**Subject: Report on the rights of the child and inclusive social protection - Human Rights Council Resolution 49/20**

**1.) Based on your work, what are the main gaps and challenges to children’s enjoyment of social protection in law, policy, and practice and the main impacts on children’s rights? Please provide any relevant statistical or disaggregated data based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, or other categories. Please consider the specific situation of marginalized children and those in vulnerable situations in your response**.

Despite its immediate and long-term impacts, approximately 1.5 billion children below the age of 15 years currently have no access to social protection and, alarmingly, progress in increasing effective coverage globally has stalled since 2016. In 2020 only 26.4 per cent of children under 15

years globally received social protection cash benefits, leaving children vulnerable to poverty, exclusion and multiple deprivations. Children are disproportionately impacted by poverty, they are twice as likely as adults to live in both extreme and multidimensional poverty. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 356 children lived in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than $1.90/day (PPP), and at the higher poverty thresholds of US$3.20 and US$5.50 PPP, there were 841 million and 1.35 billion children living in poverty, respectively. The need for expanded social protection coverage to reach children and their families, is urgent.

Significant and troubling regional disparities exist in effective coverage for children, and in some regions, progress has stalled or there has been a decline in coverage since 2016. The most pronounced decline occurred in the Americas, where coverage fell by 6.4 percentage points from 63.8 to 57.4 per cent. Elsewhere, insufficient progress has been made, with coverage stalled. For instance, it remains relatively low in the Arab States at 15.4 per cent. Coverage declined slightly from 84.6 to 82.3 per cent in Europe and Central Asia. And of all regions, effective coverage remains the lowest in Africa, where the rate has barely moved since 2016, from 12.8 to 12.6 per cent. In

Asia and the Pacific, coverage has remained more or less the same and is currently 18.0 per cent.

While coverage of children in social protection is generally low, migrant and displaced children are disproportionately affected as they are less likely to be covered by social protection in their place of origin and have no access to social protection in transit or their place of settlement. Children constituted about 41% of the total displaced in 2022.Access to social protection is challenging for displaced children and their families, who often face policy barriers and where they are able to overcome this barrier, they face operational barriers to contributory and non contributory social protection measures.

Anchoring social protection programmes, including child benefits, is crucial in order to ensure sustainability from the perspective of financing and institutional frameworks, and to provide legal entitlements to eligible individuals and households, thereby guaranteeing protection as a matter of right. However, only 114 countries/territories, out of 215 reviewed, had any child benefits anchored in national legislation.

## Figure 1: The State of Child Benefits across the globe

Sources: ILO, [World Social Protection Database](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/WSPDB.action?id=1469), based on the SSI; ILOSTAT; national sources.

Girls and women have been disproportionately impacted by multiple crises and social protection also displays major gaps in gender-responsiveness, with evidence showing only 12 per cent of measures in response to COVID-19 could be considered fully gender-responsive. Further, a systematic review of recent evidence across LMICs indicates that female headed households are almost 50% more likely to be in extreme poverty than male headed households, signaling greater economic insecurity for the children in these households and increased need for access to social protection.. A range of social protection schemes and family-friendly policies are needed to ensure social protection is gender-responsive, including social transfers, maternity benefits, care policies and parental leave, as well as connecting social protection schemes to broader gender-responsive services. When designed appropriately, social protection can reduce gendered poverty, overcome barriers and promote girls’ and women’s fuller participation in economic and social life. While the commitment to gender-responsive social protection is growing, significant gaps in coverage, adequacy and comprehensiveness remain, particularly in lower-income countries.

Children with disabilities or living in a household with a family member with a disability are particularly vulnerable to poverty but are also less likely to receive adequate social protection. Families of children with disabilities face higher costs given the additional support and care needed to lead a full life, and yet additional care responsibilities in the home mean that while needs are greater, incomes are often lower. Work on both assessing disability and understanding its costs underpins disability-inclusive social protection systems; it is advancing in many parts of the world but needs to be expanded across countries. Universal child disability benefits (UCDBs) can be a crucial foundation, both for children with disabilities and as a starting point for expanding child benefits more broadly; but they also need to be connected to additional support and services.



