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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
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**

**Note by the Secretariat**

#### *Summary*

Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/18, the Commission for Social Development has included the agenda item “Emerging issues” in its programme of work since the 2007–2008 review and policy cycle. Under that item, the Commission addresses current issues affecting social development that require urgent consideration and new cross-cutting issues in the context of evolving global development challenges. The present note provides substantive background information to the Commission for Social Development on the theme chosen by the Bureau of the sixty-first session of the Commission, “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”.

The present note contains an assessment of the individual and interlinked social impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, ongoing regional conflicts, unabating climate change, the pessimistic global economic outlook and the current policies and measures taken by Member States to overcome them through the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the note, the Secretariat highlights the scaling up by Governments of supportive socioeconomic policies, including expanded social protections, as well as their use of fiscal measures and leveraging of digital technology. The Secretariat concludes that Governments should leverage the opportunity presented by recovery efforts to build on the successes of and lessons

\* E/CN.5/2023/1.



learned from the short-term measures taken to develop medium- to long-term policies and programmes. The Secretariat further emphasizes the importance of international cooperation and solidarity in addressing the current multifaceted global challenges.

## I. Introduction

1. Member States, especially developing countries, continue to face unprecedented crises brought on by the lingering effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, compounded by fallout from the war in Ukraine, unabating climate change and the global economic slowdown. Those intersecting crises made the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development harder to achieve, especially for low-income developing countries with inadequate resources, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, impeding progress in social development and even reversing trends of progress in the areas of poverty eradication and hunger reduction.

2. Those obstacles notwithstanding, countries have taken proactive measures to overcome the challenges in a bid to accelerate recovery and progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States have mobilized social policy in accordance with their national needs and circumstances to mitigate and overcome the negative socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of those initiatives contained measures to address the specific needs of people who have been most affected, including women, older persons, young people, persons with disabilities, people living in poverty, Indigenous Peoples and those in vulnerable employment situations who do not have social protection.

3. Drawing from information presented by Member States in their voluntary national reviews in 2021 and 2022, in the present note, the Secretariat provides a sampling of efforts by Member States to counter the social impacts of multifaceted crises, including targeted measures to support people in vulnerable situations, combat multidimensional poverty and reduce hunger and food insecurity; to protect jobs and support enterprises for inclusive recovery; to leverage digital technology for education and public health; and to overcome the global challenges of the economic slowdown, conflict and climate change.

## II. Multifaceted crises and their social impacts

### A. Continued amplification of negative socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects, especially for developing countries with less access to resources

4. Adverse socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that exacerbate poverty, hunger and inequalities continue to afflict many countries, posing more challenges to rapid recovery and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Serious challenges to social protection systems and public finance, especially in developing countries, remain and, in the case of low-income indebted countries, worsened, impeding the achievement of interlinked Sustainable Development Goals.

5. The pandemic has strained essential health services in all countries and impeded progress towards the achievement of health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Inclusive and sustained recovery will require reinvesting in existing health services and systems and will need to be boosted by efforts to fully implement the health-related Goals.

6. The lingering negative impacts of COVID-19 go beyond public health-related fields. The pandemic has caused a rise in poverty and extreme poverty. The world's extreme poverty rate – the proportion of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day – increased from 8.3 per cent in 2019 to 9.2 per cent in 2020, instead of decreasing to a projected 7.8 per cent had the pandemic not happened. This represents the first

increase in extreme poverty since 1998 and the largest since 1990, pushing an additional 93 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. The rollback in poverty reduction has been worse than the global average in the least developed countries, as they depend highly on tourism, remittances and external capital flows to sustain jobs and income. Progress made towards ending extreme poverty has been reversed by three to four years at the global level, and by eight to nine years in low-income countries.<sup>1</sup>

7. The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted distribution of agricultural inputs, negatively affecting agricultural production. The distribution of agricultural products and food was also disrupted, worsening food insecurity, especially in poor countries and for poor people. Developing countries and poor families are less capable of weathering economic and food insecurities. Poor households often have to sell productive assets or use up savings to make ends meet. The next generation in those households will suffer long-term consequences on their cognitive and physical development as a result of undernutrition and hunger. That will worsen inequality in health, nutrition and education outcomes.

8. The disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, disadvantaged and marginalized social groups and people in vulnerable situations have exposed and reinforced existing inequalities. 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.

9. Education has also been negatively affected. Almost 1.6 billion students around the world were affected by school closures induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Even short disruptions to a child's schooling have significant negative effects on their learning that can be long-lasting. Those effects will be most pronounced for children from low-income households. Although schools have reopened for in-person teaching, the lingering negative impact of the pandemic on learning still needs to be addressed, with special attention paid to the children often left furthest behind. Otherwise, the longer-term negative effects of the pandemic on low-income and vulnerable households and children could cancel out other efforts to break the generational transfer of poverty and inequality.

