



## Concept Note

22<sup>nd</sup> Informal ASEM Seminar  
on Human Rights (ASEMHRS22):  
Human Rights & Poverty Reduction

Co-organisers:



**RAOUL  
WALLENBERG  
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OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY



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## Introduction

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson once stated: *“I am often asked what is the most serious form of human rights violations in the world today, and my reply is consistent: extreme poverty”*.<sup>1</sup> Poverty undermines economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education, which are indispensable rights for human dignity. A person who lives in poverty faces a range of interdependent deprivations, including inadequate food, precarious housing, unsafe working conditions, limited access to education and health care, lack of political power and unequal access to justice and public life. Furthermore, the multiple deprivations linked to poverty are often mutually reinforcing and associated with stigma, insecurity and other human rights-related issues such as discrimination and social exclusion.<sup>2</sup>

Since the mid-1990s, the human rights movement had begun to place greater importance on economic, social and cultural rights and to recognise the centrality of poverty and its worst consequences in many human rights violations. Poverty came to be seen as a human rights problem, not a lack of materials or resources. Consequently, there is now an increasing recognition of the importance of incorporating a **human rights-based approach** into poverty reduction both nationally and internationally. The human rights-based approach helps to formulate and adopt policies and strategies that not only focus on reducing financial poverty but also address underlying structural causes and related human rights violations. The inclusion of human rights-thinking in poverty reduction prompts a broader understanding of poverty, how it is measured and how it is understood.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction emphasises the accountability of policymakers and others whose actions have an impact on the rights of people. Addressing poverty based on human rights then becomes a legal obligation for which states should be held accountable.

Between 2015 and 2018, global poverty continued its historical decline, with the extreme poverty<sup>4</sup> rate falling from 10.1 per cent to 8.6 per cent.<sup>5</sup> However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of the war in Ukraine have reversed much of the progress made with global extreme poverty rising for the first time in two decades. Furthermore, the pandemic has exposed deep-seated inequalities and significant gaps and inadequacies in social protection coverage across all countries. At the same time, climate change threatens to undermine efforts to eradicate poverty and unravel hard-won development gains.

Eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 is a pivotal goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which the international community has collectively committed in 2015. However, to ensure that progress in global poverty reduction is restored, we must find game-changing, just, and inclusive approaches that can address the challenges of our unpredictable global environment in line with the agenda’s transformative promise of ‘Leave No One Behind’. For states to contribute to the protection of human rights, it is essential to put people and their well-being at the center of their development planning and implementation, as well as align economic plans with social and environmental needs of society.

It is against this backdrop that the 22<sup>nd</sup> Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights will look into the causal links between poverty and human rights and discuss how human rights-based and people-centered approaches can support poverty reduction by providing an effective framework for practical action at the international, national, and subnational levels.

## About the Seminar

The Informal Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Seminar on Human Rights series was launched in 1997 to strengthen relations between civil society actors and governments in Asia and Europe on human rights issues. The Seminar series is co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (nominated by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Philippine Department of Foreign

Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> **Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights (ASEMHRS22)** provides a constructive platform for various stakeholders working in the area of human rights and poverty reduction across **ASEM**<sup>6</sup> partner countries with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between human rights and poverty reduction, and sharing good practices and national experience for better integration of human rights-based and people-centered development approach in poverty alleviation policies, strategies and actions.

## Working Groups

Participation in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights will take place in 4 simultaneous working group discussions (on Day 2) on the 4 following topics:

- *Integration of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction Strategy and Measurement*
- *Poverty Reduction and Those in the Most Vulnerable Situations*
- *Social Protection: A Human Right and Sustainable Development Goal*
- *From Local to Global: Multistakeholder Partnerships for the Advancement of Human Rights in Poverty Reduction*

In addition to the guiding questions specific to each working group, there are cross-cutting questions which are valid across all the 4 working groups. The cross-cutting questions and the working group questions are the following:

