UNICEF’s Commitment to Ending Child Poverty and Achieving the SDGs:
Measurement, Advocacy and Evidence Based Policies
WHY CHILD POVERTY MATTERS? 
WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Child poverty has immediate and long term devastating impacts on children, as well as critical consequences for societies and economies: ending child poverty must be one of the defining achievements of our generation. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda provides a historic opportunity to realize this vision, by setting concrete targets for nations to reduce child poverty in all its forms.

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

Nelson Mandela

WHY FOCUS ON CHILD POVERTY?

- Poverty impacts on the realization of children’s rights, including their right to adequate standard of living, their right to social protection, and access to services such as health and education.
- Children are more likely to be poor than adults and are twice as likely to live in extreme poverty.
- The impacts of childhood poverty are immediate and can impact children’s ability to grow and thrive across their lifecycle.
- If not addressed, poverty can persist from one generation to the next, creating an intergenerational cycle of poverty.
- As children become adults the impacts of child poverty reverberate over time where children with lived experiences of poverty become adults with less education, poorer health, fewer labor prospects and diminished human capital, in turn negatively impacting on productivity.
- COVID-19 has led to the largest increase in child poverty in a generation, with an additional 100 million children in poverty.
- It is actionable - there are proven solutions to addressing and ending child poverty.
- Despite all of this, child poverty has received too little attention and we are moving far too slowly to achieve the SDGs.
Recognizing the importance of ending child poverty by 2030, UNICEF’s strategic plan for 2022 to 2025 places key emphasis on this area of work, including through the work outlined in Goal Area 5 on “Child Poverty and Social Protection.”

The threat to child poverty has never been greater, the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and increased conflicts are challenging the steady advances which have been made in reducing child poverty. UNICEF is at the forefront analyzing the impact of these new challenges, including the ‘new poor’, pushed into poverty due to the pandemic, as well as analyzing how this requires a shift in our policy and programming support.

UNICEF recognizes the need to adopt a multi-sectoral approach in national policy agendas to address child poverty, where the contribution of different sectors, for example health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation, are critical to eliminate child deprivations. UNICEF works across government sectors to ensure that the poorest and most excluded children and their families are prioritized in sectoral policies and programmes. Our emphasis is on partnerships, including with the World Bank and UN partners, to ensure addressing child poverty and promoting inclusive economic growth is a national, regional and global priority.

3 key areas of work:

1. **Supporting governments to measure, monitor and report on child poverty.** Knowing which children are in poverty, where, and their specific characteristics are fundamental foundations for policy design and implementation, and tracking progress towards ending child poverty.

2. **Supporting the design and prioritization of policies to end child poverty.** UNICEF works with governments in identifying, designing and where necessary implementing policies, programmes and financing strategies to end child poverty.

3. **Building global, regional and national partnerships to end child poverty.** UNICEF is working together with multiple partners at global, regional and national levels to strengthen approaches and prioritize child poverty elimination across different areas, including monitoring of SDG 1 child poverty indicators, development of global data on child poverty, evidence based advocacy, as well as convening partners to accelerate and coordinate joint work on child poverty.

**CHILD POVERTY IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON:**

- Child poverty is not confined to low-income countries, in fact the majority of children living in poverty are in middle income contexts, due to inequality and policy gaps.
- 1 in 4 children in the **European Union** are at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- Almost one-third of children in the **East Asia and the Pacific Region** suffer from at least one form of severe deprivation.
- Two out of every three children in **Eastern and Southern Africa** are affected by multidimensional poverty.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean** 46 per cent of children 0-14 years live in poverty.
- At least one in four children in **Middle East and Northern Africa** live in poverty
- A fifth of the world’s extreme poor children live in **South Asia**

**CHILD POVERTY FACTS:**

- 1 billion children worldwide are multidimensionally poor - without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or water
- 356 million children are living in extreme poverty, forced to survive on less than $1.90 a day
- Children from the poorest households die at twice the rate of their better-off peers
- Children are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than adults
- Girls and women, and children with disabilities, are disproportionately likely to live in poverty

**COUNTRY EXAMPLE**

*Multidimensional child poverty analysis and a social protection system assessment supported by UNICEF, alongside a comprehensive advocacy campaign against child poverty – provided the necessary evidence and support to the government in Montenegro to pass a law to expand the child allowance scheme to cover all children up to 18 years.*
1. SUPPORTING GOVERNMENTS MEASURE, MONITOR AND REPORT ON CHILD POVERTY

It’s hard to imagine a coherent and effective approach to address and end child poverty without measuring it. Yet as recently as 2015 only a handful of countries were routinely measuring and reporting on child poverty. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have created an incredible opportunity to make measurement of child poverty universal. And while we’ve seen significant progress, gaps still remain.

