



General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 July 2022

Original: English

Seventy-seventh 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 [76/134](#), the Secretary-General emphasizes the need for decisive national actions and international cooperation to eradicate poverty and achieve the goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He examines the multifaceted impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine on social development and underscores the importance of strengthening global solidarity and multilateral cooperation. The Secretary-General calls for the further strengthening long-term social policies to enhance people's capacities for and resilience to future crises, as well as for preserving social spending to support such national policies and strategies to fully implement the 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind. He presents the outcomes of the sixtieth session of the Commission for Social Development and an analysis of policies to address emerging challenges to social development in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He advocates for recommitting to multilateralism to tackle global crises and concludes with policy recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly.

* [A/77/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. At the World Summit for Social Development, Member States committed to eradicating poverty through decisive national actions and international cooperation as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind (see [A/CONF.166/9](#), para. 29). In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they reaffirmed the centrality of the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions to the achievement of sustainable development.

2. The steady progress of the past decades has been halted or reversed owing to the multifaceted and widespread impacts of conflicts, climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which have also exacerbated inequalities. Rising food and fuel prices and slowing economic growth are worsening poverty and could have devastating impacts on a large segment of the world's population. If no effective actions are taken, these challenges could fuel societal polarization, thereby undermining social cohesion.

3. At the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, in 2020, in General Assembly resolution [75/1](#), Member States recognized that only reinvigorated multilateralism, with the United Nations at its centre, could address current and future challenges that are interconnected, and requested the Secretary-General to report back with recommendations to advance our common agenda. In 2021, the Assembly, in its resolution [76/6](#), requested the Secretary-General to engage in broad and inclusive consultation with all Member States and called on its President to initiate a process of follow-up to enable all Member States to begin inclusive intergovernmental consideration of the various proposals, options and potential means of implementation and on ways to take them forward.

4. Following the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda" ([A/75/982](#)), the President of the General Assembly convened the first informal thematic consultations with Member States on 10 and 11 February 2022 to discuss the proposals contained in it under the theme "Accelerating and scaling up the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no one behind". The proposed world social summit was seen by Member States as a useful forum to address critical issues, such as social protection floors, universal health-care coverage, adequate housing, closing the digital divide, education for all, decent work for all and accelerating momentum towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the last five years of the decade of action to deliver those Goals.

II. Challenges to achieving an inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery from the pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Pressing global challenges to social development

5. As countries entered a recovery phase, new COVID-19 variants caused yet another health crisis. The uneven, uncertain and fragile global economic recovery that was underway was compounded by unequal access to vaccines (only 8.5 per cent of the people in low-income countries had been vaccinated against COVID-19 as at January 2022), high inflation rates, disruptions in global value and supply chains and labour markets, and tightening monetary policy. As a result, global recovery is expected to be further delayed throughout 2022. Inequality, already exacerbated during the pandemic, is anticipated to widen even further as rising food and energy prices will disproportionately affect the bottom 40 per cent of the population, whose assets and savings are limited. Under the current circumstances, many countries,

especially those with limited fiscal space and those with heavily indebted low-income or emerging economies, face significant challenges in their efforts to fully implement the 2030 Agenda and attain the Sustainable Development Goals it contains.

6. The multifaceted impacts of the pandemic have pushed millions of people back into extreme poverty with increased food insecurity and malnutrition. This has disproportionately affected those in vulnerable situations. For 2022, between 657 million and 677 million people are predicted to live in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 per person per day). This is an increase of between 75 million and 95 million compared with the pre-pandemic trajectory.¹ In 2021, the year after the start of the pandemic, nearly 40 million more people across 53 countries and territories became acutely food-insecure and in need of urgent assistance, owing mainly to conflict, economic shocks and extreme weather events. In 2021, of the approximately 193 million acutely food-insecure people, around 72 per cent (139 million) were living in countries with conflict; almost 16 per cent (30.2 million) were affected by economic shocks and 12 per cent (23.5 million) were affected by weather extremes.²

7. Climate-induced extreme weather events are among the key factors that have reversed the steady progress in reducing poverty and hunger in the past decades. Their impact on acute food insecurity (starvation and death) has intensified since 2020. For example, persistent drought, rainfall deficits, flooding and cyclones in, among other countries, Ethiopia, Madagascar, South Sudan and Yemen were the main drivers of acute food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, where almost 40 million people were facing acute food insecurity in 2021.³

8. The pandemic overwhelmed global health-care systems and severely disrupted essential health-care services in many countries. A decade of progress in reproductive, maternal and child health was halted or reversed, resulting in a shortened life expectancy and a decline in immunization coverage for the first time in 10 years, and in a rising number of deaths from tuberculosis and malaria (see [E/2022/55](#)).

9. Global labour markets started to recover from the severe rise in unemployment and from the high numbers of people who had left the labour force owing to the pandemic. By mid-2022, pandemic-related restrictions, including workplace closures, had been phased out in most countries around the world, except in East Asia. According to the International Labour Organization, by 2021, full-time job losses had been halved from their peak of 258 million in 2020 to 125 million. That number was reduced further to 52 million in 2022. Yet the number of hours worked worldwide has stalled after initially rebounding to 3.8 per cent below the pre-pandemic level in the first quarter of 2021, which is equivalent to a deficit of 112 million full-time jobs (see figure). Job recovery is projected to deteriorate in the second quarter of 2022 and could further worsen in the course of 2022 as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, high inflation, heightened financial turbulence and the tightening of monetary policy.⁴