**2.) Based on your work, can you share examples of the good practices to ensure that social protection benefits the rights of children? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring children’s access to inclusive social protection.**

The positive impacts of social protection for children are beyond question. Extensive evidence shows that child sensitive social protection reduces poverty while also contributing to income security in households, with broader significance for child health, education and food security and protection. Further, it provides resilience for households, allowing them to boost their productivity and earning potential, and lowers the risk of the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In this way, investment in social protection for children expands human capabilities and productivity, and creates a virtuous circle, fuelling economic growth and contributing to more sustainable tax and transfer systems that will enable further expansion of social protection for all, including children. However, in the absence of social protection, these basic conditions for well-being are less likely to be met during childhood, creating conditions difficult to rectify in later life. This gives reason for concern, as analysis of age-related spending shows that all children – and the families they live in – are underserved in terms of social protection, particularly in early childhood. This needs to be addressed urgently.

As outlined in UNICEF’s social protection framework child sensitive social protection system has four levels: 1) a foundation of evidence which understands the situation of children including the most vulnerable on which the system is built; 2) social protection policies, ensuring overall policy coherence, including common and shared vision, coordination and financing mechanisms; 3) social protection programmes in the areas of a) social transfers; b) social insurance; c) labour and jobs and c) the social service workforce; and finally 4) an administrative tools such as registries, payment mechanisms, grievance and redress etc

While there are still significant challenges in progressing social protection for children, good practices abound in these areas showing the progress that is possible in expanding inclusive social protection for children:

1. A foundation of evidence: In Georgia, child poverty analysis of the national cash transfer programme was used to analyse the trend of monetary poverty by age group, rural-urban differences in child poverty, and poverty rates by number of children in the household. The analysis combined with policy advocacy and partnership building resulted in the [introduction](http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-1-4648-0900-2_ch5) of a remarkable child benefit scheme in May 2015 to the social protection system, planned to reach approximately 260,000 children from the poorest households nationwide.
2. Social protection policies: Social protection strategies are the core of a social protection system. In Côte D’Ivoire, for example, the government and the international community undertook extensive reviews of the previous social protection strategy, identifying four priority areas including expansion of the coverage and increased investment in human capital. The new strategy will provide a coherent vision for the social protection sector, and strengthen the social protection floor and its related coordination mechanisms. In Tunisia, a law was adopted to institutionalize the child benefit, which offers monthly payments to poor and vulnerable families with young children under 5 years of age. This was a scheme that was introduced at the end of 2020 to mitigate the shocks from COVID among families with young children. In recognition of the continued risks and vulnerabilities and the impressive impact of the child grant in many areas, including access to better quality food, preschool, health services and better wellbeing of caregivers, the government have decided to keep the scheme as part of the national social protection system under the law. In Kenya and Sudan, forthcoming national strategies and policies are expected to explicitly cover refugees.
3. Social protection programmes: There are a range of social protection programmes that expand inclusive social protection for children, including:
	* One of the most proven and effective programmes to address child poverty and support child development are universal child benefits. In Montenegro for example, a targeted child benefit programme that began in 2006 faced challenged in low effective coverage, including due to exclusion errors. In 2021, a multidimensional child poverty study showed that 80 per cent of Montenegrin children faced multiple deprivations, and children aged 0–6 years were the most deprived, and therefore a truly inclusive programme required expanded coverage. In December 2021, Parliament adopted a follow-up decision to expand into a full universal child benefit covering all children aged 0–18 years ensuring coverage of all children.
	* Mozambique’s Child Grant, targeting children aged 0-2 years, showcased how cash transfers in combination with nutrition information and case management services not only reduce poverty, but also improve child well-being on several levels within the critical 1000 days window. With UNICEF's support the government will be gradually expanding the child grant program in country in a phased approach starting with the poorest districts. The pilot tested a cash plus approach providing cash plus case management (to reduce largely gender-based protection risks) and SBCC through skills training on care aimed at mothers.
	* Refugees have been or are starting to be included in practice in certain social assistance schemes, including in Ethiopia’s Urban Productive Safety Net Project (UPSNP), a cash transfer pilot for low-income families in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, local social services and the forthcoming National Disability Allowance in Lebanon, and the Makani integrated support package in Jordan.
4. Administrative systems: Strong and integrated administrative systems are at the heart of social protection systems ability to reach the most vulnerable with integrated services. In India, for example, efforts were made to improve data integration and social registry systems in order to advocate for children’s and women’s social protection benefits A raft of state efforts to improve existing social protection services involving local governance and community structures have provided alternative models of delivery in difficult-to-reach areas. In response to the pandemic, and the need to reach vulnerable children, cash transfers targeting girls were enhanced, with Madhya Pradesh being the sixth state to announce the social protection scheme Ladli-Laxmi 2.0 in 2021.

