



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
29 January 2024

Original: English

---

## Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Twenty-third session

New York, 15–19 April 2024

Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

Principles of effective governance for sustainable development

### **Building inclusive institutions that leave no one behind at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

#### **Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee member Najat Zarrouk, in collaboration with fellow Committee members Sherifa Sherif, Augustin Fosu, Aigul Kosherbayeva, Juraj Nemec and Carlos Santiso.

---

\* [E/C.16/2024/1](#).



## **Building inclusive institutions that leave no one behind at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

### *Summary*

The pledge to leave no one behind is the cornerstone and central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a core principle of public administration. Recognizing this, the authors take a closer look at the different steps required to build institutions that ensure the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized segments of society.

The authors elaborate on the need to first identify individuals or groups being left behind and gain a deeper understanding of their specific challenges and needs, while highlighting that different criteria can be used to identify them, such as discrimination, inequality, geography, governance, socioeconomic status and vulnerability to shocks. The authors also offer insights into possible root causes leading to people being left behind.

An overview of various measures taken around the world to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable people is also provided. The authors emphasize that actions should be prioritized to address the needs of those furthest behind first. In addition, preventive policies are important to ensure that new people or groups do not fall behind at the same time as others escape poverty, deprivation and vulnerability.

Meeting the pledge of leaving no one behind will require interministerial cooperation as well as the involvement of vulnerable groups and other actors in the development of people-centred strategies, policies and projects, as well as monitoring and review processes, with the goal of tackling persistent poverty and inequalities through participatory and accountable approaches. Reliable disaggregated data are crucial for effective and coherent policymaking and the monitoring of progress made. In addition, capacity-building efforts are required to support and empower vulnerable groups and public institutions at the regional, national and local levels.

In closing, the authors describe examples of good practice and lessons learned and make recommendations on how to turn the pledge of leaving no one behind into action.

## I. Introduction

1. The pledge of the international community to leave no one behind is the cornerstone and central and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2015, Member States committed to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole.

2. That pledge is referenced in other international or regional agendas, such as those on climate action, urban development, disaster risk reduction and financing for development. The 2063 Agenda: The Africa We Want, for example, seeks to leave no one behind by setting specific objectives for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Its goal is to transform the continent's social, economic and environmental structure to eradicate poverty and create shared prosperity by improving standards of living, quality of life and well-being for all, ending poverty, income and opportunity disparities, creating jobs, in particular for young people, addressing the issues of rapid population growth and urbanization, improving habitats and access to basic services such as education, health care, housing, water and sanitation and electricity, and providing social protection.

3. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration has long acknowledged the importance of leaving no one behind, making it 1 of its 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2018. This step was in line with the Council's affirmation that leaving no one behind should be a core principle of public administration.<sup>1</sup>

4. In September 2023, in the political declaration adopted at the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the General Assembly, Member States committed to act with urgency to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda as a plan of action for people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, while leaving no one behind. They also committed to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.

5. Given that the topic of leaving no one behind is closely linked with the 2024 theme of the Council and that the midpoint in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been reached, the Committee has decided to have a closer look at the different steps required to build inclusive institutions that leave no one behind. The present paper also contains examples of good practice and lessons learned that could inspire Member States, public administrations and other actors in their quest to leave no one behind. This could be particularly useful as the midterm review provides a chance for Member States and other stakeholders to evaluate their progress to date in implementing the 2030 Agenda, to adjust and/or correct their path, if needed, and to upgrade toolboxes, norms and approaches to better address ongoing crises and changing challenges, including by adapting the international cooperation framework

## II. Leaving no one behind: meaning and significance

6. Leaving no one behind is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda as none of the Sustainable Development Goals can be attained without addressing the plight of the weakest and most vulnerable population groups, which are also disproportionately affected by global crises such as climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Some Goals and targets are closely linked with the aim of leaving no one behind, such as Goal 1 on eradicating poverty, Goal 2 on eliminating hunger, Goal 3 on good health and well-being, Goal 10 on

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Economic and Social Council resolution [2023/28](#), para. 3.

reducing inequalities within and among countries and Goal 5 on gender equality, and several Goals are aimed at giving all people access to basic services, such as water and sanitation, health care, quality education and energy.