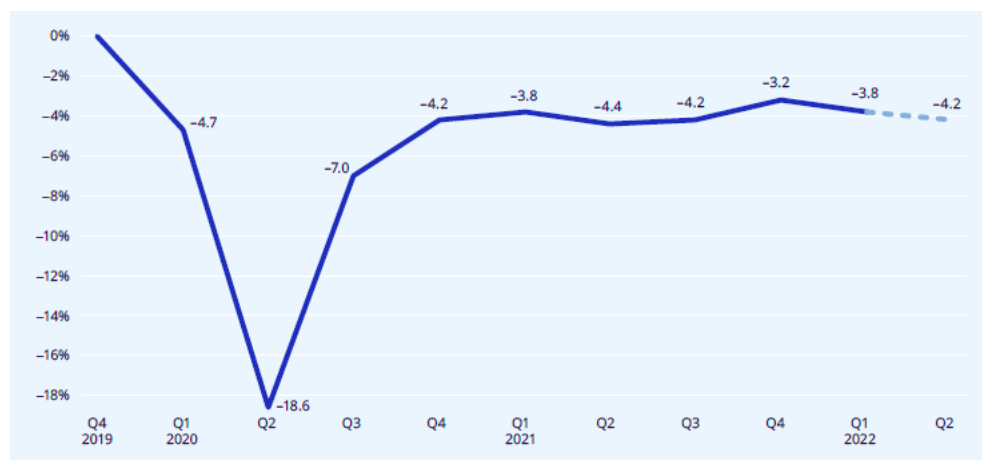
¹ See World Bank Group, “Progress in eradicating poverty and the impact of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic: UN inter-agency expert group meeting, May 16, 2022”, slide presentation. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2022/05/Presentation_Benu-Bidani.pdf.

² See Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2022*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See International Labour Organization (ILO), “ILO Monitor on the world of work, ninth edition”, 23 May 2022.

Recovery in global hours worked



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), “ILO Monitor on the world of work, ninth edition”, 23 May 2022.

Abbreviations: Q1, first quarter; Q2, second quarter; Q3, third quarter; Q4, fourth quarter.

10. In addition, job recovery has been uneven, with high-income countries recovering significantly better than middle-income countries. For example, global labour income surpassed its pre-crisis level by 0.9 per cent in 2021, thanks to a recovery in high-income countries and in China, while in the same year, labour income of three out of five workers worldwide had not yet recovered to the pre-pandemic level.⁵ Furthermore, the global gender employment gap widened during the pandemic. Currently, women work 18.9 hours per week on average, compared with 33.4 hours for men. The overall speed of employment recovery has been slower for women than for men despite the faster-than-expected recovery of informal employment. The reason is that women are more likely to work in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic and have care responsibilities within the family that often delay their re-entry into the labour market.

11. The pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation. While it is true that digital technology has brought tremendous benefits and opportunities, there is also a risk of a widening digital divide, which would further exacerbate existing inequalities and polarize societies (see [E/CN.5/2021/3](#)). This, combined with the uneven recovery, creates fertile ground for social and geopolitical tensions within and among countries, further undermining coordinated efforts to tackle common global challenges. There is a growing concern about the concentration of critical digital assets and capabilities, as well as about certain technologies. For instance, deepfake technology could be exploited for social engineering. Disinformation proliferated in the digital age. These developments could erode trust in institutions, undermine democracy and weaken social cohesion.⁶

B. Impacts of the conflict in Ukraine

12. The humanitarian, economic, financial and social impacts of the conflict in Ukraine are vast and widespread, and the most vulnerable populations and countries are hit hard. As at April 2022, the conflict had resulted in more than 5.3 million refugees (most of them women and children) and an additional 7.7 million internally

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2022, 17th Edition* (Geneva, 2022).

displaced persons, with another 13 million stranded in conflict areas (see [E/2022/55](#)). It has increased food insecurity by displacing farmers and destroying food stocks and agricultural assets while disrupting global food systems and markets.⁷ Because of the transport blockages and economic sanctions, food and fuel prices have soared, which has triggered major economic disruptions, exacerbating inflation and debt crises in many countries. This has happened while many countries are still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic, with increased poverty and inequality, a tightening fiscal space and a higher risk of debt distress (60 per cent of the least developed countries and other low-income developing countries are either in debt distress or at high risk of it, while about 25 per cent of middle-income developing countries remain at high risk).⁸

13. The situation is likely to create a cost-of-living crisis, with escalating price shocks in the global food, energy and fertilizer markets.⁹ The conflict in Ukraine, while affecting almost all countries, is having detrimental consequences for those heavily dependent on imports from the two conflicting countries. The reason is that the Russian Federation and Ukraine are among the most important producers of agricultural commodities in the world and net exporters of key food items, fertilizer, minerals and energy. Together, they represent over 50 per cent of the global supply of sunflower oil and about 25 per cent of the global wheat supply. About 1.6 billion people in 94 countries are predicted to be exposed to at least one of the three dimensions of the crisis (food, energy or finance), of which 1.2 billion live in countries highly vulnerable to all three dimensions. Many are in North Africa and Western and Central Asia, and their number includes the least developed countries and low-income food-deficit countries.¹⁰

14. In an environment where 60 per cent of workers worldwide have lower real incomes or purchasing power than before the pandemic (the average income for the poorest two fifths fell by an estimated 6.7 per cent in 2021),¹¹ the rising cost of living will threaten their economic security, pushing many into poverty. According to the World Bank, for each percentage point increase in food prices, 10 million people are pushed into extreme poverty worldwide.¹² Food insecurity and food shortages will directly hit the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities, increasing the risk of social and civil unrest.