## **B. Developing countries and poor people most affected by climate change and natural disasters**

10. Climate change and related increases in extreme weather events are among the factors driving a global rise in hunger, food insecurity and poor nutrition, as fisheries, crops and livestock may be destroyed or become less productive owing to those events. Climate impacts are also damaging health as a result of air pollution, disease, extreme weather events, forced displacement, pressures on mental health and increased hunger and poor nutrition. Every year, environmental factors take the lives of around 13 million people, as changing weather patterns expand diseases and extreme weather events increase deaths and make it difficult for health-care systems to keep up.<sup>3</sup>

11. Climate change and poverty coexist in a vicious cycle. Poverty makes people more exposed to, and less able to withstand, the impacts of climate change and natural

<sup>1</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/goal-01>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/covid-19-school-closures-fueled-big-learning-losses-especially-disadvantaged>.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change](http://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change).

and human-caused disasters. At the same time, the impacts of climate change on food security, and the creation of loss and damage, can increase and deepen poverty. That vicious cycle contributes to worsening inequality within and between countries. Although they contribute the least to climate change, accounting for less than one tenth of global greenhouse gas emissions, 74 of the world's poorest countries suffer the most from climate change, having been hit by nearly eight times as many natural disasters over the past decade relative to the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

### **C. Developing countries left exposed to cascading debt crises owing to global economic slowdown and inadequate financial support**

12. Coming out from the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy was expected to slow down in 2022 and 2023, owing to the lingering negative effects of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, combined with fast interest rate increases and fiscal tightening in advanced economies. The world economy was projected to grow 3.1 per cent in 2022 and to maintain the same growth rate in 2023.<sup>5</sup> With uncertainty regarding the conflict in Ukraine and additional interest rate hikes in developed countries, a further deceleration in global economic growth, and even a recession, is also possible.

13. A decline in tax revenues and a high debt financing burden have hindered many developing countries' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as their fiscal space to mount necessary public programmes to protect people and jobs has been very limited, while developed countries have implemented stimulus packages equivalent to 18 per cent of their gross domestic product.

14. Rising interest rates, a global economic slowdown and a possible recession, combined with fallout from the war in Ukraine, are worsening the debt crisis in many developing countries. Before the war, three in five of the poorest countries were at high risk of or already in debt distress, and one in four middle-income countries were at high risk of a fiscal crisis. Rising energy and food prices increased pressures on the fiscal and external balances of commodity importers. Many of those countries had to cut back on development spending, which undermined their ability to cope with future shocks. The cascading debt crisis is impeding the ability of countries to make the necessary investment in sustainable development, resulting in a 20 per cent increase in the unmet financing needs for key Sustainable Development Goal sectors.<sup>6</sup>

### **D. Slowdown in recovery from the pandemic due to conflict**

15. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has triggered a large-scale humanitarian crisis. With rising prices and volatility in energy markets as its consequences, as well as significant price increases in grains, fertilizers and other agricultural products, especially for those exported by the Russian Federation and Ukraine, it has also exacerbated pandemic-induced supply disruptions and financial difficulties that many countries and households face.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://blogs.worldbank.org/climatechange/when-poverty-meets-climate-change-critical-challenge-demands-cross-cutting-solutions>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council, "World economic situation and prospects as of mid-2022" (E/2022/60), 18 May 2022. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development forecasts a slight deceleration of global economic growth in 2023 (see <https://unctad.org/tdr2022>).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The great finance divide", policy brief No. 134, 13 June 2022.

16. Some 1.7 billion people in the world, living in 107 economies, are severely exposed to at least one of the three categories of fallout from the conflict: rising food prices, rising energy prices and tightening financial conditions.<sup>7</sup>

17. For developing countries that depend on imports to meet their populations' food and energy needs, rising prices, debt burdens and higher interest rates limit their Government's ability to weather the changes in global markets. In all countries, high food and fuel prices and tightening financial conditions reinforce each other and thus contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, and inequality.

18. Those developments have dragged down growth in many of the world's economies and in those of the majority of developing countries. The combined effects of the lingering impacts of the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine are expected to lead an additional 75 million to 95 million people into extreme poverty by the end of 2022, compared with pre-pandemic projections.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. Good practices in policies and strategies by Member States to address the negative impact on social development to fully implement the 2030 Agenda<sup>9</sup>**

19. Despite tremendous challenges, Member States, in accordance with their own particular needs and situations, have made great efforts to address the social impacts of these multifaceted crises. They have continued to implement policies and practical programmes to best of their abilities, through efforts that have resulted in progress in many areas.

