Seventy-eighth session
Item 25 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Social development

Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/188, the Secretary-General stresses the need to regain lost ground and strengthen national actions and international cooperation to achieve the goals and objectives of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He reviews the progress made since 1995, examines the current state of play and highlights global challenges to social development. In this context, the Secretary-General calls upon Member States to commit to bold and transformative actions to revive progress and outlines policies and programmes to address the rise in extreme poverty and food insecurity, the lack of access to quality education and energy and the shortage of employment and decent work around the world. He also presents the outcomes of the sixty-first session of the Commission for Social Development and concludes by identifying policy recommendations for consideration by Member States.

* A/78/150.
I. Introduction

1. At the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in March 1995, Member States acknowledged the need to place people at the centre of development and pledged to make poverty eradication, full employment and social integration the overriding development objectives. This social perspective on development, based on equity, social justice and non-discrimination, is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is enshrined in its central promise that no one will be left behind.

2. In his report entitled “Our Common Agenda” (A/75/982), the Secretary-General called upon Member States to consider holding a world social summit in 2025 to take stock of the global commitments. This summit would offer an opportunity to review gaps and progress in advancing a people-centred approach to development, as called for in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, thus serving to update those commitments and bring them to bear in efforts to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. The Secretary-General’s proposal to convene a world social summit in 2025 remains to be agreed upon and formally endorsed by Member States. During informal consultations on the recommendations of the report on Our Common Agenda, many countries expressed their support for convening such a summit. The present report lays the groundwork for further deliberations by taking stock of progress made in the many facets of social development since 1995 and by considering the types of policies and institutions that would be needed to create a world in which people enjoy equal rights and equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.

II. Current challenges to social development and the 2030 Agenda

4. The world faces multiple compounding challenges that are impeding progress towards inclusive and sustainable development that benefits everyone. Despite improvements in many aspects of social development since 1995, including reductions in extreme poverty and food insecurity, as well as improved access to education and energy, progress has stagnated or reversed since 2020.

A. Largest setback to global poverty reduction in decades

5. The prevalence of extreme poverty, as measured by the international poverty line, decreased from an estimated 33 per cent of the global population in 1995 to 9 per cent in 2019. However, progress in reducing extreme poverty globally decelerated from 2014 onward, because of a slowdown in the pace of poverty reduction in some large countries, notably China. In 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic caused the first increase in extreme poverty in more than two decades. The pandemic brought massive job loss and reductions in income, which affected populations in vulnerable situations the most severely. It is estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty increased by 11 per cent in 2020, rising from 648 million to 719 million. Global poverty reduction resumed in 2021, albeit at the slow rate of progress observed before the pandemic.

1 See https://pip.worldbank.org/#profile.
6. In 2022, an estimated 667 million people were living in extreme poverty, which is 70 million more than what had been projected prior to the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. At the current pace of progress, target 1.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is to eradicate global extreme poverty, will not be achieved. Instead, it is expected to reach almost 7 per cent by 2030.\(^3\)

7. These figures and projections mask substantial regional differences. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people living in extreme poverty has barely changed since 1995. While numbers are falling in other regions, extreme poverty has become increasingly concentrated in this region, which is now home to 60 per cent of the world’s extremely poor, up from 18 per cent in 1995. The prevalence of extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa currently stands at 35 per cent, which is higher than any other region in the world, even though it has fallen from just under 60 per cent in 1995. South Asia now accounts for almost one quarter of those living in extreme poverty globally.\(^4\)

8. Extreme poverty remains concentrated in conflict-affected and rural areas. Over 80 per cent of the world’s extremely poor live in rural areas. The vast majority work in the agricultural sector, as family farmers, subsistence-oriented producers and agricultural workers. Children and young people under 18 years of age are at higher risk of poverty, accounting for over 52 per cent of those living in extreme poverty worldwide.\(^5\) Many face the prospect of child labour or not completing their education.