15. Global food prices sharply increased in early 2022. Although down from its peak, the food price index of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for May 2022 was 22.8 per cent higher than that for May 2021.¹³ Shortfalls in exportable food supplies and transport disruptions are expected to further push up food prices over 2022. To make matters worse, more than 20 countries (as at early May 2022) have imposed export restrictions on some food items to protect their

⁷ See General Assembly resolution [76/264](#).

⁸ See *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2022*. (United Nations publication, 2022).

⁹ See United Nations, “Press Conference by Secretary-General António Guterres at United Nations Headquarters”, press release SG/SM/21315, 8 June 2022; see also United Nations, Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, “Global impact of the war in Ukraine: billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation”, brief No. 2, 8 June 2022.

¹⁰ See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine”, information note, update, 10 June 2022.

¹¹ See ILO Monitor.

¹² World Bank, “Joint statement: the heads of the World Bank Group, IMF, WFP and WTO call for urgent coordinated action on food security”, statement, 13 April 2022.

¹³ FAO, “World food situation”, available at www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/.

citizens from hunger and food insecurity.¹⁴ In addition, as the cost of fertilizer has soared, farmers have been forced to scale back their use, which will lead to a reduction in crop yields and spike food prices in the next season or year. For example, the International Rice Research Institute predicts that yields could drop 10 per cent (a loss of 36 million tons of rice), an amount that would feed 500 million people.¹⁵ With a surge in shipping and transport costs, food prices could further increase.

16. The second quarter of 2022 saw monetary tightening by developed countries. In an environment of rapidly rising global debt, in particular public debt, this is predicted to make low-income countries and households particularly vulnerable, as it will increase borrowing costs, undermine debt sustainability and further constrain the fiscal space of, in particular, low-income countries.¹⁶

III. Sixtieth session of the Commission for Social Development

17. The Commission for Social Development is the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up to and review of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development. At its sixtieth session, the Commission adopted two resolutions, on: (a) an inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda; and (b) the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (see [E/2022/26-E/CN.5/2022/9](#)). Both resolutions were subsequently adopted by the Economic and Social Council (Council resolutions [2022/7](#) and [2022/6](#), respectively). The Commission decided that the priority theme for the sixty-first session would be "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".

18. Member States reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda by ensuring that no one would be left behind and reaching the furthest behind first. They emphasized that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions was the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, while recognizing that the pandemic had increased the number of people living in poverty and hunger and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Member States stressed, at this critical moment in the decade of action, the relevance and centrality of the visions, principles and commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development to addressing emerging global challenges. Social policies have a key role to play in addressing the immediate effects of socioeconomic crises and in designing integrated long-term policy frameworks to enable an inclusive and resilient recovery. Member States reaffirmed their strong commitment to continue to implement the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. They expressed appreciation for the role of the Commission in facilitating effective social policies and measures implemented at the national level to combat poverty and hunger during the pandemic.

19. The ministerial forum was held on the theme "Strengthening multilateralism to deliver well-being and dignity for all by addressing food insecurity and the

¹⁴ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Reimagine global food systems to prevent hunger and protect rights", Reliefweb, 20 May 2022.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Elkin and Samuel Gebre (Bloomberg News), "Reimagine global food systems to prevent hunger and protect rights", 1 May 2022.

¹⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World economic situation and prospects as of mid-2022", 18 May 2022.

eradication of poverty, including through the promotion of sustainable food systems”. Ministers across regions participated, presenting national policies and measures being implemented to address food insecurity and the eradication of poverty and emphasizing the need for strengthening multilateralism to ensure inclusive and resilient recovery. Below is a brief summary of the discussions held by the Commission during its sixtieth session.

A. Priority theme “Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda”

1. Poverty and hunger: trends and impact of the pandemic

20. With less than 10 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is not on track to end poverty (Goal 1), hunger and malnutrition (Goal 2) by 2030. The pandemic has not only increased the number of people living in extreme poverty for the first time since 1997, but also led to further impoverishment of those already living in poverty, as highlighted in paragraphs 5 to 11.

21. Similarly, after a steady decline from 2005 to 2014, food insecurity increased by about 41 per cent from 2015 to 2020.¹⁷ Between 720 million and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020, 161 million more than in 2019. More than 3 billion people around the world could not afford a healthy diet in 2017.¹⁸ An additional 1 billion people are at risk of not being able to afford a healthy diet if a further shock were to reduce their incomes by one third.¹⁹ Women and girls are disproportionately affected by hunger, food insecurity and poverty as a result of gender inequality and discrimination. In many countries, girls are twice as likely as boys to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases, and almost twice as many women as men suffer from malnutrition.

22. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society. Low-income families and workers in informal and precarious work have been among the hardest hit by the adverse impacts of the pandemic. Many low-wage, low-skill workers, who typically have very limited access to social protection or none at all, have had to deplete their savings and/or productive assets and have been pushed into poverty. In addition, they have been affected by higher food prices and forced to reduce their food intake and change their diets. Workers in rural areas are more vulnerable to falling into poverty; they are twice as likely to be in informal employment as those in urban areas and are therefore largely excluded from social protection, with little or no savings or liquid assets to mitigate the effects of the crisis. Altogether 80 per cent of the world’s extremely poor lived in rural areas before the pandemic.

23. Those who are in vulnerable situations, particularly women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, have struggled and continue to struggle to sustain their livelihoods and are at higher risk of experiencing poverty, hunger, social exclusion and homelessness. Young people

¹⁷ See FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All* (Rome, 2021).

¹⁸ See FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets* (Rome, 2020); and Our World in Data, “Three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet”, 12 July 2021.

