



# Putting child poverty on the map through advocacy initiatives

Evaluation of UNICEF’s work in contributing to child poverty reduction, including in humanitarian and fragile settings

## Key messages



**333 million**  
children living in extreme poverty



**one billion**  
living in multidimensional poverty worldwide

The good practices outlined in this document showcase two or more of the following criteria



**evidence-based approach** grounded in robust data and analysis



**innovation and creativity** in employing novel solutions



**replicability and adaptability**, allowing the practices to be applied in various contexts



a focus on **capacity building** and ensuring stakeholder ownership



demonstrated **sustainability and scalability**, with long-term impact and potential for expansion



measurable positive outcomes and **tangible impact**



**collaborative and multi-sectoral engagement** involving diverse stakeholders



an emphasis on **inclusiveness and equity**



## Introduction

Advocacy initiatives remain vital in UNICEF's efforts to address the persistent challenge of child poverty, with approximately 333 million children living in extreme poverty and one billion living in multidimensional poverty worldwide.<sup>1 2</sup> Putting child poverty on the map is crucial to enabling governments to understand the need to address it, and for promoting social demands for measures aimed at reducing it. This good practice note aims to highlight UNICEF's work in undertaking advocacy efforts to raise awareness of child poverty among political stakeholders and the general public, showcasing the consistent use of evidence, engagement with political stakeholders and dissemination of key messages in the media by Country Offices (COs). The cases of Montenegro, Malaysia and Argentina highlighted in this good practice note underscore the importance of advocacy initiatives aimed at raising general awareness of child poverty for strengthening a support base for child poverty reduction initiatives, laying the ground for advocating vital policy changes. The cases highlight UNICEF's evidence-based approach to advocacy, utilising quantitative and qualitative approaches and communicating results effectively with key audiences.

The good practices outlined in this document showcase two or more of the following criteria: i) an **evidence-based approach** grounded in robust data and analysis; ii) **replicability and adaptability**, allowing the practices to be applied in various contexts; iii) demonstrated **sustainability and scalability**, with long-term impact and potential for expansion; iv) **collaborative and multi-sectoral engagement** involving diverse stakeholders; v) **innovation and creativity** in employing novel solutions; vi) a focus on **capacity building** and ensuring stakeholder ownership; vii) measurable positive outcomes and **tangible impact**; and viii) an emphasis on **inclusiveness and equity**, targeting the most vulnerable and promoting fairness. The primary aim of this document is to provide valuable insights and serve as a guide for other UNICEF COs to undertake advocacy efforts aiming to raise awareness of child poverty. This good practice note will highlight activities undertaken by UNICEF COs to increase the visibility of child poverty in the public agenda and support governments in understanding the need for child poverty reduction policies. These activities highlighted are aligned with the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty's guide to reducing child poverty, *A World Free from Child Poverty*,<sup>3</sup> specifically relating to Milestone 3: Putting child poverty on the map through child poverty advocacy.

# Highlighted good practices

## UNICEF Montenegro's advocacy with the parliamentarians and utilisation of evidence to advocate for improvements to child poverty reduction programmes

### Summary of the good practice

UNICEF's work in Montenegro demonstrates **collaborative and multi-sectoral engagement** through its partnership with the Montenegrin Parliament, **innovation and creativity** by amplifying adolescent voices, and **impactful results** seen in the introduction of a universal child allowance program. Since 2020, the UNICEF Montenegro CO has been undertaking actions to increase awareness of child poverty and advocating for the expansion of social protection for children. In partnership with the Parliament of Montenegro, UNICEF conducted a 12-month advocacy campaign focusing on raising awareness of multidimensional child poverty and discussing policy options to mitigate its impacts. This collaboration with the Parliament extended into 2021, with continued high-level thematic dialogues focusing on multidimensional child poverty and violence against children. These efforts aimed to build support for child poverty reduction policies, including universal child benefits.<sup>4 5</sup> UNICEF conducted advocacy initiatives involving media engagements and dialogues with decision-makers and the public on the harmful effects of child poverty, contributing to positioning child poverty reduction as a priority within the new government's agenda.<sup>6</sup>

