



Executive summary

# UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework

#### **Prepared by**

**Social Inclusion and Policy** 

United Nations Children's Fund 3 United Nations Plaza New York, NY, 10017, USA

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Visual Communication Design: Shangning Wang, Jiayan He

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The infographic on the inside front cover represents the life course infographic in *UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework*.



Executive summary

## UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework



### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since UNICEF produced its first *Social Protection*Strategic Framework in 2012, social protection
has expanded rapidly in low- and middle-income
countries, and UNICEF's work has grown as well,
covering far more countries and areas of support.
A growing number of development partners,
international financial institutions (IFIs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also
increased their work in the area. With robust
evidence clearly establishing the positive impact of
social protection on people's lives and its inclusion
in Sustainable Development Goal 1 on eradicating
poverty, this momentum is likely to continue.

Against this backdrop, new threats for children are emerging which social protection can help to mitigate: climate breakdown, urbanization; demographic change; and humanitarian crises that create ongoing risks for children through protracted conflict and displacement within and across borders.

This updated framework takes these changes into account, refining UNICEF's approach to social protection to reflect this changing landscape, along with emerging good practice and innovation in the field. The framework is intended to outline our social protection priorities, and to foster ever stronger relationships with governments and international and national partners. It outlines how UNICEF sees social protection, why it's so vital for children, and provides clarity on the elements of a child-sensitive

social protection system. Finally, it outlines UNICEF's 10 key action areas on social protection, through which we are committed to working with partners to realize social protection for every child.

# Why social protection matters: addressing economic and social vulnerability to give every child an equal chance

The conceptual foundations of UNICEF's approach to social protection remain unwavering: a rights-based approach towards universal social protection as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In line with our work supporting progressive realization of universal coverage, we prioritize the poorest and most vulnerable children and families, with the objective of breaking the cycle of disadvantage across generations and ultimately transforming the lives of children and families (see Box 1).

At the heart of child-sensitive social protection is the protection of children and families against economic vulnerability. Living in or being vulnerable to poverty fundamentally undermines children's futures, often with lifelong consequences, directly impacting their opportunity to access quality social services and, every bit as perniciously, undermining their dignity and confidence.



Alongside economic vulnerability, social vulnerability also has profound impacts on children's life chances. Social vulnerability can stem from personal characteristics such as age, disability or chronic illness, as well as from social discrimination and exclusion due to identities such as gender, race, religion, disability, political affiliation or geographic location. Evidence consistently shows that socially vulnerable children and families are more likely to be in poverty and excluded from social services and, ultimately, opportunity.

Social protection is a sector dedicated to addressing these economic and social vulnerabilities. It cannot stand alone and must be part of an integrated approach of social services for children. But without it, the needs of children and families living in poverty and exclusion now, or vulnerable to it as life's risks unfold, will not be addressed.

This framing of child-sensitive social protection is in line with the inter-agency definition of social protection that UNICEF helped to develop and supports:<sup>1</sup>

'a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life-course, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups'



### Box 1: Four key principles that guide UNICEF's approach to social protection

**The best interests of the child** – UNICEF supports a rights-based approach to social protection rooted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all our work in social protection is informed by this core principle.

#### Progressive realization of universal coverage -

UNICEF supports the progressive realization of universal coverage, which involves helping countries to identify and expand programmes while recognizing the different capacities, contexts and challenges that countries face.

**National systems and leadership** – UNICEF supports nationally-owned and led systems, and only in exceptional cases, including in some humanitarian contexts, would UNICEF consider supporting implementation of temporary social protection programmes outside of government collaboration.

Inclusive social protection - UNICEF is committed to inclusive social protection that is responsive to the needs of all children and sensitive to particular characteristics and identities which can increase the risk of exclusion, including gender, disability status, ethnicity, HIV status, and geographic location.

For full box, please see Box 3 on page 14.