7. Member States have put leaving no one behind at the heart of the 2030 Agenda so that all people can benefit from the global transformative agenda and full realization of human rights, without discrimination on the basis of social status, sex, age, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. This is particularly important as people tend to fall behind when they are denied rights and opportunities to participate in and gain from sustainable development in comparison with others in a society. People being left behind can experience:

- Absolute deprivation, i.e. living in multidimensional poverty or below other minimally acceptable standards of security, income, public services, infrastructure and well-being
- Relative disadvantage, i.e. experiencing exclusion, discrimination and/or deep-rooted inequalities; being less able than others in society to gain influence, obtain an education, acquire wealth, gain access to health care, housing, job markets or technologies and have decent work; or having a lower life expectancy

8. The 2030 Agenda seeks to ensure that no one is being left behind, by abolishing poverty in all its manifestations and forms, stopping prejudice and inequality that have led to uneven outcomes for disadvantaged populations and reaching the most disadvantaged.

9. Despite impressive development gains over the past few decades, hundreds of millions of people in several parts of the world remain unable to fully participate in or benefit from human development, opportunities, innovation and digital transformation, economic growth or globalization. They are the world's poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized people and many still endure diseases, deprivations, indignities or violent acts that have long been eradicated in other parts of the world.<sup>2</sup>

10. Several crises have worsened the situation of vulnerable groups and/or increased the risk of more people being left behind. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, an additional 110 million to 150 million people may have been pushed into extreme poverty, adding to the 689 million people worldwide surviving on less than \$1.90 a day in 2018. In 2022, at least 1.3 billion people lived in multidimensional poverty, half of them children. There were also more hungry and displaced people than a decade ago.<sup>3</sup>

11. The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt, amplified by geopolitical tensions and ongoing crises such as the Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas war, coups d'état and unrest in several African countries, as well as systemic threats brought on by climate change and large movements of refugees that seem to be difficult to regulate and control. As a result, and despite more than two decades of improvements, the gaps between different groups of people have widened, affecting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the pledge to leave no one behind.

12. In the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*, recent crises were confirmed to have revealed unequal coping mechanisms and deepened divides across various dimensions of well-being. A decades-long trend of narrowing global income inequality has been reversed, more people are fleeing conflict than ever before, the number of displaced persons is rising dramatically and the slum population is

<sup>2</sup> See also United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "What does it mean to leave no one behind?", July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022* (New York, 2022).

increasing. The effects of these reversals are felt mostly by women, girls, young people and other vulnerable and marginalized population groups. By 2030, if nothing changes, 575 million people will be living in extreme poverty, some 660 million will still be without electricity, some 84 million children will be out of school and 300 million children or young people attending school will leave unable to read and write. In addition, it will take 286 years to close gender gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws.

13. Apart from inequalities within countries, there are also inequalities between countries and regions. African countries, for example, are considered among the most vulnerable to ongoing challenges and crises, despite the abundance of valuable resources (e.g. gold, diamonds, oil, natural gas, copper and uranium). The majority of the least developed countries are located in Africa. African countries are struggling to accelerate progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda, owing mostly to the lack of strong institutions, ethical leadership and coherent policies, as well as to external interferences in African affairs. If nothing changes, approximately 492 million people in Africa will be left in extreme poverty by 2030, and at least 350 million by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

14. As a guiding principle and core value of the 2030 Agenda, the pledge to leave no one behind draws attention to the most vulnerable people and calls for governments at all levels and other actors to intensify efforts to narrow existing gaps and divides between population groups and improve the well-being of those furthest behind in order to contribute to global stability and resilience. This would also have multiplier impacts across the Sustainable Development Goals and accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

### III. Building inclusive institutions to leave no one behind

15. The principle of leaving no one behind means that, to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality, public policies are to take into account the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those subject to discrimination. It also requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and among countries, and their root causes. It is grounded in the United Nations normative standards that are foundational principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights law and national legal systems.

