

**Synthesis of Key Messages on
Eradicating Poverty
to support preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development**

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I. Introduction

Thirty years ago, the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development marked a paradigm shift in the international development agenda. At the Summit, Governments made a series of ambitious commitments aimed at putting people at the centre of development efforts. Chief among them were the three interlinked core pillars of poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social integration. The Copenhagen Declaration embraced a broad and integrated vision of social development aimed at social justice, solidarity, harmony and equality within and among countries.¹ Achieving its vision, now enshrined in the 2030 Agenda, requires actively reducing inequality, advancing social justice, strengthening solidarity, and upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms.² The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force supporting preparations for the Second World Summit for Social Development has prepared three non-papers synthesizing key messages on the three pillars of social development and aligned with the “fields of action” identified in the co-facilitators’ [Food for Thought paper](#).³ To ensure full coverage of issues and areas presented by the Food for Thought paper, a fourth related non-paper, prepared by the summit secretariat, provides an overview of the mandates contained in the main outcome documents from selected United Nations summits and conferences, with respect to follow-up implementation, monitoring and review. These non-papers are meant to serve as a resource for Member States in their preparations for the Summit.

The outcomes of the Copenhagen Summit, together with those of other global conferences, inspired the international development agenda in the decades that followed. In adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments recognized the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, as the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

II. Progress and gaps: a snapshot

More than one billion people have escaped extreme income poverty since 1995.⁴ This trend has been driven in large part by rapid reductions in poverty in Eastern Asia, particularly in China. However, the COVID-19 pandemic stalled and reversed decades of progress. By 2024, the

¹ Copenhagen Declaration, para. 29.

² Copenhagen Declaration, para. 5.

³ Consulting entities/offices at time of preparation: ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, DESA, DGC, DCO, FAO, ILO, IMF, IOM, ITU, OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNRISD, WBG, WHO, UN Youth Office, Office of the USG for Policy.

⁴ World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform. <https://pip.worldbank.org>. Accessed on 28 March 2025.

estimated number of people in extreme poverty (692 million) was close to the pre-pandemic level. The majority of people in extreme poverty live in rural areas.

Multidimensional measures of poverty suggest even higher levels of deprivation. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which considers deprivations in health, education and living standards, 1.1 billion people lived in acute multidimensional poverty in 2024.⁵ In addition, hunger and malnutrition continue to rise in many countries. An estimated 733 million people—9% of the global population—experienced undernourishment in 2023, compared to 7.5% in 2019.⁶ Educational exclusion persists: Globally, 251 million children and youth remain out of school, including 33% of all children and youth in low-income countries.⁷ Over 1.12 billion people lived in informal settlements or slums in 2022— an increase of 130 million since 2015.⁸

The goal of eradicating poverty is increasingly challenging. Poverty is more and more entrenched in those countries and regions with the least financial resources, institutional capacity and political stability to implement the necessary policies—that is, in low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in the poorest regions of middle-income countries.

Eradicating poverty from the poorest places is not the only challenge, however. The pandemic and other recent crises have exposed how fragile gains have been, even in countries and regions that had succeeded in reducing poverty. Many people remain one misfortune away – such as job loss, illness, a drought, flood, or forced displacement – from falling into poverty all around the world and those who manage to escape poverty often do so temporarily.⁹

The urgency of preventing falls into poverty cannot be overstated. Globally, over 2.8 billion people—more than one-third of the world’s population—live between the extreme income poverty line of \$2.15 a day and a higher poverty line of \$6.85 a day. Even a small shock can push them into extreme poverty, given that only just over half of the global population (52.4 per cent) enjoys some form of social protection cover, with the percentage being much lower in low-income and climate-vulnerable countries, and among women.

The recent crises, compounded by growing threats from climate change and conflict, have heightened this urgency. Nearly one in five people worldwide is at high risk from climate-related hazards.¹⁰ One in seven people was exposed to conflict in 2024, with the number of state-based conflicts at its highest levels since World War II.¹¹

⁵ *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024: Poverty Amid Conflict*. UNDP and OPHI (2024).

⁶ *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2024).

⁷ UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Report*, 2024/5.

⁸ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*.

⁹ See *World Social Report 2025* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis*. World Bank (2024).

¹¹ *Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023*. Rustad, S, Peace Research Institute Oslo (2024). On average, income poverty is much higher in countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations than in other countries. See *World Social Report 2025* (forthcoming).

Reductions in inequality can help accelerate progress towards ending poverty. Unfortunately, the world today is as far from the Copenhagen vision founded on equality within and among countries. Countries where income inequality has grown since then are home to two-thirds of the world population.¹² Economic inequality among countries, which had declined in the decades prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, is also on the rise.¹³ Extreme income and wealth inequalities hold back progress towards poverty eradication, create social tensions and foster political instability. Without appropriate policies and institutions to prevent it, inequality concentrates political influence among those who are better off, perpetuating cycles of unequal opportunity and challenging policies meant to reduce poverty, including progressive taxation.

