Priority policies to reduce inequality in childhood and adolescence
C. Priority policies for reducing inequalities among children and adolescents

Priority policies for reducing inequalities among the child and adolescent population include:

- Promotion of well-being and social inclusion during all stages of childhood based on policies aimed at achieving universal quality health care and education and at putting in place social protection systems that include cash transfers, and policies on childcare and early childhood development that guarantee access to social services and address emerging problems,

- Child protection as a means of preventing and addressing violations of children's and adolescents' rights to grow and learn in a safe environment free of violence.

1. Well-being and social inclusion

Public policies on the eradication of child poverty should be the top priority. In order to achieve this aim, cash transfer programmes will need to be strengthened, expanded and continued within the framework of universal, comprehensive social protection systems of proven effectiveness, along with measures for interrupting the vicious circle of poverty by upholding the right to education and health through the progressive, systematic expansion of service coverage and improvement of service quality.

An integrated, long-term approach is called for that will provide guarantees for the right to well-being and social inclusion in all areas of health and education, housing and basic services, along with guaranteed incomes during all three stages of development of this sector of the population: early childhood, childhood and adolescence.

i. Early childhood (0-5 years)

Special attention needs to be devoted to the stage of early childhood as one of the most important phases of human development. As observed by UNICEF (2010), a proper diet and developmental stimulation, protection and care are crucial during early childhood in order for children to survive, progress, learn and participate during that stage as well as during future developmental stages. Measures focusing on this stage should include:

- Ensuring appropriate care during gestation by providing health and nutrition support to the expectant mother and ensuring the availability of prenatal care, starting with early pregnancy detection and including proper care for the newborn. Brazil's Happy Child Programme, for example, prepares pregnant women for childbirth and promotes the strengthening of family ties in caring for, protecting and raising the child. Another example is the Chile Crece Contigo (“Chile Grows with You”) programme, which makes use of the Biopsychosocial Development Support Programme as a gateway for monitoring and supporting the health and integral development of children starting while they are still in the womb and continuing on until they reach 9 years of age. This initiative provides prenatal workshops to help prepare expectant mothers and their partners during gestation and childbirth, promotes active fatherhood with the help of its Guide for Active Fatherhood and Shared Responsibility for Raising Children, health check-ups for the children and the provision of training, opportunities for play and other early childhood stimulation activities.

See Facts for Life (UNICEF, 2010).

See (online) http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/.
• **Reinforcing efforts to promote breastfeeding** during at least the first six months of life and promoting healthful nutrition programmes through parent training, food transfers and/or school meal arrangements. For example, Brazil has launched a breastfeeding and complementary feeding strategy which offers five-hour workshops aimed at promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding and healthful complementary feeding practices.

• **Ensuring universal access to quality preventive and curative health services for children during their first five years of life.** These services should include regular check-ups to track children's growth and development and to ensure the timely administration of vaccines based on WHO international standards. Argentina's National Early Childhood Plan serves children between 45 days and 4 years of age and offers workshops and training courses as part of its health-care and health promotion efforts. In Ecuador, the National Intersectoral Strategy for Early Childhood is designed to provide access to services for children between 0 and 5 years of age and to ensure the coverage and quality of those services. It focuses on coordinating prenatal and postnatal health checks, wellness visits, neonatal screening and immunizations.

• **Promoting early childhood development through programmes in which health professionals specialized in early childhood provide stimulation and help to support the development of psychomotor skills and provide training to parents and guardians.** The Chile Crece Contigo programme, for example, includes a module entitled "Nobody's Perfect" that runs parenting workshops for mothers and fathers of children between the ages of 0 and 5 years.

• **Expanding the coverage of health-care services with a view to the provision of universal access** by setting up more paediatric health-care centres in line with minimum international guidelines. One example of a cross-sectoral policy initiative in this area is the National Network for Childcare and Child Development (REDCUDI) in Costa Rica, whose chief aim is to increase the coverage and quality of comprehensive health-care services for children in their first months of life and continuing up to 6 years of age. To this end, public and private social actors are advancing policies to guarantee protection, care and integral developmental support for children in this age group.

• **Implementing policies on awareness-raising and training for parents and caregivers of young children aimed at ensuring quality care and a stimulating environment for them.** Chile’s Newborn Support Programme, for example, provides a set of basic supplies for newborns. It also educates families about how to raise and care for young children and provides information about how to strengthen the parent-child bond.