16. The United Nations approach to leaving no one behind is set out in the shared framework for action entitled *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development*, endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in November 2016. The shared framework seeks to ensure that the United Nations system puts the imperative to combat inequalities and discrimination at the forefront of the Organization's efforts to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

17. While the pledge to leave no one behind is a noble, essential and timely commitment, the path to stable, peaceful, inclusive and equitable societies is not without complexities, owing to several challenges, such as global instability, insecurity and uncertainty.

18. Various intersecting and cross-cutting factors can prevent or slow the pledge of leaving no one behind, such as demographic imbalances caused by rapid population growth, lack of access to basic services and unprecedented shocks and crises. Therefore, a better understanding of the current situation, the identification of

<sup>4</sup> African Union, Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank and UNDP, *Africa Sustainable Development Report 2022* (2023).

vulnerable groups and root causes and the establishment of inclusive public institutions and policies that leave no one behind are urgently required.

## **A. Who is being left behind?**

19. The initial step is to identify individuals or groups being left behind and understand their specific needs and challenges. It involves identifying those that are the furthest behind as well as those at risk of being left behind in the future. Those being left behind may be different in different societies, such as women, the poor, children and young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, including ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrants, refugees or displaced persons.

20. Several criteria and concepts can be used to identify those being left behind within a country or across countries, such as poverty, inclusiveness, discrimination and inequality. The United Nations Development Programme, for example, uses the following five key factors: discrimination, geography, governance, socioeconomic status, and shocks and fragility.<sup>5</sup>

21. While a person might be left behind because of disadvantages related to only one of the five factors described above, most of the people left behind face intersecting disadvantages stemming from more than one factor. People experiencing deprivations and disadvantages related to all five factors are most likely to be among the furthest behind.

22. Accordingly, over the past decade, multidimensional analysis has been growing steadily, transforming from a purely academic discussion into domestic policies and policy-centred dialogues in international forums on poverty reduction, such as the multidimensional poverty peer network. The driving force for this expansion is the realization that the traditional measurement of income poverty alone, while important, is not sufficient, and there have therefore been calls for a complementary approach that goes beyond the normative economic goal of satisfying desires and basic needs.

23. The United Nations Development Programme Multidimensional Poverty Index is the most extensively used non-monetary poverty measurement and can be used in addition to standard monetary poverty measurements. Over 100 developing countries are being measured using the Index, which calculates each person's overlapping deprivations with over 10 variables in three equally weighted dimensions: health, education and standard of living. Another example for measuring multidimensional poverty and multiple deprivations is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Better Life Index.

## **B. Why are people being left behind?**

24. As a next step, it is important to identify the root causes keeping people marginalized and excluded, sometimes over long periods of time. The following aspects should be examined as possible reasons for people being left behind:

(a) **Discrimination:** many of the barriers that people face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but rather the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people behind, owing, for example, to their gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability or sexual orientation.

---

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams* (2022).

Persistent forms of discrimination leave individuals, families and whole communities marginalized and excluded, with limited access to basic services, such as education, health care, housing, water and sanitation and energy, as well as economic opportunities and decent work;

(b) Cultural and social factors: cultural norms and societal attitudes or stereotypes can create barriers to the inclusion of certain groups. Some marginalized communities may also lack awareness of their rights and opportunities. Empowering them through education and awareness-building is crucial for meaningful participation in development processes;<sup>6</sup>

(c) Socioeconomic and demographic factors: socioeconomic factors such as low income, reduced life expectancy and low educational attainment or lack of access to social safety nets, financial services and basic services such as health care, water and sanitation, education and energy, as well as decent work, can perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization. In addition, rapid population growth can negatively affect vulnerable population groups by, for example, leading to a scarcity of essential resources and services (e.g. fresh water and food);

(d) Geographic location: remote and isolated local communities, often in rural areas, are more likely to be left behind owing to territorial inequality in terms of infrastructure and basic services, with access to, for example, health care, public services, the Internet, technologies, roads and public transport either inadequate or missing;