UNICEF is dedicated to child poverty being measured everywhere, including through:

- **Making the case:** in many countries measuring and monitoring child poverty is not high on government agendas. UNICEF works with governments on the importance of routinely measuring child poverty, and highlighting the plight of those most marginalized, including children with disabilities, children from certain ethnic groups etc., as a crucial foundation for poverty reduction policies.

- **Providing technical support and building capacity:** UNICEF provides capacity building support to increase national capacities to measure and report on child poverty, encouraging a greater sense of national ownership of child poverty analysis and policy recommendations. UNICEF supports child poverty measurement in over 100 countries, this includes hands-on and on-site child poverty measurement training with national statistical offices.

- **Building networks for national ownership:** UNICEF partners with governments, UN agencies, academia, research institutes, civil society, think tanks and other key stakeholders to produce high quality evidence to inform the policies and programs to end child poverty.

- **Comprehensive child poverty analysis:** UNICEF has jointly analyzed and produced with governments and other partners over over 100 national child poverty reports and technical briefs.

- **Embedding child poverty in national statistical processes:** UNICEF aims to ensure child poverty measurement is nationally embedded in every country and becomes an integral part of national statistical processes. This includes supporting national household survey data collection and analysis.

Consistent and dependable support from UNICEF has translated into additional countries having established routine measurement of child poverty, increasing steadily from year to year.

### GLOBAL PROGRESS AND 2025 TARGET:

**Countries measuring child poverty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Monetary Child Poverty</th>
<th>Multidimensional Child Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025 Target</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Mozambique the government is scaling up a child grant, with strong UNICEF technical support for evidence informed policies.
2. SUPPORTING THE DESIGN AND PRIORITIZATION OF POLICIES TO END CHILD POVERTY

Measuring child poverty is a necessary starting point in ending child poverty, but it is only the beginning. Robust child poverty data can translate into the design, prioritization and implementation of the right mix of policies and programmes, with high political support, to address child poverty.

**UNICEF supports design and implementation of policies to address child poverty:**

- **Policy design:** UNICEF works with partners to develop and design policy solutions to address child poverty based on existing evidence, research and analysis. In 2021, UNICEF country offices supported the design of policies, strategies and programmes for addressing child poverty in 78 countries. This support ranged from the scale up of social protection programmes, including in fragile and humanitarian settings, increasing and improving public finance for children, and the expansion of social services, particularly for the most marginalized.

- **Policy advocacy and prioritization:** UNICEF’s strength and expertise in communication and advocacy, alongside long standing presence and work with government counterparts allows us to be strong advocates for addressing child poverty and implementing the policies and programmes that can make a difference. In 2021 there were 111 UNICEF country offices engaged in advocacy efforts for placing child poverty as a priority issue to address in national agendas, ranging from national communications campaigns to targeted engagement with policy makers and key stakeholders.

- **Integrating child poverty and policy responses into key development frameworks:** All countries have key policy and vision documents that guide national prioritization and action. UNICEF is uniquely placed, working with governments, and influential for integrating child poverty into these policies and frameworks. This can lead to high-level political and financial commitment at the national level, laying the groundwork for increased and better coordinated multi sector actions to combat child poverty, and funding to ensure sustained implementation.

---

**UNICEF’S SUPPORT TO CHILD POVERTY RELATED WORK IN 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Number of UNICEF country offices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support the design of policies to address child poverty</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the government utilize child poverty measurement</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening stakeholders around the importance of addressing child poverty</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy: placing child poverty at center of national agendas</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COUNTRY EXAMPLE**

_The multidimensional child poverty analysis in Panama, supported by UNICEF, was a key tool for determining priority districts for the national poverty reduction plan._
3. BUILDING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO END CHILD POVERTY

Ending child poverty requires collaboration, not only at national level, but also regionally and globally. UNICEF prioritizes building partnerships to ensure child poverty is high on the global and regional agendas. This work includes:

**Building child poverty partnerships**
UNICEF co-founded and co-chairs, along with Save the Children, the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty – a 20+ member organization initiative to raise awareness and accelerate efforts to end child poverty by 2030. UNICEF and the Coalition successfully advocated for the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 1 targets focusing explicitly on child poverty and developed a comprehensive SDG Guide to End Child Poverty.