### Cross-cutting questions:

1. How does **framing poverty as a human rights violation** help people living in extreme poverty? How can communities experiencing poverty use human rights to act against discrimination, injustice, build alliances between groups, and articulate their conditions and claims? What can be done to improve this?
2. How are human rights being **implemented in practice** in poverty reduction work by governments and other organisations? What are some of the key hurdles, and capacity needs in this regard?
3. In what ways have the **2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals** made progress toward integrating human rights into poverty reduction, reducing inequalities among individuals and groups and addressing discriminatory barriers? How is the progress currently assessed, and are the required monitoring and reporting arrangements sufficient? Are the 2030 Agenda targets regarding poverty reduction attainable? What could be an alternative approach?
4. The importance of adopting a **gender-sensitive approach** has been underscored in international and regional instruments and frameworks; how successful has gender mainstreaming in poverty eradication been, and what can be done to achieve greater gender equality?
5. **People-centered development** is an approach to international development that focuses on improving local communities' self-reliance, social justice, and participatory decision-making. How does it apply to a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction, and how can the integration of the two approaches be strengthened? What experiences and good practices can be shared between Asia and Europe?
6. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which is an important treaty for enforcing the rights of those living in poverty, acknowledges that the realisation of all economic, social and cultural rights is not immediately achievable in all countries. However, it commits signatory governments to the “progressive realization” of these rights and obliges governments to raise and invest the “maximum of its available resources” to secure people’s rights. How can government accountability for their **ESCR obligations** (including poverty reduction measures) be strengthened? What effective tools, methods and existing human rights indicators can be utilised to track **governments’ accountability and budget management** in relation to human rights in poverty reduction initiatives?
7. Bearing in mind the **development gap between the Global North and Global South**, it is widely claimed that more economic and technological assistance should be provided to developing countries in order to reduce poverty and disparity. Besides providing **Official Development Assistance (ODA)**, what other role can the

developed countries play in this regard? How can the human rights norms of equality, participation, transparency and accountability be ensured in such partnerships?

## Background

### *International and Regional Frameworks*

Eliminating poverty and promoting human rights are interrelated objectives mentioned in many international treaties and commitments. **The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** are the fundamental sources of international law on poverty and human rights and the basis for states' obligations under international law. Alongside these, specific conventions which were drafted to protect the rights of certain vulnerable groups, such as women and children, and to address certain specific rights, such as the elimination of racial discrimination, provide an important set of norms and values to guide policy setting for poverty reduction. All **ASEM Partners** have chosen to ratify at least one human rights treaty; consequently, they all have some international legal obligations, binding under the law of treaties, in relation to human rights.

Human rights and poverty reduction are also inextricably linked in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, to which the international community has collectively committed in 2015. Goal 1 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) "End poverty in all its forms everywhere", calls on stakeholders at every level to drastically reduce the number of people in poverty, provide services and assistance to those in need, and ensure the resilience of the poor and vulnerable in times of crisis.<sup>7</sup> The 2030 Agenda set out a 15-year plan of action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere in accordance with its central principle of "Leave No One Behind".

At the regional level, both the **European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** have formally committed to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, comprising of 53 Partners, the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** leaders have recognised that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. To address it, they have committed to working together for inclusive and sustainable development and the promotion and protection of human rights, on the basis of the UN Charter to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>8</sup>

### *Poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon*

Poverty is not solely an economic issue, but rather a **multidimensional phenomenon** that encompasses a lack of both income and the basic capabilities to live in dignity.<sup>9</sup> It describes a complex of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, which impact people's ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In a fundamental way, therefore, the denial of human rights forms part of the very definition of what it is to be poor.<sup>10</sup>

Poverty is at least in part, created, enabled and perpetuated by acts and omissions of states and other economic actors, while structural and systemic inequalities - social, political, economic and cultural - which often remain unaddressed, serve to further entrench it.<sup>11</sup> Previously, it was generally defined as insufficient income to buy a minimum basket of goods and services. Today, the term is usually understood more broadly as the lack of basic capabilities to live in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. This definition, which was affirmed by the **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)** in 2001, recognises poverty's broader features, such as hunger, poor education, discrimination, vulnerability and social exclusion.<sup>12</sup>

