

Seeding Change for A Human Rights Economy

Unlocking the Potential of Human Rights to Accelerate Achievement of the 2030 Agenda

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

"It is time for a profound shift in our approach to economic policies. …
(Human rights economies) place people – their human rights,
including their economic, social and other rights – at centre stage
(and) prioritise the health of our planet.

People are empowered to participate in decision
making processes that affect them.

Resources are more fairly distributed, reducing poverty and inequalities."

Volker Türk, 6th Intersessional Meeting of the Human Rights Council
on human rights and the 2030 Agenda – January 2024

Contents

Executive summary 4

1. Introduction 7

2. Focus of work 10

3. Shaping this vision 14

4. Achievements and Impacts 16

4.1 Achievements and Impacts: Central, East, South and West Africa 17

Cameroon 17
Chad 19
Republic of the Congo 20
Eswatini 22
Guinea Bissau 23
Kenya 25
Southern Africa 27
Zambia 29
Zimbabwe 31

4.2 Achievements and Impacts: Asia and the Pacific 32

Lao PDR 32
Malaysia 33
Mongolia 35
Timor Leste 37
Regional: South and South-East Asia 38
Viet Nam 40

4.3 Achievements and Impacts: Europe and Central Asia 41

Central Asia 41
Moldova 43
North Macedonia 45
Serbia 47
Ukraine 49

4.4 Achievements and Impacts: Latin America and the Caribbean 50

Brazil 50
Costa Rica 51
Paraguay 52
Peru 53
Uruguay 54

4.5 Achievements and Impacts: Middle East and North Africa 56

Jordan 56
Lebanon 58
Libya 59

5. Reflections and lessons learned 60

Endnotes 63

Executive summary

This report presents a compilation of examples of UN Human Rights` work undertaken between 2020 and 2024 in around thirty countries to leverage human rights for transformative economic, social and environmental policy and practice at national level. The work was pursued through the Office's Surge Initiative – a team of economists and specialists in sustainable development and economic, social and cultural rights – which was set up in 2019 in response to skyrocketing inequalities, growing levels of poverty and hunger and climate breakdown acceleration.

One of the principal goals of the Surge Initiative was to augment engagement and support to States to ensure that human rights obligations – such as that of committing the maximum available resources to economic, social and cultural rights – are integrated as an essential piece to economic policy analysis and practice. At the heart of these efforts, therefore, was an intention to help break the artificial and unhelpful silos between economics and human rights. International human rights norms and standards and the wealth of analysis and recommendations from the UN Human Rights system, offer a critical yet under-utilized contribution to economic policy making and financing for development.

The Surge Initiative worked under the vision of a 'Human Rights Economy', which calls for economic decisions such as, on budget, taxation, development finance and business, to be firmly grounded in existing human rights norms and standards. This is the pathway to ensure adequate investment in essential public services, shape fairer societies, and prevent further environmental degradation, while boosting accountability and public participation.

The projects presented in this report – undertaken in partnership with States and in close collaboration with UN Country Teams, civil society, local communities and other stakeholders – show in concrete terms how such an approach can serve as a catalyst that at the same time advances the realisation of human rights; accelerates implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and helps deliver on the pledge to leave no one behind.

The examples featured span UN Human Rights work across various areas. This includes providing a human rights-based analysis to public budgets and taxation systems to advise and assist countries – such as Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Jordan – to generate resources and increase investment in health, education, social security and other human rights.

As more and more developing countries are faced with a crippling debt burden, the Office also advised and supported countries such as the Lao PDR, Lebanon and Zambia, with analysing and mitigating the detrimental impact that high public debt servicing can have on the fiscal space available for economic, social, cultural and other human rights.

The report also provides a snapshot of the support UN Human Rights has provided to countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Costa Rica, Eswatini, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Viet Nam in using their national strategies, including those relating to education, food, health, housing and social security, to advance the implementation of their human rights commitments. Leveraging States' commitment to leave no one behind has been central to this work, with emphasis consistently placed on empowering marginalized rights-holders and grassroots organisations, safeguarding greater equality and non-discrimination.

Ensuring that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is central to economic and development policy considerations, has also been an important element of this human rights economy work. The support provided to Brazil to analyse the opportunities and implications of the State's new bioeconomy strategy on human rights, as well as work focusing on issues of pollution from fossil fuel use – at the intersection between the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the right to health – in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are examples in this regard.

The report concludes with reflections about shifts that the Surge Initiative has intended to generate – and which the Office and its partners can now build on. The examples presented in this report unequivocally show the importance of breaking silos between human rights, sustainable development and economics. A number of examples demonstrate how leveraging human rights norms, standards and obligations – including



their indivisibility and interconnectedness – in States' policy and practice as well as UN development country analysis and programming, contribute to protecting fiscal space for the Sustainable Development Goals. They also bring out the positive shifts on people's access to essential services, when rights-holders – and in particular disadvantaged groups – are empowered to engage in policy-making.

