

Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027): UNICEF 2022 input

The year 2022 was incredibly difficult for children and their families living in poverty, as well as those vulnerable to falling into poverty. These families were confronted by a series of major crises, including the continued impact of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, rising inflation and food insecurity, as well as unprecedented global debt – economies facing extremely challenging financing gaps.

Children and their families continue to be particularly affected by these multiple crises. Children are more than twice as likely as adults to live below the poverty line and continue to face multiple deprivations. This document highlights key steps made by UNICEF in 2022, in implementing the interagency and system-wide plan of action for eradicating poverty, monetary and multidimensional.

Expanding inclusive and shock responsive social protection

- A key component of UNICEF's work in 2022 was ensuring that children living in poverty are visible, including their needs, capacities, agency and voice – via the systematic measurement and monitoring of child poverty, and the effective use of data and analysis to support policy change and innovative programmatic approaches at scale. In 2022, the number of UNICEF country offices reporting that evidence and advocacy had led to policies and programmes in child poverty reduction increased, from 32 countries in 2021 to 38 countries in 2022. The number offices reporting on the measurement of multidimensional child poverty, 70, remained static. There was however a decrease in the number of countries measuring monetary child poverty – 74 in 2022, compared with 85 in 2021. This is because a number of countries have not updated their estimates since 2017, which reflects the difficulties countries face in systematically resourcing and supporting national-led child poverty measurement.
- The second global publication by UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO) on social protection for children highlighted that close to 1.8 billion children currently have no access to social protection. Progress in increasing effective coverage globally has stalled since 2016; in 2020 only 26 per cent of children under 15 years globally received social protection cash benefits. This is partly due to the retrenchment or discontinuation of large-scale child benefits in some countries, often as part of fiscal consolidation measures. This average hide significant regional disparities: while 82 per cent of children in Europe and Central Asia are covered, coverage was 54 per cent in the Americas, 18 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 15 per cent in the Arab states and 13 per cent in Africa.¹
- UNICEF worked on strengthening social protection systems across countries and, encouragingly, 2022 saw countries strengthening aspects of their social protection and a steady increase in the number of countries with strong or moderately strong systems, from 56 in 2021 to over 68 in 2022. Equally critical is the ongoing scale-up of UNICEF work in fragile and humanitarian contexts. In 2022, UNICEF-supported transfers reached over 103 million households across humanitarian and development contexts.

¹ More than a billion reasons: the urgent need to build universal social protection for children. ILO and UNICEF. 2023.

- UNICEF also promoted a move towards enhanced gender-transformative and inclusive systems. In 2022, 115 UNICEF country offices integrated gender-specific objectives in their support of national and subnational social protection systems – an additional 15 more offices than 2021 and a fourfold increase on 2019. Of these 115 offices, 58 specifically tackled gender-based violence, 61 aimed to increase girls’ access to education and 49 targeted an increase women and girls’ decision-making, corresponding to respective increases of 45 per cent, 42 per cent, and 36 per cent on the previous year. UNICEF made strides in addressing the [global care crisis](#) with 75 country offices reporting on family-friendly policies and other approaches to addressing the sharply rising global caregiving burden, up from 56 such country offices in 2021.
- In addition, in 2022, UNICEF continued strengthening social protection systems so that they are more inclusive of children and adults with disabilities, including supporting 60 countries to initiate disability-inclusive social protection programmes, up from 55 countries in 2021. UNICEF supported cash transfers that reached around 800,000 children with disabilities.