#### **A. Scaling up supportive social economic policies to counter the immediate social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises**

##### **1. Action to step up support for vulnerable populations through expanded social protection measures**

20. To provide social assistance to those vulnerable to the social and economic effects of COVID-19, cash transfer measures were implemented by many Governments through existing social protection programmes. In Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, the Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Sudan and Tunisia, there has been an increase in cash transfers to poor and vulnerable households, using existing social protection programmes to provide increased social assistance (E/CN.5/2022/5). In Egypt, the Ahalina presidential initiative provides a monthly grant of 500 Egyptian pounds (about \$31.77)<sup>10</sup> for workers whose livelihoods are severely affected by the crisis. Ahalina is a community partnership initiative that is part of efforts to support lower-income families and informal workers affected by COVID-19. In Malawi, a four-month lump-sum payment was disbursed under the Social Cash Transfer Programme, which is targeted at the rural ultra-poor and labour-constrained households.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://news.un.org/pages/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UN-GCRG-Brief-1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/pandemic-prices-and-poverty>.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes, all Member State examples given in the present note are from the voluntary national reviews presented at the 2021 and 2022 sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

<sup>10</sup> Estimated equivalents provided in United States dollars are as at the time of writing the present report.

21. In Kyrgyzstan, the Cash Plus initiative, which was introduced to strengthen the impact of the national cash transfer programme, increased and diversified food production and boosted income-generating activities. In addition to monthly payments, families who joined a contract under the Cash Plus model were provided with production support options based on beneficiary profiles, taking into account agroenvironmental conditions and local market needs. As a result, 74 per cent of households involved in the initiative increased their agricultural productivity and 90 per cent improved their dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes.

22. Coverage of existing social protection programmes has also been expanded by identifying and enrolling new beneficiaries. New households in Nigeria were enrolled in the National Social Safety Nets Project and became eligible for regular social assistance and COVID-19 emergency relief. By building a national social register and coordinating, refining and integrating social safety net programmes into social protection systems, consistency and policy coherence were enhanced. In Brazil, the Bolsa Família programme was expanded to additional beneficiaries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Households eligible for the Bolsa Família programme receive a monthly income transfer based on their household income and composition.<sup>11</sup> Peru instituted a second Universal Family Bonus, targeting families living in poverty. This is a subsidy for families living in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty in urban and rural areas, as a measure to provide economic protection for vulnerable households against impact of the pandemic. Finland, a country that had already established a comprehensive, agile and sustainable social protection system before the COVID-19 crisis, made basic adjustments to the existing system in response to the crisis, mostly with regard to food insecurity.

23. To ensure that the most vulnerable have access to health care related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments adjusted national insurance schemes. In Morocco, the National Medical Assistance Programme, a non-contributory health insurance scheme for vulnerable households covering 20 per cent of the population, was adapted to offer income compensation for quarantine periods. The Programme was also expanded to cover informal workers who lost their livelihoods. Rwanda made changes to its community-based health insurance scheme, to improve access for poor people, and removed the waiting period between registration and eligibility for medical services.

24. Some Governments also instituted changes in their legislative framework to improve the functioning of their national social protection systems. In Antigua and Barbuda, the Social Protection Act was established to create a more robust institutional and administrative framework. A Social Protection Board and a Social Protection Commission have been established, with clear roles and responsibilities for strengthening the coordination of social protection programmes.

25. To reach additional vulnerable people affected by the social and economic effects of COVID-19, some Governments deployed digital technologies to support the identification and enrolment of beneficiaries, as well as the disbursement of cash transfers. In Colombia, a new requirement for individuals to have a bank account in which to receive pandemic-related aid has resulted in an exponential increase in people opening deposit accounts for the first time, enabled through collaboration between the public sector, banks and financial technology firms. Pakistan leveraged digital platforms to create programmes targeting the most vulnerable households, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2. Programmes include increased health coverage, youth empowerment, targeted subsidies to farmers and the increased use of digital platforms. The Government of Uganda launched its National

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/792901468770374532/brazil-bolsa-familia-project>.

Single Registry for Social Protection, a unified platform where common and essential information across all social protection programmes will be stored, analysed and reported for the benefit of all stakeholders. These measures, implemented in response to the pandemic, could have long-term positive benefits, as they have improved financial and social inclusion of marginalized populations.

26. To support vulnerable groups against socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Georgia has both adopted an anti-crisis plan to support the entire population and provided targeted support for large families (three or more children), persons with disabilities and students.

27. Specific measures were introduced to support persons with disabilities, as a group that has faced an increased risk of being infected by the virus and thus enduring economic hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. To support persons with disabilities, Egypt launched the automatic testing of COVID-19 symptoms using chatbots in sign language through the Wasel app, alongside the Tamkeen website. People with hearing disabilities can also reach ambulance, police or fire service through the app, by typing in their messages. Those messages will be received by customer service agents, who will then respond to users' questions through the app.

28. Ireland plans to adopt a range of mitigating measures to strengthen support to vulnerable groups during the pandemic. A response team on households' financial position will be established. Members of the response team will include representatives from financial institutions, stakeholder groups and a Debtors' Ombudsman, similar to the Office of the Debtors' Ombudsman in Iceland. Following a one-time payment made in 2020 to recipients of disability and rehabilitation pensions, permanent changes in Iceland were made in early 2021 to the disability pensions system, thereby increasing social security benefits for the lowest-paid disability pensioners. Internal reductions will be scaled down, and the lowest-paid disability pensioners will receive a supplement of nearly 8,000 Icelandic króner (about \$56) per month, in addition to the planned 3.6 per cent increase provided for in the fiscal budget proposal. The total increase in social security benefits for the lowest-paid disability pensioners will therefore be nearly 20,000 króner (about \$140) as at the end of 2022.

29. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the importance of housing to well-being. The Government of Mongolia took steps to gradually increase social welfare benefits to support poor and vulnerable households, individuals and organizations. The National Statistics Office of Mongolia is developing a national multidimensional poverty index, which would enable the identification of poverty, not only by income, but also by other dimensions, such as education, living conditions and health status.

30. As the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on families, targeted supportive measures were introduced. The Russian Federation put in place "maternity capital" to provide monthly assistance to families with more than three children, with the goal of improving living conditions, children's education, social adaptation and the integration of children with disabilities.

## **2. Economic measures for inclusive recovery**

31. Governments implemented economic measures to support sectors and individuals most affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Algeria and Tunisia deferred income tax payments as a means of boosting the disposable income of low-income households. Import taxes were also reduced or exempted on basic commodities.

32. Fiscal measures were used to assist the wider national economy to recover from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Egypt enacted fiscal

stimulus measures to help the country to recover from COVID-19, including loans to help its citizens.

33. To mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on business and individuals and to enable swift economic recovery, Brunei Darussalam took interim financial support measures. To assist the private sector, in particular micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and ensure their operational viability, a six-month deferment was made on employers' contributions to the Employees Trust Fund and Supplemental Contributory Pension scheme for private sector employees earning up to 1,500 Brunei dollars (about \$1,110) per month in all sectors under the micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises category. The Government has financed the pension contributions for those registered as self-employed within the stated period, to ensure that they will have ongoing survivorship fund protection.

34. To mobilize the financial resources necessary to build back better, including by strengthening its social protection systems, Cabo Verde took a multipronged approach through the reprioritization of national budget lines. The Government suspended fiscal consolidation and the reduction of public debt and revised the 2020 budget to strengthen the national health system to 5 per cent of public expenditure.

35. The Governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa implemented temporary value added tax (VAT) exemptions on basic commodities as a means of boosting the disposable income of low-income households. The Government of Mozambique implemented temporary VAT exemptions on basic medicines and for essential products such as cooking oil, sugar and soap. The Government of Mali implemented temporary VAT exemptions on electricity and water tariffs.

36. To help businesses to weather the COVID-19 pandemic, sectoral support was provided by Governments. Egypt launched a domestic tourism initiative aimed at spurring tourism in the country by reducing airline prices for domestic routes that connect tourist cities, including Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Sharm el-Sheikh, Taba, Ghardaqah, Marsa el-Alam and Alexandria.

37. With national budgets under strain, many low-income countries are unable to close the financing gap solely through domestic resource mobilization and thus rely on external financing. The roll-out of a new urban COVID-19 social transfer programme in Malawi, the Government Urban Cash Initiative, was entirely dependent on external financing, while the Government's own fiscal resources were diverted towards urgent health and education responses to the crisis.

38. To mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and address poverty, inequality, food insecurity and malnutrition and environmental challenges in a more integrated manner and in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, the Government of Mexico created a mechanism to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. The intersectoral government mechanism involves 18 thematic working groups for dialogue among a wide range of public sector institutions, relevant United Nations agencies and civil society actors, including smallholders, agribusinesses, food suppliers, marketing agencies, consumers and regulators.

39. To promote rural development, measures were introduced that were focused on agrarian reform and rural development. The Philippines has developed a national action plan on family farming, formulated through multi-stakeholder processes and national committees on family farming. Through the action plan, the Philippines has identified priority policies and programmes on which to embark, focused on agrarian reform and rural development, for the well-being of family farmers and involving all government agencies concerned with rural development.

40. Sri Lanka provided financial relief for a range of sectors, including the micro-, small and medium-sized enterprise and tourism sectors. These facilities were extended twice for the businesses and individuals engaged in the tourism sector.

41. The Government of Morocco started to roll out its road map to economic recovery. In July 2020, the King of Morocco, in addition to promising the reform of State-owned enterprises, announced that a law had been approved to set in motion the universalization of social protection systems for the entire population, including health insurance and family allowances, to ensure universal access to public health services.

## **B. Additional measures to strengthen policies for sustainable development**

### **1. Policies and initiatives to reduce multidimensional poverty and hunger**

42. To overcome poverty, various education and labour market policies were launched. Colombia offered support to young people in poverty to continue their education, through an investment of \$600 million. Additional investments went to programmes that included income-based solidarity, a change in the VAT rate and a \$200 million programme targeting food security for vulnerable households.

43. To aid the informal sector, targeted measures were introduced to assist households in meeting basic needs. Argentina provided family emergency aid for informal sector workers, to whom which it granted 10,000 Argentinian pesos (about \$58 and equivalent to 59.3 per cent of the minimum wage). The Government also launched a programme for essential workers to help households to meet basic needs through child allowance and food cards. Cooperatives in Argentina work with both other commercial producers and the Government to provide affordable food.