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**ii. Childhood (6-12 years)**

Although primary education coverage has increased, it is still not universal, and this is also true of food security and health-care coverage for this age group. In order to turn this situation around, action needs to be taken in the following areas:

• **Guaranteeing universal school attendance while combating child labour by implementing conditional cash transfers and other special-purpose programmes.** Brazil’s Child Labour Eradication Programme (PETI), for example, focuses on enforcing labour laws as they apply to children and adolescents. In Brazil, children under 14 years of age are prohibited from working; between the ages of 14 and 16, they may only work as apprentices. Adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 who wish to work may do so under certain conditions.

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24 See the WHO Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (WHO, 2003).
26 See [online] https://www.argentina.gob.ar/desarrollosocial/primerainfancia.
27 See [online] https://www.todaunavida.gob.ec/primera-infancia/.
29 For further information, see the Global Report (UNICEF, 2019).
30 For further information, see Grubach Guizar (2013) and Marco (2014).
31 See the Technical Secretariat of the National Network for Child Care and Development (2018).
33 See Ministry of Citizenship (2020).
so only if they have been issued an employment card, but certain restrictions still apply. They are not allowed to work at night or to work in locations or in services classified as dangerous or unhealthful. Anyone who learns of the use of child labour can report it to one of the country’s Guardianship Councils or to the Specialized Social Assistance Referral Centre (CREAS) or can call a special number to report the situation to the government’s social services network.

- **Making use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to provide children in remote areas with access to a basic education.** For example, the government of the State of Amazonas has set up the Centre for Media Education in Amazonas, which has been providing instruction via satellite television to children and young people living in remote areas since 2007. A team of teachers give classes in Manaus, the state capital, and those classes are then broadcast to classrooms in rural communities (UNICEF, 2017). Another example is the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project, which provides each child with a laptop so that they can take advantage of information and self-guided instruction technologies.

- **Preventing undernutrition and malnutrition by mounting information and awareness-raising campaigns about the benefits of a balanced diet and its contribution to children's growth and development.** Along these lines, Panama’s National Food and Nutrition Security Plan 2017-2021 focuses on reducing the extent of undernourishment by increasing the food supply and improving food and nutrition security in indigenous regions. Peru has a law on the promotion of healthful diets for children and adolescents (Act No. 30.021) which provides for educational initiatives dealing with healthy eating habits, the establishment of the Observatory for Nutrition and the Study of Overweight and Obesity, the introduction of stands in schools that offer healthy foods and meals, the promotion of physical activity and the regulation of advertising of unhealthy food products. Other countries are also implementing food labelling strategies. Chile, for example, has passed the Nutritional Composition of Food and Advertising Act (No. 20.606), which provides for highly visible nutrition labelling and warnings so that consumers will know what they are buying.

- **Detecting and treating undernutrition.** Visits to primary schools in order to check children’s height and weight should be coordinated by the education and health sectors. These initiatives should also include monitoring arrangements and the provision of health care where necessary. For example, Mexico’s National Weight and Height Registry (RNPT) is maintained as a joint effort by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the National System for Integral Family Development and the System’s state offices, with coordination and technical support services from the Salvador Zubirán National Institute of Medical Sciences and Nutrition (INCMNSZ).

- **Incorporating emerging issues in the education system, such as the promotion of culture and peace, sex education and sustainable development.** Examples include progress in making sex education a part of the regular primary and secondary school curricula in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where sex education is now mandatory in the formal education system. An example of steps being taken to promote a culture of peace is provided by the guide prepared by UNESCO in conjunction with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) entitled *Strengthening the Rule of Law through Education: a Guide for Policymakers* (UNESCO/UNODC, 2019), which advocates the approach taken by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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34 See [online] https://www.centrodemidias.am.gov.br/.
35 See Panama (2017).
36 See Peru (2013).
37 See [online] https://observateperu.ins.gob.pe/.
38 See [online] http://rnpt.sivne.org.mx/pagina_/.
40 Initiatives in this area in the region include Argentina’s National Programme for Comprehensive Sex Education, which promotes healthy habits and provides information about personal care, interpersonal relations, sexuality and children’s rights, and Cuba’s Syllabus on Sex Education from a Gender and Sexual Rights Perspective, which is intended to help ensure that sex education is an integral part of the education process (Argentina, 2006, Ministry of Education of Cuba, 2011).
iii. Adolescence (13-17 years)

Limited coverage of the secondary educational system and high grade repetition and dropout rates, combined with a lack of access to appropriate health services for people at this stage in their development, can jeopardize adolescents’ future. This stage is one that often has a strong influence on young peoples’ chances of gaining access to the combined gateways for inclusion represented by vocational or higher education and employment opportunities that will enable them to obtain better-quality employment down the road. Steps that can be taken to help reverse exclusionary processes at this stage include the following:

- **Keeping young people in school by providing scholarships and cash transfers so that they do not have to drop out of school for economic reasons.** The cash transfer programmes used in Brazil (e.g. the Bolsa Família family grants) is one example. Another is Mexico’s Benito Juárez Scholarships for Well-being, which are granted to children and adolescents in early, primary and secondary education in order to support school enrolment and school completion.

