

UNICEF's Approach to Social Protection

KEY MESSAGES

- Evidence clearly demonstrates that social protection has significant and positive impacts for children and their families.
- While cash transfers are an important part of social protection, other social protection programmes and services are also vital for children.
- Effective child sensitive social protection often means supporting families and communities as well as children directly.
- UNICEF supports the progressive expansion of coverage through nationally-led, inclusive social protection systems.

SOCIAL PROTECTION IS CRUCIAL FOR CHILDREN... AND FOR EVERYONE

Social protection is a child's right, and an investment in a nation's future.

Social protection helps societies increase equity and social justice and enables children and adults to realize their full potential.

Social Protection is a child's right, and helps fulfill other rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes children's right to social security and to an adequate standard of living. Social protection measures also play a critical role in supporting the fulfillment of children's other rights, such as the right to survival and development or the right to education.

Child-sensitive social protection responds to children's multiple vulnerabilities

Children face multiple and compounding vulnerabilities which shape both their current poverty, and their likelihood of becoming poor(er) in the future. Child-sensitive social protection addresses a number of these underlying vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation by removing economic and social barriers that prevent access to services and an adequate standard of living. In this way, it also complements investments across sectors, resulting in more equitable outcomes.

UNICEF defines social protection as:

The set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation.

UNICEF's work on social protection concentrates on four components:

- 1) **Social Transfers**, such as cash transfers, public works, child and disability grants;
- 2) **Programmes to ensure access to services**, such as removal of user fees and health insurance;
- 3) **Social support and care services**, including family support counseling and referrals;
- 4) **Legislation and Policy Reform** to ensure equity and non-discrimination in access to services and economic opportunities.

Child-sensitive social protection does not mean child-exclusive programmes. Tackling the economic and social vulnerabilities children share with their households and communities is as crucial for child rights as tackling those that are child-specific.

Social Protection is an investment in children now, and in future prosperity

Investing in child-sensitive social protection makes sense from both an economic and a human development

perspective. Evidence – as well as UNICEF’s own experience – shows that social protection can improve the lives of children, families and communities, often with stronger impacts for the poorest and most marginalized. Rigorous quantitative and qualitative impact evaluations from diverse countries show that social protection can improve multiple dimensions of human development, including significant improvements in food consumption and dietary diversity; school enrolment, attendance and completion; health care use and reduction in morbidity; and sense of well-being and self-esteem.

The demonstrated impacts of social protection on children’s development last long beyond childhood, increasing adult productivity, decreasing the burden of human development losses, and contributing to breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. Social protection programmes also have more immediate economic impacts by enabling households to make productive investments and increase engagement in labour markets, stimulating demand in local markets and reducing poverty.

UNICEF PROMOTES THE STRENGTHENING OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Breaking the pattern of compounding and cumulative vulnerabilities children and their families face requires a holistic approach, and moving away from fragmented responses. An integrated social protection systems approach can provide a comprehensive, coordinated package of interventions to address different dimensions of child poverty and deprivation and to reduce vulnerability across the life-cycle. Such systems ensure that individual measures complement one another to progressively achieve universal coverage and deliver

predictable and cumulative benefits to individuals and households.

The pathway towards more integrated systems is a gradual and contextual process, which will take different forms in different countries. However, integrated social protection systems strengthen:

- The key structures, mechanisms and human resources that are required to deliver coherent and coordinated social protection interventions and policies
- Linkages between social protection and multi-sector outcomes (i.e.: education, health, nutrition, early childhood development, water and sanitation, child protection and HIV/AIDS)

Together, these ensure coordination between programmes within social protection and with other programmes and services, to achieve multiple and reinforcing outcomes for children and their families.

THREE KEY PRINCIPLES FOR UNICEF’S WORK ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

Guiding all of UNICEF’s work on social protection are three key principles, grounded in a human rights approach.

Progressive realization of universal coverage

UNICEF supports progressive realization of universal coverage. In practice, this translates into helping countries to identify and progressively expand programmes, policies and financing options most conducive to achieving universality, while also recognizing countries different capacities and contexts. Expansion of social protection coverage, including for children, is critical, given currently limited coverage.

National systems and leadership

UNICEF supports long-term, nationally-owned and –led systems. This includes support to national leadership in identification of fiscal space and development of long-term national financing strategies necessary for sustainable national systems.

Only in exceptional cases where government capacity to implement or coordinate is weak or when there is a humanitarian crisis, would UNICEF consider supporting implementation of temporary safety nets or social protection programmes outside of government collaboration. This principle does not preclude UNICEF from supporting others – civil society, children, etc. – in their initiatives to influence, participate, and engage with social protection policy and programmes.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ blueprint for social protection policies. UNICEF’s work in diverse contexts has highlighted the different challenges and priorities countries face. Different types and combinations of programmes, as well as different design and implementation modalities, are required to respond to context-specific vulnerabilities, national priorities, and national capacities and constraints.

Inclusive social protection

Social dimensions of vulnerability such as gender, ethnicity, HIV status, geographic location, and disability status fundamentally shape exposure to risk and resilience, and access to essential social services and secure livelihoods. Inclusive social protection is responsive and sensitive to the needs of all children, by:

- Using specific social protection instruments that explicitly promote social inclusion and equity; and
- Ensuring that programme design and implementation is sensitive to the added vulnerabilities that stem from social exclusion.