Social Protection in humanitarian and fragile contexts

- The year 2022 was also crucial in the evolution of UNICEF’s comprehensive offer in fragile and humanitarian contexts, leveraging our expertise and approach to prepare both government and UNICEF delivery systems to rapidly deliver cash assistance using government, parallel or mixed approaches, depending on the context. Government system strengthening continued. The number of countries with moderate readiness to respond to a crisis increased from 68 to 78 in the past year, while progress in the number of countries with high readiness was slower, increasing from 17 to 18 – highlighting the challenges in developing strongly shock responsive systems. The increased readiness of UNICEF systems can be seen in the significant scale-up of humanitarian cash transfers as part of emergency responses, including in Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies, where UNICEF exceeded planned milestones for the year. Overall, UNICEF reached an estimated 2.8 million households in 43 countries. The overall volume of payments to UNICEF partners for cash-based assistance has significantly scaled to US\$725 million over the course of the year
- Significant progress was made in 2022 towards building capacity to deliver cash transfers during emergencies, including the implementation of an inter-divisional approach to humanitarian cash transfer programming, bringing programme and operations staff together to make UNICEF more fit for purpose to implement HCT programs on the ground. This coordinated approach is required to implement country level HCT programs at scale and it calls for coordinated efforts at headquarter and regional levels across operational and programmatic areas of work. These efforts have resulted in the development of a global digital solution, the Humanitarian cash Operational and Programmatic Ecosystem (HOPE), to manage beneficiary data for country offices to use in a systematic manner when no government beneficiary management system is available. It has also translated into the continued strengthening and dissemination of the programmatic and operational frameworks, guidance and tools required for country offices to deliver cash transfers in a timely and risk-informed manner.
- With a strong focus on leaving no one behind, UNICEF is committed to strengthening social protection systems that are inclusive of displaced and migrant populations while at the same time providing support through a parallel system to meet their immediate needs, when

required. In 2022, UNICEF worked with governments and other partners to deliver humanitarian cash transfers to displaced populations through a government/parallel/mixed delivery system. Some of these countries include Jordan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Moldova, Turkey, Belize and Ecuador. To reduce the significant gaps which continue to exist, UNICEF has been stepping up its efforts to extend social protection to children on the move. In addition to cash transfers, this includes technical support to governments to ensure social protection systems become more inclusive of children on the move, for example by providing capacity building to the social service workforce and by supporting governments to draft inclusive social protection policies or design inclusive programmes.

Human capability development – addressing the non-income forms of poverty

- In the majority of countries UNICEF works in, UNICEF offices focused on analysing the multiple deprivations the most disadvantaged children experience, in areas such as health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and housing. In addition, UNICEF partnered with the World Bank for joint analysis, launched in 2022, focusing on the socioeconomic impacts of the Covid-19 on households with children – which showed that households with many children were more likely than households without children to suffer from income loss and food insecurity, including going without eating for a whole day.
- UNICEF strengthened efforts to address barriers for addressing social services, including in the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation and education. In 2022, despite the challenges posed by the global food and nutrition crisis, 356.3 million children under 5 years of age – more than ever before – benefited from programmes to prevent malnutrition in all its forms, and a 182.4 million benefited from programmes for the early detection and treatment of wasting. With UNICEF support, 77.9 million children were vaccinated against measles, and the number vaccinated in countries affected by humanitarian crises increased substantially, to more than 27 million. Maternal and newborn health indicators saw steady progress, with 44.4 million live births delivered in health facilities through UNICEF-supported programmes, while the percentage of live births attended by skilled health personnel increased to 86 per cent based on annualized estimates. As a result of UNICEF support, 37.9 million out-of-school children and adolescents (49 per cent girls) accessed education in 2022 (with 3.2 million accessing pre-primary education), including 3.1 million children on the move and 18.6 million children in humanitarian settings. Learning materials reached 28.3 million children, including 3.8 million in humanitarian settings. In the area of water and sanitation, 26 million people (including 894,000 people with disabilities) gained access to at least basic sanitation services, 30.6 million (including 1.4 million with disabilities) to basic water that is safe and available when needed, and 23.6 million (including 1.1 million with disabilities) to basic hygiene. More than 88 per cent of those gaining access were in fragile countries, where UNICEF direct support is concentrated.

Reducing inequalities

- Accelerating efforts to reduce poverty and inequality requires increasing the fiscal space for social spending, as well as improving the efficiency and equity of resources, including through progressive taxation and other public financial management approaches. UNICEF's Public Finance for Children (PF4C) programme seeks to influence and support the mobilization, allocation and use of domestic financial resources to achieve greater, more equitable and sustainable results for children. If government budgets are insufficient, concentrated on better-off groups, or used poorly, the poorest children and their families are left behind. Evidence is

revealing that fiscal equity is critical to reduce poverty and inequality, and to realize the Leaving No One Behind Agenda. UNICEF supports countries to measure and monitor child poverty to guide and inform policy and programming. Important to note that UNICEF undertakes fiscal equity analysis to highlight the impact of policy changes on vulnerable children and works with governments at national and subnational level to plan, cost, budget and implement policies and programmes to directly address social deprivations that contribute to multi-dimensional poverty, as well as the expansion of integrated and shock responsive social protection programmes to directly address poverty barriers.