B. Food insecurity and malnutrition are on the rise

9. Conflict, climate change and economic shocks, combined with the high cost of nutritious foods and growing inequalities, continue to drive food insecurity and malnutrition. The global share of people facing hunger fell from 13 per cent to 8 per cent between 2000 and 2015 and remained around that level until 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the absolute number of people facing hunger was 735 million people in 2022, which was an increase of 122 million compared with 2019.\(^6\)

10. Globally, close to 600 million people are projected to face hunger in 2030, which makes achieving target 2.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 2, to end hunger by 2030, a formidable challenge. There are marked disparities at the regional level: in 2022, one in five people in Africa faced hunger, compared with one in twelve in Asia and one in sixteen in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2022, 2.4 billion people around the world were moderately or severely food insecure. Globally and in every region, the prevalence of food insecurity is higher among women than men. In 2022, around 28 per cent of all adult women were moderately to severely food insecure (down from 32 per cent in 2021), compared with 25 per cent of all adult men (down from 28 per cent in 2021).

11. The effects of inflation and soaring food prices have increased the cost of healthy diets worldwide.\(^7\) In 2021, more than 3.1 billion people could not afford a healthy diet, which represented an increase of 134 million compared with 2019. Despite progress since 1995, stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age.

---

\(^3\) Ibid.


continue to be an important challenge globally, especially among children in rural areas or poorer households and those whose mothers lack a formal education. In addition, high levels of maternal anaemia and adult obesity continue to be observed.

C. Access to electricity is widespread but progress is slowing

12. Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is crucial to achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development. Access to reliable and modern energy facilitates access to education, the heating and cooling of homes and the storage of foods and medicines, and it improves women’s chances of employment outside the home. It is crucial for closing the digital divide and providing access to basic services such as e-health and information about rights. Global access to electricity rose significantly between 1998 and 2021, from 73 per cent to 91 per cent. This progress was due to strong political commitments, better targeted policies, technological advances, effective business models and innovative financing tools. Despite this, one in four children attends primary schools that do not have access to electricity.

13. Despite relatively high access levels, the reliability and quality of access to electricity continue to create gaps between the rich and poor and between rural and urban populations. The pace of electrification has slowed in recent years, mainly owing to the complexity of reaching the remaining unserved populations and the impacts of COVID-19, which, in 2020, made basic energy services unaffordable for 90 million people in Asia and Africa who had previously enjoyed access. In 2021, the global number of people without access to electricity reached around 675 million, 80 per cent of whom lived in rural areas.

14. Disparities at the regional level remain stark. Despite progress in the Africa region – notably in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Senegal – four out of five people without access to electricity live in sub-Saharan Africa. South Asia is the region that saw the fastest growth in access to electricity, from around 48 per cent to 96 per cent between 1995 and 2020. India accounted for a large share of this progress as a result of its ambitious Saubhagya scheme. Nevertheless, at the current rate of progress, only 92 per cent of the global population will have access to electricity in 2030. Of the 660 million people projected to remain without access in 2030, 85 per cent will be in Africa. In Asia, many developing countries are on course to achieve universal access by 2030.

---

10 United Nations, “Addressing energy’s interlinkages”.
13 International Energy Agency and others, Tracking SDG 7.
16 See https://powermin.gov.in/en/content/saubhagya.
17 International Energy Agency and others, Tracking SDG 7.

4/16
D. Large gaps remain in access to education

15. Ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education is central to all development aspirations. In 2018, 17 per cent (258 million) of children, adolescents and young people around the world were out of school, down from 28 per cent in 1995. In sub-Saharan Africa, although the out-of-school rate has fallen for primary and secondary school-age children, the absolute number has increased.

16. Globally, the improvement in primary and secondary school completion rates has only been marginally faster for children in rural areas compared with the average rates for the total population. The same trend is visible for primary school completion among the poorest income group. For secondary school students, the poorest quintile is falling even further behind. At the current rate, closing the gap in primary and secondary school completion rates would take many decades.

17. Academic achievement also varies on the basis of gender, socioeconomic background, remoteness, disability, ethnicity, language, migration or refugee status, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes. In all regions, except in Europe and North America, adolescents from the richest households were three times more likely to complete lower secondary education than those from the poorest households. The 240 million children with disabilities were also more likely to be out-of-school at all levels of education compared with children without disabilities. According to a report by the United Nations Children’s Fund, children with disabilities are 49 per cent more likely to have never attended school and 47 per cent more likely to be out of primary school compared with those without a disability. Being female and living in a rural area are also associated with lower access to education and educational attainment. In at least 20 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, almost no poor, rural, young women complete secondary education. Immigrants and refugees also face major barriers to education and often lag behind their peers. In the European Union, twice as many foreign-born young people left school early in 2017 compared with native-born young people. Asylum-seeking children and young people are detained in many countries, often with limited or no access to education. Refugee education remains underfunded and refugee children and young people tend to be excluded from mainstream schooling. Similarly, the educational needs of adult migrants and refugees are often overlooked.