- **Preventing early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases by rolling out sensitization campaigns that will help to dispel the stigma and taboos surrounding contraceptive use and promote comprehensive sex education for families, communities and school populations, as called for in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (ECLAC, 2013).** For example, Argentina’s National Programme for Sexual Health and Responsible Parenthood focuses on distributing information over the web and its helpline. It thus provides an avenue for people to consult with experts in sexual and reproductive health on a confidential basis and without cost regarding a wide range of topics, such as methods of contraception, sexual and reproductive rights, sexual violence, the legal termination of pregnancy and others. In addition, public hospitals and clinics provide contraceptives free of charge. Another example is the handbook entitled *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an Evidence-Informed Approach*, which was prepared in 2018 by UNESCO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) secretariat, UNFPA, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN- Women) and WHO. This handbook is a tool that can be used by education, health and other authorities in the development and implementation of comprehensive sex education programmes and materials in school and non-school settings (UNESCO, 2018).

- **Providing support to teenage mothers and fathers so that they can continue their education, have an adequate income and have access to care services. They should also be provided with information that will help them avoid a second unwanted pregnancy.** The Chile Crece Contigo programme includes a school retention support subprogramme to help pregnant teenagers and young mothers and fathers complete the Chilean system’s 12 years of compulsory education.

- **Preventing gender violence by implementing sensitization campaigns aimed at empowering adolescent girls.** The idea here is to promote their self-esteem and enable them to protect themselves by resisting attempts to subject them to gender-based violence. For example, Brazil’s Programme “H” community workshops consist of 14 two-hour group sessions held over a six-month period and a community-based campaign in the favelas targeting boys and men between the ages of 14 and 25.

- **Promoting leadership and participation among adolescents.** The aim here is for adolescents to acquire skills and knowledge that will help them to make wise decisions about their lives, their families and their communities and to become active members of...
society. One example of initiatives in this area is the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER)\textsuperscript{47} funded by UNFPA, which is a network of over 500 non-profit organizations and government institutions that are working to build a partnership between young people and adults to advocate for policies and services associated with national youth development strategies, improved access to sexual and reproductive health information, knowledge and services, and the sharing of lessons learned in different countries and cultures. Another example is the Unidas Crecemos (“United We Grow”) initiative promoted by UNFPA Mexico in collaboration with a number of strategic partners in an effort to help teenage girls to exercise their rights and duties as citizens and assist them in gaining access to education and health services. The girls are organized into clubs that meet in public community venues where they attend training workshops dealing with such topics as human rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of violence.\textsuperscript{48}

- Providing mental health support services\textsuperscript{49} for adolescents based on strategies for preventing and treating mental health conditions.\textsuperscript{50} In Chile, for example, the National Suicide Prevention Programme (Ministry of Health, 2017) runs cross-sectoral initiatives aimed at reducing the number of deaths by suicide. It focuses on early risk detection and assistance and therapeutic treatment for persons in crisis. It also runs prevention campaigns in schools to reach the child as well as the adolescent population.

2. Child protection

The principle of the best interests of the child is established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and should be upheld in all public policy actions targeting children and adolescents.\textsuperscript{51} Some of the options in this field are as follows:

- Promoting action to prevent and/or eradicate sexual exploitation and trafficking and to punish persons perpetrating these crimes. As one example, Chile’s specialized programmes to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents\textsuperscript{52} work at the national and subnational levels to secure the physical and psychological recuperation and rehabilitation of child and adolescent victims of sexual exploitation. Another example is Argentina’s “Equipo Niñ@s” Team Campaign against Sexual Exploitation and Grooming,\textsuperscript{53} which provides professional counselling and advisory services on victims rights when victims of sexual exploitation are giving their depositions or testifying. These kinds of measures can be brought together under a national plan such as the Dominican Republic’s Action Plan to Eradicate the Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Boys, Girls and Adolescents 2006-2016. This plan included four main lines of action: (i) strengthening the family for development; (ii) strengthening citizens’ responsibilities in reporting exploitation and general knowledge about child abuse and exploitation; (iii) reviewing and improving regulations, laws and protection programmes; and (iv) strengthening laws and justice systems to ensure the effective apprehension and prosecution of perpetrators of child abuse and exploitation.