(e) Weak public institutions and policies: inefficient, unfair, unaccountable or unresponsive global, national and subnational institutions, as well as inequitable, inadequate or unfair laws, policies, procedures or budgets, can hamper the pledge to leave no one behind. The lack of policy coherence at all governance levels, vertically and horizontally, can lead to weak results and impact. If a centralization of power, resources and capacities occurs, it does not offer an enabling environment for the Committee's principles under the umbrella of inclusiveness, in particular participation, non-discrimination and subsidiarity, and can make space for misconduct, unethical behaviour and corruption. In addition, insufficient institutional capacity, at both the national and subnational levels, can impede the effective implementation of policies and programmes. Despite significant decentralization and devolution efforts in recent decades, local authorities in Africa, for example, still have weak administrative and fiscal capacities. According to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, on average, only 14.1 per cent of public sector personnel expenditure in Africa is allocated to local and regional governments; and local governments, when all categories are combined, are only responsible for 11 per cent of all public investment;<sup>7</sup>

(f) Lack of political will and commitment: achieving the pledge of leaving no one behind requires strong political will and commitment. In some cases, often starting from a so-called "whim of the majority" in government, political priorities and decision-making may not align with the needs of marginalized groups, making it challenging to implement inclusive policies. There is also a risk of people losing trust

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, United Nations Development Group and Regional Coordination Mechanism for Europe and Central Asia, *Building More Inclusive, Sustainable and Prosperous Societies in Europe and Central Asia: From Vision to Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals Call for Action from the Regional UN System* (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Economic Commission for Africa and African Development Bank, *Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2022: The Economic Power of African Cities* (Paris, 2022).

in public institutions and political leaders, in particular when unethical behaviour, corruption and misconduct occur;

(g) Insufficient means of implementation: limited resources can hinder the implementation of programmes and interventions targeted at vulnerable and marginalized population groups. Governments may struggle to allocate sufficient funds to address the needs of marginalized populations, leading to gaps in public service delivery.<sup>8</sup> Delays in achieving the pledge of leaving no one behind are felt mostly at the subnational level where vulnerable groups strongly feel and experience exclusion, inequalities, discrimination and a lack of opportunities. In many cases, local and regional governments and authorities have to address their needs and challenges without having the competences, responsibilities, appropriate resources or sufficient number of qualified, competent and professional human resources;

(h) Global economic system: the global economic system can contribute to inequalities between countries and regions. Developing countries in particular face challenges in accessing markets, technologies and resources, hindering their ability and capacity to leave no one behind;

(i) Shocks and crises: climate change, natural and man-made disasters, global pandemics, violence, conflicts and wars, mass displacement, economic downturns, price fluctuations and other shocks and crises disproportionately affect vulnerable population groups, often exacerbating existing challenges. For example, countries facing war, conflict or political instability often struggle to implement inclusive development policies, which can make it difficult to provide essential services to all segments of the population;<sup>9</sup>

(j) Digital divide: the widening digital divide within and between countries due to the lack of digital skills and/or access to Internet resources results in marginalization and the uneven distribution of public services. In 2022, an estimated 2.7 billion people globally remained unconnected to the Internet.<sup>10</sup> Women and girls are particularly affected by the digital divide, often having less access to technologies and the Internet than boys and men;

(k) Data challenges and gaps: understanding which population groups are being left behind in order to design effective policies requires the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. Many countries, however, face challenges in collecting accurate and disaggregated data, especially in remote areas. Without detailed information, it becomes difficult to identify and address the specific needs of different population groups and to design suitable policies, strategies and action plans.<sup>11</sup>

25. Limited social mobility, coupled with pronounced inequalities, conspires to maintain and perpetuate the disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind within and between countries and across different generations.<sup>12</sup> Patterns of exclusion, structural constraints and unequal power relations that produce and reproduce inequalities over generations will need to be addressed in order to move towards both

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Kingdom of Morocco, *Voluntary National Review of the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals* (2020).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind* (Paris, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2022* (2022).

<sup>11</sup> See also Asian Development Bank, *Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals* (Manila, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> World Bank, *Fair Progress? Economic Mobility Across Generations Around the World* (Washington, D.C., 2018).



formal and substantive equality for all population groups. Causal, role pattern and capacity gap analyses should be conducted to help determine the focus and prioritization of national and local interventions to leave no one behind.<sup>13</sup>

### C. Ensuring that no one is being left behind

26. Sustainable Development Goal 16 is aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is important as people everywhere should be free from all forms of violence and feel safe as well as have access to the same opportunities as others no matter their social condition, gender, age, race, ethnicity, faith, migratory status, disability and sexual orientation. The Goal is aligned with the broader human rights framework by promoting societies that respect and uphold individual rights, as well as the rights to privacy, freedom of expression and access to information.