- In 2022, UNICEF also scaled up its engagement with governments to better respond to the increase in economic challenges. A total of 144 (up from 137 in 2021) countries engaged with governments on Public Finance for Children (PF4C), of which 78 countries generated new evidence and strengthened national social sector budgets (up from 65 in 2021). Noteworthy is the increased number of countries working with governments to improve equity in public budgets, from 122 in 2021 to 130 in 2022. UNICEF accelerated its efforts to support governments in leveraging international and private resources to expand social service delivery and, to this end, engaged in a total of 127 countries (up from 126 in 2021). In 65 of these countries, efforts led to concrete results for social service delivery (up from 55 in 2021).
- Enhancing the capacity of sub-national/local governments to formulate policies, plans and programmes to address structural inequalities is key. For these reasons, UNICEF's local governance programming has grown in scope and scale in recent years, with more countries and more partnerships working with UNICEF to address the multiple deprivations faced by children and their families and caregivers. From major urban centres to the most isolated of rural villages, UNICEF provided technical assistance to improve outcomes for children, with a focus on poverty and equity. UNICEF supported local and urban governance programming in 107 programme countries worldwide in 2022, up from 77 countries in 2021. The war in Ukraine further underlined the value of subnational and local governments as frontline responders in emergency and humanitarian situations. They play a pivotal role in providing essential emergency support, bridging resource gaps, improving coordination with national governments and adapting and scaling up existing social services to reach every child.

Inter-agency collaboration: Partnerships are at the core of UNICEF's anti-poverty efforts, including key UN partnerships. Below is a non-exhaustive overview of UNICEF's UN interagency work in 2022 in relation to poverty reduction, which includes among others:

- In 2022, UNICEF convened partners and stakeholders in the fight against child poverty at the global, regional and national levels. Convening stakeholders to produce and share information about child poverty and its policy responses is an important step in understanding how to move forward, and the pathways to achieving the SDGs on child poverty. UNICEF continues to co-chair a 20-member coalition, alongside Save the Children and the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, bringing together a comprehensive policy agenda to end child poverty in 2022.
- UNICEF is a lead partner together with ILO and UNDP on the Global Accelerator on Decent Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions. This is an initiative of the UN Secretary-General launched in September 2021 that aims to support the creation of 400 million decent jobs, the extension of social protection to the 4 billion people who are currently excluded, and to

facilitate "just" transitions for all. This multi-stakeholder initiative is also a means to achieve a more effective and coordinated form of multilateral cooperation - an imperative for addressing current and future crises. UNICEF has been supporting the development of the Accelerator from the beginning as a core partner with ILO.

- UNDP continues to be an important UNICEF partner for reaching the SDG poverty targets. In Uzbekistan, for example, in partnership with the Centre for Economic Research and Reforms, UNDP and UNICEF supported nationwide consultations and a survey of 1,500 households to define a national measurement of multidimensional poverty in Uzbekistan, which will be used to inform household survey data collection and provide critical information on multidimensional poverty. In Angola, UNICEF collaborated with the National Institute of Statistics and UNDP to highlight the importance of going beyond income-based measures of poverty, to complement these with multidimensional poverty measures.
- In 2022, UNICEF continued to work with ILO and Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) on the EU-funded SP-PFM programme to strengthen financing for social protection in eight countries.
- Also with ILO, UNICEF published a joint report on the latest status of social protection for children " [*More than a billion reasons: The urgent need to build universal social protection*](#)"
- Partnerships are central toward achieving universal social protection for all children as a key policy solution to address child poverty. Building on our strong country presence and profound knowledge and experience in social protection, we led and coordinated partnerships to shape critical social agendas in social protection programming and influenced global debates on social protection in areas including system strengthening, financing, and inclusion.
- UNICEF and WFP continued and expanded their joint programme on supporting national social protection responses to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in three countries (Mali, Mauritania and Niger) in the Sahel region of West Africa.

In conclusion, and of utmost importance for child poverty eradication is UNICEF's work across the sectors – in nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation, working towards access to quality social services for all, with emphasis on reaching those most marginalized.