Accelerating poverty eradication requires renewed political commitment, strengthened multilateralism, and sustained investment in integrated strategies across sectors to target both income and multidimensional poverty drivers. Reinforcing social protection systems, investing in decent work, strengthening resilience to shocks, and reducing inequality must remain at the core of national and international efforts.

III. Catalysing change – Key action areas

Progress towards eradicating poverty has all along been fragile. Countries, including those where poverty has declined substantially, must focus on building people's resilience, enabling them to manage risks, and tackling the structural causes of persistent poverty in its many dimensions.

It is recognized in both the Copenhagen Declaration and in the 2030 Agenda that the eradication of poverty and other development goals are mutually reinforcing and interdependent. No goal can be reached in isolation or through piecemeal approaches. Sustained progress requires integrated solutions—the whole-of-government, systems approach set forth by the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It also demands renewed multilateralism and stronger international cooperation. The Second World Summit for Social Development (social summit) presents a critical opportunity for immediate and coordinated action to advance the integrated and coherent policy solutions needed. Key action areas include:

- **Ensuring that macroeconomic policies are aligned with social goals.** Inclusive economic growth is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for poverty eradication. While strong social policies are essential to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, the barriers to and enablers of sustained social investments lie beyond their immediate scope—in fiscal rules, tax structures and international financial systems. Following the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, the social summit offers a platform to strengthen policy coherence and deepen commitments to increase and protect social investments, including by:
 - Strengthening tax administration systems and **broadening the redistributive impact of fiscal policy**, comprising more progressive tax systems, including wealth taxation.

¹² See *World Social Report 2025* (forthcoming). Results based on the Gini coefficient of income inequality.

¹³ See *Poverty, Prosperity and Planet Report 2024: Paths Out of the Polycrisis*. World Bank (2024).

- Creating and protecting **fiscal space for social spending** and reallocating budgetary resources from other sectors, taking account of States' obligations towards economic and social rights, to secure the rights to health, education and social protection for all without discrimination.
 - Increasing dedicated resources for **social protection investment**.
 - Prioritizing direct over indirect taxation, fostering higher contributions from top earners and **ensuring tax justice**, so that people living in or close to poverty do not pay more in taxes than they receive through public transfers.
 - Implementing **fair, effective, progressive and gender-responsive tax systems** to finance social investments and reduce inequality and avoiding forms of regressive taxation that increase inequalities or where the burden is borne disproportionately by particular groups.¹⁴
 - Expanding efforts to **broaden the tax base**, combat illicit financial flows, corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, and eliminate safe havens.
 - Promoting **international tax cooperation** to close loopholes and combat tax evasion, avoidance, and illicit financial flows; as well as to enhance global fairness and improve tax collection, especially from multinational corporations, the wealthiest and high-income groups through taxing corporate income, wealth and property taxes, among others.
 - Supporting highly indebted countries with **paths to debt sustainability and relief**.
 - **Protecting and increasing social investments**, including in social protection and essential public services, and considering increased spending during shocks and crises.
 - **Integrate social impact assessments** into policy and investment decision-making.
 - Pursuing **international finance architecture reforms** that scale up access to resources for inclusive development,¹⁵ tackling the high cost of debt and debt servicing that are crowding out social spending.
- **Investing in productive employment and decent work.**¹⁶ Decent jobs are the main way out of poverty and help reduce inequality. Countries that have experienced economic growth alongside sustained improvements in decent work and productivity, particularly in agriculture, have made the most progress in reducing poverty. Today, managing ongoing changes in the world of work and tackling informality require stronger international commitment and consensus.
 - **Guaranteeing universal access to comprehensive social protection systems.** Building people's resilience to prevent falls into poverty and address inequalities call for ensuring that everyone has adequate social protection coverage. In most countries, social protection funding gaps can be bridged through the mobilization of domestic resources, but many low-income countries require international support. The social summit can strengthen the commitment to building and

¹⁴ United Nations (forthcoming). [*World Social Report 2025: a new policy consensus to advance social progress*](#) (chapter 5).

¹⁵ A/RES/79/1, Pact for the Future.

¹⁶ See Synthesis Brief on Employment and Decent Work for additional and more detailed recommendations.

maintaining social protection floors, including through a mix of tax-financed and contributory schemes. It can also enhance international cooperation to support countries in implementing social protection systems, including by:

- Implementing a measurable commitment to **increase social protection coverage by at least two percentage points per year** as measured by SDG indicator 1.3.1.
- **Supporting middle- and low-income countries to close social protection financing gaps**, noting that an additional 1.3% of GDP can close coverage gaps in these countries.
- Ensuring that people **receive adequate social protection benefits** when they need them, across the life course.
- Establishing a standard for public investment in **tax-funded (non-contributory) programmes** to ensure adequacy.
- Ensuring that **means-tested and other targeted schemes** are rights-based and that they **complement, but do not replace**, universal schemes.
- Engaging in strategic foresight, ensuring that **any efforts made to ensure the sustainability of social protection systems are fair, promote equity** and that benefits are adequate.
- Increasing the gender-responsiveness of social protection systems through greater linkages with care services and better coverage of women and men with care responsibilities.
- Strengthening social protection delivery mechanisms, including through digital technologies to expand the reach, efficiency, and resilience of social protection systems, and the portability of social protection benefits, including across international borders.