Equally important are the outcomes that the Office's human rights economy work has had on fostering new and strengthening existing partnerships. The impactful collaboration this work has generated with new and less 'traditional' partners – within and outside the UN system, including with other UN economists, economic and finance state ministries and institutions, and International Financial Institutions – is reflected throughout the report. These partnerships are critical to promote a shift towards a greater integration of human rights, including the right to development, in economic, social and environmental policy-making.

Support for the human rights economy has been increasing over past years, among State authorities, within the UN and throughout civil society and academics, including, with several prominent economists. The support of Member States in recent Human Rights Council resolutions, is also testimony to this. So is the continued increase in demand for UN Human Rights' support from States, the UN and other stakeholders. Responding positively to these requests, including by further expanding its work on the human rights economy at country level, is a strategic priority for the Office. Ensuring continued funding for this work will be critical to allow the Office to continue to further scale up this work and avoid setbacks.

The work of the Surge Initiative presented in this report shows that investing in human rights is not only the right thing to do but the smart thing to do – Investing in human rights has many positive multiplier effects that help accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals for all. They reduce inequality, prevent costly crises, unlock people's potential, and protect our planet. The Human Rights Economy is more than a vision. It's a smarter approach to policy – one that builds stability, sustainability, and inclusive growth and aims at making economies work for all.

1. Introduction

> ***"The world does not have a crisis of resources. It has a crisis of sharing and managing those resources effectively and to the benefit of all."***
>
> *Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, ECOSOC meeting, 2023*

The current state of the world is untenable. Interlocked crises have eroded progress on most of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are vital to advancing and sustaining peace and well-being for all of humanity. Whereas available data shows moderate progress with regard to 35% of the 137 Sustainable Development Goal targets, progress on 47% of the targets is insufficient, and 18% of the targets show regression from the 2015 baseline.[1] Inequalities are skyrocketing, generating social unrest and instability while undermining commitment to democratic values and multilateral cooperation. Hunger and food insecurity have escalated, with over 750 million people hungry and more than 2.3 billion facing food insecurity. Over 700 million people live in extreme poverty.[2] Climate change continues to burn and pound our planet with global temperatures having crossed the 1.5°C threshold in 2024, marking the hottest year on record.[3] And over half of the poorest countries are in or near full-blown debt distress, with some 3.4 billion people – living in countries where governments are forced to spend more on servicing debt than on education or healthcare.[4]

In 2020, in response to galloping inequalities, slow-paced implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and an outbreak of social protests across the globe – all of which were exacerbated by the global Covid-19, UN Human Rights[5] established the Surge Initiative. This initiative brought together economists and specialists in sustainable development and economic, social and cultural rights to step up country engagement and integrate human rights into the social, economic and environmental dimensions of national development strategies and policies, with a focus on those most marginalized.

At the heart of these efforts was an intention to help break silos and to infuse economic, social, environmental and developments policies and practice with human rights. Indeed, human rights considerations are largely missing from economic analysis and practice.[6] Essential international human rights obligations, such as refraining from taking regressive measures – i.e. measures that would diminish or endanger the realization of the human rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, unless they can be justified by certain strict criteria – are frequently not part of economic assessments, policy advice and planning.[7] Detailed recommendations on strategies to tackle extreme poverty, inequalities, marginalisation, and to protect human rights in highly indebted countries – that arise from expert scrutiny by UN Treaty Bodies, and the UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures and Universal Periodic Review – are often underutilised.

Through catalytic micro-grants of up to 30,000 USD, UN Human Rights' Surge Initiative[8] collaborated with UN Human Rights in-country presences – working alongside States, UN Country Teams, Resident Coordinator Offices and their economists, national human rights institutions and statistical offices, civil society, academia, economists and other partners, including international financial institutions – to implement over 80 seeding-change projects. Through these projects, UN Human Rights collected key data to spotlight gaps and obstacles, particularly for disadvantaged groups; developed tailored analysis; and identified specific recommendations for economic and social policy shifts. Above all, the Surge Initiative's projects aimed to seed change at country level – contributing to economies that deliver for human rights and protect the planet.

This work has been guided by the overarching Human Rights Economy concept that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has been promoting since 2023. The human rights economy shares the goal of the 2030 Agenda of securing more equitable, just and sustainable development. It accords high priority to fulfilling economic, social and cultural rights. This involves treating these rights as the legal obligations they are. The human rights economy aims to refocus

the economy on its primary role which should be to protect and advance human rights and the protection of the planet, ensuring sustainability, including environmental, with a fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of development. Tensions and conflict in society often commence with the denial of fundamental rights, including economic and social rights, and a breakdown in development trajectories, especially for disadvantaged and marginalised populations. The human rights economy aims to tackle the root causes of such tensions and conflicts.