**3.) Are there examples of how measures and responses to alleviate poverty through social protection systems in emergency situations or, for example, in response to**

**the COVID-19 pandemic, have positively affected children’s rights, particularly to social security?**

COVID-19 had significant repercussions for child poverty, with 2020 witnessing its first global growth in child poverty in generations. Children constitute 41 per cent of the 83.9 million forcibly displaced people across the world. Given the increasingly protracted nature of crises, displaced children are at high risk of spending a quarter of their childhood in deprivation and facing uncertain futures. While the economic impacts of COVID-19, conflict and displacement continue to be felt, children and families face a growing cost-of-living crisis, as well as the devastating impacts of an

accelerating climate emergency to which children have contributed so little but of which they, especially the most vulnerable, will bear the greatest costs. During COVID there was a strong social protection response, More than 200 countries and territories either introduced new programmes or rapidly adapted existing schemes – amounting to approximately 4,000 policy measures in total

– boosting social assistance and supporting children and families. It is no exaggeration to say that for families facing profound economic hardship or living through humanitarian emergencies, social protection can be a lifeline. Programmes included for example:

* In Mongolia the Government vertically expanded (top-up) the flagship Child Money Programme (CMP) for 6 months (400% increase from pre-COVID benefit levels from 20,000 to 100,000 per month), having reached so far 1,191,099 children. COs target in HAC reflects the beneficiaries of the CMP top up by the Government as a response to COVID as a result, in part, of the technical support provided by UNICEF last winter (2019-2020) through a piloted SRSP response for children to the Dzud (channeling CTs thought he CMP for the first time).
* In Cambodia, the government launched the COVID-19 Emergency Cash-Transfer Programme with the aim of reaching approximately of 540,000 households (2,3M individuals), with enrolment ultimately surpassing this target. The Covid-19 cash transfer programme was made possible by the existence of the recently established cash transfer for pregnance women and children, underlining the importance of existing social protection programmes to respond to crisis.
* In South Africa the were a vertical top up of the national of Universal Child Grant of R500 a month, reaching 12.8 million children. Together with expansions of other social protection programmes including for unemployment and food distribution vouchers the total value of the social protection expansion was USD2.6billion.
* Argentina has instituted an increase in cash transfers to children, equivalent to an additional payment of the Universal Child Allowance (AUH) and the Universal Pregnancy Allowance for $3,100 Argentine pesos (US$47) for 4.3 million people (Total: $14 billion Argentine pesos or US$215 million). Additionally there will be an extraordinary bonus of $3,000 Argentine pesos (US$45) for the people who receive social programs (565,000 people).
* During COVID-19, countries like Belgium, Chile, and Hungary provided parents with cash-for-care payments to compensate for childcare and school closures while enabling parents to continue to provide care to children with some economic security during the pandemic; this in turn ensured that children, particularly girl children, would not be subjected to take on caregiving responsibilities.