## 1. Integration of Human Rights In Poverty Reduction Strategy and Measurement

Since poverty is both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations, it must be addressed with the state's human rights obligations in mind. A **human rights-based approach** to poverty reduction is based on the recognition of persons living in poverty as rightsholders and agents of change. It respects the dignity and autonomy of persons living in poverty and empowers them to meaningfully and effectively participate in public life, including in the design of public policy, and in holding governments accountable.<sup>13</sup> By introducing the concept of rights into policy-making and in poverty reduction strategy, poverty reduction is no longer justified solely by the fact that the poor have needs, but also by their rights - entitlements that create legal obligations on the part of others.<sup>14</sup>

A human rights-based approach to poverty reduction can also help ensure that strategies not only focus on reducing monetary poverty but also address structural causes and related human rights violations. Furthermore, it complements more traditional approaches to development and poverty reduction, looking not just at resources, but also at the capabilities, choices, security and power needed for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and of other fundamental civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.<sup>15</sup>

Empowerment, inclusion and participatory decision-making are also values central to **people-centered development approach**, which places high importance on promoting inclusive development, improving self-reliance, enhancing social cohesion, and fulfilling people's development needs, including of those in the most marginalised situations. By bringing people and their rights into focus, the aim of poverty reduction activities is not just to provide temporary assistance to people living in poverty, but instead address the underlying causes of poverty to ensure a more permanent change.

Rights-based approach to **poverty measurement** requires recognising the interconnection between human rights violations and material deprivation and recognising poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon not reducible to income poverty but a combination of health, education, employment, and housing-related deprivations, worsened by political disempowerment. It further calls for using a range of methodologies in combination when measuring poverty, including participatory methodologies, which are best suited to highlight power relationships and the causal links that lead to poverty and its reproduction.<sup>16</sup> But while different international and regional frameworks and mechanisms recognise poverty this way, many poverty reduction and measurement approaches continue to view poverty in narrow, monetary terms.<sup>17</sup> Also, in countries where multidimensional poverty is measured, the measurement remains mostly at the national level, and is rarely taken up at the local level.<sup>18</sup> And although the Leave No One Behind principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that poverty is multidimensional and should be examined at the individual level, most empirical studies focus on the household as the unit of analysis, underestimating poverty levels and failing to capture inequalities within households.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, many people still remain uncaptured, which include children without parental care, migrants, refugees and displaced people, people hidden within households - often people with disabilities, children who are not part of the biological family, and older people. Numerous data gaps also remain in areas that are specific to women and girls and the challenges that are unique to their experiences.<sup>20</sup>

Developing disaggregated data will help deliver and measure Leave No One Behind results, but there is a lot more work to be done.

### Working group questions

1. To what extent does the lack of **reliable methodology** that can provide accurate information and data affect human rights-based poverty reduction efforts? How can the situation be improved?
2. Despite international and regional commitments, many government policies still fail to capture a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction and measurement. What can be done to encourage the intake of **Multidimensional Poverty Measures**? What are some of the human rights considerations that the current poverty measures do not capture? Why is important to measure individual poverty?
3. As **national strategies addressing poverty reduction** need to take into account the human rights dimension of poverty, to what extent are human rights experts and practitioners involved in the strategy development and



follow-up process? What are some of the cooperation and coordination challenges in this regard, and how can they be addressed?

4. How effective are poverty-reduction policies in providing opportunities for **public participation and involving those left behind** (or at risk of being so) in all stages of **programming** and **measuring results**?
5. Legal empowerment of the poor can be understood as the process of systemic change through which the poor are protected and enabled to use the law to advance their rights and their interests as citizens and economic actors. Are there any impediments to the **legal empowerment of the poor** in your country, and how can these be addressed? Are domestic institutions effective in handling with poverty-related claims and providing remedy, and how can the processes be improved? What are some capacity-building needs in this regard?
6. Despite the global recognition of, and support for, the principle of equality, **women and girls** continue to face challenges to the full enjoyment of their human rights. Discrimination and inequalities in women's access to land, property, the labour market and inheritance persist, often resulting from statutory and customary property systems that disenfranchise women. How effective are poverty reduction plans and strategies in addressing root causes and **gender-based inequalities** underpinning women and girls' poverty? Do women have a sufficient voice in the institutions and processes that determine economic and social policies?
7. How forward-looking are poverty-reduction strategies? Are they inclusive of those who are at **risk of being left behind**? And who might these be?