### Amplifying adolescent voices to raise awareness of child poverty among parliamentarians and civil society

The campaign conducted with the Parliament in 2020 involved young reporters engaging with parliamentarians, civil society members, academics, international stakeholders, and fellow young people to discuss strategies for addressing child poverty. Additionally, they engaged representatives of the newly elected government on this issue.<sup>7 8</sup> Through the campaign, adolescent voices were amplified, advocating for child poverty reduction as a national priority.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, UNICEF organised the #YouthAskingPoliticians campaign, providing a platform for adolescents to engage in public dialogue with 14 political representatives running for parliamentary elections. The initiative involved young reporters posing questions to candidates about various pertinent issues, including strategies to alleviate child poverty, in the lead-up to elections. These questions were sourced from young reporters, adolescents, and their families through social media and in-person initiatives, and the dialogues were broadcast on national television. Additionally, the campaign encouraged young people to make informed voting choices, prioritising issues important to them.<sup>10</sup> By actively involving adolescents in the advocacy process, UNICEF Montenegro CO fostered intergenerational dialogue and civic engagement. This not only raised awareness among parliamentarians but also empowered young people to participate in shaping policies that directly impact their lives.

### Leveraging child poverty rates and policy analysis to advocate for improving social protection for children

In 2021, in partnership with the UNICEF Office of Research, the CO launched a study on multidimensional child poverty along with a position paper on the subject and shared these findings with stakeholders alongside advocacy briefs in response to announced budget cuts on social spending.<sup>11</sup> By highlighting statistics such as one in three children being at risk of poverty, UNICEF effectively communicated the urgent need for improved social protection measures.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the CO mobilised evidence from a social protection system assessment (SPSA) to support plans for reforming the social protection system and collaborated with the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare to develop a simulation tool for poverty reduction scenarios. These scenarios included expanding child allowance for children aged 6-17, expanding the family material allowance, and implementing income tax reform to fund the expansion of social protection.<sup>13</sup> In 2022, following the findings of the 2021 SPSA, the CO partnered with the World Bank to conduct a Social Protection Situation Analysis (SitAn) and consistently disseminated these results.<sup>14</sup> These analyses demonstrated the potential impact of policy reforms on reducing child poverty rates and provided policymakers with evidence-based recommendations.

#### Key results achieved

- ▶ advocacy efforts summed up with evidence on poverty reduction policy options were instrumental in driving the government's decision to introduce a quasi-universal child allowance in 2021 for children up to five years old, followed by the universal child allowance for children up to 18 years old.<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> In 2022, more than 90% of children were registered for the programme.<sup>17</sup> As of March 2022, about 36,000 children under the age of six were eligible for monthly financial aid, totalling almost €18 million allocated by the government.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the decision to provide child allowances until the age of 18 is projected to further alleviate child poverty, with simulations indicating a potential reduction in the child poverty rate to below 30%, the lowest percentage since 2013.<sup>19</sup>
- ▶ UNICEF's public advocacy and high-level dialogues supported the new government in prioritising child poverty reduction and committing to invest efforts in improving child allowances for vulnerable segments of society and enhancing the quality of social and child protection services. The CO is providing technical support to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare to develop the Strategy for the Development of Social and Child Protection System 2024-2028 and a new law on Social and Child Protection.<sup>20</sup>