- Promoting measures for preventing and eradicating child labour and for punishing persons making use of child labour by developing strategies for ensuring that the regulations and laws on child labour are enforced. The Child Labour Risk Identification Model developed by ILO and ECLAC (ILO/ECLAC, 2018), for example, can be used to gather empirical evidence

\textsuperscript{47} See Hinrichsen and Jensen (2006).
\textsuperscript{48} See UNFPA (2019b).
\textsuperscript{49} WHO (2005) has a manual on the implementation of mental health policies.
\textsuperscript{50} For statistics on mental health facilities in each country, see WHO (2016) [online] http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.MHFAC?lang=en.
\textsuperscript{51} See general comment No. 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the application of the principle of the best interests of the child.
\textsuperscript{52} See Ministry of Justice (2009).
\textsuperscript{53} See (online) http://www.jus.gob.ar/atencion-al-ciudadano/atencion-a-las-victimas/brigada-nin@s.aspx.
for use in establishing national and subnational policy priorities for the prevention and elimination of child labour. Mexico has rolled out two initiatives aimed at promoting the eradication of child labour. The first provides labels that read “agricultural enterprise free of child labour” to companies that demonstrate that they observe the relevant regulations and laws and that institute a child protection policy (Secretariat of Labour and Social Security, 2019). The other provides badges or certificates that read “For a Mexico without child labour” to public, private and civil society organizations that have put in place procedures, policies, programmes and measures for preventing and eradicating child labour (Secretariat of Labour and Social Security, 2017).

- **Taking action to put an end to bullying in schools, emotional assault and cyberbullying through awareness-raising efforts and the strengthening of reporting and redress mechanisms.** For example, the Fundación ANAR in Peru has a Buentrato (“Kindness”) programme that works to counter violence in schools by inculcating fundamental values and basic skills in secondary school student volunteers who can then become “trainers” for younger students and can model ways of dealing with other people that engender good relations among peers. Other examples around the world include the “Safe to Learn” programme, whose objective is to eliminate violence from schools by 2024. Participating organizations include UNESCO and UNICEF. Yet another example is the NGO “No Bully” initiative which, with support from Scholastic and UNESCO, is running the “Power of Zero” campaign. Schools and households around the world are provided with learning resources and materials to help small children to learn how to use the Internet properly and to understand the importance of digital citizenship so that they will be prepared to prosper in a digital world. This initiative is indirectly associated with the drive to reduce cyberbullying.

- **Taking steps to prevent and address cases of domestic violence and to foster the creation of a healthy environment.** As one example, the Chile Acoge (“Chile Embraces”) programme seeks to put an end to domestic violence and violence against women by employing preventive measures, assisting and protecting victims, re-educating men who use violence, training key stakeholders and promoting cross-sectoral coordination.

3. **Special assistance for vulnerable groups of children**

Another highly important issue to be taken into consideration in the formulation of social policies and programmes is the social exclusion of vulnerable groups of children. The following types of action should therefore be taken:

- **Implementing measures to ensure the social inclusion of excluded groups and those in particularly vulnerable situations, such as children and adolescents with disabilities, those belonging to indigenous groups or who are of African descent, migrant children and adolescents, those living in rural or marginalized urban areas, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and adolescents.** One example is the Indigenous Education Support Programme in Mexico, which works to make sure that children and young people enrolled in public schools continue to pursue their education. It provides five different kinds of support to indigenous students: lodging at what are called Indigenous Children’s Homes; a balanced and culturally appropriate diet; scholarships for higher education and assistance for participation in degree programmes; accident insurance; and socially, linguistically and culturally relevant complementary activities. Another example is Costa Rica’s National Policy on Disability (PONADIS), which establishes

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54 See [online] https://www.end-violence.org/safe-to-learn.
55 See [online] https://www.powerof0.org/.
56 See UNICEF (2014).
58 For further information, see INPI (2015).
59 See CNREE (2011).
a long-term framework for efforts to promote, guarantee and ensure respect for the rights of persons with disabilities. A special component of this programme for children is directed specifically at providing support and technical assistance services to students with special educational needs, providing inclusive education and making learning opportunities in the areas of music and drama available to children and adolescents with disabilities. A third example is Mexico’s Education Without Borders programme, which provides advisory assistance and guidance to returnees, migrants and refugees regarding the options available to them for beginning, continuing, completing or certifying their primary and secondary educations.

See National Institute for Adult Education (2019).
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