## 2. Poverty reduction and those in the most vulnerable situations

Persons living in poverty frequently experience social exclusion, isolation, alienation, discrimination and inequality, which may arise from a combination of economic deprivation and sociocultural factors, such as ethnicity, race, religion, social hierarchy and gender. Poverty not only arises from a lack of resources – it may also arise from a lack of access to resources, information, opportunities, power and mobility. As the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights observes: “Sometimes poverty arises when people have no access to existing resources because of who they are, what they believe or where they live. Discrimination may cause poverty, just as poverty may cause discrimination.”<sup>21</sup>

Socially excluded people are often denied the opportunities available to others to increase their income and escape from poverty through their own efforts. So, despite any economic growth and increased income levels, excluded people are likely to be left behind, and constitute an increasing proportion of the poor. Poverty reduction policies often fail to reach them unless they are specifically designed to do so.

Poverty drives vulnerability. Impoverished people are more likely to live in conflict-prone, hazard-exposed areas and are less able to invest in risk-reducing measures. The lack of access to insurance and social protection means that people in poverty are often forced to use their already limited assets to cushion any losses caused by the disaster, which further compounds their poverty. In addition to the loss of life, injury, and property damage, disasters can also take away livelihoods, cause displacement, harm health, and lead to food insecurity. Disasters can lead to a cycle of losses, poverty traps and a slowing of efforts to reduce poverty. It is estimated that 535 million children – nearly one in four – live in countries affected by conflict or disaster, often without access to medical care, quality education, proper nutrition and protection.<sup>22</sup>

Economic and social status play a huge role in the ability of people to adapt to disasters, including climate-related events. Climate-related disasters are especially detrimental to the health and well-being of people who live in poverty and face marginalisation.

Generally, women are more vulnerable to poverty<sup>23</sup>, but also to climate change since their livelihoods are more dependent on natural resources that are impacted by it.<sup>24</sup> United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in turn, estimates that almost 600 million children, especially girls, will be living in areas of extremely high-water stress with limited or no access to safe water and sanitation by 2040. It is usually the poorest children living in areas of high-

water stress that are most affected.<sup>25</sup> Women and girls are 14 times more likely to die in climate-related disasters than men.<sup>26</sup>

Climate change also impacts persons in vulnerable situations differently, including **Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees, migrants**, as well as **persons belonging to ethnic, linguistic, religious or other minorities**. Yet, they are often excluded from any form of adequate social protection to allow them to prepare for, cope with, and adapt to shock.

According to UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related events – such as floods, storms, wildfires and extreme temperatures – since 2008. But forced displacement of persons due to other reasons, such as conflict, violence, persecution and disasters has also continued to rise. In 2022, the number of displaced persons reached the highest number ever recorded, 100 million.<sup>27</sup>

Up to 83% of the forcibly displaced are hosted in low- or middle-income countries, which puts a strain on host communities and resources. As displacement issues are rarely - if at all - incorporated in national development plans or poverty reduction strategies<sup>28</sup>, the survival of displaced persons depends largely on the availability of assistance provided by the authorities, local communities and humanitarian organisations. Thus, many lack access to shelter, food and other basic services.

In many instances, the number of displaced people makes up a substantial part of the total population and an even bigger part of the poor population. Thus, poverty reduction strategies that do not factor in the needs and potentials of displaced people, risk not being very effective in achieving poverty reduction.