18. Poverty and discrimination are driving exclusion from education. Very often public education is not affordable. In low-income and lower-middle-income countries, households account for almost 40 per cent of total spending on education. These private funds are in large part spent on learning material and uniforms. Ethnic, religious and other minorities can suffer prejudice and discrimination and face barriers in access to education. For instance, people with albinism are at a higher risk of exclusion from education in sub-Saharan Africa. Roma children in Europe are segregated and face a higher chance of being placed in special schools.

III. Sixty-first session of the Commission for Social Development

19. The Commission for Social Development is the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. The present section provides an outline of the work undertaken at the sixty-first session of the Commission, as reflected in the resolutions on: (a) future organization and methods of work of the Commission for Social Development; (b) social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development; and (c) creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

20. During the deliberations, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the principles and goals of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, with a particular emphasis on poverty eradication, productive employment and decent work, and social inclusion. They highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic and other ongoing crises had exacerbated inequalities in both income and access to basic rights and services, including access to jobs, nutritious food, health care and education. In some cases, these crises have disproportionately affected population groups in vulnerable situations, but not always. For example, women, children and young people were at a lower risk of dying from COVID-19. During the session, Member States acknowledged the detrimental impact of informal employment and stressed the centrality of extending access to decent work, social protection, health care, education and lifelong learning to achieving a full recovery from the pandemic, accelerating inclusive economic growth, building resilient societies, promoting social inclusion and cohesion, and ensuring a sustainable future. In order to better address the multiple ongoing and interlinked global crises, Member States underlined the critical role of international cooperation, thanked the Secretary-General for the comprehensive reports and expressed their appreciation for the work of the Commission.

21. The ministerial forum, held on the priority theme of the sixty-first session of the Commission, underscored the critical role of productive employment and decent work in tackling inequality. It also highlighted the need to give special attention to women, young people, migrant workers and persons with disabilities, because of their disproportionate vulnerability to poverty, discrimination and exploitation at work. Ministers noted that social protection had been a front-line response of Governments to protect people’s health, jobs and incomes during the pandemic and emphasized that digital, green and care economies provided numerous opportunities for decent work. Below is a summary of the discussions held by the Commission on the priority theme during its sixty-first session.

A. Priority theme: creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. Reducing inequality through decent work and job creation to advance inclusion

22. Social justice for all is the foundation for overcoming inequality and ensuring a level playing field. Ensuring universal access to basic services, decent work, health care, social protection and quality education and training is central to narrowing inequalities at source.
23. The COVID-19 crisis reversed the trend of declining inequalities and revealed the fragility of social gains made in recent decades. There are growing concerns that inequalities in income, wealth and access to basic services are increasingly being transmitted across generations, often as a result of unequal access to education and employment.

24. Limited access to decent work is one of the major causes of rising inequalities. Globally, some 2 billion people are employed in the informal economy, in most cases without an employment contract and with low and unstable incomes, unhealthy and unsafe working conditions and no social protection. The rate of working poverty is therefore high among informal workers, especially in the agricultural sector. Women, lower-skilled workers, migrants, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately exposed to informal employment and thus to poverty, which leads to worsening outcomes for them in terms of health, education and income.

25. Informal employment is also associated with lower productivity, reduced tax revenues and poor governance. Addressing informality is therefore a means for promoting long-term development. Moreover, promoting decent work and social dialogue can help to counter polarization and social conflicts and restore trust in Governments and public institutions.

26. Formalization and job creation require a broad set of policy tools, as well as legal frameworks and effective labour inspections. Digital tools and payments can support the transition of informal workers and economic units to the formal economy by creating legal identities, simplifying national formalization strategies and reducing the cost of business registration. Digitalization is also key to ensuring the financial inclusion of the around 1 billion adults who currently lack access to a payment-enabled account.

