**STATEMENT BY MAESTRAL INTERNATIONAL**

***Call for Inputs on Rights of the Child and Inclusive Social Protection***

[Maestral International](http://www.maestral.org), a global organization supporting the protection and welfare of children, strongly welcomes the call for inputs on the rights of the child and inclusive social protection by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Many of the provisions of the [*Joint Statement on Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection*](https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/advancing-child-sensitive-social-protection)*,* endorsed in 2009 by UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, the World Bank and other global organizations remain relevant today, but have been only partially realized over the last fourteen years.

**The protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect is a human capital issue.** Children who experience these rights violations are far more likely to experience greater risks of lower earnings over their lifetimes, reduced participation in education and poorer education performance, poorer lifetime physical and mental health status, and greater likelihood of social problems including coming into conflict with the law. These risks are greatly enhanced in emergency and humanitarian settings.

Social protection strategies and programs can support long-term human capital development by expanding their focus beyond economic resilience and opportunity. There is growing evidence that **integrated social protection services (sometimes referred to as ‘cash plus care’ programming), yield greatly enhanced outcomes for vulnerable populations** relative to cash transfers and non-cash social services operating separately.

For example, a 2022 [study in Niger](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-022-04647-8) found that combining economic and psychosocial supports led to impressive internal rates of returns under a variety of scenarios relative to delivering those interventions in unison. An in-person parenting program in South Africa was [evaluated](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31179028/) in 2019 and found to generate $6 saved for every $1 spent (at an average cost of $15.10 equivalent per family), with significant reductions shown in poverty, violence, sexual risk, and other issue areas. **These and other studies show that complex experiences of child adversities require integrated interventions beyond cash and in-kind assistance.**

Many higher income countries have long recognized the importance of integrating cash and non-cash services to address the needs of children and families, but this approach is only just emerging in lower resource settings. **UNICEF and its partners have called for** [**connecting child protection measures with humanitarian social protection measures**](https://socialprotection.org/sites/default/files/publications_files/Webinar%20Presentation%2018%2002%202021.pdf), and USAID has recently [reported](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00W5ZH.pdf) on how ‘cash plus care’ approaches have leveraged its DREAMS programming to enhance child well-being.

We would like to highlight three critical and inter-connected components that are necessary for ensuring that inclusive social protection approaches can effectively support the rights of the child:

* **Social work and case management**: Every child and family has a unique constellation of strengths and vulnerabilities that exist within a broader socio-economic setting. [Social workers and related professions](https://maestral.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Maestral-SSW-strengthening-Exernal-summary-FINAL.pdf) use case management tools to assess child and family/household needs, to develop a case plan to address those needs, and to make referrals to available community supports (whether formal or informal, publicly or privately provided). These can include referrals to cash and in-kind supports, school feeding and nutrition programs, psycho-social support, parenting and early childhood services, and other related programs. *Case management is the best tool we have to address the complex needs of children and families and to ensure that the needs particular to the child are addressed by the best available resources.*
* **Family-centered child protection systems.** Children are best able to meet their development potential at all ages when they are in safe and nurturing families, further supporting human capital. Yet [billions of dollars](https://www.barna.com/orphan-care/) are donated annually to support residential care models for children (such as orphanages and children’s homes) that a recent [Lancet Commission study](https://www.thelancet.com/commissions/deinstitutionalisation) found highly detrimental to children’s protection and cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development, while costing 6-10 times as much as family-based support. Social protection policies and programs should work to prevent family separation, to promote protection and nurturing of children within families, and to provide family-based alternative care (kinship, guardianship, foster care, kafalah, and adoption) when separation does occur. The USAID Global Development Alliance [Changing the Way We Care](https://www.changingthewaywecare.org/) (of which we are a member) is undertaking cutting edge work in this area.
* **Strengthening government ownership of integrated social protection.** Many countries have not embedded an integrated social protection approach into their broader social welfare policies and show a heavy reliance on external programs funded by development partners and donors. Governments should increasingly invest in integrated social protection policies [through the public budget](https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/135.11_EN_Public%20Expenditure%20and%20Children%27s%20Care.pdf) in order to sustain and scale their programs – and realize the human capital benefits as a result.

Many of the above measures are child-centered but provide benefits at all ages. We encourage case management and planning approaches that strengthen the entire household and family for the benefit of children. A diagram of the components of an integrated social protection system promotive of child rights is attached for the consideration of the Office of the High Commissioner.



Philip Goldman January 24, 2023

President

Maestral International

**Attachment: Integrated Social Protection Services for Children Diagram**