**Monitoring progress**
As a global leader on child poverty, UNICEF is co-custodian of SDG monitoring on multidimensional child poverty, alongside UNDP and the World Bank. At the global level, our joint work with the World Bank focuses on routine global measurement of extreme child poverty (SDG 1.1.1) to support prompt global and local action to address and end child poverty. In collaboration with the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, UNICEF undertakes annual assessments of annual progress in reporting of child poverty, including in the annual Voluntary National Reviews of SDG progress as well as analyzing official SDG databases.

**Rapidly analysing and understanding emerging trends**
Global child poverty data is essential to understand the challenges of child poverty and the impacts of global events, such as COVID-19 and the climate crisis. For example, UNICEF collaborated with the World Bank for the analysis of the impact of COVID on households with children. Further, UNICEF collaborates with Save the Children for global and regional estimates of multidimensional child poverty and monetary child poverty including the impacts of COVID-19. The analysis informs policies and programmes on emerging trends.

**COUNTRY EXAMPLE**
UNICEF Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the UN country team, developed recommendations based on the UN Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19, provided capacity building support for key government counterparts, and presented a series of strategic analyses and assessments to the Government. A cash transfer is estimated to have initially benefitted 47 per cent of households nationally and was subsequently expanded to reach 66 per cent of households in 2020.
A SHARED APPROACH TO ENDING CHILD POVERTY: 
5 MILESTONES TO ACHIEVE THE SDG’S

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty developed a global guide outlining 5 key milestones and the concrete tasks to achieve them towards ending child poverty and ending the SDG’s.

01 Building a national pathway to end child poverty

02 Measuring child poverty

03 Putting child poverty on the map: child poverty advocacy

04 Reducing child poverty through policy and programme change

05 Achieving SDGs: ending extreme child poverty and having it by national definitions

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In Egypt, UNICEF generates regular evidence to the government and partners to strengthen the large scale cash transfer programme in the country.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In Mongolia a study supported by UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank on the expansion of the Child Money Program (CMP) informed the government’s decision on CMP programming as a response to COVID-19. The government responded to the pandemic with a top-up to the CMP, increasing the benefit level by five times.
• Extensive on the ground experience and capacity. UNICEF works across all aspects of child poverty elimination in over 120 countries. UNICEF has over 15 years of child poverty related experience and over 370 dedicated social policy officers in every region of the world, covering a range of social policy related activities, including child poverty analysis, social protection policies and programming, enhancing public finance for children and strengthening local governance.

• As a world technical leader in child poverty measurement, both from an income/monetary lens as well as the multidimensional deprivations children experience, UNICEF plays a key role in monitoring the SDG child poverty targets, including providing support to build national capacities for child poverty measurement in nearly 70 countries. UNICEF’s high quality in house research and expertise places us as poverty thought leaders at global, regional and national level.

• Cross sectoral experience to support development of integrated child poverty solutions: Child poverty is multidimensional, and UNICEF is uniquely placed, working across sectors and ministries, including ministries of finance, to understand the situation of children living in poverty and define effective and sustainable financed policy responses that can make a difference.

• Trusted by governments and partners and building national solutions: UNICEF’s convening power at global, regional, and country level is unique. We are a trusted partner working with governments, development partners, researchers and civil society producing robust, sustainable, and nationally owned solutions to addressing child poverty.

• Long standing presence, across contexts, before during and after crisis: UNICEF works in all contexts - high, middle and low-income as well as fragile and conflict affected areas. Children living in countries that experience conflict and fragility are particularly vulnerable to poverty, around 42% of children who live in these contexts live in extreme poverty compared to 15% of children in non-fragile contexts. Even in these most precarious situations, UNICEF works to measure and highlight the plight of children living in poverty, and advocate for the policies and programs that can make a difference.

• Passionate, mission driven and tireless: The passion and pride of working for children living in poverty around the world drives everything we do. Working with us on child poverty means partnering with teams who are strategic, passionate and relentless in achieving our mission of ending child poverty.