27. Active labour market policies, together with demand-side policies and gender-transformative frameworks, are other important measures that can promote access to decent work for women and other population groups in vulnerable situations. Such policies should entail the elimination of stereotypes and discriminatory laws and practices and the promotion of measures to counter occupational segregation. They should also involve making childcare and elderly care more widely available and affordable, while also providing options for maternity and parental leave.

2. Importance of well-coordinated policy responses

28. International solidarity and cooperation are essential for tackling growing inequalities and solving cross-border challenges, such as climate change, food shortages and migration. At the national level, a whole-of-government approach can help to ensure that departments and agencies act within the same framework for development. Many countries have therefore taken an integrated approach and forged broad-based partnerships with the public and private sectors, international development partners and civil society organizations.

29. Social policies have played a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of the recent overlapping crises. While some countries have been able to deploy a coordinated and coherent policy approach as well as significant financial resources for crisis mitigation and recovery, others have not. As a result, disparities across and within countries have deepened.

30. Of the social policies available to countries, social protection has been a key tool. While many countries introduced new social protection measures to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, countries with well-developed systems already in place were generally better placed to rapidly scale up coverage and benefits. On
the contrary, in countries where existing systems were less developed and possibly fragmented, responses were often inadequate. Unsurprisingly, systems that already utilized digital technologies, for example an electronic registry of beneficiaries and payments, provided more effective tools for emergency response.

31. However, even in countries where social protection systems were more developed, coverage gaps were exposed by the crisis. This was particularly the case for informal workers, self-employed workers and employees of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, who often have limited or no access to social insurance benefits and are not eligible for non-contributory social protection benefits. Women are often disproportionally affected by these policy shortcomings because of their overrepresentation in informal jobs and front-line occupations.

32. Future social policies should ensure better coverage for informal workers and people in vulnerable situations. They must also be anchored in legal frameworks and governed by effective, transparent and accountable institutions. In order to be successful, social policies should also be integrated into a broader development framework.

B. Emerging issues: addressing the social impacts of multifaceted crises to accelerate recovery from the lingering effects of the pandemic through the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

33. A number of ongoing and overlapping crises have exacerbated inequalities in income and opportunities, both within and between countries. No country, community or person has been immune to these social impacts. Those who were the most vulnerable in the past have been the hardest hit. Millions of people have also been pushed into precarious living situations with women, older persons, young people, migrants, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples being disproportionally affected.

34. The growing unmet needs and gaps in basic services require urgent action, particularly in the light of the green transformation, population ageing, increasing migration and rapid urbanization, for example by extending access to decent work, social protection, universal health care, quality education and digital connectivity.

35. There are a variety of causes for these simultaneous crises, the most prominent of which are the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts, increasing foreign debt and soaring food and energy prices. Together, these crises and other emerging challenges are amplifying the existing risks of failing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

36. In order for an inclusive recovery to be sustainable, it is critical to place human rights at the heart of these policies and to deepen solidarity and trust and integrate gender equality into every aspect of the work. This requires strengthening international cooperation and broad-based partnerships with both the public and private sectors, international development partners and civil society organizations.

37. Generating sufficient financing for sustainable development is an immense challenge. For developing countries alone, the financing gap that must be closed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has been estimated at nearly $4 trillion per year.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} See https://unctad.org/news/closing-investment-gap-global-goals-key-building-better-future.
38. While developing countries need to find their own paths and adopt what is best suited for them, estimates indicate that over 50 of the poorest developing countries are in danger of defaulting on their debt and becoming effectively bankrupt, unless high-income countries inject liquidity into their economies and are generous when it comes to debt restructuring.

39. Although official development assistance plays an important role in supporting sustainable development, building resilience and promoting an inclusive recovery, it is neither sufficient nor a long-term solution. National actions must therefore better target fiscal policies, increase the mobilization of private finance and investments and generate revenue through progressive taxation and social security contributions. In this respect, there is a need for new and innovative solutions, including global cooperation on taxation and financial flows.

C. Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development

40. The Commission reviewed the socioeconomic progress and challenges experienced by Africa as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict in Ukraine and climate change. It also reviewed the corresponding efforts undertaken by African countries and their partners, including the United Nations system, to help the continent to emerge from the crises. While the ongoing crises are a setback for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and the aspirations of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the recovery process offers an opportunity to promote a paradigm shift and to reset socioeconomic policies, with a view to promoting greater inclusion and well-being for all.

41. In order to promote further social progress, African countries need to invest in a green and inclusive structural transformation to accelerate actions to eradicate extreme poverty, provide decent work and tackle the climate emergency. In order to make the health sector more resilient and capable of tackling future health emergencies, they should prioritize policies and actions that provide quality and affordable health services, including access to vaccines. In order to protect people’s livelihoods, support those in vulnerable situations and combat hunger, there is an urgent need to extend social protection to all and reform agricultural food systems. All policies must place a particular focus on closing existing gender gaps.

IV. Policies to counter current challenges to social development and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda

42. The lack of progress in social development since 1995, due to multiple and enduring challenges, including extreme poverty and challenges relating to food security, employment and access to education and energy, has caused intergenerational inequalities that in turn challenge social cohesion. The stalling of progress across many aspects of well-being in the years leading up to the pandemic and the important setback that the pandemic caused as it unfolded remain a cause for concern. Bold and urgent action is needed in the form of a social development strategy that is inclusive, multisectoral, integrated and capable of mitigating the negative impacts of ongoing and emerging shocks, addressing long-standing deprivations and accelerating progress towards achieving the goals and objectives of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda.
A. Designing fiscal policy to support social development, including more equitable revenue collection

43. The ongoing crises have resulted in a significant deterioration in public finances. Many countries now face the challenge of falling revenue and increased spending. In this respect, any decisions taken by countries to address these challenges must not exacerbate the plight of the poor and disadvantaged groups, but rather build their resilience and access to opportunities.

44. Domestic resource mobilization is essential for preserving and increasing social spending. For instance, domestic public funds account for 79 per cent of spending on education globally. Likewise, less than 1 per cent of global health spending comes from external aid, making domestic spending an essential part of achieving universal access to health care. However, in many countries, even before the COVID-19 crisis, domestic resource mobilization was failing to match the scale and ambition of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda. In 2020, despite the increased need for tax revenues to protect people from the adverse impacts of the pandemic, the estimated median tax revenue to gross domestic product ratio fell in all country groups and regions.

45. In terms of social spending, funding for essential public services, including education, health care and universal social protection, is lagging. The significant underinvestment in social protection, particularly in Africa, the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific, is a major reason for gaps in coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy. Globally, countries spend on average 12.9 per cent of their gross domestic product on social protection (excluding health), but this figure hides important variations with, for example, high-income countries spending on average 16.4 per cent, which is twice as much as upper-middle-income countries (8 per cent), 6 times as much as lower-middle-income countries (2.5 per cent) and 15 times as much as low-income countries (1.1 per cent).

46. There is clear public support for increased spending: three in four people in 34 middle-income and high-income countries would prefer more public spending on education, with support increasing the more unequal the country. While spending on health has increased, only 39 to 63 per cent of the world’s population is expected to be covered by essential health services if current trends continue until 2030.

47. Effective and progressive tax systems can be a powerful tool for combating poverty and inequality. According to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 10.4.2 – which assesses the redistributive impact of fiscal policy on inequality by comparing pre-fiscal and post-fiscal income, as measured by the Gini coefficient – the redistributive impact is highest in high-income countries, where the average reduction in the Gini inequality index is 10 points, while the redistributive effect of fiscal policies in middle- and low-income countries is less effective, with the average reduction only 2.5 points and 1 point, respectively. In developing countries, corporate and personal income tax revenue is low owing to the widespread informal economy, the result of which is a greater reliance on indirect taxes, in particular value added tax, that tend to be regressive. Globally, decision makers need to prioritize more equitable revenue collection. In order to reform tax systems, to make them fairer and

---

more equitable, it necessary to shift towards more progressive forms of taxation that prioritize direct taxation, including of undertaxed sources, such as digital transactions, property, carbon emissions and wealth.