¹⁹ See FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2021: Making Agrifood Systems More Resilient to Shocks and Stresses* (Rome, 2021).

around the globe are suffering long-term consequences of the pandemic, with difficult transitions from education to the labour market and interrupted career paths. School closures not only disrupted education but also halted the school feeding programmes on which many children from poor households depended. Thus, the pandemic profoundly affected the physical and mental well-being and development of children at all levels. As online education and remote learning were used during the pandemic, children from poor households, especially girls, were more likely to lack access to the Internet and/or digital equipment and support, which led to their discontinuing their studies or permanently dropping out, which in turn exposed them to greater risks of malnutrition, child labour, domestic work, child marriage and domestic violence. Students with disabilities were also at higher risk of being left behind, as online learning is not sufficiently adapted to their special needs.

24. Furthermore, the rising cost of living and drops in household income have forced more families to ration food and cut out-of-pocket health expenditures, which causes child malnutrition and stunting and has long-term negative effects on children's health, well-being and capacity to reach their full potential in life.

2. Integrated long-term social policy frameworks

25. Recovery from the pandemic is an opportunity to develop and strengthen integrated long-term policy frameworks to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Such frameworks should be aimed at simultaneously eradicating poverty, hunger and malnutrition, as well as combating inequalities and enhancing people's capabilities and well-being. They should promote accelerated actions at the national, regional and international levels and ensure sustainable livelihoods for all.

26. Investing in human capacities and basic infrastructure is necessary to develop the healthy, skilled and productive workforce that is needed for broad-based growth. It helps individuals to improve their livelihoods and well-being, build their resilience against future shocks and achieve their full potential. Universal policies should be formulated to ensure equal access to basic services and basic infrastructure, in particular access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, health-care services, safely managed drinking water and sanitation, affordable housing, reliable and affordable Internet, social protection and decent employment. Service delivery should be aimed at progressively achieving universal coverage while addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged groups and communities and of those who are in vulnerable situations. To help workers to be more resilient to shocks and adaptable to technological transformation, vocational and skills training and the opportunity to develop skills in the area of information and communications technology are essential.

27. Investing in strong and resilient health-care systems and ensuring access to affordable, quality primary health care is critical to combating poverty and inequality. Countries should continue to strengthen their national health-care systems to achieve universal health-care coverage to ensure that all people, throughout the course of their lives, have access to the health care they need without incurring financial hardship. In addition, investment in human resources in the health-care sector is needed to produce over 18 million additional health-care workers by 2030, in particular in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

28. Fostering economic security and strengthening social protection systems, including nationally appropriate floors, is critical. Recovery from the pandemic provides countries with an opportunity to strengthen social protection systems. Efforts should be accelerated to build nationally appropriate universal social protection systems that are adequate, comprehensive and sustainable, that include nationally defined social protection floors that guarantee at least a basic level of social

security for all, that address vulnerabilities throughout a person's lifetime, improve food security and nutrition outcomes, offer universal health-care coverage and increase resilience to shocks and stressors. Such systems will guarantee basic income security across an individual's life cycle, including child benefits, maternity benefits, sickness benefits, disability benefits, unemployment benefits and an old-age pension. At the same time, efforts should be made to extend the coverage of such systems to all populations, including children, women, subsistence farmers, informal workers and other groups not covered or inadequately covered, and, in parallel, promote the transition of enterprises and workers from the informal into the formal economy.

29. Addressing food insecurity and strengthening agrifood systems, including through a holistic food systems approach, is essential to reducing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, and to promoting well-being for all people throughout their life cycle. To deliver affordable and healthy diets for all people (in other words, safe, sufficient and nutritious food), agrifood systems should be made more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable. This can be achieved by investing in science, agricultural technologies and innovation, including digital innovations, to sustainably increase agricultural productivity. Such technologies and innovations should be adapted to local environments so that they are suited to the needs of small-scale producers and family farmers.

30. There is a need to create off-farm jobs, foster entrepreneurship, diversify the rural economy, boost public and private investments and financing services, increase access to infrastructure and financial resources for farmers, and provide incentives for the private sector to support agrifood systems and rural development. In addition, the productivity of family farmers and small-scale food producers needs to be enhanced by investing in human capital, social protection and rural infrastructure. At the same time, efforts should be made to change food consumption habits to reduce food waste and mobilize international and domestic resources to catalyse agricultural finance and enhance food security. Finally, policy coherence and coordination among government agencies and institutions responsible for social protection, agriculture, food security and nutrition should be strengthened further.

31. International cooperation and solidarity based on joint responsibility and mutual trust are essential to ensure an equitable and resilient recovery. The contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation to poverty eradication and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been well recognized as a complement to North-South cooperation and should be further strengthened as a means of bringing relevant experience and expertise to bear in development cooperation.

3. Emerging issues: national policies and measures implemented by Member States to combat hunger and poverty in times of the coronavirus disease pandemic and beyond – challenges to getting on track towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

32. The socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic have adversely affected countries' economies, labour markets, food security and nutrition outcomes, and have disrupted the lives and livelihoods of all people across regions. Many low-income countries depended on assistance from the international community, including United Nations system agencies. The pandemic exposed vast gaps in social protection coverage, even within high-income countries.

33. Countries across regions have implemented policies and measures to respond to the impacts of the pandemic, in particular to combat hunger, food insecurity and poverty by supporting the agricultural sector; ensuring economic security of people through promoting inclusive growth; strengthening and/or streamlining social protection; strengthening labour policies; investing in basic services, in particular

quality education, health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, and affordable housing to enhance human capacities and the well-being of all people; addressing the specific needs of those who are vulnerable and in vulnerable situations; and mobilizing the necessary financial resources to build back better, including strengthening their social protection systems.