#### The state of child poverty and vulnerability

The implications of child poverty and vulnerability are felt most immediately by children themselves, but they have profound implications for nations as a whole as children become the next generation of adults that build societies and drive economies. According to the World Bank, for example, improving health and education to significantly improve 'human capital' would bring an additional 1.4 per cent annual growth rate for 50 years'.<sup>2</sup>

While there has been progress in reducing poverty in recent decades, 385 million children, or 1 in 5, are still struggling to survive on less than PPP\$1.90 (see Figure1). Put another way: children are more than twice as likely to be living in extreme income poverty as adults. For children, poverty is about much more than income, and 665 million children are estimated to be living in multidimensionally-poor households, again with poverty rates consistently higher than adults. These measures of poverty can obscure that child poverty is a truly global problem and so must be the social protection response: 27 OECD countries have child poverty rates above 10 per cent, with only two countries maintaining child poverty rates below 5 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

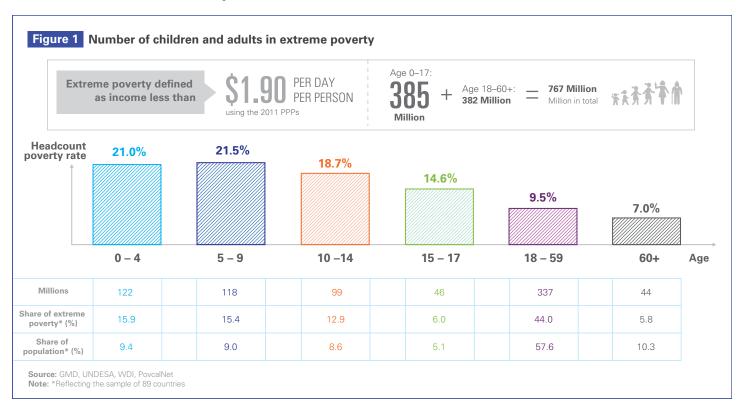
Poverty measures, while important for social protection policy design, are often static and can be blind to the range of vulnerabilities children face

both at an individual and societal level. Looking slightly above this extreme poverty line underlines the scale of the challenge: about 45 per cent of children – over 1 billion children – are living in households subsisting on less than US\$3.10 a day compared to 27 per cent of adults,<sup>4</sup> and in some middle-income countries people living on US\$6 a day face a 40 per cent probability of living in poverty in subsequent years.<sup>5</sup>

Social vulnerabilities impact on children's life chances. Evidence consistently shows that children in disadvantaged groups have higher rates of poverty and lower access to basic services, such as healthcare and education. For example, children with disabilities face extremely high poverty rates and challenges accessing services, while analysing poverty with a gender lens shows that women and girls are often disproportionately affected.

The framework also identifies four key 'macro' trends that are having, and will continue to have, profound impacts on children and families and to which social protection must be designed to respond:

 Climate breakdown: Climate breakdown is changing the world for children in unprecedented ways, resulting in both immediate effects and long-term implications for



which future generations will pay the heaviest price. Poorer households often also have less resources and capacity to cope with climateinduced shocks.

- **Demographic shifts:** The world population is increasing and is projected to reach 8.5 billion in 2050. Globally the number of adults and older people will increase more than the number of children, but there are stark regional differences, with Africa seeing by far the largest increase in the number of children by 2050.
- **Urbanization:** The urban population is expected to rise by an additional 1 billion people to 5 billion by 2030, when cities will contain 60 per cent of the world's population. While Asia is continuing to urbanize rapidly, Africa isn't far behind.
- Conflict and forced displacement: It is estimated that by 2030 nearly half of those living in extreme poverty will live in fragile and conflict-affected states with devastating impacts on children. Conflict is also a major driver forcing families to move, and there are now more children forcibly displaced by conflict and violence an estimated 30 million than at any other time since the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

#### The role of social protection

Social protection is designed to address economic and social vulnerability and provide support to all that need it across the life course. It has long been established in higher-income countries as a foundation of social policy, and now a growing body of evidence shows the significant impacts social protection is having in addressing the multiple dimensions of child poverty and vulnerability in lower-income countries. Accordingly, while social protection has been explicitly recognized not only as a standalone target in SDG 1, it also acts as an accelerator in achieving results across sectors and SDGs (see Table 1) and provides a foundation to ensure no one is left behind.