27. Equal access to justice, as covered in target 16.3, is essential for protecting the rights of individuals, resolving disputes and protecting vulnerable populations from being marginalized or mistreated. This should be paired with peace and stability as fundamental preconditions for social, economic and environmental development and preserving lives and resources. Target 16.6 specifically contains a call to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and target 16.7 contains a call to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

28. Building inclusive institutions will require implementing the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development developed by the Committee and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2018, which fall into the following three categories:

- Effectiveness: competence, sound policymaking and collaboration
- Accountability: integrity, transparency and independent oversight
- Inclusiveness: leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity

29. Accountable, responsive and inclusive institutions will also have to be built at the subnational level to reduce inequalities and exclusion. The African Union Development Agency, for example, notes the need to strengthen economic governance at the local level and also calls upon local governments to transcend their traditional bureaucratic functions and become initiators, catalysts and drivers of transformative processes.

#### **Policies and interventions for leaving no one behind**

30. Once the vulnerable groups and root causes have been identified, Governments are encouraged to develop integrated people-centred strategies for leaving no one behind with mutually reinforcing processes and targeted equity-based policies and interventions.<sup>14</sup> They should apply a human rights-based approach and a gender perspective. Various methods can be used to better target those being left behind, such

<sup>13</sup> See also United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams*.

<sup>14</sup> See also German Agency for International Cooperation, *Leave No One Behind: Guidelines for Project Planners and Practitioners* (Bonn, 2020).

as direct individual or household assessments by the Government or community members, categorical targeting (geographical and demographic) and self-targeting.<sup>15</sup>

31. Countries around the world are taking measures to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as improving their legal frameworks and ensuring access to justice, enhancing the quality and accessibility of public services, combating discriminatory practices, reducing spatial and geographical inequalities between rural and urban areas, promoting gender equality, ensuring full employment and inclusive economic policies and growth, providing social protection systems and ensuring access to basic services, such as health care, education, water and sanitation and information and communications technologies.<sup>16</sup>

32. Some countries use macroeconomic policy instruments, such as fiscal policy and monetary policy, to promote sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty. Capacity-building efforts and the empowerment of vulnerable groups, local communities and civil society are also undertaken to foster inclusion. During the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath, many countries also provided relief aid to the most vulnerable groups in the form of cash, emergency employment and business grants.

33. Actions should be prioritized to address the needs of those furthest behind first, and Governments should specify the entities responsible for implementation, which, ideally, are close to citizens. In addition, preventive policies are important to ensure that new people or groups do not fall behind at the same time as others escape poverty and deprivation.

34. Governments should involve all actors, in particular the most marginalized, in the decision-making, review and follow-up processes to empower them and ensure accountability and transparency. Multisectoral and interministerial (horizontal and vertical) collaboration and cooperation are required in the context of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

35. At the same time, there should be a change of mindsets in public institutions to better implement the 2030 Agenda, improve service delivery and build trust in public institutions.<sup>17</sup> There also needs to be a change of mindsets by citizens, away from the mentality of entitlement to welfare and support and towards values of hard work, competitive spirit and a sense of merit based on achievement or contribution.

36. From a societal point of view, it is also necessary, in parallel, to promote and anchor democracy and sustainable economic growth. Governments should invest in the well-being of their citizens and civic education, building healthy, active and educated citizens and offering them the opportunity to live a good life while leaving no one and no place behind.

### **Measuring and monitoring progress**

37. In the pursuit of implementing the principle of leaving no one behind, a critical aspect involves ensuring the effective measurement and monitoring of progress. This indispensable step forms the backbone of any successful initiative, as it enables a comprehensive understanding of the outcome and impact of interventions aimed at addressing inequalities.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2016* (New York, 2016), chap. 1, “Ensuring that no one is left behind and the 2030 Agenda”.