44. Governments suspended certain fees and taxes to support those vulnerable to the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several countries, including Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia, temporarily suspended the fees for mobile money transfers, commonly used to send remittances that cover recipients' essential costs, such as food, medical expenses, school fees and housing expenses. For example, in Zambia, the Government waived charges for person-to-person electronic money transfers of up to 150 Zambian kwacha (about \$8.34), making those transactions free of charge. The Governments of Chad, Mali and Mauritania made food and other necessities exempt of import taxes as a means of boosting the disposable income of low-income households.

45. The Government of Guyana is engaged in multiple endeavours to develop programmes for accessible and free training and empowerment opportunities targeting the most vulnerable populations, including women, young people, the unemployed and persons with disabilities, to open up pathways for employment and entrepreneurship. There are specialized programmes for persons with disabilities that include information and communications technology training, functional literacy, garment construction, sustainable farming and guidance counselling. Women and girls are benefiting through the Women's Innovation and Investment Network programme, which provides accessible and no-cost training for entrepreneurial skills, with no admission criteria.

46. To bolster the health sector in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments have injected significant additional resources since the start of the crisis. A 100 per cent budget increase was allocated to the Ministry of Health and Population for 2020/21 in Egypt. The Government has also been waiving fees and subsidizing health insurance to ensure that the most vulnerable have access to health

care. Indonesia dedicated about one fifth of its stimulus package announced in March 2020 to the health sector. The country also provided free medical treatment to all, regardless of their registration status with the national health insurance scheme.

47. Owing to the increase in mental health disorders stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments placed greater emphasis on related support. In Malaysia, in partnership with government agencies, Mercy Malaysia launched the Psychological First Aid Hotline. In quarantine centres and hospitals, mental health and psychological support services teams were deployed for patients with COVID-19 and for health-care workers. The Mexican Institute of Social Security maintains telephone consultation services in psychology and psychiatry to support persons suffering from anxiety and depression stemming from confinement measures.

48. Ghana has put in place a comprehensive strategy to promote the domestic production of vaccines. The first phase of commercial production is expected to start in January 2024.

## **2. Leveraging digital technologies and related policies for education and to safeguard public health**

49. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred growth in distance learning to sustain learning continuity, and digital technologies were developed to improve and scale up distance learning and to build more open, inclusive and flexible education systems after the pandemic. Qatar launched a new online learning platform (Mzeed) that offers digital and interactive resources for students, including interactive books, PDF textbooks, and video, audio and other digital learning materials, as well as the QLearning platform to facilitate and support all distance-learning services.

50. Remote schooling has propelled investment in school connectivity. In Burundi, secure digital cards meant for mobile telephones preloaded with audio content have been distributed to children in hard-to-reach areas since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Cyprus has invested in digital classrooms and in providing the necessary support services. Remote schooling forced the upgrade of Internet connectivity, the creation of digital classrooms and the provision of necessary equipment and support services to step up necessary digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital technologies also helped to close the urban-rural divide in education attainment.

51. To assist with distance learning, made necessary by COVID-19, Governments are providing support to strengthen the capacity of teachers, parents and pupils to adapt to remote teaching and learning. A national information unit (accessible by telephone and email) was established in Ecuador to provide guidance to teachers and parents, as well as psychological support to parents and students. A national educational platform is available, with more than 800 pedagogical resources, combined with the use of traditional media to broadcast educational content, through both radio and television. A virtual classroom offers online sessions nationwide.

52. To ensure that no one is left behind in the education sphere, measures were introduced to support access education for vulnerable groups. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia developed an education programme to teach Indigenous languages for better integration of Indigenous Peoples.

53. To support education in the face of negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, measures targeting young people were launched. Through its national youth system, Sinajuve, Brazil made free distance education courses available in such fields as entrepreneurship and personal finance.

54. Multipronged strategies that combine digital learning with more traditional distance learning tools (television, radio and print) were also pursued. In Colombia, alongside Aprender Digital, a national platform with over 80,000 digital resources

organized by grade, the Government is preparing a kit to support home-based learning for households without connectivity and is broadcasting educational programmes on both radio and television for learners from primary to middle school.

55. Governments used digital tools to help to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Bulgaria, a mobile app allows user to report their health condition on a daily basis, and a web portal provides up-to-date epidemiological data and information on measures taken. The information facilitates the preparation of a more accurate statistical model, which is necessary for a swift return to normalcy. The National Statistical Institute has launched a COVID-19 rubric on its official website, with timely statistical information about the impact of the pandemic on socioeconomic life in the country.

56. To help individuals to return to normalcy, digital tools were used to minimize health risks. In collaboration with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, an online interactive risk assessment tool for COVID-19 was adopted in Cyprus. The health code generated by a mobile app has become a pass that people can use to return to work and school and to move around the country.