**Lessons learnt**

- ▶ seizing opportunities during key political windows proved crucial as UNICEF effectively advocated for the introduction of the universal child allowance in Montenegro following a change in government. UNICEF's advocacy campaigns and high-level dialogues with representatives of the new government in 2023 contributed to maintaining child poverty reduction as a priority during the government transition.<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ Advocacy efforts aimed at raising awareness of child poverty among candidates, parliament members, and civil society, emphasising its importance for children, can strengthen the support base for policies to address it. In this case, awareness-raising campaigns paved the way for effective advocacy for improving and expanding social protection, informed by child poverty measurement and policy analysis.
- ▶ The CO's collaboration with the Parliament of Montenegro was pivotal for the successful implementation of the campaigns involving adolescent participation in 2020 and 2023. This partnership facilitated the CO's consistent involvement in advocacy dialogues with parliamentarians and line ministries and the provision of technical support to enhance the social and child protection systems.
- ▶ The involvement of young reporters and active citizenship among youth has proven to be instrumental in raising awareness and advocating for policy change regarding child poverty. Their participation in campaigns and dialogues with policymakers highlights the significance of amplifying youth voices in addressing societal challenges. This underscores the need for continued support and platforms for youth engagement in decision-making processes.

## UNICEF Malaysia's evidence generation and dissemination efforts to raise awareness of urban child poverty

### Summary of the good practice

UNICEF's advocacy work in Malaysia highlights an **evidence-based approach** through comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research on urban child poverty, **inclusiveness and equity** by incorporating children's and families' perspectives, and **sustainability** by working to integrate child poverty considerations into national strategic planning. Between 2018 and 2021, the UNICEF Malaysia CO produced a series of studies revealing alarming living conditions and rates of child malnutrition and other deprivations in urban areas, including the studies titled "Children Without" in 2018 and "Families on the Edge" in 2020, focused on poverty and deprivation in low-cost flats. The latter consisted of a longitudinal study that assessed the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and children in low-income households.<sup>22 23</sup> Moreover, between 2018 and 2020, UNICEF conducted studies on urban multidimensional child poverty and deprivation in two cities in the Sabah state to identify children living in "data blind spots."<sup>24</sup> Building on these efforts, the CO advocated for integrating child poverty and social protection considerations into the 12th Malaysian Plan and Shared Prosperity Vision 2030.

### Disseminating evidence to raise awareness of urban child poverty through media and stakeholder engagement

UNICEF effectively disseminated the "Children Without" study results to the public, decision-makers, and the media to raise awareness about urban child poverty. In 2019, the CO organised an awareness-raising event about stunting in Kelantan, a state with high child stunting prevalence rates,<sup>25</sup> and presented the results of the study in the Sabah state to state authorities in 2020.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the CO collaborated with local think tanks and academia to generate evidence on child poverty and well-being.<sup>27</sup> The "Families on the Edge" study findings received significant media coverage, providing essential advocacy materials during policy and budget decision-making processes.<sup>28 29</sup> The CO utilised its findings to inform a joint United Nations paper on social protection reform, including policy analysis and financing options, presented to the Malaysian Social Protection Council, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Economy.<sup>30</sup>

### Complementing quantitative with qualitative research approaches, including children's perspectives

The "Children Without" and "Families on the Edge" studies combined quantitative survey data with qualitative insights, including photographs and written descriptions, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue's nuances. In the "Children Without" report, selected photographs taken by adolescents during a photography workshop were included.<sup>31</sup> For the "Families on the Edge" study, qualitative insights on well-being were gathered through telephone surveys and interviews, along with photographs taken by children. UNICEF also supported the production of four short documentaries based on the "Families on the Edge" results, offering additional qualitative insights into the effects of COVID-19 on low-income households and child poverty.<sup>32</sup> Involving children as active participants in research processes provided valuable insights into their lived experiences, aspirations, and challenges, enriching the understanding of urban child poverty dynamics.