### Working group questions

1. The UN General Assembly resolution (15 December 2022) calls on members ‘in taking measures to eliminate **discrimination**, to ensure that their legal frameworks are non-discriminatory on the basis of **socioeconomic status** and to address the need to effectively remove the obstacles that people in poverty face in areas such as housing, employment, education, health and other social services’. Many national, regional and international anti-discrimination provisions prohibit discrimination based on a person’s socioeconomic situation, but is this applied in practice? Also, are intersectional and multiple discrimination effectively addressed by poverty reduction strategies and evaluation?
2. According to a British Bangladeshi social economist, Naila Kabeer, there is a need for poverty indicators which recognise that the lives of women are ruled by different and sometimes more complex social restrictions, titles and responsibilities than men’s, and that women live their lives to a large extent outside the formal economy. She also suggests that this broader concept of poverty would include dimensions like economic autonomy and gender violence, which are rarely taken into account in poverty studies.<sup>29</sup> Can you share any good practices for **measuring poverty from a gender perspective**? Have these influenced the design of better policies?
3. **Indigenous and tribal communities** are around three times more likely to face extreme poverty than others. In Asia and the Pacific, the region’s 335 million indigenous people comprised over seven per cent of the total population, and almost 16 per cent of the extreme poor (ILO, 2020). Are poverty reduction measures failing to address the needs of Indigenous and tribal communities? What can be done to enhance **minority groups’ participation** in the design and evaluation of poverty reduction programmes and policies?
4. Poverty is one major driver of people's vulnerability to climate-related shocks and stressors and the **Sustainable Development Goal 1** requires state parties to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all” (**target 1.3**), and to “build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters” (**target 1.5**). What **evaluations** have been conducted on the solutions to combat climate change and poverty?
5. Do countries do enough to prioritise **child poverty**? How well are measures to reduce child poverty monitored and tracked?

6. Lack of access to social protection and appropriate risk management instruments pushes many **informal economy workers** into income insecurity or vulnerability to income poverty. Do poverty reduction strategies and plans adequately target **workers in the informal economy**?  
What are the opportunities for **displaced persons** to participate, negotiate, change, and hold accountable those institutions that affect their well-being? How can the incorporation of displacement issues in poverty reduction strategies be strengthened?
7. “In many societies, older persons comprise a disproportionate of the poor, the persistent poor and the poorest among the poor”, as Claudia MAHLER, Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights of Older Persons highlighted in her speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights of Older Persons. In view of the sheer magnitude of the growth in the old-age population globally, ending poverty in all its forms everywhere depends on the international community and national Governments recognising and addressing **old-age income insecurity**. Have sufficient or encouraging steps been taken in this regard?

### 3. Social Protection: A Human Right and Sustainable Development Goal

*“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security.../...Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

*Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.”* (Articles 22 and 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

The right to social security is recognised in numerous human rights instruments, including the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. It is a fundamental right, and as a tool to combat discrimination and promote social inclusion, social security plays an important role in poverty alleviation. Social protection consists of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout people’s lives, as well as to ensure dignity for all people. Furthermore, social protection can be a critical policy instrument for addressing climate change-related risks and impacts.<sup>30</sup>

The right to social protection is also recognised in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, which commits countries to implement nationally appropriate universal social protection systems, including social protection floors<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, target 1.3 of Sustainable Development Goal 1 emphasises social protection for children, the unemployed, older persons, persons with disabilities, new mothers and work-injury victims.

Despite its recognition as a human right, the vast majority of the world’s people are unable to enjoy social protection and it is still a privilege for far too few. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), at the onset of the COVID-pandemic, over half of the world’s population were left wholly unprotected by any social protection benefit.<sup>32</sup> There are also persisting uneven levels of protection within and across regions, between genders, and considerable gaps in support to vulnerable groups, such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities and those in the informal sector. Employment injury, disability and maternity benefits are also available on only a very limited basis globally.<sup>33</sup>

Europe and Central Asia have the highest rates of coverage in social protection with 84 percent of people being covered by at least one benefit. In Asia and the Pacific, only 44 percent of people can obtain some income security from their national social protection system.<sup>34</sup> Government spending on social protection also varies significantly, with high-income countries spending approximately 16.4 percent and low-income countries only 1.1 percent of their GDP on social protection.<sup>35</sup>



And although social protection can be a critical policy instrument for addressing **climate change**-related risks and impacts, their potential remains under-explored and underutilised and only a handful of countries have adopted “climate-smart” social protection systems to support climate adaptation and mitigation.