34. Some countries used fiscal packages, including debt restructuring assistance and lower interest rates for rural credit targeted to small and medium-sized producers, while other countries leveraged existing programmes and mechanisms to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on the agricultural sector. Many countries modified in-kind food or voucher schemes and school and child-feeding programmes to address the food insecurity of vulnerable families and communities.

35. In addition, countries provided support to businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, in the sectors particularly hard hit by the pandemic, including tourism, hospitality, fishing and construction, as well as the informal sectors. To increase the disposable income of low-income families, many Governments introduced tax reductions or temporary exemptions on value added tax. Some countries deferred the collection of income tax or reduced or lifted import taxes on basic commodities such as food, medicines, electricity and water, while others instituted debt relief and offered interest-free loans to vulnerable businesses and households.

36. The majority of the measures implemented in response to the pandemic lay in the sphere of social protection. Between 20 March 2020 and 14 May 2021, a total of 3,333 social protection measures were planned or implemented by 222 countries. This has since slowed down to an additional 523 measures taken between May 2021 to January 2022, adding up to a total of 3,856 measures by 223 countries.²⁰ In May 2021, total spending on social protection reached \$2.9 trillion (or 3 per cent of global gross domestic product in 2021), which is 4.5 times higher than spending in the sector during the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009.

37. Social assistance (61 per cent) is the most prevalent form of social protection support across regions, followed by supply-side labour market programmes (20 per cent) and social insurance (or contributory social protection schemes) (19 per cent).²¹ For most countries, cash transfers are the instrument of choice. Most cash transfer schemes have been newly introduced, while existing schemes have been scaled up or adapted by offering additional benefits (vertical expansion) and expanding coverage to newly vulnerable households (horizontal expansion). Some countries simplified the delivery of social assistance, bringing it closer to the beneficiaries. Countries also leveraged digital technologies to identify and enrol beneficiaries, deliver cash transfers and expand their social register and national identification systems.

38. Many countries have expanded their social insurance programmes by waiving or subsidizing social security contributions and offering unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, pensions and health-care insurance support. In countries where unemployment insurance schemes existed, those who lost their jobs benefitted from significant and rapid income support. On the other hand, in low-income countries, most workers were not covered by social insurance. Many countries strengthened health benefits to ensure income security for those who are unable to work because of the pandemic.

39. Countries introduced active labour market policies and labour regulations. They adjusted labour regulations, adopted training measures, shortened work hours and

²⁰ World Bank, "Social protection and jobs responses to COVID-19: a real-time review of country measures", version No. 16, 2 February 2022.

²¹ ILO, "World employment and social outlook: trends 2022", 17 January 2022.

introduced job retention schemes (including wage subsidies) to incentivize companies to keep their employees, which would let them bounce back faster. Some countries targeted vulnerable sectors and workers or jobseekers with wage subsidies, while others covered all or most sectors of the economy.

40. The pandemic significantly challenged countries in their efforts to progress towards universal access to basic services and infrastructure, in particular access to quality education, quality health-care services, safe drinking water, safe sanitation, public transport, affordable housing, and reliable and affordable Internet. Since the start of the pandemic many countries have injected significant additional resources into their health-care sectors. Some have used digital technologies to improve and scale up distance learning and to build more open, inclusive and flexible education systems after the pandemic. Countries took steps to maintain access to clean water during the pandemic so as to uphold sanitation and hygiene standards. Countries established eviction moratoriums, rent stabilization measures and tax moratoriums for landowners.

41. Policymakers and experts made policy recommendations in four main areas: consolidating the gains from the expansion of social protection measures during the pandemic; using targeted social policies in addition to universal policies to address the specific needs of those in vulnerable situations; continuing the expansion of digital opportunities to leave no one offline; and engaging all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society partners representing all population groups, in the socioeconomic recovery from the pandemic.

B. Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development

42. The Commission reviewed the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in Africa and the response given to it by African countries and their partners, including the United Nations system. The pandemic has reversed hard-won development gains, such as poverty reduction, and exacerbated inequalities that hamper the ability of African countries to be resilient to external shocks and achieve sustainable development objectives. To recover better from the pandemic and to accelerate inclusive growth during the United Nations decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, African countries need to continue to prioritize policies and strategies that improve the health-care sector, eradicate extreme poverty, combat inequality, in particular gender inequality, and provide quality education and decent jobs for all. In addition, they need to invest in data collection and registries and in digital infrastructure and technologies to create jobs, transition to the formal economy and close the digital divide. Finally, they need to prioritize investments in social protection and aim for universal social protection in order to build preparedness for future shocks, including climate shocks and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals and aspirations formulated in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

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

43. Research and analysis of good practices followed by Member States shows that an array of policies is needed to promote inclusive and sustainable social development. They come under five headings: promoting equal opportunity; maximum investment in human capability; fairer sharing of risks; fairer sharing of costs through progressive and broad-based taxation; and economic diversification.

Promoting equal opportunity

44. Equality of opportunities is central to a just society. We need to build societies that provide a fair chance for everyone. Yet too often, the family and socioeconomic background that a child is born into will determine his/her life chances. Poverty, inequality and deprivation are perpetuated from one generation to the next through structural factors. To break these intergenerational cycles and achieve fairer social outcomes, Governments need to prioritize investment in targeted remedial actions for disadvantaged groups in a range of areas. For instance, to support the reintegration of early school-leavers, schools need to take active steps to create a level playing field, including by engaging with parents to help to support children's literacy,²² adapting learning resources to teach at the right level and improve learning outcomes,²³ strengthening ties between the school and the community to broaden the networks of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, offering extracurricular activities outside regular school hours and establishing second-chance schools (see A/76/177). It has been shown in that context that having equal access to education positively affects girls and women beyond education. Moreover, to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty, countries should prohibit discrimination on grounds of socioeconomic disadvantage, a type of discrimination that continues to plague equal access to health care, education, housing and employment.²⁴ In Ireland, for instance, a discussion is ongoing to amend existing equality and anti-discrimination legislation by adding a prohibition on discrimination on grounds of disadvantaged socioeconomic status.

