

In 2023, children and their families continued to be confronted by a series of major crisis, such as conflict, inflation, and food insecurity, as well as the climate crisis. This document highlights key steps made by UNICEF in 2023, in implementing the interagency and system-wide plan of action for eradicating poverty.

### **Expanding inclusive and shock responsive social protection**

- In 2023, UNICEF continued its social protection support at legal and policy level, for the expansion of social protection and ensuring inclusive access to family or child benefits. As a result, 165 million children were reached with cash transfer programmes supported by UNICEF, a 25 per cent increase from 2022.
- UNICEF supported the digitalization of social protection information management systems and their interoperability, contributing to make social protection systems more transparent, efficient, and accountable, and supporting evidence-based implementation and a systems approach to social protection. For example, in Madagascar, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank and WFP, supported the development of the Unified Social Registry, and the initial registration of 65,000 households.
- UNICEF increasingly recognizes social protection as a vehicle for transformative change in gender equity and inclusion. In 129 countries UNICEF integrated gender-specific objectives in support to national and subnational social protection systems (including addressing gender-based violence, increasing girls' access to education, improving access to maternity benefits and sexual and reproductive health services, and increasing women and girls' decision-making). Further, UNICEF engaged in care and family-friendly policies in eighty-three country offices, promoting child benefits, affordable childcare and paid parental leave, among others.
- In addition, UNICEF recognizes the transformational power of social protection for children with disabilities and their families, who face significant additional costs regarding health and rehabilitation, assistive technology, transport, childcare among others - undermining their resilience and capacity to escape from poverty. UNICEF is actively supporting sixty-seven countries worldwide to enhance their social protection programmes and systems to offer better support for children with disabilities and their families.

### **Social Protection in humanitarian and fragile contexts**

- In 2023, humanitarian crises have continued to threaten the lives and rights of children globally. Ensuring access to social protection for all children in all contexts, UNICEF's work on social protection includes a strong focus on fragile and humanitarian contexts - engaging with national policymakers to invest in the preparedness of social protection systems. Together with BMZ, UNICEF promotes evidence generation on the contribution of adaptive social protection in building resilience and achieving outcomes for children in fragile contexts, and as a co-lead of the [SPIAC-B working group on linking humanitarian action and social protection](#).
- In 2023, UNICEF scaled up use of humanitarian cash transfers as part of its emergency responses to forty-eight countries, a total of 2.9 million families were reached with humanitarian cash transfers.
- UNICEF invests in resilient and risk-informed public finance management systems towards shock-responsive social spending, including spearheading global knowledge - releasing in 2023 a Social Spending Policy Brief on [Financing Social Services in Humanitarian Settings](#).

### **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 2023, UNICEF supported 34.1 million live births in health facilities across 86 countries. Implementation of integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses reached 66.4 million children, and 1.1 million health workers received the skills and support for delivering essential maternal, newborn and child health services. With WHO, UNICEF led the global agenda for quality of care for maternal and newborn health; 70 of 106 countries developed national plans.
- With UNICEF support, 132.9 million children were vaccinated against measles, including 32.4 million in emergencies, and over 400 million were vaccinated against polio. UNICEF delivered 2.79 billion doses to 105 countries.
- UNICEF-supported policies and programmes for stunting prevention reached, in 2023, 434.4 million children under the age of 5 years and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. Policies, programmes and services for prevention, early detection and treatment of wasting reached 210.2 million children.
- Through the No Time to Waste Acceleration Plan 2022–2023, UNICEF reached 6 million children with severe wasting in 15 acutely affected countries and renewed its partnership with the World Food Programme to optimize prevention and treatment protocols.
- UNICEF supported education policies and programs in 144 countries, working on service delivery and systems strengthening on access to education, learning quality, skills, and youth engagement. UNICEF support enabled 37.7 million children and adolescents to access education, including 3.1 million children on the move and 17.7 million in emergencies. Learning materials were distributed to 31.2 million children, including 5.4 million in emergencies.

### Reducing inequalities

- UNICEF's work to support equity in social spending focuses on ensuring public resources are spent on services for those who need them the most, create equal opportunities and reduce poverty. 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. In 2023, UNICEF worked on Public Finance for Children (PF4C) in 145 countries, supporting strengthened public finance systems, advancing the sufficiency, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and equity of social sector budgets.
- UNICEF generated evidence for developing the National Action Plan on implementation of the European [Child Guarantee](#), which aims to ensure that the most vulnerable children in the European Union have access to health care, education, childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition. This has resulted in increased social spending by EUR 99 million to advance equity and decrease child poverty.
- UNICEF's publication [Too Little, Too Late](#), found that most countries fail to make the early childhood investments that protect their rights, ensure their well-being, and secure them a better future.
- UNICEF prioritized and expanded support for subnational and local governments and other local stakeholders to ensure local development plans are child sensitive and adequately resourced for implementation. In 2023, UNICEF provided support to 118 countries - reaching more than 4,000 subnational and local governments, more than half of which were urban municipalities, to increase local governance capacities for poverty reduction.

### Accelerating climate action

- Nearly half of the world's children live in countries that are extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts – floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires. In 2023, UNICEF accelerated efforts to promote adequate investment in climate finance, and integrate climate action into programme planning, advocating child-sensitive climate policies, and mobilizing resources for resilience in social sectors.
- Children and young people were engaged in action and advocacy to address climate change or environmental degradation, supported by UNICEF in 78 countries, 28 of which worked to mainstream climate change in teacher training and learning opportunities.
- Working with the [Global Coalition to End Child Poverty](#) (co-chaired by UNICEF and Save the Children), UNICEF analysed the critical linkages between climate risks and child poverty, illustrating in their [Briefing Paper 'A Disproportionate Burden: Children in Poverty Bearing the Brunt of the Climate Crisis'](#) how the climate crisis is a

social and intergenerational justice issue. Children in poverty are the ones who contribute the least to the climate crisis, yet they are bearing the brunt of it.

- Through UNICEF support, 5.4 million and 4.8 million people, respectively, accessed climate-resilient water systems and sanitation facilities.

#### **Inter-agency collaboration**

- UNICEF and the World Bank joint analysis highlighted that children bear the brunt of stalled progress on extreme poverty reduction worldwide - raising awareness that at current rates of reduction, the SDG target of ending extreme child poverty by 2030 will not be met.
- UNICEF and the ILO joint report in 2023, [More than a billion reasons: The urgent need to build universal social protection for children](#), highlighting that 1.4 billion children under the age of 15 years have no access to social protection.
- UNICEF continued its role as leading member of the United Nations' Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, and as part of the EU-funded Joint Programme to improve synergies between social protection and public finance management, UNICEF, together with ILO and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (GCSPF) continued its advocacy and strengthening of social protection financing systems.
- To strengthen gender-responsive social protection through participatory policymaking at global level, UNICEF launched the *We Deserve Better* initiative in partnership with the Hewlett Foundation and collaboration with UN Women, FCDO, the World Bank, and women and girl-led organizations.
- The UNDP-UNICEF Global Flagship's public finance component provided financial support for the agencies to work together on 11 country-level and 2 regional-level initiatives, and UNICEF continued collaborating with the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Financing for Development, as well as collaborating with the International Budget Partnership to identify, alleviate, and improve global awareness and engagement on budget credibility.