	<p><b>Advocating for the inclusion of social protection and child poverty reduction measures into national strategic planning</b></p> <p>In 2018, the CO supported the integration of a social protection component into the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD)'s Action Plan to address child poverty.<sup>33</sup> UNICEF engaged in dialogues on child poverty and social protection, including through media statements and awareness-raising events in the context of the development of the "Shared Prosperity Vision 2030".<sup>34</sup> In 2019, in collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF participated in the conference of the 12th Malaysia Plan development process, presenting a paper on child poverty and child-sensitive social protection, advocating for and providing policy options to expand child benefits. Additionally, in response to a request from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, UNICEF developed a policy brief on urban child poverty aimed at informing the 12th Malaysian Plan.<sup>35</sup></p>
<p><b>Key Results Achieved</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The "Children Without" study received significant media coverage and effectively increased awareness about child poverty among important political stakeholders, supporting the allocation of around MYR 2.6 million (US\$635,000) for health and nutrition interventions aimed at reducing child stunting.<sup>36</sup></li> <li>▶ Prompted by the findings of the "Children Without" study, the government reformed the BR1M social assistance programme in 2019, adjusting benefit levels based on the number of children in eligible households.<sup>37</sup> This reform, initiated in July 2019, aimed to address the specific needs of families on the edge of poverty, enhancing the effectiveness of social protection measures.</li> <li>▶ The Government's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 underscored commitments to tackle child poverty and malnutrition.<sup>38</sup></li> <li>▶ "Families on the Edge" raised awareness on urban child poverty through substantial media coverage, with over 140 news articles and 15 radio and television interviews, being referenced in Parliamentary debates during the 2022 budget discussions and proposals.<sup>39</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Lessons Learnt</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "Children Without" and "Families on the Edge" highlighted how factors such as timing, methodological comprehensiveness - including quantitative and qualitative approaches- and strategic planning of public communications and advocacy efforts are pivotal for enhancing the impact of UNICEF's research.<sup>40</sup></li> <li>▶ Combining campaigns with directed advocacy leads to positive outcomes, ensuring that evidence reaches decision-makers and influences policy changes effectively. This strategic approach involves aligning advocacy language with government priorities, which demonstrates the effectiveness of framing discussions to resonate with policymakers.</li> </ul>

## UNICEF Argentina's advocacy initiatives to raise awareness of child poverty among candidates, and the media

### Summary of the good practice

UNICEF Argentina's advocacy work demonstrates **innovation and creativity** through impactful public campaigns, an **evidence-based approach** by leveraging data on child poverty and social protection, and **impact and results** contributing to the expansion of child-focused social protection policies and budget allocations. Since 2016, UNICEF Argentina CO has been actively engaged in advocacy efforts to raise awareness of child poverty through advocacy campaigns during electoral periods, and the consistent mobilisation of child poverty messages in the media. During the 2019 elections, the CO launched the "The Debt is with Children (#LaDeudaEsConLaNiñez)" campaign, urging presidential and governor candidates across the political spectrum to prioritise policies to reduce child poverty and protect public funds for children. As part of this campaign, the CO engaged in dialogues with presidential candidates and presented a formal document outlining the organisation's call to address various dimensions of child poverty.<sup>41 42</sup> In the lead-up to the 2023 presidential elections, the CO initiated the "Vote for Childhood" campaign, encouraging both voters and candidates to focus on child poverty reduction policies. This campaign included the dissemination of a brief highlighting the deprivations faced by children and proposing measures to address them. Additionally, the campaign advocated for safeguarding budget allocations for children<sup>43</sup> and urged the general population to demand that their candidates prioritise policies aimed at addressing child poverty.

### Leveraging evidence to inform advocacy campaigns and advocacy for child poverty reduction policies

The CO conducted qualitative and quantitative studies to understand the impact of the economic crisis on children, informing the "The Debt is with Children" campaign. Additionally, the "Vote for Childhood" campaign utilised data on child poverty rates, budget analyses, and a rapid survey underscoring deprivations across various dimensions.<sup>44</sup> In 2020, the CO developed and implemented the first of a series of 8 rapid surveys on the situation of children and adolescents based on the sampling frame from the 2019-2020 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) survey. These rapid surveys provided insights into various deprivations children faced during and after the pandemic. Additionally, simulations of the pandemic's impact on child poverty were produced. This evidence bolstered UNICEF's advocacy for improving child-sensitive social protection policies and informed recommendations given to key government stakeholders, including the President of Argentina.<sup>45</sup> In addition to advocacy efforts during elections, the CO consistently produced evidence on monetary and multidimensional poverty, focusing on understanding the determinants of specific deprivations and various poverty profiles, along with periodic analyses of budget allocations to child-focused sectors and policies. This evidence was instrumental in informing advocacy initiatives aimed at expanding and enhancing existing child benefits, as well as safeguarding budget allocations for children.<sup>46</sup>