While the evidence on social protection shows clear and positive sectoral outcomes, it also highlights that social protection programming alone cannot address the holistic needs of children and families, nor does it address information and knowledge gaps or the availability of quality services. This underlines that while social protection is a vital part of integrated programming for children, alone it is far from sufficient to fulfil child rights.

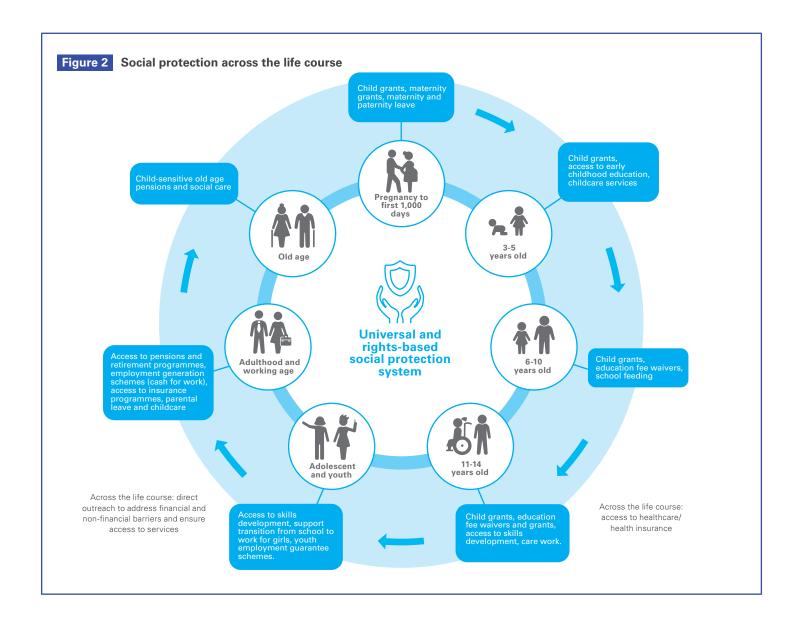
Table 1 – Impact of social protection on key sectoral outcomes	
Poverty and productivity (SDG 1 and 8)	Social protection can address child monetary poverty directly, and where not sufficient to move children and families above the poverty line it can increase household expenditure. Social protection also increases household productivity and has positive multiplier effects on local economies. Aspects of social transfer design are crucial, including programme coverage, transfer size and frequency.
Nutrition (SDG 2)	Social protection programmes, including cash transfers, show significant impacts on food security, but alone do not always impact nutritional outcomes for children. In countries with high rates of undernutrition, integrated social protection interventions ('cash plus' programmes) are beginning to demonstrate impacts.
Health (SDG 3)	Social protection has a significant impact both on the usage of health services and in mitigating the financial impacts of a health crisis in a household. The evidence generally shows that transfers do not need to be conditional to benefit child health.
Education (SDG 4)	Social and economic barriers are a significant impediment to children's education. Social protection, including cash transfers, has a significant impact on enrolment and attendance, including strong results for girls. Evidence on impacts on educational outcomes is more limited.
Gender equality (SDG 5)	Social protection has significant potential to contribute to tackling gender inequality. For example, it can help to reduce physical abuse and increase women's decision-making power. However, social protection is not automatically supportive of gender equality and can even reinforce harmful gender norms and practices if not designed and implemented in a gender-sensitive way.
Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) (SDG 6)	WASH has generally received limited focus in social protection programmes and impact evaluations, and relatively little is known about how addressing economic and social vulnerabilities would affect key WASH indicators. Including relevant indicators in cash transfer evaluations could clarify the role of changing family income and WASH outcomes.
Child Protection (SDG 16)	The work of social protection to strengthen families economically and socially may have direct impacts on child protection results. The role of social service workers and family outreach is a crucial connection between social protection and child protection.
HIV/AIDS (Cross-cutting)	HIV-sensitive social protection measures, particularly cash transfer progammes, have a positive impact on mitigating the risky behaviours associated with HIV, and in supporting the treatment and income of households with HIV-positive members. 'Cash plus' approaches (a combination of cash and linkages to existing services services) may be more effective to address HIV outcomes than cash alone.