Furthermore, some groups may be excluded from social protection due, for instance, to conditions impossible to fulfil, corruption, discrimination or unwanted informality, to the distrust of beneficiaries towards social service providers. UN Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter defines “**povertyism**” as the negative stereotyping of the poor, and a major source of “**non-take-up**”<sup>36</sup> of rights in that it can discourage people from applying for jobs and benefits.<sup>37</sup>

### Working group questions

1. Well-designed social protection measures are powerful tools for governments to reduce poverty and economic inequality and to meet their human rights obligations. Yet, many existing social protection programs are insufficient or not meaningfully responsive to the economic realities of people living in poverty. Many eligible people also find it hard to apply or don’t apply due to the stigma associated with poverty. How can they be made more **efficient** and **inclusive**? Could **unconditional basic income** be a viable alternative to targeted social welfare measures?
2. Ensuring a financially sustainable and equitable social protection system remains a challenge, especially in developing countries with limited fiscal space and a narrow tax base. What are some of the best practices or innovations for mobilising resources for **social protection at the national level**? How can solidarity-based **Global Fund for Social Protection** be an effective solution and help finance social protection?
3. **Financial Institutions**, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) play a critical role in poverty reduction efforts by providing financing (loans) for social protection programmes in low-income countries. Are human rights mainstreamed into the poverty reduction strategies of International Financial Institutions, and what can be done to enhance their accountability for rights-based poverty reduction?
4. Although every child has a right to social protection as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to UNICEF’s estimate, 1.3 billion children are not covered by any form of social protection. What can be done to increase the intake of **universal child benefits (UCB)** to help to narrow existing coverage gaps and fulfil a child’s right to social protection? Are the economic benefits of social measures well understood? In countries where child allowance is available, are the programmes effective and far-reaching enough?
5. What are some of the opportunities, challenges and human rights implications associated with **digitalisation of social protection**?
6. How effective have **Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) programs**, which intersect social protection (SP), climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction, been in providing protection from risks from natural hazards? How can their use be expanded?
7. **Social protection floors** (i.e. Basic set of social rights, services and facilities that every person should enjoy) have great potential in facilitating the enjoyment of several economic and social rights, including the rights to social security, health, food, housing, education and water, in accordance with the obligations of States under international human rights law. Has the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notably target 1.3 of the SDGs where countries agreed to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, accelerated the progress in building social protection systems, including floors? Any innovative or good practices that could be replicated or scaled up?
8. Further mobilisation of **partners** is needed to promote the uptake of social protection measures, including floors. How can the involvement of **international human rights organizations** in poverty reduction advocacy (and social protection in particular) be enhanced? What about **National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs)**?

#### 4. From Local to Global: Multistakeholder Partnerships for the Advancement of Human Rights In Poverty Reduction

Although the primary responsibility in poverty reduction lies with the state, there is a universal recognition that effective poverty reduction demands international action. According to article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." Furthermore, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights explains that all rights have to be fulfilled "individually and through international assistance and cooperation". This means that there is not only a national responsibility but also an international responsibility for developed states, as well as others who are "in a position to assist" in poverty eradication. Therefore, the elimination of poverty is not a question of charity or goodwill of the wealthiest states; it is a question of fulfilling human rights obligations.<sup>38</sup>

Strong commitment to **global partnerships and cooperation** are also emphasised in the 2030 Agenda and **Goal 17 of Sustainable Development Goals** which call for action by all countries – developed and developing – to ensure no one is left behind. It further requires partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society.

An important dimension of international assistance and cooperation are the activities of bodies and organisations that are directly or indirectly related to the **UN**, including a number of specialised agencies and **international financial institutions**, whose activities should be in accordance with human rights, both civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights<sup>39</sup>. International Financial Institutions' role in poverty reduction is especially influential as two-thirds of global aid to low-income countries for social protection is provided by the World Bank. According to the Bank's own statistics, by April 2022, its safety net portfolio has reached US\$26.55 billion in 71 countries.<sup>40</sup>

Although the implementation of poverty reduction policies is primarily the responsibility of the state, local governance is critical for poverty reduction. **Local governments** have an advantage in knowing and understanding the needs and resources of their own territories and so they are better placed to meet the demands of their populations. Opportunities for participation in different phases of policy development and implementation are also more likely to arise in community-led activities, which in turn are more likely to flourish within an institutional framework of local government.<sup>41</sup> Thus, human rights approaches to poverty reduction should promote the transfer of power and responsibility to the local level