Maximum investment in human capability

45. Countries need to reverse capital losses incurred by school closures during the pandemic by investing in quality primary and secondary education for all. Several policies have been implemented to support educational systems during and beyond the crisis to prevent further learning losses. For instance, in Botswana, engaging families during lockdowns with text messaging and phone calls has supported children's learning. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the newly launched national tutoring programme has provided catch-up programmes for disadvantaged pupils. In Nigeria, Edo State launched the initiative EdoBEST@Home and used public-private partnerships to provide a mobile-device based remote learning programme at no costs to students or teachers. Some countries have supported re-enrolment campaigns. One such example is Togo, where back-to-school media campaigns have meant that 98 per cent of students in primary and lower-secondary schools have returned. Other countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, have instituted conditional cash transfers to boost re-enrolment.²⁵ As pupils return to school, countries should invest in assessing current learning levels to design learning activities in line with needs and boost progress. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank advise that countries establish a learning recovery programme that includes evidence-based strategies to accelerate learning.²⁶ Such efforts fundamentally require that teachers are supported and have the skills and competencies to implement such measures.

²² See FLN Hub, "Engaging parents to overcome reading poverty (India)".

²³ See FLN Hub, "Teaching at the right level".

²⁴ See ATD Fourth World, "Dignity for all in practice: overcoming poverty-based discrimination". Available at www.atd-fourthworld.org/overcoming-poverty-based-discrimination-2/.

²⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Bank, *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*, 2021.

²⁶ Ibid.

46. Investing in people's capabilities and equalizing life chances also requires greater investment in early childhood education and care, and may be supported by maternity benefits and universal child benefits. Providing the right nutrition, care and stimulation in the first three years of a child's life is crucial to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty; it is one of the most effective policies to support social mobility and equalize life chances. Similarly, the increasing length of careers and the rapid increase in the pace of digital transformation have increased the need to prioritize lifelong learning and reskilling throughout life. Education can strengthen people's employability in a rapidly changing labour market.

Fairer sharing of risks

47. The world is a riskier place for poor families and those in vulnerable situations. In high-income countries, many risks faced throughout one's life cycle are taken on by the State in conjunction with the private sector, such as risks that are linked to old age, ill health, unemployment, widowhood and disability. The same applies to support for child-rearing and maternity. While the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy remain a challenge, the aim of the modern welfare state is to redistribute resources across the life cycle and across socioeconomic status groups. However, in many developing countries, the State has a more limited role and many such risks are taken on by the individual and his/her family. Thus, the family that one is born into becomes a crucial determinant of resilience to risks.

48. More recently, in advanced economies, labour market transformations, growing informality and new forms of employment that have been enabled by digital technology have been placing a greater risk burden on the individual and driving economic insecurity. This has affected social protection in many areas, such as health-care benefits, health-care protection, pension entitlements and unemployment support. In developing countries, high levels of informal employment and excessive health-care costs are major causes of income insecurity. In 2018, in low- and lower-middle income countries, 40 per cent of total health-care spending was out of pocket. Policies are failing to keep up.²⁷ Governments need to readjust this imbalance by supporting the formalization of work in developing countries and mandating that workers' rights apply across all forms of employment including gig work, contract work, informal employment and temporary forms of employment, while retaining the benefits of flexibility.

49. Despite the unprecedented social protection response sparked by the pandemic, deep-seated inequalities and important gaps persist in the coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy of social protection across all countries. Countries need to seize the opportunity provided by the pandemic to ensure that risks are shared more fairly and that there is universal social protection by reinforcing social protection policies (guided by international social security standards); closing coverage and adequacy gaps (in particular for women, informal workers and migrants); and ensuring adequate protection for all, including workers in all types of employment, through a combination of contributory and non-contributory schemes, including social insurance and tax-financed benefits.²⁸ Linkages between social protection and health-care policies should be further strengthened, including by setting nationally defined social protection floors that ensure universal access to essential health care and basic income security.

²⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "A new global deal must promote economic security", policy brief No. 90, 29 January 2021.

²⁸ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020-22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – In Pursuit of a Better Future* (Geneva, 2021).

Fairer sharing of costs through progressive and broad-based taxation

50. The devastating impact of the pandemic on public balance sheets is threatening Governments' financial capacity to realize the ambition of the World Summit for Social Development. Governments should consider the equity of their fiscal policies in taxation and spending. Doing so requires political will to reform national tax policy and administration in order to tackle tax avoidance and evasion (by strengthening their capacity for tax policy design, administration and enforcement), scale up international tax cooperation and support efforts at formalization. Prioritizing progressive tax systems and expenditure can help to build fairer societies. In developed countries, on average, fiscal policy offsets one third of income inequality (before tax and transfer), with 75 per cent of the offset coming from transfers.²⁹ However, since the 1980s, tax progressivity has consistently fallen in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.³⁰ In developing countries, greater reliance on more regressive indirect taxes (including sales taxes and value added tax) means that fiscal redistribution is much more limited. Tackling informality and raising direct taxes – including corporate income tax, personal income tax and various types of wealth tax – if effectively designed and administered, can support greater fiscal redistribution within society.³¹