## Gaps in social protection coverage for children and families

Despite the proven impacts of social protection programmes, coverage of children and families remains extremely low. Globally, 2 out of 3 children currently have no access to child or family benefits, and coverage is lowest where child poverty is highest. Looking at social protection more broadly, mapping suggests that 108 countries (out of 136 countries surveyed) either had an active social protection policy or strategy document in place or were in the process of planning such a document. Despite this, determining the child-sensitivity of these structures is extremely challenging. A qualitative assessment of UNICEF colleagues suggests children have received some consideration

in systems development, but in only a very small minority were they assessed as 'highly considered'.

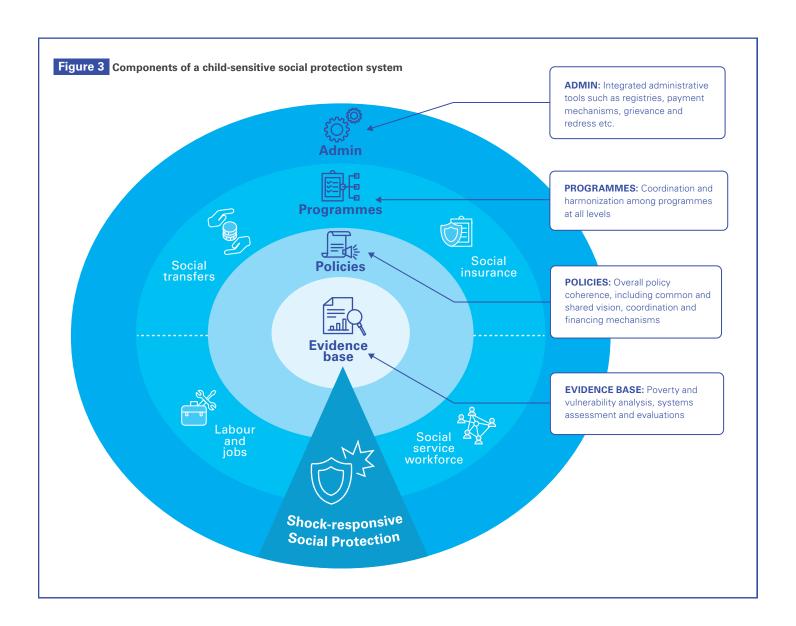
Insufficient financing is a major barrier to comprehensive child-sensitive social protection systems. On average, countries spend only 1.1 per cent of GDP on social protection for children, although the amounts vary greatly across countries and regions: while Europe and Central Asia, as well as Oceania, spend more than 2 per cent of GDP on child benefits, regional estimates for Africa, the Arab States and Southern and South-East Asia show expenditure levels of less than 0.7 per cent of GDP.



## The key elements of integrated social protection systems: protection across the life course

Social protection must provide support across the life course; an effective and comprehensive system will thus include different types programmes to address the varied needs of different population groups (see Figure 2). From the perspective of child-sensitive social protection, such a life-course approach is essential for children to be reached directly and to recognize their connections with adults at different stages of their lives (see also Box 2).

Building a comprehensive approach to social protection across the life course requires integrated systems. Social protection systems can be broken down into three constituent levels: policy, programme and administrative. UNICEF follows this approach, but adds one additional component that our experience suggests is essential: to be effective, child-sensitive social protection systems must be built on a foundation of evidence which highlights the situation of children, the impact of current social protection programming, and identifies remaining gaps (see Figure 3):



As outlined Figure 3, the four components of a child-sensitive social protection system include:

- A foundation of evidence. A robust evidence base is a necessary foundation for all elements of a social protection system, including having a clear understanding of child poverty and vulnerability as well as of the effectiveness of existing social protection programmes and remaining gaps in programme areas and coverage.
- 2. Policy, coordination and financing of social protection systems. The policy level is the highest level of engagement, where a common vision is established, and the objectives and functions of the social protection system are defined in the context of national goals and parameters. This includes social protection laws, policies, and strategic frameworks; national-level coordination mechanisms between ministries that oversee social protection; and appropriate financing for integrated social protection systems to function effectively.
- 3. Programme areas of child-sensitive social protection systems. The programme level is the operational heart of a social protection system. There are different ways to look at social protection systems including dividing programmes into contributory and noncontributory programmes. For clarity on the programmes that makes up a child-sensitive social protection system, this framework divides social protection programmes into four key areas:
  - Social transfers This can include cash transfers and tax credits but also include in-kind transfers such as school feeding subsidies or fee waivers. Social transfers not targeted directly at children (such as social pensions or maternity or unemployment benefits) can also be crucial in temporarily replacing lost income. Of all social protection programmes, transfers are often the most important in responding to crises.

- Social insurance Social insurance refers to mechanisms that pool economic risks across the life-course and can prevent children and families from falling into poverty when shocks or unexpected life events occur. Common mechanisms of importance to children and families include health insurance and unemployment insurance.
- Labour and jobs This includes programmes and services that support employment and livelihoods and enable families to have sufficient income while ensuring provision and time for quality childcare. These may be broader labour market programmes, or more focused on children and families, including childcare services and family-friendly workplaces to facilitate employment, particularly of women.
- Social service workforce The social service workforce provides direct outreach, case management and referral services to children and families. While not always explicitly included in social protection frameworks, UNICEF considers this social care function as integral to effective child-sensitive social protection. They allow the range of needs of families to be understood and connect families to relevant services, including those such as violence prevention that may fall out of the social protection sphere.
- 4. Administration and integrated service delivery. The administrative level focuses on the core tools that facilitate the business processes of social protection programmes, and these components are often vital entry points for enhancing integration of social protection systems. Administrative components include integrated beneficiary and social registries; management information systems (MIS); delivery, grievance and redress mechanisms; human resources; and sub-national coordination mechanisms.

## Shock-responsive social protection (cutting across all levels of the social protection system)

Social protection systems should be able to support children and families exposed to protracted, slow and sudden onset humanitarian crises, as well as economic crises. In order to become shock responsive and ready to respond in the event of a crisis, national social protection systems often require some adaptation in the areas of evidence, policy, programme and administration.



Box 2: What a child-sensitive social protection system should offer every child

Understanding what a social protection system should offer every child can help bring focus to what we are trying to achieve. The goal of child-sensitive social protection is for every child to:

- Live in a household with sufficient income to develop and fulfil their potential. Sufficient household income can not only impact children access to services, but can increase children's sense of dignity and inclusion. Social protection response ranges from employment programmes to social transfers.
- Have access to quality basic social services regardless of income or personal characteristics.
   Social protection programmes can include those that address financial accessibility such as fee abolition or waivers as well as programmes that support access to services of marginalized and excluded children.
- When needed, have direct contact with an outreach worker who can support families and empower them to access key services and information. Direct outreach can be essential to understanding the vulnerabilities facing children as well as providing referral to enable access to appropriate services.

For full box, please see Box 11 on page 40.

## UNICEF's 10 key action areas in supporting national child-sensitive social protection systems

UNICEF has a long and growing history of working on social protection with governments and partners, and currently works on strengthening national social protection systems in over 100 countries. Drawing from this experience, this programme framework identifies 10 action areas where we work in partnerships to contribute to integrated social protection systems.

As in all sectors, UNICEF country offices work with national governments to determine the areas of focus that would most benefit children and contribute to agreed results. Accordingly, different offices will work on different action areas, or indeed there may be situations where a focus outside these areas makes sense. Further, UNICEF's work on social protection has grown dramatically in the past 15 years, and the maturity of our work ranges from areas of deep experience within and across countries (such as child poverty analysis, building evidence and expanding and improving cash transfers), to areas that are relatively new but growing fast (such as shock-responsive social protection), to others that despite their importance remain relatively nascent (such as health insurance). Our 10 key action areas are presented in more detail in Table 2.