Given their close proximity to local issues and extensive experience designing solutions with and for marginalised communities, **civil society organisations (CSOs)** also serve as important partners in poverty reduction efforts, providing assistance services, advocating for policy change, and lobbying the government for pro-poor reforms. Furthermore, the wealth of experience, expertise, and evidence from CSOs has the potential to strengthen the design and development of poverty reduction programmes and policies by global, regional, and national policymakers if fully leveraged.

The **private sector** constitutes a large portion of wealth and job creation in most countries, rendering it a powerful, yet often underutilised, social tool that can be used to alleviate poverty.<sup>42</sup> Businesses hold a powerful lever for reducing poverty in their capacity as employers, producers and buyers through ensuring decent working conditions for their employees and workers across the supply chain. This includes, for example, fair wages, reasonable working hours, and adequate health and safety measures for workers.<sup>43</sup> Businesses can also contribute to poverty reduction by generating tax revenues for governments which in turn can be used to fund public healthcare, education, social protection programmes and other critical expenditures. Despite the emergence of some pertinent domestic laws and international frameworks, such as Sustainable Development Goals and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, however, business action on human rights remains largely voluntary.

Furthermore, **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)** are ideal actors in supporting a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction and measurement, given their broad human rights mandate and position as

interlocutors between civil society and the state. NHRIs are also important mechanisms at the country level to ensure adherence to international human rights commitments states make. In this regard, NHRIs also play an important role in advocating for those responsibilities to be translated into law and practice.

While there is the widespread view that an effective response to poverty reduction requires the cooperation of multiple stakeholders in which successful coordination includes both civil society and the private sector at the national and international level, greater effort should be made to engage the various stakeholders and to tap into their respective expertise, experience, and potential to promote a human rights-based approach and people-centered development approach to poverty reduction. Considering the increased international dimensions of economic, social, and cultural rights, it is also necessary to discuss potential **extraterritorial responsibilities** in relation to poverty reduction.

### Working group questions

1. The multistakeholder partnership ~~approach~~ to rights-based poverty reduction draws on a wealth of knowledge, skills, assets, and resources. What can be done to overcome **coordination challenges** and 'silo' approaches to addressing poverty?
2. Although the implementation of poverty reduction policies is primarily the responsibility of the state (as the main duty-bearer), other stakeholders, such as local government units, NGOs and the private sector are also important players. Are civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Europe and Asia giving appropriate attention to the links between human rights and poverty reduction? And if not, why do you think that is? In contrast, what are the challenges facing CSOs/NGOs seeking to engage in poverty reduction?
3. **Community-led activities** achieve a range of valuable outcomes around poverty but sometimes only for relatively small numbers of people. At the same time, it is important not to solely assess activities on a qualitative basis as the process of participation may be as important in many community-led interventions. How can community-led approaches be embedded within wider partnerships, strategies and funding opportunities to reach their full potential?
4. How can the role of the **private sector** in human rights-based poverty alleviation be further strengthened? What about their accountability? How can government work more effectively with the private sector to leverage its investments?
5. How can the role of **national human rights institutions (NHRIs)** as independent watchdogs and advisors on poverty reduction strategies grounded on human rights be supported? Any good practices on NHRI collaboration and experience sharing that could be replicated or scaled up?
6. How can **regional cooperation** on rights-based poverty reduction be enhanced and made more effective? What role can the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** play in this regard?
7. How can governments work together to fill the gaps in human rights protections, especially in human rights regulation and accountability of **transnational corporations and international financial institutions**, which both play a critical role in poverty reduction? What are the limitations of the current international human rights law in this regard and how do potential extraterritorial obligations come into play?,