- **Investing more—and investing better—to guarantee universal access to quality education and lifelong learning, healthcare and other essential services.** The Pact for the Future underscores the need to invest in people to end poverty and strengthen inclusion, trust and social cohesion, including through universal health coverage, quality inclusive education and lifelong learning, and adequate, safe and affordable housing. Even where universal access exists, service quality often falls short. The social summit can serve as the platform to **mobilize sustained investments and advance financial and technical cooperation** to strengthen institutional capacity and improve service delivery, including by:

- Pursuing **universal policies that are sensitive to differences**, as some groups face greater challenges than others in accessing services and social protection and overcoming social exclusion.¹⁷
- Creating robust, resilient and **gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and age-sensitive care and support systems** with full respect for human rights¹⁸ of paid and unpaid caregivers and care and support recipients.¹⁹

¹⁷ United Nations (2016), *Report on the World Social Situation 2016: Leaving no one behind – the imperative of inclusive development*.

¹⁸ See preambular paragraphs of A/RES/77/317, International Day of Care and Support. For more detailed policy recommendations, see the report to the Human Rights Council on human rights dimension of care and support (A/HRC/58/43) and UN System policy paper, *Transforming care systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda*.

¹⁹ A/HRC/RES/54/6, OP 1, E/RES/2024/4, OP 1.

- Investing in skills development and decent work to foster recruitment and retention of adequate and quality education, health and other care and support workers.²⁰ Investing in **education** from early childhood and through the life course to expand quality education, reduce inequality and promote social inclusion. Expanding universal, affordable and **meaningful connectivity to improve digital inclusion**, with consideration to digital infrastructure, device, user profiles, connection quality and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.
 - Investing in **digital public infrastructure** designed to enhance access, quality, and efficiency of service delivery in education, health, and housing as part of broad social and economic development strategies.
 - Pursuing **digital inclusion** in a secure environment that ensures non-discrimination and protects rights, supported by a strengthened regulatory framework for security and privacy.
 - Enhancing **digital skills and literacy** to bridge existing digital divides.
- **Investing in rural communities and agrifood systems.** Rural areas are home to the majority of the world's poor, many of whom rely on small-scale agriculture, pastoralism, and fisheries for their livelihoods. Agrifood systems transformation offers critical opportunities to promote inclusive growth and poverty eradication. Aligning food systems transformation with just transitions is essential to ensure that rural populations benefit from the green and digital transitions. The social summit can strengthen commitment to rural development, including by:
 - Supporting **small-scale producers** in adopting sustainable agricultural practices to improve productivity.
 - Promoting **diversified rural livelihoods and the creation of decent employment in both farm and non-farm sectors**, including through support to cooperatives.
 - Ensuring **equitable access to resources**, including land, water, seeds, technology, markets, and finance, especially for women, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalized groups.
 - Scaling up **climate finance for rural areas** to accelerate adaptation across sectors and aligning **climate mitigation policies with just transitions**, avoiding harm to the livelihoods and food security of vulnerable groups.
 - Improving **rural infrastructure**, including universal and affordable digital connectivity, and access to essential services.
 - Investing in technical and vocational education and training programmes for agricultural workers so as to enhance their resilience to climate change and break rural poverty cycles.
 - Strengthening social dialogue and realizing rights at work in rural areas for the protection of rural workers.
 - **Advancing gender equality is essential to eradicate poverty.** Gender-based violence, child marriage, and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services trap women and girls in cycles of poverty and exclusion. Addressing these barriers through strengthened legal protections,

²⁰ ILO, Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy (14 June 2024).

universal access to quality health services, and investments in care and support systems can substantially enhance women's economic empowerment and break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

- **Strengthening national data collection systems, promoting the dissemination of disaggregated data and data transparency**, noting that sound policy interventions to address the root causes of poverty require reliable and timely information on the levels, duration and severity of poverty in all its dimensions, as well as on the drivers of poverty. Efforts are also needed to **improve the measurement of well-being and social progress**, including through an agreed framework on measures of progress that goes **beyond Gross Domestic Product** and reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- **Strengthening governance mechanisms and fostering inclusive, participatory mechanisms** to enable people living in poverty and other disadvantaged groups to contribute meaningfully to decision- making. Inclusive deliberation and civil dialogue processes are needed to ensure that Governments respond to the needs of all stakeholders and address their concerns, that policies are adapted to local contexts and that they are broadly supported.²¹

²¹ See Synthesis Brief on Social Inclusion for additional and more detailed action-oriented recommendations.