#### A vision of universal coverage, and a plan on the steps to get there

UNICEF, along with other members of the Universal Social Protection 2030 partnership, is committed to social protection coverage for all. While gaps in coverage are significant in many parts of the world, progress in many countries shows that incredible change is possible. These 10 action areas represent UNICEF's commitment to work with governments and international and national partners to increase the scale and scope of child-sensitive social protection systems towards achieving universality. They are integrated in our Strategic Plan as well as our monitoring, reporting and financial indicators.

While the vision is large, the practical experience of how to get there is significant. Each area is backed by extensive knowledge about how to make progress from a range of partners. UNICEF's key activities by action area are outlined in Table 2, and the Companion Guidance to this framework provides detailed activities, tools and resources for each action area drawing from UNICEF and our partners. Rapid progress towards universal coverage is within our grasp and has the potential to have a transformative impact on children's lives and the societies in which they live for generations to come.

#### Table 2 UNICEF's 10 key action areas

UNICEF's 10 key action areas in supporting social protection systems and their child-sensitivity



#### A FOUNDATION OF EVIDENCE

#### **Action Area 1:**

Child poverty analysis, impact evaluations and systems assessments

- Child poverty measurement and analysis: Routine national measurement analysis of child poverty and implications for social protection.
- Impact evaluations: Assess programme impacts using evaluation designs including randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental designs to inform national programmes.
- Social protection systems assessments: Generate evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of how the social protection system works for children, including identifying gaps and options.



#### POLICY, LEGISLATION AND FINANCING FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

#### **Action Area 2:**

Policy and strategy development, coordination and financing

- Strategies and policy frameworks: Supporting national dialogue on social protection laws/policies, supporting the drafting and development of social protection strategies.
- **Coordination:** Assessing and supporting development of national capacities and coordination mechanisms. Support strengthening of lead ministries, and coordination development partner coordination.
- Domestic financing: Sector expenditure reviews, costings of programmes, fiscal space analysis and working
  with governments to increase resource allocation for social protection.



#### PROGRAMME AREAS OF CHILD-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

#### Social transfers

#### **Action Area 3:**

Expanding and improving cash transfers for children

- Building political support: Advocacy and stakeholder engagement to build understanding, support and financing for cash transfer programmes.
- Supporting programme design: Including targeting, addressing exclusion, transfer size, frequency and links to other programmes.
- Implementation: Beneficiary identification, communication, payments systems, linkages to other services, programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and management information systems (MIS).

#### **Action Area 4:**

Connecting cash transfers to information, knowledge and services

Providing recipients with information, knowledge and connections to services: Understanding the
non-financial needs of beneficiaries, connecting cash transfer programmes to information, knowledge and
relevant services, and building the evidence base on best practices.

#### Social insurance

#### **Action Area 5:**

Expanding and improving health insurance

- Increasing coverage to poor and marginalized populations: Advocacy for health insurance expansion, linking
  cash transfer beneficiaries with health insurance, and improving identification of poorest for non-contributory
  health insurance.
- Defining health services included in health insurance: Analysis of gaps in health coverage and defining
  minimum package of health services for child and maternal health to be included under universal health
  coverage.

#### Labour and jobs

#### **Action Area 6:**

Supporting childcare and adolescent employability

- **Childcare:** Development of policy and normative frameworks, increasing convenience, affordability and quality of childcare and supporting family-friendly workplaces.
- Adolescent learning and skills: Support systems-based approaches to adolescent learning and skills for
  employability, improving quality and relevance of programmes and flexible approaches to education.

#### Social service workforce

#### **Action Area 7:**

Strengthening the social welfare workforce and direct outreach to families

- Building and strengthening the social welfare workforce: Including clarifying roles and responsibilities, and
  expanding the workforce and training.
- Family outreach and case management: Integrate family outreach and support into social protection programmes including case management approaches.



#### ADMINISTRATION AND INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

#### **Action Area 8:**

Strengthening integrated administrative systems

- Improving integrated management information systems (MIS): Needs assessments, developing MIS, building technical capacity and developing grievance and redress mechanisms.
- Improving coordination and service delivery at sub-national level: Improving overall capacity of sub-national social protection system to plan, coordinate and implement social protection programmes in an integrated way.