48. Political will to reform national tax policy and administration will be essential to increase domestic revenue. Tax avoidance and tax evasion are major impediments to domestic resource mobilization for social policies and long-term structural reforms that improve the resilience of economies and societies. A group of measures can help to combat tax avoidance and tax evasion, including the promotion of voluntary compliance, closing of loopholes and strengthening of enforcement measures. Likewise, strengthening international corporate tax systems can help to reduce tax avoidance and evasion, as well as harmful tax competition.

49. A further priority area for action concerns the reallocation of public spending towards social policies and public investments that support long-term development. Investments in social protection and health-care systems, human capital, infrastructure and research and development have a positive long-term impact on the resilience of societies, solidarity among people and trust. Reallocating public spending towards social policies and public investments can also boost economic growth and reduce inequality and poverty. For instance, reallocating fossil fuel subsidies to the social sector, introducing progressive taxes and increasing taxes on environmentally harmful goods and health-harming products can have long-lasting impacts that benefit all.

50. Finally, international and regional cooperation also have an important role to play in creating fiscal space for social development, including through the fulfilment of official development assistance commitments to developing countries, issuance of special drawing rights, support for debt management and relief through reform of the international debt architecture, and creation of a more sustainable and resilient international financial architecture.30

B. Extending social protection coverage to all

51. The pandemic further exposed the critical importance of achieving universal social protection. It drew attention to significant gaps in social protection coverage, comprehensiveness and benefit adequacy for many groups. In 2020, 53 per cent of the global population was completely unprotected by any social protection scheme.31 This figure masks important regional differences in coverage rates, which range from 84 per cent in Europe and Central Asia to 44 per cent and 17 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and Africa, respectively.32 While the crisis sparked an unprecedented global social protection response, as countries took steps to extend coverage to hitherto unprotected groups, increase benefit levels and improve delivery mechanisms, many low- and middle-income countries have struggled to mount a proportionate response to counteract the pandemic’s adverse effects on population groups in vulnerable situations.

52. Countries are at a crossroads when it comes to the trajectory of their social protection systems. Rather than pursuing a “low-road” strategy of minimalist provisions, countries should seize the window of opportunity offered by recovery to capitalize on crisis response measures to strengthen their social protection systems and design nationally appropriate floors that ensure a basic level of social protection for all. Building universal, comprehensive, adequate, sustainable and gender-

30 For more information on these points, see A/76/181.
31 Excluding health-care and sickness benefits.
responsive social protection systems will increase people’s resilience to shocks and ensure basic income security across their life course, including through child benefits, maternity benefits, sickness benefits, disability benefits, unemployment benefits and retirement pensions.

53. Particular attention is needed to extend coverage to disadvantaged groups and those in vulnerable situations. This includes women, children, migrant workers, informal workers, poor households, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and older persons. In the case of poor households in rural areas, social protection benefits do not only provide a buffer against income shocks, but they also help them to diversify their livelihood sources and invest in higher risk, higher return on-farm and off-farm activities.33

54. Social protection systems are most effective when they combine contributory and non-contributory schemes, which secure a basic income security for all while increasing the benefits for those who also actively pay into the systems. They are also better adapted to the realities of ageing, changing family structures, different employment situations and new forms of work. In many countries, there is a need to rethink the design of social protection systems and extend protection to informal workers, including through social insurance. This would include adapted mechanisms that allow self-employed workers and other categories of workers that are currently not covered to contribute and effectively access benefits.

55. Universal social protection systems can also support the transition towards more environmentally sustainable economies and societies, as well as the transition from the informal to the formal economy and structural transformations of economies, associated in particular with the digital transformation.

C. Repurposing existing food and agricultural policies and support

56. Countries should reconsider existing policies that are aimed at bolstering food security and nutrition. This would involve examining current food and agricultural policies and rethinking how existing public budgets can be reallocated to make them more cost-effective and efficient in reducing the cost of nutritious foods and increasing the availability and affordability of healthy diets.

57. Globally, government support for food and agriculture amounted to $630 billion per year on average between 2013 and 2018.34 Around 70 per cent of these funds were targeted at individual farmers, through trade and market policies and fiscal subsidies. These policies have helped to stabilize or increase farmers’ incomes and have significantly supported the growth in production and reduction in the price of staple foods, such as cereals, meat and milk. These interventions have played an important role in increasing food security globally. However, by the same token, many of them have crucially affected the availability and affordability of healthy diets. At present, many government interventions distort market prices, harm the environment and hurt small-scale producers and Indigenous Peoples, while failing to support the production of nutritious foods. In high- and upper-middle-income countries, government support for agricultural production tends to prioritize staple foods, dairy and other animal source protein-rich foods. Rice, sugar and various types of meats are the foods most incentivised globally. Conversely, fewer subsidies and less support for nutritious foods, such as fruit, vegetables and pulses, make them less available and less affordable.