	<p><b>Utilising media platforms to increase public awareness of child poverty</b></p> <p>In collaboration with La Nación, one of the country's most widely read newspapers, the CO provided technical and financial support for the "Hunger for Future" journalistic project from 2018 to 2023. This initiative involved a series of journalistic reports showcasing children's experiences of poverty in various dimensions across 24 provinces. UNICEF contributed up-to-date child poverty data and facilitated access to field activities to enhance the reporting.<sup>47</sup> As part of the "The Debt is with Children" campaign, the CO launched a video featuring celebrities and influencers to engage the public in discussions through traditional and digital media channels. Similarly, the "Vote for Childhood" campaign promoted key messages through op-ed and interviews, garnering significant coverage on both traditional and social media platforms.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the CO actively disseminated the results of child poverty studies -including monetary, multidimensional assessments and rapid surveys- through traditional media and digital channels.<sup>49</sup></p>
<p><b>Key results achieved</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "The Debt is with Children" campaign generated significant engagement on social media and was extensively covered by traditional media, with over 240 stories and six op-ed. Across social media platforms, the campaign garnered over 4000 mentions.<sup>50</sup> The "Vote for Childhood" campaign received more than two hundred mentions in traditional media, including articles in most Argentine provinces and a reach of 23 million impacts with the message.<sup>51</sup></li> <li>▶ The "The Debt is with Children" campaign fostered critical partnerships with the government in 2019, enhancing collaborative mechanisms that enabled UNICEF to promptly share data on the impacts of COVID-19 on child poverty and deprivations. This evidence informed the government's policy decisions in response to the pandemic.<sup>52</sup></li> <li>▶ The dissemination of child poverty rates facilitated the success of advocacy efforts, contributing to the expansion of the cash transfer programme <i>Asignación Universal por Hijo</i> to benefit one million children in 2021. Additionally, efforts supported the increase in coverage and benefit size of the Food Allowance.<sup>53</sup> In 2022, the CO's advocacy contributed to the National Congress' decision to approve an 8.9 per cent increase to the original proposed budget for children and adolescents.<sup>54</sup></li> <li>▶ The newspaper La Nación published more than 200 journalistic articles on child poverty as part of the Hunger for Future initiative, contributing to prioritising the issue on the public agenda.<sup>55</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Lessons learnt</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ advocacy campaigns during general elections, coupled with the extensive dissemination of evidence on child poverty, social protection and budget analyses, and continued media engagements, have enabled the CO to strategically advocate for enhancing policies aimed at reducing child poverty. This was achieved by broadening the support base for such measures and streamlining partnerships with incoming governments.</li> <li>▶ The Social Policy team actively participates in the "Advocacy Committee" - bi-weekly meetings with the CO's communications and management teams - to establish objectives and deliberate on thematic priorities. These meetings have played a vital role in driving and refining efforts to raise awareness of child poverty, especially during the electoral campaigns, coordinated by the Social Inclusion and Communications teams. Additionally, this practice has bolstered the CO's strategic approach to navigating political sensitivities and leveraging opportunity windows.</li> <li>▶ The inclusion of child poverty reduction as a priority in the CO's advocacy strategies for 2023 and 2024 has elevated its importance across the CO, leading to dedicated efforts and resources being allocated to this issue.</li> </ul>

## Abbreviations

<b>CO</b>	Country Office
<b>EPRI</b>	Economic Policy Research Institute
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>MWFCD</b>	Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
<b>SitAn</b>	Situation Analysis
<b>SPSA</b>	Social Protection System Assessment

## Endnotes

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