Economic diversification

51. For many developing countries, supporting economic diversification – and reducing overreliance on commodity exports, tourism and imports of manufactured goods – is an important avenue for tackling inequality and reducing poverty. In many low- and middle-income countries, social spending has been tied to commodity price volatility. For instance, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the commodity boom supported a large decrease in poverty and inequality from 2000 to 2014.³² However, when the commodity boom ended, many countries saw a drop in public investments in social services, conditional cash transfers and infrastructure. Economic diversification into more complex products can help to create and distribute more wealth across society by creating more and better-quality jobs – including formal and skilled jobs – and expanding the range of available occupations. Diversification can also stabilize and improve the resilience of tax and foreign exchange revenues that fund social programmes and policies.³³ Private-sector-driven diversification can be supported by integrated public policies. Such policies include public investments in infrastructure, a national policy framework that supports a transparent and stable business and investment environment, and labour market and education policies that support the supply of skilled labour, the accumulation of human capital in strategic industries and the relocation of workers away from declining sectors.

²⁹ See *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2019* (United Nations publication).

³⁰ See International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Fiscal Monitor: Tackling Inequality* (Washington, D.C., October 2017).

³¹ For a more in-depth review of domestic resource mobilization to preserve or increase social spending, see [A/75/216](#).

³² See Ravi Balakrishnan and Frederik Toscani, "How the commodity boom helped tackle poverty and inequality in Latin America", IMF Blog, 21 June 2018.

³³ See Amir Lebdioui, "Inequality trends, constraints, and ways forward: Latin America", 16 May 2022. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2022/05/Presentation_-_Amir-Lebdioui.pdf.

V. Strengthening multilateral cooperation to tackle emerging challenges, including increased poverty and inequality

52. Not all challenges can be addressed at the national level. Many challenges are global in nature and thus require global solutions, collective action and international solidarity. Multilateralism stands for more than cooperation between States to regulate global affairs; multilateralism is a commitment to the idea of a common destiny in an interconnected world, the search for shared progress and adherence to the rule of law, with the United Nations at its core. Multilateral arrangements have brought rules and standards to administer air safety, international shipping, the mail and the Internet.³⁴ Collective leadership and ambition are at the heart of international agreements such as the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Multilateral arrangements have saved lives, supported economic and social progress, set and upheld international legal and human rights norms, secured vital freedoms for workers, women, children, persons with disabilities and refugees, and helped to prevent the descent into global conflagration and the scourge of war. Multilateralism has also supported humanitarian action. The United Nations and partner organizations aim to assist 183 million people who are the most in need across 63 countries.³⁵ Multilateralism through the United Nations has established mechanisms such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals to help Member States along their path towards inclusive and sustainable development.

53. The need for collective action for a common purpose has increased in urgency and scale. The world is facing unprecedented global transformations and challenges that can only be tackled collectively. They range from pandemic preparedness to widening inequalities, an extreme increase in wealth concentration,³⁶ the digitalization of economies and societies, unresolved conflicts, humanitarian crises and migration, the need to contain nuclear proliferation, combat terrorism and extremism and combat cybercrime, as well as the need to counter climate change and implement adaptation and mitigation measures. Moreover, global challenges are increasingly interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Global economic, social and environmental challenges stretch beyond the confines of single issues and have knock-on effects in other areas. The past decades have taught us that our destinies are closely interwoven. To improve the provision of a broader set of global public goods and governance of the global commons, the world needs enhanced multilateral governance.

54. Yet, precisely when the need for collective action is growing, challenges to multilateralism abound. The rise of unilateralism, isolationism, protectionism, authoritarianism, populism (harnessing racial and religious prejudice) is challenging the rules-based international order.³⁷

55. The world needs reinvigorated and strengthened multilateralism that supports social development. Multilateralism has evolved significantly since the United Nations was founded and continues to do so. Below are some principles that Member

³⁴ See Elizabeth Cousens, “Why I won’t apologize for using the word ‘multilateralism’”, United Nations Foundation, 24 August 2018.

³⁵ See United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022* (Geneva, 2021).

³⁶ See Lucas Chancel and others, *World Inequality Report 2022* (World Inequality Laboratory, 2021).

³⁷ See United Nations, “Speakers call for reinvigorated multilateralism, stronger diplomacy to address global crises, as General Assembly marks international day”, press release GA/12140, 24 April 2019.

States should consider in the process of revitalizing multilateralism in the field of social development and beyond.

56. First, reinvigorated multilateralism in the field of social development must be networked and inclusive, anchored within the United Nations (see [A/75/982](#)). When the Charter of the United Nations was written, multilateralism related to cooperation among a limited number of States. Today, a broader range of State and non-State actors are participating in global affairs, including in the field of social development. Effective multilateralism that works for everyone should involve all relevant stakeholders. The United Nations should act as a trusted platform for collaboration between a growing number and diversity of actors. For example, solutions to the challenges of eradicating poverty, promoting social inclusion and tackling inequalities are increasingly dependent on the active involvement of the private sector and civil society actors such as academia, researchers, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, the philanthropic community, the private sector, local and grass-roots organizations, and women and youth groups, which should therefore be included in discussions, commitments and accountability mechanisms. Similarly, parliaments and local and regional governments are central to such inclusive approaches; the voluntary local reviews of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals are a testament to this. International cooperation on tax matters is a critical component of resource mobilization to finance efforts to reduce inequality and to eradicate poverty and hunger. The private sector needs to be accountable as one of the important actors in today's multilateralism. The private sector can commit to responsible innovation and to designing and promoting universal access to digital technologies. It can support business models that champion social impact and accountability within the local community.