**4.) Can you provide information on any programs or activities your agency has implemented regarding inclusive social protection and the rights of the child?**

UNICF is working in over 100 countries on social protection, including with a strong focus on inclusion. For example, UNICEF has worked to extend cash transfer to the most vulnerable children. Despite clear evidence of the wide-ranging impact of cash transfers on children and families, only one in four children have access to any child/family benefits, globally. In close collaboration with partners, UNICEF has been working globally to support the expansion of national cash transfer programmes towards universal child benefits, and has also worked in humanitarian contexts to provide HCTs for families in need. In 2021, over 132 million children were reached by cash transfers supported by UNICEF across humanitarian and development contexts. For example, in Nepal, the Child Grant programme was expanded with support from UNICEF, as well as the World Bank, the

EU and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to an additional 11 districts, reaching 375,000 children. UNICEF contributed to the programme’s expansion through the timely production of real-time assessments of COVID-19 impacts, budget analysis and policy advocacy. In Tunisia, a child benefit programme introduced in 2020 scaled up its coverage from an initial 50,000 children to 129,000 children in 2021. Further, the programme was institutionalized through the amendment of a law.

UNICEF is also committed to reach the most vulnerable children affected by humanitarian crisis. UNICEF’s preferred approach is to strengthen government systems to be able to respond to crisis and in 79 countries UNICEF is working on shock- responsive social protection. In the Philippines, UNICEF focused on strengthening the social protection programme in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and enhancing the poverty registry for shock responsiveness. Work has also been carried out with other partners on anticipatory action and supporting municipalities in transferring cash ahead of a cyclone. In Mongolia, UNICEF’s support for the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in monitoring its pandemic response via the Child Money Programme and Food Stamp Programme generated useful evidence that informed the government’s decisions on transfer value, coverage and additional measures. This allowed it to improve on the implementation and institutionalization of shock responsiveness in its social protection system.

Migrant and displaced inclusive social protection is a core part of UNICEF’s work on social protection system strengthening in countries. In Lebanon, UNICEF has been working on demonstrating a proof of concept to support multi dimensional needs of children through the provision of cash transfers. Evidence and learning from this programme are being leveraged to influence the social protection system and making it inclusive. In Turkey, UNICEF works with the government to extend social assistance to refugee children to enable their access to education. This programme mirrors an existing social assistance programme for children from poor households in Turley.

UNICEF is also committed to reach the most vulnerable children affected by humanitarian crisis and continues to pursue its commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to strengthen the links between HCTs and social protection. 2021, UNICEF-supported HCT programmes reached 19 million children in 62 countries. An overwhelming majority of these children – 97 per cent – were supported by linking HCTs with social protection. Meanwhile, UNICEF increased the number of countries implementing UNICEF-funded HCT programmes to 52 in 2021 (up from 50 countries in 2020), reaching 2.7 million households (up from 2.5 million in 2020). Of these, 724,000 households across 20 countries (up from 18 in 2020) were reached through direct funding and national social protection programmes, and 1.9 million households in 38 countries (up from 34 countries in 2020) were reached through implementation partnerships with local financial service providers and civil society partners.

The remaining 6.8 million households were reached through the provision of technical assistance to expand government social protection programmes. In most countries, this entailed providing technical assistance and funding to governments to scale up social cash transfers. In eight countries, however, this included leveraging components of the existing social protection system, such as beneficiary lists or the social workforce

UNICEF has developed a new strategy to work towards gender- transformative social protection, and made concrete commitments to increase the number of countries with social protection programmes that are gender responsive. A total of 101 UNICEF country offices have explicit gender objectives in their social protection work (up from 29 in 2019). For the new strategic plan, what counts will be how this number translates into concrete changes in the lives of the people we serve, particularly how social protection systems can change the lives of girls experiencing exclusion, and shift detrimental poverty, power and gender norms for everyone. For example, in the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF is supporting the government with an adolescent-focused cash plus programme, assessing its impact, including reducing gender-based violence and promoting gender-equitable attitudes amongst adolescent boys (such as on domestic chores, violence and other domains), health and more. Further research on cash plus work in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme and social protection programmes in other countries is also under way, under the Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection programme, in partnership with the United Kingdom. This includes a robust research agenda that will produce more than 13 studies this year on cash and related interventions with a strong gender and age-sensitive lens. Additionally, in Albania, UNICEF and UN Women are working to generate evidence around the impact of social protection on children and women, and to make actionable recommendations around sustainable financing for cash and care services that are appropriate, adequate and relevant to the needs of children and women throughout their life cycle. These examples illustrate the range of work taking place across regions and domains to advance our agenda.