---

58. Even with the same level of public resources, Governments can build resilience against future shocks and invest in agrifood systems to make them more equitable and sustainable. Trade and market interventions and fiscal subsidies for producers and consumers can help to improve the availability and affordability of nutritious foods and thereby reduce the cost of healthy diets.\textsuperscript{35} The repurposing of public policies to make healthy diets less costly needs to be evidence-based, involve all stakeholders and comply with the commitments and flexibilities under current World Trade Organization rules.

59. Making healthy diets less costly and more affordable is one piece of the puzzle. Reforms to repurpose food and agriculture support must be accompanied by policies that promote shifts in consumer behaviour towards healthy diets and away from emission-intensive foods, notably animal-based foods. Indeed, about a third of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions is linked to food. Likewise, social protection policies are needed to mitigate the unintended consequences of reforms for population groups in vulnerable situations, such as small-scale farmers. Finally, transforming agrifood systems and increasing agricultural productivity are central to eradicating rural poverty, but it is also necessary to facilitate transitions into non-agricultural employment and improve people’s livelihoods in rural areas.

D. \textbf{Achieving universal access to electricity through increased financing and decentralized solutions}

60. There is a need to increase the pace of progress in improving access to electricity. The High-level Dialogue on Energy, held in 2021, delivered a Global Roadmap for Accelerated SDG 7 Action that provides a way forward in this respect. Insufficient financing is one of the major barriers to achieving global access to electricity. Low demand in remote areas can dissuade private investors from investing in this. In such cases, many projects require public support and the use of concessional and blended financing. An annual investment of $35 billion in power access, namely 2 per cent of current global energy investment, is needed to achieve full electricity access by 2030. Current investments are largely below this level.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, there is a need to provide support to the most remote and poorest populations to ensure affordable access to electricity. Decentralized solutions are crucial to expanding access, especially in rural areas. Under the International Energy Agency Net Zero by 2050 scenario, these solutions are the most affordable way of providing electricity to half of those who require access. They include mini-grids and stand-alone systems, such as solar home systems, which are 90 per cent based on renewable solutions.\textsuperscript{37}

E. \textbf{Achieving quality education for all through inclusive education strategies}

61. Access to quality education for all is crucial to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage. The design and implementation of inclusive education strategies require a whole-of-government approach that tackles the many barriers that disadvantaged learners face in obtaining accessing to education. Collaboration across government departments and levels can support the design of comprehensive programmes as disadvantaged groups and those in vulnerable situations often have complex needs and face multiple barriers to education, including a home environment in which they do not have a quiet place to

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} International Energy Agency, “SDG7: data and projections”.

study, there is no access to electricity, they are responsible for the household chores and care work and their parents are not present or never had the opportunity to have an education themselves. Likewise, government collaboration with non-governmental organizations can help to ensure that education is inclusive and meets quality standards.

62. Social protection programmes are a prime example of the way cross-sectoral collaboration can support inclusion in education. School health and nutrition programmes are in place in some 90 per cent of countries and reflect the cross-cutting challenges to social development. It is crucial that policies are evidenced-based and assessed in terms of their impact on equity, efficiency and effectiveness in ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to learn and develop their full potential.

63. Greater investment in early childhood education and care can significantly contribute to equalizing life chances. Providing the right care, stimulation and nutrition in the first three years of a child’s life is crucial to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and supporting social mobility.

64. Countries are taking steps to tackle discriminatory beliefs and practices that exclude certain groups from obtaining access to quality education. For example, in Latin America, countries have introduced affirmative laws and policies to promote racial equality or better targeting of policies. Globally, around one quarter of all countries now have affirmative action programmes for access to tertiary education.