57. Second, there is a need to ensure that multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, are transparent, effective and agile. Several design elements could be considered. For instance, consideration could be given to designing optimal cooperation between regional and multilateral organizations to achieve greater efficiency in global governance.³⁸ A balance between complementarity and subsidiarity could allow countries to harness the benefits of regional cooperation (for instance, being nimbler in responding to local challenges) while avoiding certain of their limitations (for instance, a limited ability to tackle global challenges). Another consideration is that multilateral networks could be flexible, giving rise to the possibility of variable participation, where small "mini-lateral" groups working on specific issues could grow over time to encompass more actors (see [A/75/982](#)). Similarly, multilateral cooperation needs to be more coordinated and work across the three pillars of the United Nations. Responses currently remain too fragmented. Multilateral cooperation needs to go beyond traditional siloes, such as peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian action. Social development cannot be seen in isolation. Indeed, conflict, State fragility and climate change are compounding factors in the recent increase in global poverty. Finally, a balance could be found between voluntary and binding actions to achieve results, including in international law, as well as mutual accountability and learning frameworks, including peer review and methods of sharing goods practices.

58. Third, the financing divide is curtailing the ability of many developing countries to invest in a sustainable and inclusive recovery. A variety of solutions are possible, for instance, creating a new global liquidity insurance mechanism that could expand

³⁸ See Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, "Regional cooperation: a necessary complement to global multilateralism", in *Essays on a 21st Century Multilateralism that Works for All*, Brahim S. Coulibaly and Kemal Derviş, eds, (Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., February 2022).

the financial safety net to reach a larger share of the world's population.³⁹ Likewise, the risk of a sovereign debt crisis across low-income countries has sparked a discussion about a framework for orderly debt restructuring.⁴⁰ Similarly, there have been calls for purpose-driven funds that are both robust and agile. For instance, a large-scale fund with the overarching purpose of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030,⁴¹ or a global solidarity fund to support countries in establishing national social protection systems or tackling climate change. Steps are being taken to establish such purpose-driven funds or mechanisms. For instance, September 2021 saw the creation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for a Just Transition, the aim of which is to channel national and international, public and private, financial and technical support to create 400 million decent jobs in the care and in green and digital economies and extend social protection floors to over 4 billion people not currently covered.

VI. Conclusion and policy recommendations

59. With the lingering effects of the pandemic, widening inequalities, the intensified impact of climate change and ongoing conflicts including in Ukraine, the world is now facing multiple and interlinked global crises in the areas of food, energy and finance. These simultaneous crises have caused major economic disruption, increased social tensions and diverted policy attention and priorities away from medium- and long-term development aims such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress made thus far in social development has been halted or reversed, putting the achievement of the Goals by 2030 at great risk.

60. Action is urgently needed to accelerate an inclusive recovery so as to further advance social development and accelerate the implementation of the Goals in all countries, while leaving no one behind. A recommitment to multilateralism and to strengthening international cooperation is necessary to forge consensus on a comprehensive and effective response to the emerging crises, using the 2030 Agenda as a roadmap and building on the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

61. As follow-up actions to the World Summit to accelerate progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Countries should continue to invest in people's capacities, in particular through quality education, including early childhood education and lifelong learning, and affordable quality health-care services, which are necessary to enable inclusive and sustained growth, eradicate poverty and hunger, reduce inequalities and enhance the well-being of all. Investing in basic infrastructure and services, including schools, safe water, sanitation and hygiene systems, hospitals and other medical facilities, is critical to enhancing people's capabilities and resilience to future crises. Countries should make every effort to safeguard and further increase social spending to fully implement the 2030 Agenda;

(b) While efforts are being made to progressively achieve universal access to basic services and social protection, targeted policies and measures should be

³⁹ See Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly and Eswar Prasad, "A new proposal for the G-20 to strengthen the global financial safety net", (Brookings Institution, 27 September 2021).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Homi Kharas, John W. McArthur and Dennis Snower, "From vertical funds to purpose-driven funds: a new approach to multilateralism" in Coulibaly and Derviş (eds.), *Essays on a 21st Century Multilateralism*.

implemented to address the specific needs of disadvantaged communities and groups, including women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, to achieve fairer social outcomes so that no one is left behind;

(c) Investing in the capacities of women and girls is central to reducing poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition and inequalities, as well as to achieving higher productivity and boosting social returns in terms of health, lower infant mortality and the well-being of their families. Countries and their development partners should pursue accelerated actions to close gender gaps and ensure full and equal access for girls and women to education, health-care and social protection, and access to employment and decent work, recognizing that there has been a setback in gender equality during the pandemic;

(d) To recover from the pandemic and prepare for future crises, international communities and multilateral institutions should take coherent and coordinated actions and innovative measures to promote vaccine equity, build better health systems and improve early warning and monitoring systems for pandemic preparedness at the global, regional and national levels;

(e) To enable a just and inclusive digital transformation, effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, led by Governments and in partnership with the science, technology and innovation communities and with academia, civil society, the private sector and multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, should be promoted. Such partnerships should be aimed at closing the digital divide, achieving universal Internet connectivity and promoting responsible and inclusive digital governance;

(f) Countries should commit to reinvigorating and strengthening multilateralism to collectively address global challenges and to support countries in need in their efforts to enable an inclusive and resilient recovery, including through mobilizing resources to strengthen their education, health-care and social protection systems and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change. Priority actions for reinvigorated and strengthened multilateralism to foster social development for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals could include strengthening international tax cooperation and debt management and relief; identifying new financing options and direct funding for the Goals; and creating and supporting innovative purpose-driven global solidarity funds to support countries in fighting extreme poverty, establishing adequate, comprehensive, and sustainable social protection systems, or fighting, mitigating, and adapting to the effects of climate change.