#### SOCIAL PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN, FRAGILE AND RISK-PRONE CONTEXTS

#### **Action Area 9:**

Strengthening national shock-responsive social protection systems

- Evidence and analysis: Inclusion of an analysis of risks and shocks in child poverty analysis, impact evaluations/ M&E/learning, social protection costing exercises and system assessments.
- Policy, strategy, legislation, coordination and financing: Reviewing and adapting relevant policies for scale
  up; making budgetary provisions; contingency planning; and strengthening horizontal and vertical coordination
  between social protection, emergency response and other relevant local authorities.
- Programmes and design features: Reviewing and adjusting the mix of programmes and their design features, such as eligibility criteria and transfer values, to enhance coverage and provide adequate levels of assistance in times of crisis; inter-linkages and complementary services.
- Administration and delivery systems: Adjusting the administrative and delivery systems of routine social
  protection programmes so they can be leveraged fully, partially or in combination to respond to the needs of
  children and families affected by crisis.

#### **Action Area 10:**

Linking humanitarian cash transfers to social protection systems

- Designing humanitarian cash transfers to achieve sectoral outcomes: Context analysis including children's needs, transfer design and coordinating with stakeholders.
- Determining the role of national systems in implementation of a humanitarian cash transfer programme:
   Ascertaining the compatibility of the national system, assessing capacity and choosing the most appropriate
   delivery option.
- Using the national social protection system to implement a humanitarian cash transfer: Delivery of
  humanitarian cash transfers through national or mixed (national/parallel systems). Building linkages with national
  approaches when using parallel systems.

## **Endnotes**

- Definition developed by SPIAC-B as part of Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) tools development. SPIAC-B is an interagency coordination mechanism composed of representatives of international organizations and bilateral institutions to enhance global coordination and advocacy on social protection issues and to coordinate international cooperation in country demand-driven actions.
- 2. World Bank, Human Capital Project, <www. worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital>, accessed 12 May 2019. This refers to lifting countries from the 25th to the 75th percentile on the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI). The HCI measures the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by the age of 18. It is constructed for 157 countries and conveys the productivity of the next generation of workers compared to a benchmark of complete education and full health. It is made up of five indicators: (1) the probability of survival to age five; (2) a child's expected years of schooling; (3) harmonized test scores as a measure of quality of learning; (4) adult survival rate (fraction of 15-yearolds that will survive to age 60); and (5) the proportion of children who are not stunted. See also World Bank, World Development Report 2019: The changing nature of work, World Bank, Washington DC, 2019.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'Poor children in rich countries: why we need policy action', Policy Brief on Child Well-Being, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018. Data refers to percentage of children (0-17) with an equivalised post-tax-andtransfer income of less than 50% of the national annual median equivalised post-tax-and-transfer income, 2015-16 or nearest available year.
- 4. World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity* 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2018.

- López-Calva, Luis F., and Eduardo Ortiz-Juárez, 'A Vulnerability Approach to the Definition of the Middle Class', Policy Research Working Paper 5902, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2011.
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- UNICEF, 'Around 30 million children displaced by conflict need protection now and sustainable solutions over the long term', Press release, UNICEF, New York, 20 June 2018, <a href="https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/around-30-million-children-displaced-conflict-need-protection-now-and-sustainable">https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/around-30-million-children-displaced-conflict-need-protection-now-and-sustainable</a>>, accessed 7 May 2019.
- 8. See, for example, UNICEF and World Bank, Common Ground: UNICEF and World Bank Approaches to Building Social Protection Systems, UNICEF and World Bank, New York and Washington, DC, January 2013.
- Kaltenborn, Markus, et al., 'The Influence of Policy and Legal Frameworks on the Development of National Social Protection Systems', IDS Working Paper no. 501/CSP Working Paper Number 016, Institute of Development Studies and Centre for Social Protection, Brighton, November 2017.

3 United Nations Plaza
New York NY 10017 USA