65. Technology can support learning among remote populations, for example through low-technology tools such as radio and television or more advanced means, including online learning platforms. Massive open online courses can provide populations with limited financial resources or time with access to education. Furthermore, technology, including assistive technologies, can make education more accessible to learners with disabilities and special educational needs. However, the pandemic has shown that remote learning is not a panacea. Many disadvantaged learners find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide and unable to gain access to distance education. This is often owing to the lack of affordability of devices, lack of access to electricity and/or the Internet and lack of digital skills. Closing the digital divide is essential if all learners are to benefit from the many advantages that technologies offer, including in the field of education. Technology can also help to improve learning among disadvantaged students. Many disadvantaged learners enter primary education with knowledge gaps. Technology can help teachers to manage different ability levels in the classroom. Software exercises, which are increasingly powered by artificial intelligence, can adapt to different ability levels and personalize learning, including by adapting to different learning styles and paces. Teachers are therefore being increasingly asked to integrate technology in the classroom and require support in the form of training in digital skills. Teachers require support and training in areas such as digital technologies in education and the classroom, as well as training in inclusion, including in integrating and teaching students with special needs. In this regard, universal design in schools can valuably support access to education for children with disabilities.

66. Legal frameworks can support the goal of inclusive and equitable education. Every year, 12 million girls are married before they reach 18 years of age, thereby severely limiting their chances of accessing and completing education. Today, 117 countries still allow child marriage. Likewise, in least developed countries, one in

39 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Situación de las Personas Afrodescendientes en América Latina y Desafíos de Políticas para la Garantía de Sus Derechos (Santiago, 2017).
four children between 5 and 17 years of age are engaged in child labour, which is detrimental to their health and development. Ratifying the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), of the International Labour Organization and banning child marriage can help to support universal access to education.

V. Conclusion and policy recommendations

67. Despite marked progress since 1995 in meeting the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development, the deceleration in these advances since 2015 and further setbacks since 2020 serve as reminders that progress remains fragile and uneven. The poorest and most vulnerable populations have been disproportionately affected by recent slowdowns and reversals in progress towards the goals of the World Summit.

68. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in many public services, including social protection and health-care and educational systems. The devastating impact of the pandemic also reduced the available fiscal space, thereby limiting the spending power of Governments and forcing them to make difficult choices about how to allocate public funds. Action is urgently needed to get back on track, including a recommitment to the objectives of the World Summit and to the pledge contained in the 2030 Agenda that no one will be left behind.

69. The recovery from the pandemic has provided a window of opportunity to change the current trajectory of development. In an effort to recover better, countries may wish to redesign their long-term socioeconomic policies to build more inclusive, equitable, resilient and sustainable societies, with the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals as a blueprint.

70. As follow-up actions to the World Summit that can help to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Consider the proposal by the Secretary-General to convene a world social summit in 2025 and leverage it as an opportunity to review gaps and progress in advancing a people-centred approach to development, as called for in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and as a means of accelerating action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) Reform tax policies and administration to increase domestic tax revenues, especially through effective and progressive taxation, but also through the reallocation of public spending away from fossil fuel subsidies, environmentally harmful goods and health-harming products towards social policies and public investments that support long-term development and resilience;

(c) Seize the opportunity offered by the pandemic recovery by taking bold action towards achieving universal social protection, including nationally appropriate social protection floors, to ensure a basic level of social security for all. Priority should be accorded to extending coverage to those in vulnerable situations;

(d) Repurpose existing food and agricultural policies and support to make healthy diets more available and affordable for all. This can be done by leveraging trade and market interventions and fiscal subsidies and by strengthening policies that promote a shift in consumer behaviour towards healthy diets and away from emissions-intensive foods;
(c) Step up efforts to achieve universal access to electricity through increased financing and by promoting decentralized solutions for expanding access in rural areas, including mini-grids and stand-alone systems;

(f) Promote quality and affordable education for all by investing in strategies for inclusive education that tackle discriminatory beliefs and practices that disadvantaged learners face. Furthermore, invest in early childhood education and care and leverage digital technologies for remote learning and tailored learning in the classroom;

(g) Adapt policies and regulations as necessary to support decent work and employment growth, by strengthening effective labour market institutions, collective bargaining and social dialogue and by promoting employment protection legislation and employment law, as well as their effective implementation, so that all workers can enjoy labour rights.