---

**Guiding Principles on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty**

“Given that most of those living in poverty are children and that poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood, children’s rights must be accorded priority. Even short periods of deprivation and exclusion can dramatically and irreversibly harm a child’s right to survival and development. To eradicate poverty, States must take immediate action to combat childhood poverty.”

---

**The Guardian**

Progress in fight against child poverty could be wiped out by Covid, says report

UN and World Bank call for structural changes to tackle the effects of the pandemic on children, who make up half the world’s poor

- Coronavirus – latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

---

Kenyan boys play on the railway lines in Kibera, a Nairobi slum. Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a massive rise in child poverty. Photograph: Kate Holt/The Guardian
ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY IN A CRISIS: 
THE CASE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that during crisis UNICEF’s social policy workforce is well placed to immediately support and leverage existing government partnerships, as well as other UN partnerships to rapidly assess the changing socio-economic impacts, in order to inform responses. This includes making visible in numbers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child poverty, and highlighting the policy responses, including social protection and sectoral responses, to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on children living and/or vulnerable to poverty.

Measuring the impacts of the pandemic on child poverty
As a knowledge leader with extensive experience and established partners in data and evidence generation on child poverty measurement and policy analysis, and leveraging its dual mandate, UNICEF is at the forefront of efforts to assess the impact as well as respond to crisis. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF’s social policy officers in all regions of the world engaged in over 70 socio-economic impact assessments with governments and UN partners, and 62 national child poverty focused analyses in 2020 alone (see for example Georgia example below).

Supporting the design and prioritization of policies to address the impacts of the pandemic
To mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, most countries adopted measures of unprecedented scale – many supported by UNICEF. This included scaling up social protection measures, such as direct cash transfers to families and children, with UNICEF supporting the social protection response in over 115 countries. The public finance for children response has also been prioritized by UNICEF, including shedding light on social spending during the COVID-19 era (see social spending monitor box).

Regional and global partnerships to strengthen the child poverty research and policy responses to the pandemic
At the global level, together with Save the Children, UNICEF conducted analysis of monetary and multidimensional child poverty increases due to the pandemic, showing that at the height of the pandemic in 2020, an additional 150 million children were living in multidimensional poverty. UNICEF and the World Bank conducted global analysis to highlight the impact of the pandemic on households with many children. Together with the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, UNICEF has organized high profile events to draw attention to the effects of the crisis on children living in poverty, and the policy solutions to mitigate the impact, including the scale up of social protection and calling for an inclusive recovery.

UNICEF’s Social Spending Monitor sheds light on social spending during the COVID-19 era. It is an evidence-based advocacy platform for protecting and transforming social spending for children amid COVID-19.

The dataset is focused on three areas:

- **Demographic data and finance**: demographic data organized by region, income group, child poverty, population, COVID-19 cases and deaths; and financial data on government expenditure and revenue, GDP, borrowing and ODA.
- **Additional financing**: details on extra-budgetary financing introduced in response to COVID-19: below the line measures i.e. IMF loans and debt relief; and above the line items by sector (health, education, social protection, WASH and vaccines/COVAX).
- **Budget and Programme response**: details on budget response by country and sector based on the UNICEF COVID-19 dashboard and the IMF COVID19 Policy Tracker.
COUNTRY EXAMPLES:
A SAMPLE OF UNICEF’S WORK ON CHILD POVERTY

MALAYSIA

Malaysia: Supporting an equitable recovery from COVID-19 through strengthened social protection for low income families

Joint research by UNICEF and UNFPA generated powerful evidence of the impact of the crisis on women and children in low-income urban families. The research highlighted the elevated vulnerability of low-income families and stimulated intense public and political debates throughout 2020. In response, the government’s first COVID-19 stimulus package allocated USD 2 billion in temporary cash transfer support to low- and middle-income households, including 3.5 million children. By the end of 2020 the government announced a revision of the eligibility criteria for its main means-tested child benefit which will extend coverage by up to a factor of ten.

GEORGIA


At the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF and Development Analytics conducted microsimulation analysis to estimate the child poverty impacts of the crisis under various scenarios. They explored how cash benefits can ease the socio-economic shock on families. The results showed that COVID-19 would have substantial impact on child poverty and outlined poverty reduction potential, benefit incidence and cost effectiveness of various cash transfer options, providing rich information and detailed analysis to guide government responses to support families. Alongside a UNICEF supported “Shock Responsive Social Protection Feasibility assessment,” this evidence was key for the government’s decision to introduce one-off, universal cash assistance to all children. By the end of 2020 nearly 1 million children in Georgia benefited from the universal cash assistance.

