront of efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda alongside the prioritization of implementation efforts to first reach those children at greatest risk of being excluded.<sup>28</sup>

**Investing in child rights-compliant inclusive social protection is a strategic choice. It benefits all children, enabling them to realize their human rights and potential and live in dignity, and is a central component of strong economies and healthy societies.**<sup>29</sup>

The pandemic exposed systemic and structural causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination, and demonstrated that many countries, both developed and developing, need to establish, strengthen or implement human rights frameworks to meet their people's needs. It delivered a powerful reminder of the instrumental role universal social protection has in addressing inequalities and poverty and building inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies that respect child rights.

### **ENGAGE CHILDREN MEANINGFULLY IN DECISIONS CONCERNING THEM**

Children surveyed envision a world where children and adults will contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes.<sup>30</sup> The reality is that children continue to encounter challenges in their efforts to influence decisions that concern them.<sup>31</sup> Some explained how they are not acknowledged as independent rights-holders and civic actors, including not being recognised by their families, wider communities, and national decision-makers because they are children. Disregard for children's rights is embedded further when children are not recognised in government laws and policies. Whereas some children may be given opportunities to be involved in decision-making, they do not have confidence that their contributions are heard and taken into account.

Children believe that a lack of child/human rights awareness prevents them from being recognised, and their rights being fully respected and guaranteed.<sup>32</sup> Children demand greater efforts be taken to raise knowledge and awareness about human rights in their communities and increase understanding about human rights at home, in schools and, especially, in rural and marginalized areas.<sup>33</sup> **This includes ensuring that children are engaged meaningfully in social protection decisions concerning them, and that information on social protection is child-friendly and accessible to children in all their diversity.**<sup>34</sup> To build back better, we need more participation – not less.

## **INTERLINKAGES WITH OTHER SDGs UNDER REVIEW AT THE 2024 HLPF:**

### **GOAL 13: CLIMATE ACTION**

**The climate crises act as a major driver in increasing child poverty.**<sup>35</sup> Children from all regions have expressed deep concern about the impact that climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss have on their lives. Extreme temperatures, heavy rains and storms, droughts, flooding, and forest fires affect a wider range of children in different contexts than ever before. They connect these changes to various causes, including waste and pollution, deforestation, toxic air, and plastics. Children described how

these issues impact their other rights, including their right to education, an adequate standard of living, and their right to play.<sup>36</sup>

All human rights depend on a healthy environment. Environmental degradation, climate change and childhood exposure to toxic and hazardous substances present an urgent challenge and negatively affect children's rights, including the rights to life, survival and development, bodily integrity, physical and mental health, an adequate standard of living, including food, water, sanitation and housing, culture, freedom from child labour, education, play and livelihood.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, children are often unable to fully realize their rights to freedom of information, participation and access to remedy regarding environmental issues. The effects of environmental damage, pollution and toxic substances also intensify social and economic inequalities and poverty and reverse improvements in children's well-being.<sup>38</sup>

States' efforts must focus on the fight against the triple planetary crisis as [one of the Six Transitions](#) given its catalytic and multiplier effect on achievement of all Goals.

States must urgently act to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights related to environmental damage, pollution and toxic substances, including by meeting their human rights obligations and responsibilities contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Agreement and other international human rights and environmental instruments.<sup>39</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child clarifies these obligations in its [General comment No. 26 \(2023\) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#).

## GOAL 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Violence in all contexts and in all its forms affects children in every part of the world. Children highlighted that they or others they know have experienced physical and sexual violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation in different locations, including at home, in school, online and in the wider community.<sup>40</sup> **Some children connected poverty and an inadequate standard of living to increased risks of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and parental neglect.**<sup>41</sup>

Children in all regions are worried about the impact that violence has on their mental and physical health, and their ability to access other rights.<sup>42</sup> Children expressed significant concerns about the high levels of violence that adults can experience, including abuse and maltreatment in the home, especially towards women, and gender-based violence in the wider community.<sup>43</sup>

The fulfilment of all the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16, addressing protection from violence and other fundamental freedoms, must be a priority for all countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, alongside related targets under Goal 5 on gender equality. At national level there is a need for both preventive and remedial action, and child protection systems must be strengthened in an integrated manner, including through the transformation of legislation and policies to prohibit all forms of violence against children, alongside supportive measures in relation to services and social norms.<sup>44</sup>

## GOAL 17: PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS

If the SDG investment needs to 2030 are to be met, some \$30 trillion of additional investment must be found over the next eight years.<sup>45</sup> An [SDG Stimulus](#) of \$500 billion annually in affordable long-term finance for developing countries, is required to get the SDGs back on track.