57. The digitization of health services increased during the crisis. In Denmark, a strategic digitization initiative was developed, building on lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that new digital tools support a more resilient and sustainable health system.

### **3. Labour market policies to protect jobs and people's well-being: unemployment protection and wage subsidies**

58. To counter the economic consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, Governments made changes to labour laws to provide better worker protection and income security. India issued guidelines to bring all vehicle aggregators under a new regulatory framework. The measures are aimed at ensuring customer safety, the formalization of gig workers (drivers, in this case) and making ride-hailing companies more accountable. A fixed commission rate, if implemented by States, can offer income security for drivers as they are trying to strike a balance between payment obligations on monthly instalments for car loans and more limited income opportunities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

59. To retain employees in the wake of economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic, job retention schemes were implemented. In the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam, wage subsidies were targeted at specific vulnerable sectors, vulnerable workers or jobseekers. In other cases, they were rolled out nationally, covering all or most sectors in the economy. The Government of Lesotho paid a three-month wage subsidy to workers in textile factories. The industrial workers' wage subsidy programme has been structured to benefit the most vulnerable groups of industrial workers covered by minimum wage regulations.

60. By easing the criteria to qualify for a short-term working allowance, unemployment in Germany did not increase significantly. Short-time work is designed to offset some of the temporary earning losses and prevent job losses. At the end of 2021, the short-time work allowance was raised to up to 80 per cent of net earnings lost. The maximum period of eligibility was raised from 12 to 24 months, although only until the end of 2021.

61. To rebuild the labour market in the wake of COVID-19, Argentina provided half the minimum salary to guarantee a basic income, while at the same time incentivizing work. The Government also planned to create more employment opportunities in rural areas, as well as in selected industries, including construction, textile, recycling, food production and health care.

62. To support workers laid off as a result of COVID-19, unemployment insurance schemes provided a significant and rapid source of income. In China, unemployment insurance coverage was temporarily expanded in 2020 to make unemployed migrant workers who had been insured for less than one year eligible for benefits.

63. In Azerbaijan, paid public jobs were created to ensure the active employment of people with difficulty securing other employment. Sierra Leone launched a procurement process for the rehabilitation of 1,200 km of trunk and feeder roads, foreseen to create jobs for young people and help to connect farmers to markets. In South Africa, the Expanded Public Works Programme saw a sharp increase in demand during the crisis and employed many vulnerable South Africans during the nationwide lockdown. In Ethiopia, Rwanda and South Africa, work requirements on public works were waived, owing to concerns about difficulties in enforcing social distancing, to enable participants to receive wages and food transfers as a form of income support. In Kenya, the newly launched National Hygiene Programme, Kazi Mtaani, provided employment opportunities with daily wages to young people. The programme involved street and drainage cleaning, garbage collection, fumigation and disinfection. The Government of Monaco supported single parents facing challenges stemming from COVID-19 through wage guarantees.

64. To support small businesses and the self-employed against the economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic, Eswatini offered tax refunds to small and medium-sized enterprises that retained workers on full pay during lockdown. In Namibia, grants were given to employers, workers and citizens in sectors heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including tourism and hospitality, fishing, construction, small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sector. This has provided relief to formal and informal businesses in some of the worst-affected sectors. Support for businesses includes reductions in interest rates, wage subsidies and negotiated debt repayment holidays, as well as credit support for businesses, workers and households.

65. To combat the increase in the unemployment rate due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Spain has put in place measures to support employment, including grants to small and medium-sized enterprises and the self-employed.

66. To promote the hiring of employees in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, job creation schemes were used to incentivize business hires. In Lithuania, hiring subsidies provided to employers supported the creation of jobs for the most vulnerable persons, including persons with disabilities, older persons, young people and long-term or low-skilled unemployed persons. From 2021, employers will receive the full compensation (100 per cent) for the wages paid to an employee during downtime. The maximum compensation could amount to 1.5 times the employee's minimum monthly wages, namely €963 (about \$1,027), provided the compensated amount does not exceed the wage fixed in the employment contract before the date of the declaration of the second quarantine.

**4. Targeted measures to support social groups heavily affected by the crises: women, older persons, children, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples**

67. In response to the disproportionate effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women and girls, additional gender mainstreaming measures were needed. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women country gender equality profile for Liberia provided an in-depth analysis of the differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and property rights, development planning, control of assets and decision-making powers between girls, women, boys and men in their assigned gender roles.

68. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the gender-sensitive measures that have been taken is to support unpaid care work, which increased during the pandemic and fell mainly on the shoulders of women and girls. Such support includes the provision of paid family leaves, cash-for-care programmes, flexible and shorter work-time arrangements and/or the continued provision of childcare services. In Austria, the Government provided extended paid leave for pregnant women who could not work remotely during the pandemic.

69. The Government of Australia has taken measures targeting support for children, given that unsafe living, the chronic stress of poverty and a lack of adequate stimulation and learning opportunities in early childhood, all of which have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, can diminish children's chances of success later in life. The childcare sector received a financial boost with the launch of the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package.