KENYA

Kenya: Addressing multidimensional child poverty at the local level through integrated planning.

The data and evidence generated by Kenya’s multidimensional child poverty measurement has been instrumental in the formulation of sub-national development plans (County Integrated Development Plans or CDIP), many of which now prioritize key issues in WASH, child protection, HIV and AIDS. For instance, the Turkana County CIDP 2018-2022 notes high incidence of multidimensional child poverty in the county, where 85% or close to half a million children are deprived in areas such as clean water and sanitation, adequate housing and quality education; and outlines various programmes and activities planned to address these issues. In addition to feeding into planning, the measurement informed design and resource mobilization of a child-sensitive social protection programme, ensuring that needs of the most vulnerable children are addressed through holistic interventions.

COLOMBIA

Colombia: Evidence informed policy package to address multidimensional child poverty

Colombia is among the pioneers in multidimensional poverty measurement and its use in policy and programming. This includes developing a child specific multidimensional poverty measure and a comprehensive policy package to lift children out of poverty, as part of the commitments on its National Development Plan. The design of the National Strategy for Eliminating Child Poverty has commenced, where UNICEF along with the World Bank, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and Universidad de los Andes provided technical support to the National Planning Department through conducting comparative social policy analysis as well as microsimulations.
Iraq: Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq

UNICEF Iraq leveraged its ongoing partnership with the Ministry of Planning and the World Bank to generate evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on poverty and vulnerability. The joint study, launched in July 2020, shows the devastating impact on children, with 2 out of 5 expected to live below the national poverty line due to COVID-19 – doubling the pre-pandemic levels. The assessment also looked at children’s multidimensional vulnerability, which showed that 1 in 2 is suffering deprivation in more than one wellbeing dimension. This evidence generation and advocacy efforts were paralleled with close engagement with, and technical support to, the Ministry of Planning in the design and roll-out of a one-off cash transfer to households affected by COVID-19. The scheme - called “Minha” - benefited 2.1 million households affected by COVID-19 socio-economic impacts.

Nepal: Child and Family Tracker during the pandemic

There was a strong need for data on the impact on children at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF responded to this need by launching a Child and Family Tracker (CFT). Through technologized survey composed of telephonic interviews and interactive voice responses (IVRs), CFT captured over 7,000 households with children and served as a real time monitoring and tracking tool for assessing social and economic impacts of COVID-19. With over 100 social and economic indicators, the survey provided an in-depth insight into children’s situation, including their caregivers’ income/livelihood loss, and how COVID-19 affected their lives socially and economically.

Ghana: Multidimensional child poverty analysis informing national development plans

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE, KEY DOCUMENTS AND LINKS

KEY DOCUMENTS

- SDG GUIDE TO END CHILD POVERTY
- A REVIEW OF THE USE OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY MEASURES
- NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CHILD POVERTY REPORTS
- WORLD BANK/UNICEF LATEST GLOBAL ESTIMATES ON EXTREME CHILD POVERTY
- UNICEF’S SOCIAL PROTECTION FRAMEWORK
- A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MONETARY POVERTY ANALYSIS
- MULTIDIMENSIONAL OVERLAPPING DEPRIVATION ANALYSIS

KEY SITES

- UNICEF’S CHILD POVERTY SOCIAL POLICY SITE
- UNICEF CHILD POVERTY DATA SITE
- IMPACT OF COVID-19 CRISIS STUDY REPOSITORY
- CHILDREN AND COVID-19 RESEARCH LIBRARY
- GLOBAL COALITION TO END CHILD POVERTY SITE

Subscribe to the Child Poverty Newsletter

Follow us on twitter
@unicefsocpolicy and @globalcoalition
For every child
Whoever she is.
Wherever he lives.
Every child deserves a childhood.
A future.
A fair chance.
That’s why UNICEF is there.
For each and every child.
Working day in and day out.
In more than 190 countries and territories.
Reaching the hardest to reach.
The furthest from help.
The most excluded.
It’s why we stay to the end.
And never give up.

unicef
for every child