UNICEF has also provided extensive support to make social protection systems more inclusive for children and adults with disabilities in more than 56 countries, and initiated support in 25 more. The UNICEF–Norway disability partnership enabled both an increase of its technical capacities and its support to countries to make their social protection response to COVID-19 more disability-inclusive, including in Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In terms of systems-strengthening, the focus was on improved disability data collection and analysis, the development or reform of disability identification assessment mechanisms and programmes, and systems that take into consideration disability-related costs faced by children with disabilities and their families. On data collection, UNICEF has supported evidence generation for more disability-inclusive social protection in more than 40 countries. For example, in Jamaica, one study analysed the socioeconomic impact of disability on children and their access to social protection. The study showed that there is a need to improve outreach to children and adults with disabilities and their families, as most do not have access to existing social assistance, and may not even be aware of existing services and support. In Mali, a study on people living with a disability aged 0–17 years was produced by the Sustainable Development Observatory and the Fight Against Poverty in collaboration with UNICEF. In Maldives, UNICEF supported the inclusion of disability questions in the upcoming 2022 census questionnaire. In addition, UNICEF is supporting the government to collect information on the disabled population nationwide, to build the first national disability database, providing appropriate information for targeting national interventions towards people with disabilities. UNICEF is also supporting the department of social welfare of the Philippines to carry out an innovative study on disability-related costs faced by children with disabilities and their families, to help design more supportive social protection schemes.

**5.) How can States deliver more effectively to ensure the effective implementation of universal social protection for children, including through international cooperation? Please consider the place of social protection in international donor programs.**

Social protection systems have the potential to ensure rights-based, comprehensive, and universal social protection across the life cycle both progressively and inclusively. As the Human Rights Council stresses, an inclusive social protection system must safeguard the rights of all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized. This is why UNICEF believes that any approach must be underpinned by a basis of equitable access for all incorporating gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, and migration-sensitive considerations for women and men, boys and girls through social transfers, social insurance, and labor and market interventions. At its heart pursuing a path to universal social protection for children means closing the coverage gap for children and making systems more inclusive. UNICEF and ILO have been working together to assess the key actions needed to achieve universal social protection for children, and highlights six recommended steps on the high road to universal social protection for children:

1. Accelerate progress towards universal coverage for children as a critical step towards improving their well-being.
2. Guarantee adequate benefit levels to generate meaningful change in children’s lives.
3. Provide a comprehensive range of benefits that supports children and families through a life-cycle approach.
4. Ensure sustainable and equitable financing of social protection systems that allows for the necessary investment in social protection for children.
5. Build social protection systems that are rights-based, inclusive of migrants and displaced children, gender-responsive, informed by social dialogue and able to effectively respond to multiple shocks and crises, and that can therefore deliver for children and families.
6. Ensure that social protection systems are adapted to developments in the world of work to enhance economic security for parents, caregivers and their families while providing access to high quality care for children.
7. Address access barriers faced by displaced and migrant children in accessing social protection. This could mean change in policy, adjustment of programmes or strengthening portability of social protection, in particular child benefit.

This document draws heavily on:

* UNICEF-ILO forthcoming
* UNICEF Global Social Protection Framework
* UNICEF: A companion guidance to UNICEF’s Global Social Protection Framework
* UNICEF Global Annual Results Report
* UNICEF and ODI: Universal child benefits: policy issues and options
* UNICEF and ODI :Strengthening Inclusive Social Protection for displaced children and their families