<sup>16</sup> See also United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development* (New York, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the United Nations Public Administration Network training toolkit on changing mindsets in public institutions to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

38. Evidence will have to be gathered and analysed regarding which individuals are experiencing various forms of deprivation, disadvantage or discrimination and to what extent. Providing accessible and robust data forms the basis for efficient and effective access to basic services, such as health care and education, and political participation. It also constitutes the basis of accurate and timely statistics essential for effective and coherent policymaking.

39. Indicators and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals linked to leaving no one behind can be used to monitor progress for specific groups in comparison with the general population. United Nations entities and country offices can support this endeavour by systematically compiling all available disaggregated data and other relevant quantitative and qualitative data from a wide range of data sources, including trend analysis where feasible. Information gathered from desk reviews should be complemented, guided by and cross-referenced with the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups and communities.

40. Data collection and analysis processes should ensure the meaningful participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Citizen-generated data, for example, which are produced by people to directly demand, drive or monitor changes on issues that affect them, can be very useful in complementing traditional data sources. It is also important to have an overview of the existing data and data gaps and capacity-building needs of national and subnational government entities and local communities.

41. Measuring and monitoring progress can also help people being left behind to hold their Government accountable for the effective implementation of policies and programmes aimed at supporting them. Legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as multidimensional poverty indices, can provide the basis for defining the obligations, functions and liabilities of responsible parties and for establishing enforcement mechanisms to hold them accountable. The integration of leaving no one behind in the follow-up and review processes for the Sustainable Development Goals, such as the voluntary national review process of the high-level political forum, is important.

#### **IV. Examples of good practice and lessons learned**

42. In 2023, 39 countries presented their voluntary national reviews on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. According to the synthesis report, the principle of leaving no one behind was prioritized in many of the reviews and translated into concrete actions for tackling the systemic problem of inequalities and discrimination, with efforts to ensure inclusive and effective participation in policy development and implementation efforts. While progress was made in many areas, countries noted the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises on progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the pledge to leave no one behind.

43. Examples of efforts made by some countries over the years to leave no one behind are presented below.<sup>18</sup>

44. The Comoros is working on strengthening its contributory and non-contributory social protection system, adopting new laws to promote youth employment, strengthening existing laws on violence against children and women, launching a national institution for human rights and civil liberties and establishing universal health coverage. Since its initiation, the social safety net project, for example, has supported about 36,000 households, with 10,290 households receiving socioeconomic recovery

---

<sup>18</sup> For more information, see <https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs>.

grants and women making up 76 per cent of cash transfer recipients. The programme focuses on human capital, women's empowerment and productive inclusion.

45. The Government of Dominica is taking various measures to ensure the inclusion of people being left behind. Among other things, it is working with the World Food Programme on creating a more shock-responsive social protection system to strengthen its ability to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable people following a climate shock by linking social protection systems to the payouts made by the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. The pilot project has increased the Government's access to disaster risk financing, enabling it to build the financial resilience of the most vulnerable against natural disasters.

46. In France, digital divides are hindering the aim of ensuring inclusive digital transformation. A national plan for digital inclusion was launched in September 2018 to provide support and training to citizens, with the goal of achieving the digital inclusion of at least one third of the population over the next 10 years, which means equipping a total of 4.5 million citizens with basic digital skills. This is in line with the European Commission digital decade, which aims for 80 per cent of European citizens to develop basic digital skills in the next decade.

47. Greece pays particular importance to the protection of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups and aims to ensure the effective integration of the principle of leaving no one behind at all levels and across all public policies and reform measures. The country's strategy for social inclusion and the fight against poverty and its first national action plan for the protection of children's rights, for example, are aimed at reducing child poverty and guaranteeing access to free health services, education, childcare, housing and adequate food for every child.

48. In Kazakhstan, significant progress in eliminating unequal access to the Internet is being achieved through the implementation of the "250+" project, which seeks to provide villages with high-speed mobile Internet. As a result, 5,000 of the 6,400 settlements – accounting for 99 per cent of the country's population – were provided with access to the Internet using various technologies. The remaining 1,400 settlements are small villages where access is expensive or technically challenging. The country will be able to cover about 500 of the settlements on its own using various support mechanisms, such as tax breaks. The rest can only be covered using non-geostationary satellite constellations, such as Starlink.