70. Older persons have also been the focus of targeted measures. In Bangladesh, support has been provided to older persons through the Old Age Allowance. Brazil increased its financial assistance for long-term care institutions for the elderly and enhanced monitoring and accountability measures.

71. Through its Rural Revitalization Strategy, launched by the Government of China to promote sustained livelihoods and the well-being of rural populations through agricultural development, total rural credit was increased by 17.8 per cent in 2020.

72. As Indigenous Peoples have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the United States of America, COVID-19 relief grants to address the vulnerabilities of Indigenous Peoples during the crisis have included federal grants to support health services and systems for Indigenous Peoples as well as housing and education programmes at all levels.

73. The Government of Cuba focused on vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, through targeted programmes in its economic and social policies responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago introduced a microsite specifically targeting persons with disabilities.

### **C. Measures to tackle food insecurity to support those most susceptible to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**

74. To improve food security and promote healthy diets, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, under the food card programme that is part of its National Plan to Eradicate Hunger, Argentina provides access to money for a basic food basket through a debit card. The basic food basket improves food security and promotes healthy diets for children, pregnant women and persons with disabilities. During the COVID-19 crisis, the amount provided through the programme was doubled from May to December 2020 and was subsequently (since February 2021) increased by 50 per cent to respond to the rise in food prices.

75. To protect food security during the COVID-19 pandemic for children who previously received a daily meal at school, Libya provided take-home rations through its "school feeding at home" initiatives.

76. To protect household food security during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Open Market Sales Programme in Bangladesh, with support from the World Food Programme, formalized the inclusion of fortified rice to allow people living in urban areas to purchase rice at one quarter of the original price to enhance the food security and nutritional well-being of vulnerable households consuming diets deficient in micronutrients. Bhutan built new irrigation channels and promoted commercial

farming to bolster national food security in the face of its additional supply challenges related to COVID-19 as a landlocked nation.

77. In the Dominican Republic, the Government is prioritizing means to ensure water for crops and training farmers in efficient water usage. Other policy measures are also taken to support family farming, encourage women to benefit from food production, support agricultural cooperatives and ensure efficient food distribution to schools, hospitals, prisons and children's centres. Through an assisted credit programme, the Government is providing funding for agricultural land and real-time market information. The Government is also working to change consumption habits and diets.

78. Burkina Faso set up supportive measures, including monetary and in-kind payments, to tackle food insecurity stemming from agricultural shocks during the 2021/22 agricultural period and long-term nutritional crises. Those measures have been accompanied by additional support for vulnerable households in rural areas through the promotion of local agriculture.

79. To address the food crisis, long-term strategies to implement modern technologies, sustainable agriculture practice and agro-technical methods are necessary. Israel highlighted innovative agricultural technology as a solution to the food crisis and the promotion of clean energy to mitigate climate change, which is a threat to farmers and island States. The agricultural programming of the country's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV) deals with the introduction of modern technologies and agro-technical methods designed to increase the levels, sustainability and quality of agricultural production to ensure food security.

80. To boost productivity potential and ensure the sustainability of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food industries through innovation, Japan formulated its Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems, specifically its Measures for the Achievement of Decarbonization and Resilience with Innovation, as a medium- to long-term strategy to enhance the engagement of stakeholders at each stage of the food supply chain and promote innovation to reduce environmental loads. This will be enabled through the development and dissemination of innovative technologies and the greening of the policy tools of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The Measures provide a new model for sustainable food systems in the Asian monsoon region, which has weather conditions and production structures that differ from those of other regions like Europe and North America. The Ministry plans to share methods and technologies applicable to other countries in the Asian monsoon region.

81. A broad range of laws and policies were adopted by Mongolia to ensure food safety and accessibility, including on food and food product safety, as well as national programmes on healthy food. Mongolia set objectives in mid- and long-term development policy documents to stabilize food supply and access, improve nutrition and ensure the safety of raw materials and products at all stages of the food chain.

#### **D. Concerted efforts to address cross-cutting emerging issues related to the global economic slowdown and conflict and other compounding challenges**

82. In an effort to adapt to climate change, many countries referred to disaster risk reduction preparedness as a priority, citing their implementation of specific policies to better adapt to climate-related conditions and awareness-raising actions to educate and inform the general public and the youth population. Some countries also made

efforts in halting forest degradation, with strategies and action plans to address the environmental impact of climate change.

83. To support the climate change agenda, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sought to identify vulnerable communities in order to design and implement effective adaptation strategies to facilitate the building of climate resilience and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals with no one left behind.

84. To promote a healthier and more sustainable food system, the European Union implemented the Farm to Fork strategy. In the strategy, the European Union sets out both regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives, with common agricultural and fisheries policies as key tools to support a just transition to a sustainable food system. Such a system will have a neutral or positive impact on the environment, help in mitigating climate change and in adapting to its impacts, reverse biodiversity loss, ensure that everyone has access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and sustainable food and preserve food affordability, while generating fairer economic returns, fostering the competitiveness of the European Union supply sector and promoting fair trade.

