SDG 1: Ending child poverty in all its forms, everywhere

For children, living in poverty is a denial of their fundamental rights to good nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, and shelter – diminishing their life chances and ability to realize their potential. This lack of investment in human capital has devastating, life-long consequences and serious implications for future generations and societies.

In almost every country in the world – rich and poor – children are more likely than adults to live in poverty, and their young age makes them more vulnerable to its effects. One in six children – 355 million – are living in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than PPP US$1.90 a day, and almost one in three children – 644 million – are living in households that are multidimensionally poor. High income countries are also not immune from child poverty – where around 1 in 7 children in rich countries are deprived. The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation for the most vulnerable children. An estimated 142 million additional are projected to have fallen into poverty in 2020 as a result of the crisis. Historically, the burden of such shocks on households have disproportionately been borne by girls. It is possible to end poverty by focusing on children in poverty reduction efforts. For the first time, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries have committed to end extreme child poverty and halve the number of boys and girls living in poverty according to national definitions. There are proven ways to address child poverty effectively, such as through child-sensitive social protection programmes and investing in accessible and quality social services. By focusing on children, national governments can address poverty at its root and build the foundation for stronger, more sustainable, and inclusive development.

KEY ASKS

Reducing child poverty in all its forms effectively and sustainably requires systematic policy and programmatic responses, both at international and national levels. To eliminate extreme poverty and halve the proportion of people living in poverty according to national definitions, UNICEF encourages all governments to:

1. Routinely measure and monitor child poverty: Measuring child poverty both from monetary and multidimensional perspectives not only helps build knowledge and understanding about scale and scope of the issue but also sets the foundation for building evidence-based solutions to effectively address child poverty.

2. Prioritize child poverty in national development strategies and plans: Including child poverty in the national development agenda can have significant impact on reducing it systematically and sustainably. Selecting child poverty as one of the key indicators to measure development progress or including policies and programmes that target poor and vulnerable children can help channel national attention and resources to address child poverty.

3. Expand child-sensitive and inclusive social protection programmes, including within governments’ immediate and longer term COVID-19 response: Social protection is one of the key instruments to address child poverty and build human capital of children, and address gender and disability related vulnerabilities. Yet only one third of boys and girls across the world are covered by social protection. To protect and prevent children from the negative impacts of poverty and deprivation, child sensitive social protection, including cash benefits for children, need to be scaled up rapidly – especially as millions of people around the world have lost their livelihoods in the face of the pandemic.

4. Invest in quality social services: Child poverty is multidimensional and many public services are relevant in children’s survival, development, and growth. These include early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, health care
and water and sanitation, among others. To ensure access to and utilization of these services by the most disadvantaged children, more investment as well as joint planning across sectors are needed.

5. **Safeguard Social Spending:** The COVID-19 crisis has greatly impacted children and it is crucial to safeguard spending on health, education, social protection, and other social sectors. Economic and fiscal policies should be embarked upon to protect the decades of investments in social sectors and to mitigate the consequences of the current crisis. Investment in children should always be protected, during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

### MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

To track progress in child poverty reduction, countries are encouraged to regularly conduct both income-based measurements that assess the living standard of children’s families as well as non-income-based measurements that assess children’s deprivations and well-being. Additionally, it is important to monitor social spending on key sectors that impact children. UNICEF encourages governments to:

- **Report on the baseline and progress towards SDG 1 indicators,** namely:
  - 1.2.1 proportion of the population living below the national poverty line, disaggregated for children;
  - 1.2.2 proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions;
  - 1.3.1 proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, disaggregated for children;
  - 1.a.2 proportion of government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection);

- **Enhance efforts to count and reach children missing from data:** Poverty statistics generally rely on household surveys, which can often miss certain groups of children who might be living in greatest poverty – such as refugees and migrants, children living in child care institutions or in street situations. To enumerate and capture the situation of these children, governments need to adopt a holistic approach: from making household surveys more inclusive of all populations, to exploring supplementary data collection methods such as specialized surveys to capture these groups of children missing from data.

- **Make better use of existing data and statistics:** Reducing child poverty requires cross-sectoral interventions, including social protection policies that address economic and social vulnerabilities, and programmes that focus on improving the quality, access, equity and usage of public services. National child poverty reports provide a rich information on the scale, scope and whereabouts of children living in poverty, serving as a powerful evidence base for guiding, designing, implementing and evaluating these cross sectoral interventions that address child poverty in all its forms. National data on tracking social sector spending is key to better monitor investments in social sectors.

### INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

Investing in children yields positive benefits to economies and societies. Since the foundation of an individual’s health and well-being is laid in early childhood, the opportune time to break the cycle of poverty, or prevent it from beginning, is during childhood. Child related interventions have relatively low financial costs and yield high returns in terms of human lives as well as economic productivity. This makes a strong case for paying particular attention to children in economic policy and fiscal budgets in times of economic hardship, including the COVID-19 crisis, as well as in times of growth. Recognising the need to continue to invest in children to safeguard progress, UNICEF recently issued [Financing an Inclusive Recovery for Children: A Call to Action](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Financing-an-Inclusive-Recovery-for-Children-A-Call-to-Action.pdf), which calls on governments and the international community and the private sector to:

- Safeguard critical social spending and minimize the negative impacts of the economic crisis on people, children, ensuring children are last in line for budget cuts.
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of financial resources across social sectors for human capital development, maximizing coverage and impact for all children.
- Identify and deploy additional international and domestic financing options, using innovative approaches as necessary to direct adequate finance towards an inclusive recovery that protects children (especially the poorest and most marginalized), tackles inequalities (including those of gender that have been revealed and deepened by the pandemic), and sets a course for more resilient economies to respond to future shocks.
Both the SDGs and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) recognize the link between child and youth-focused investments and growth. The SDG indicator 1.a.2 gives specific emphasis on investing and tracking social spending, and 1.b.1 emphasizes that public social spending should reach the poor. UNICEF works to support data and evidence generation for better and greater public investment in children, and encourages Governments to:

- **Improve measurement and reporting on actual expenditure on social services and sectors that have an impact on alleviating and reducing child monetary and multidimensional poverty**, such as social protection, education, health, early childhood care and education, nutrition, WASH and others. Given the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to monitor and track the consequences of economic and fiscal policies on children and vulnerable groups to better safeguard social spending.

- **Increase visibility and coherence of investments on child and adolescent-focused SDG priorities that are sector specific in nature as well as those that are cross-cutting nature**. It is also key to protect and further support social spending as part of the COVID-19 stimulus measures, while adopting effective solutions during the next phase of the crisis.

- **Adopt principles of results-based reporting to spending on children and adolescents, with a particular focus on equity and effectiveness**, including gender equality. Examples include tracking of spending that explicitly addresses geographic disparities of services for children and adolescents (quality and access) and inequities among different population groups in access to public social services, or other matters.

- **Collaborate with National and International Development Partners and the Private Sector**, to better expand resources to support national fiscal responses.

This type of budget data, along with other targeted analyses of the costs and returns of investing in children, can be used to support decision making by Government Ministries, Ministries of Finance, and parliamentary committees to influence allocation decisions and improve spending performance. Additional information on how UNICEF works with governments to achieve the best results for children from national budgets is set out in the Public Finance for Children Framework.

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### ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Engaging with children, adolescents and youth in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies and programmes that address their well-being is essential in fostering inclusion as well as ownership of the principles of the SDGs. To this end, UNICEF encourages governments to:

- **Develop children, adolescent and youth capacities for participating in development and humanitarian contexts**: through identifying vulnerable and marginalized groups and establishing safe spaces for them to assess their situation, identify challenges and opportunities, form an opinion, and express it.

- **Actively involve children, adolescents and youth, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in local and national planning processes in development and humanitarian contexts** through consultation and other participatory means. Additionally, as part of ongoing efforts to make children, adolescents and youth aware of these issues, inspire their positive action and expand the space for their participation in accountability mechanisms and activities. This should be part of a continuum to regularly, meaningfully and consistently engage children, adolescents and youth as agents of change to advocate, raise awareness, participate in policy work, and implement their own solutions to issues affecting their lives and communities.

- **Establish institutionalized mechanisms for promoting participation and implementing recommendations from children and adolescents** by ensuring that there is a responsive audience, dedicated budgets, accountability mechanisms and feedback loops.

- **Provide spaces for children, adolescents, and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including Ending Poverty**. UNICEF can support this effort through our existing work in this space and create child-friendly education and entertainment materials through our foundational partnerships on the World’s Largest Lesson and Comics Uniting Nations. UNICEF’s Youth Activate Talk Methodology is also a platform for children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.

For more information, visit: [https://www.unicef.org/sdgs](https://www.unicef.org/sdgs)