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> UNDP, Poverty Reduction and Human Rights: A Practice Note (UNDP, 2003) available at: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/HRPN\\_\(poverty\)En.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/HRPN_(poverty)En.pdf) iv
- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/OHCHR\\_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf), p.2
- <sup>3</sup> Hans-Otto Sano (2020)
- <sup>4</sup> The international poverty line is currently defined as 1.90 US dollars per person per day.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/goal-01/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://aseminforboard.org/partners/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>
- <sup>8</sup> [https://aseminforboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL\\_ASEM13-Chairs-Statement.pdf](https://aseminforboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL_ASEM13-Chairs-Statement.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/OHCHR\\_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf), p.2
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PovertyStrategiesen.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-39\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session21/A-HRC-21-39_en.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/statements/E.C.12.2001.10Poverty-2001.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/SDG%201%20Goal%20Profile\\_Final%20Web\\_EDIT%20v3.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/SDG%201%20Goal%20Profile_Final%20Web_EDIT%20v3.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3f8298544.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2006) "Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies" (<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PovertyStrategiesen.pdf>)
- <sup>16</sup> Oliver de Schutter: A Human Rights-Based Approach to measuring Poverty" in "Research Handbook on Human Rights and Poverty" (2021)
- <sup>17</sup> "Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction and Measurement" (2019). European Network of National Human Rights Institutions.
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-RBAP-Multidimensional-Poverty-Index-Measurement-Asia-Pacific-2020.pdf>
- <sup>19</sup> Khaufelo Raymond Lekobane, 2022. "Leaving No One Behind: An Individual-Level Approach to Measuring Multidimensional Poverty in Botswana," Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement, Springer, vol. 162(1), pages 179-208, July.
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development/docs/leave-no-one-behind-results-workshop-oct-2017.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PovertyReductionen.pdf>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/nearly-quarter-worlds-children-live-conflict-or-disaster-stricken-countries>
- <sup>23</sup> [https://data.unwomen.org/features/poverty-deepens-women-and-girls-according-latest-projections#:~:text=In%20all%20regions%20of%20the,%245.50%20and%20national%20poverty%20line\).](https://data.unwomen.org/features/poverty-deepens-women-and-girls-according-latest-projections#:~:text=In%20all%20regions%20of%20the,%245.50%20and%20national%20poverty%20line).)
- <sup>24</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the nearly 80 percent of the world's poor who live in rural areas and typically rely on agriculture, forestry and fisheries for their survival are particularly affected by climate change. <http://www.fao.org/3/CA3204EN/ca3204en.pdf> (p.V)
- <sup>25</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/media/49621/file/UNICEF\\_Thirsting\\_for\\_a\\_Future\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/49621/file/UNICEF_Thirsting_for_a_Future_ENG.pdf) (p.8)
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-13-climate-action>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/6/62a9d2b04/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend.html>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/41b079fe4.pdf>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://www.socialwatch.org/node/11590>
- <sup>30</sup> C. Costella, A. McCord, et al. ; "Social protection and climate change: scaling up ambition" (May 2021)
- <sup>31</sup> Social Protection Floor is defined as a set of social security guarantees that ensure, at a minimum, that all people have access to social protection at adequate benefit levels – or income security. Social protection floors typically include, but are not limited to, cash transfers for children, maternity benefits, disability pensions, support for those without jobs, old age pensions as well as access to essential health care (ILO, 2016)
- <sup>32</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_817653/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_817653/lang-en/index.htm)
- <sup>33</sup> A/69/297, p. 5
- <sup>34</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---soc\\_sec/documents/publication/wcms\\_817572.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_817572.pdf)
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid
- <sup>36</sup> "Non-take-up" of rights in the context of social protection affects millions of people around the world, effectively preventing them from enjoying their right to social security as enshrined in international human rights law, according to UN Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter (A/HRC/50/38)
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/26/make-poverty-discrimination-like-racism-or-sexism-official-to-tell-un>
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/poverty>
- <sup>39</sup> CESCR General comment 2. (General Comments) (available at: <https://www.escr-net.org/resources/general-comment-2>)
- <sup>40</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/14/imf/world-bank-targeted-safety-net-programs-fall-short-rights-protection>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/PovertyStrategiesen.pdf>
- <sup>42</sup> <https://borgenproject.org/what-role-can-the-private-sector-play-in-poverty-alleviation/>
- <sup>43</sup> <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/poverty>