85. Increased cooperation among developing countries, together with reforms to the multilateral trade and financial architecture, could help to direct the global economy onto the right track. Supporting alternative models of enterprise such as cooperatives, as well as micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, can also contribute to the transition to a more inclusive, job-rich and greener growth path. In the Philippines, a cooperative-led group teamed up with the Government's Department of Social Welfare and Development to assist victims of Typhoon Odette in December 2021. The umbrella organization of family-farmer cooperatives signed a purchase order for 18 million Philippine pesos (about \$375,000) with the Department for a three-day delivery of 25,000 family food packs, consisting of 3,000 sacks of rice and other food items for the victims of Typhoon Odette. Recognized as engines of job creation, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises have become crucial stakeholders for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Small and medium-sized banks and green finance programmes in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cyprus and Egypt have strengthened the resilience of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and facilitated innovations.

86. E-commerce and digitization are identified as crucial ways to enhance the resilience of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in China, Germany and Malaysia. The formalization of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises is a focus of countries' efforts to boost productivity and exploit opportunities arising from regional market integration mechanisms in Cabo Verde, Colombia, Cuba, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Zimbabwe.

87. Phased responses to address conflict-triggered global food, energy and financial issues underscore the importance of access to energy for all. While Cabo Verde, China, Czechia, Denmark, Indonesia, Norway, Thailand and Uruguay reported progress in energy access despite the negative effects of global crises, Afghanistan, Angola, Namibia and Tunisia pointed to energy-related challenges that affected parts of their populations. Cabo Verde noted significant progress made towards ensuring access to energy for all, stating that those without sufficient access were mostly located in remote areas. Thanks to large power grids, rural areas in China now have access to stable and reliable power supply. In Tunisia, energy access for low and middle-income populations is a challenge, owing to domestic energy prices, which, combined with an increase in general poverty, has affected many.

88. Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway, Qatar, Sweden, Thailand and Tunisia stressed the importance of energy efficiency in contributing to climate action. Through its Smart Grid Master Plan, Thailand aims to use electricity more efficiently

by better managing usage within private homes, commercial and industrial establishments. The initiative also encompasses an electricity forecasting system tied to renewable energy consumption.

89. Many countries reported solar energy solutions among renewable energy sources, to improve access to clean energy and accelerate climate action. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda implemented a project in 2018, retrofitting government buildings, hospitals, schools and parking garages with solar and wind systems. That effort is estimated to provide 10 per cent of the island nation's energy needs. In addition, Antigua and Barbuda has turned to solar energy as part of the recovery from Hurricane Irma in 2017, with the establishment of a solar plant as an effort to build back better. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea also encouraged the introduction of solar technology.

## IV. Conclusions

90. COVID-19 and other ongoing crises continue to pose obstacles to social development and to progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries all over the world have implemented various policy measures on many fronts to overcome the adverse impacts of these multifaceted and intertwined crises. Those measures have yielded at least shorter-term results, providing a foundation for accelerating recovery and fully implementing the 2030 Agenda with no one left behind. However, the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing regional conflicts, unabating climate change and a pessimistic global economic outlook are further constraining policy space. To accelerate an inclusive recovery and get back on track to fully implementing the 2030 Agenda, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts and policy coherence to address the current unprecedented challenges and make a breakthrough for a safer, greener and more resilient future for all.

91. Countries should take the opportunity presented by their efforts at recovery from multifaceted crises to strengthen their medium- to long-term policy perspectives, by building on the successes of and lessons learned from the short-term crisis-response measures taken. In particular, in order to accelerate an inclusive recovery and get back on track to implementing the 2030 Agenda, countries should expand and strengthen social protection systems and safety nets by turning some emergency social protection measures into building blocks for national social protection floors in accordance with national circumstances and sustainable development goals. This will increase the capability of countries and their people to weather future shocks and to accelerate sustained progress in achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals.

92. As cross-cutting challenges, energy security, food security and climate mitigation are interlinked, a crucial opportunity also presents itself, as countries recover from the pandemic, to build measures to fight climate change and protect the environment into their national recovery action plans. Transitioning to greener energy will lead to less dependence on imported fossil fuels and bring countries closer to achieving carbon neutrality, while also contributing to the reduction of poverty and inequality.

93. There are also good practices to draw on to make further progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women, together with the active participation of young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. The gender perspective and attention to the needs of disadvantaged social groups and people in vulnerable situations must be mainstreamed in strategies and policymaking processes to make recovery inclusive and sustainable and to ensure the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda with no one left behind.

94. Global challenges require global solutions. International cooperation and solidarity and multilateral action are indispensable for a breakthrough, in particular for countries in special situations. The countries left furthest behind cannot address the multifaceted and interlinked socioeconomic impacts of the present crises without international support and a peaceful environment in which to shape an inclusive and transformative recovery and successfully implement their national development strategies.

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