49. Mali is paying particular attention to vulnerable groups, aiming to reduce poverty and address inequalities, exclusion and discrimination. To support the social and economic inclusion of the most disadvantaged, the Government, in collaboration with United Nations entities, is implementing programmes to strengthen the resilience of individuals, households and entire communities and ensure their inclusion. For example, it has set up targeted money transfers as well as canteens in public schools to ensure that children attend school and improve their health.

50. One of the goals of Morocco is to leave no women and no girls behind. In the 2022 national report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, various achievements accomplished over the past 14 years in promoting women's rights were highlighted, including legislative and institutional reform projects, strategies, plans and programmes. In line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Morocco adopted a national action plan on women and peace and security in 2022, showing its commitment to gender equality and its conviction that the women and peace and security agenda is an essential component of maintaining international peace and security.<sup>19</sup> Several other policies

---

<sup>19</sup> See also <https://social.gov.ma/mme-la-ministre-aawatif-hayar-met-en-exergue-les-efforts-du-maroc-pour-la-promotion-des-droits-des-femmes-devant-le-cedaw>.

and strategies are being designed to target specific vulnerable groups, such as rural communities, older persons, young people, persons with disabilities and minorities, based on the mobilization of all stakeholders involved in a sustainable development dynamic.

51. In Slovakia, the Hlavičky (“Clever heads”) project is an intergenerational volunteer programme bringing children and seniors living in Banská Bystrica together to learn from and help each another. Senior citizens tutor children and elementary school students and help them with their homework. In exchange, the children help senior citizens to master modern technologies. The programme focuses primarily on children from vulnerable or large families who cannot afford to finance a tutor. It has many benefits, including reducing the social isolation of seniors.

52. The Uši k duši (“Ears to the soul”) programme was launched in 2020 in the Banská Bystrica region as a response to the involuntary isolation of people from their loved ones and others during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on identifying and helping people who feel lonely by engaging with them in meaningful conversations via mobile phones. Volunteers supporting the programme also benefit by improving their communication skills and active listening and learning to respond to the different situations of clients. The primary target groups are senior citizens and patients with chronic and serious diseases, but others can also use the programme if necessary. Citizens are involved in developing and implementing both projects.

#### **Selected countries using the Multidimensional Poverty Index<sup>20</sup>**

53. Poverty in Egypt generally increased during the first two decades of the current millennium, with almost 1 in 3 Egyptians living below the poverty line. With the help of the Multidimensional Poverty Index, Egypt introduced one of the largest initiatives to improve the living conditions of the poorest in the country. Hayat Karimah (“Decent life”) is a climate-sensitive initiative launched in 2019 with the aim of creating sustainable rural communities, closing developmental gaps and alleviating poverty in villages and slums in urban areas. It targets 4,500 villages across the country and aims to improve the lives of 60 million Egyptians.

54. India educated government officials, citizens and others on the value and necessity of the Multidimensional Poverty Index as a potent policy tool and is using it in planning development strategies, budgetary allocations and goal setting. The Index provides crucial insights into many cross-sectoral indicators and evidence for decision makers at all levels. It complements existing metrics to track progress and informs high-impact interventions. It not only covers the national poverty headcount ratio but also includes important information on the extent of poverty. This resulted in numerous targeted development interventions leading to progress in key areas, such as health and education, and about 135.5 million persons escaping poverty.

55. In Malawi, the second Multidimensional Poverty Index report, launched in 2022, complements monetary poverty measurements that have traditionally been used in the country to measure poverty, by providing an understanding of the multidimensional nature of poverty and the dominant deprivations experienced by various population groups. It uses data from the fifth Integrated Household Survey, which was conducted in 2019 and 2020. Its findings show that people in rural regions are in general poorer than those in urban areas, indicating the urgent need to address rural-urban disparities. In 2022, more than half of the population – 58.8 per cent – remained multidimensionally poor, albeit indicating a slight decline from 61.7 per cent in 2021. The country has enacted various pieces of legislation and put in place various

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see <https://ophi.org.uk/category/publications/national-mpi-reports>.

strategies to ensure that no one is being left behind. Marginalized groups are also involved key decision-making processes.