**Universal social protection that respects, protects, and fulfils the rights of all children is attainable.** The framework, guidance and resources all exist to expand social protection towards universal, inclusive social protection for children. **It requires a policy shift, international solidarity,**

**the political will to make the right choice and bold budgetary decisions that lead to more equitable outcomes for all.**<sup>46</sup>

Integrating the rights of the child into economic decision-making yields better outcomes for children and the planet they have inherited. **Addressing and redressing root causes and structural barriers to equality, justice, and sustainability for children, are key objectives of the human rights economy. It calls for the application of a child rights lens to public budgeting.**<sup>47</sup> This requires adequate financing and investment in children, prioritizing those in situations of greatest vulnerability and marginalization; participation throughout the implementation and follow-up and review processes, with effective measures to bring about accountability; and a human rights approach to data and monitoring, including through transparency and quality disaggregated data to reflect the situation of all children, particularly those who are too often uncounted, yet also at greatest risk of being left behind.<sup>48</sup>

Considering the increasing global and institutional momentum towards realizing universal social protection, it is time for most States to move from ad hoc, inadequate short-term measures or even a lack of measures, to implementing inclusive, sustainable, well-financed, child rights-compliant systems, and move towards establishing a [Global Fund for Social Protection](#). Needed interventions go beyond the national level and include reforming the international financial architecture, the international debt architecture, and the global tax architecture, which all aim to increase fiscal space for more investments in economic, social and cultural rights in general, and in social services in particular.

The world stands at a crucial moment where wealth continues to grow, as do wealth-related inequalities. Applying some of that enormous wealth to provide social protection for more than 1 billion children would open vast and positive possibilities for all children and the collective future of all. As the world marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and advances discussions on the Pact for the Future, States have a critical role in delivering a social contract built on trust, inclusion and participation. This is foundational to realizing children's rights and their ability to reach their maximum potential and participate fully in society.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, [A/RES/78/1](#) (adopted on 29 September 2023), para. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 2023 Political declaration, A/RES/78/1, paras. 2-3, 38(a).

<sup>3</sup> UN Sustainable Development Group, [Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Deliver the SDGs](#) (September 2023), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, [Progress on Children's Well-Being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda](#) (September 2023), p.1.

<sup>5</sup> 2023 Political declaration, A/RES/78/1, para. 4.

<sup>6</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, arts. 9 and 10; Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 26; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 28; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 11; International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, art. 27; and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 22.

<sup>7</sup> 2023 Political declaration, A/RES/78/1, para. 18. *"We reaffirm our resolve to realize our vision of a world with access to inclusive and equitable quality education, universal health coverage including access to quality essential health-care services, social protection, food security and improved nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, sustainable industrialization and quality, resilient, reliable and sustainable infrastructure for all."*

<sup>8</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1 September 2023), [A/HRC/54/36](#), para. 79.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* at para. 105(c).

<sup>10</sup> Good practices of support systems enabling community inclusion of persons with disabilities, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (26 December 2023), [A/HRC/55/34](#).

<sup>11</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 105(b).

<sup>12</sup> Strengthening a child rights-based approach in the work of the United Nations, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1 February 2024), [A/HRC/55/36](#).

<sup>13</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 105(e).

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- <sup>14</sup> UN OHCHR, [Children’s Vision for Human Rights](#) (December 2023), pp. 7-8. A total of 1,152 children contributed directly to the survey online; and 2,684 children discussed the survey in one of 249 focus group discussions held all around the world. Most participating children were aged between 6-17 years; several children who participated were aged five or younger. Children participated from 53 geographical locations. Children’s contributions to other recent global human rights consultations also inform this report. These include: Global consultations held in General Comment No.26 on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change; and Global consultations for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2023 Report to the Human Rights Council on the Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid at p. 5. Recent global engagement with children have ensured that children’s views, realities, and recommendations on human rights have been incorporated alongside the recommendations of other key stakeholder groups.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid at, p. 12.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid at, p. 14.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid at, p. 17.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid at, p. 14.
- <sup>20</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 101.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid at para. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid at para. 105(a).
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid at para. 18.
- <sup>24</sup> UNICEF, *Progress on Children’s Well-Being (2023)*, p. 27.
- <sup>25</sup> *Children’s Vision for Human Rights*, p. 11.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid at p. 17.
- <sup>27</sup> UNICEF, *Progress on Children’s Well-Being (2023)*, p. i.
- <sup>28</sup> Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (15 December 2016), [A/HRC/34/27](#), para. 66.
- <sup>29</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 102.
- <sup>30</sup> *Children’s Vision for Human Rights*, p. 24.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid at p. 11.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid at p. 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid at p. 28.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid at para. 105(d).
- <sup>35</sup> UNICEF, *Progress on Children’s Well-Being (2023)*, p. 13.
- <sup>36</sup> *Children’s Vision for Human Rights*, p. 14.
- <sup>37</sup> Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (3 January 2020), [A/HRC/43/30](#), para. 103.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid at para. 104.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid at para. 105.
- <sup>40</sup> *Children’s Vision for Human Rights*, p. 13. Globally, children are also concerned about high levels of bullying. Children in some regional listed child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, among the greatest human rights challenges facing children in their community.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid at p. 12.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid at p. 13.
- <sup>43</sup> *Children’s Vision for Human Rights*, p. 18.
- <sup>44</sup> Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, A/HRC/34/27, para. 24.
- <sup>45</sup> UNCTAD, [SDG Investment Trends Monitor \(Issue 4\)](#) (14 September 2023), p. 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 104.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid at para. 105(d).
- <sup>48</sup> Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, A/HRC/34/27, para. 67.
- <sup>49</sup> Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection, A/HRC/54/36, para. 104.