56. In 2021, Nepal published its second Multidimensional Poverty Index report, examining poverty from more than an income perspective by including other aspects such as nutrition, child mortality, schooling, housing and assets. The country opted to produce the report in order to compare itself with other countries and accelerate its own progress. Nepal recognizes the prevalent issues of intersectional discrimination, exclusion, violence, inequality and exploitation in its society and is taking measures to ensure equity, including through legal provisions, policy measures, institutional arrangements, investments and the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships. While 3.1 million people were left in multidimensional poverty between 2014 and 2019, Nepal made considerable progress in reducing the overall poverty rate from 30.1 per cent in 2014 to 17.4 per cent in 2019 in line with its commitment to improve the prosperity and well-being of its citizens.

## V. Recommendations

57. **Leaving no one behind requires a holistic, enabling, coordinated and sustainable approach involving all actors, including governments at all levels, the United Nations system, citizens, the private sector, civil society and academic institutions. It is based on the identification and mapping of vulnerable groups and requires not only implementing targeted policies but also addressing systemic issues and root causes that contribute to persistent inequalities, discrimination and exclusion.**

58. **Countries are encouraged to develop integrated people-centred strategies for leaving no one behind by establishing inclusive public institutions, mutually reinforcing processes and targeted equity-based policies and interventions. They should apply a human rights-based approach and a gender perspective and implement the Committee's principles of effective governance. Accountable, responsive and inclusive institutions will also have to be built at the subnational level to reduce inequalities and exclusion. Equity-based policies should be enforced, and a dedicated and adequate budget attributed to targeted interventions to address the deprivations of those being left behind. Lessons learned should be used to continuously improve policies and interventions.**

59. **Macroeconomic policy instruments, such as fiscal and monetary policy, should work towards equitable sustainable growth, job creation and the reduction of poverty and inequalities. Gender-based budgeting should be promoted and various options for financing targeted policies and interventions to leave no one behind assessed, with a focus on providing safety net packages to the most vulnerable.**

60. **Interventions should be aimed at addressing the needs of those furthest behind first and be paired with preventive policies to ensure that new people or groups do not fall behind at the same time as others escape poverty and deprivation. To better achieve the pledge to leave no one behind, interministerial (horizontal and vertical) collaboration should occur in line with the whole-of-government approach.**

61. **Governments should support and empower vulnerable groups through education and awareness-building efforts. They should also ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making as well as monitoring and review processes, applying a whole-of-society approach. Civic engagement through a participatory approach, supporting local communities and civil society**

organizations, can help to shape public decisions and hold Governments accountable regarding the realization of the rights of vulnerable population groups. Collective action should be taken, involving Governments, human rights institutions and civil society, to institutionalize community feedback mechanisms and collect people-centred data. The increased participation of women and vulnerable groups, such as young people, in political, parliamentary and electoral processes as candidates and voters should also be promoted.

62. A change of mindsets in the public sector to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda needs to occur. Governments should invest in intellectual capital and human resources, including in the skills, competencies, resources, working conditions and values of public servants, which can support the building of strong institutions and the achievement of effective public service delivery. This can also promote and anchor trust in public institutions.

63. Accessible, reliable and robust data are required to guide policymaking and drive change. Governments and other stakeholders should be supported in order to identify, embed and report effectively on Sustainable Development Goals essential to leaving no one behind, expanding on the use of voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews. National and subnational capacities should be strengthened to better gather, analyse and use disaggregated data, understand disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind and track progress in achieving the Goals. At the same time, all actors, including marginalized communities, should be mobilized to bridge disaggregated data gaps with surveys, registries, innovative solutions and technologies.

64. The ongoing monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management of efforts aimed at leaving no one behind are essential to ensure that strategies remain effective and responsive to the changing circumstances and living conditions of those being left behind. Transparent reporting, follow-up and review processes for the Sustainable Development Goals should be ensured that are people-centred and gender-sensitive, respect human rights and focus on the most vulnerable and furthest behind. Localization of the Goals should be encouraged to better understand and address divergent rates of progress, while establishing support mechanisms to increase capacities at the regional, national and local levels.