Costa Rica Surge Initiative project – consultations with relevant stakeholders

2. Focus of work

> ***"(W)e need to infuse our economies with human rights. It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of human rights will be decided in finance ministries."***
>
> *Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, Intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda, January 2023*

The current report compiles examples of Surge Initiative country work undertaken between 2020 and 2024.[9] Through these examples, the report analyzes the impacts – achieved and aimed at – as well as challenges and opportunities created in some thirty countries across all geographic regions. This work was undertaken in partnership with States and in close collaboration with UN Country Teams, civil society, local communities and other stakeholders. It fostered new and strengthened existing partnerships with new and less 'traditional' partners – within and outside the UN system, including with other UN economists, economic and finance state ministries and institutions, and International Financial Institutions. The Initiative's field-facing and field-driven operational nature – strengthened through recent capacities at the regional level – was critical for the effective delivery of the Surge Initiative's goals to contribute specialized, practical and solution-oriented support for human rights-based economic policies.

The examples demonstrate the catalytic and transformative role of human rights, including the right to development, for sustainable development, in recognition that policies (including economic and environmental) that are grounded in States' human rights obligations, promote a more equitable distribution of resources, and can contribute to preserving social cohesion, prevent further environmental degradation and boost transparency, accountability and participation resulting in more robust, sustained, and sustainable progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

> ***"Human rights need to be reflected in budget allocations. If a country does not invest sufficiently in education, health, equality and other essentials, this will result in a cascade of problems in society – scuppering development and increasing inequalities. … This human rights economy will build greater social harmony. For example, when people are able to follow the money through transparent and accountable budget decision-making, their scrutiny – and resulting dialogue – generate more effective policies and greater trust in government."***
>
> *Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, press statement in LAO PDR, June 2024 and Statement by the High Commissioner on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, April 2023*

One of the main pathways to effect this change has been by **applying a human rights-based approach to economic policy-making**, for instance through: human rights-based **budget** analysis, and assessing how **tax** policies can expand the resources available for more effective investments in human rights and equitable development, and in a manner that is consistent with states' human rights obligations and the realisation of the 2030 Agenda, its Sustainable Development Goals and pledge to leave no one behind.

> ***"A fair and just global economy means a reform of global tax rules that will increase the resources governments can mobilize domestically. … It also means national economies with more efficient and transparent tax regimes and progressive tax policies on income and wealth."***
>
> *Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, Intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda, January 2024*

As part of this work, The Surge Initiative has also contributed country analysis and advice on the impact of high public **debt** servicing costs on the fiscal space available for economic, social, cultural and other human rights, and advocated for ring-fencing critical social spending in the context of the negotiations of loan agreements. This work has been guided by the notion of the prohibition of regressive measures that requires that conditionalities, such as austerity measures, do not lead to a reversal of human rights gains, in particular for marginalised groups.

> ***"Debt repayments should not interfere with States' human rights obligations to allocate the maximum available resources to the realization of economic and social rights."***
>
> *Volker Türk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, Press Statement in Lao PDR, June 2024*

It has also worked to assess how economic and development policies can better promote **the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment** conducting impact analysis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, especially on marginalised groups, looking at State and business responsibilities and ways to enhance compliance with the international human rights law framework, and accountability in this regard.

> ***"Human rights must be at the heart of rebalancing our economies, so they work for people and planet, in line with the concept of a human rights economy, promoted by our Office. ...***
>
> ***With human rights, we can break the deadlock in addressing the climate crisis."***
>
> *Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commission for Human Rights addresses participants at the 16th World Human Rights Moot Court Competition, July 2024*

Combined with its work to bridge human rights obligations with economic policy-making, the Surge has focused on providing comprehensive analysis and policy advice to the design and implementation of national sectoral strategies on social protection, housing, health, food, and other **economic, social and cultural rights**, with a focus on disadvantaged groups. It identified critical gaps in legal, policy and budgetary frameworks, assessing barriers faced by marginalised and discriminated groups in relation to their rights to, for instance, adequate housing and an adequate standard of living.

Showing the value of anchoring the 2030 Agenda's central promise of **leaving no one behind** to human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, the Surge leveraged States' obligations to support targeted **data collection and disaggregation**. It undertook in-depth country analyses to document people's real-life experiences and identified solutions to tackle the disadvantage of groups such as Indigenous Peoples, migrants, persons belonging to minorities, persons with disabilities and informal workers. By helping to bring disadvantaged or underrepresented communities to the table, the Surge worked to foster a culture of accountability, that can simultaneously contribute to social cohesion by enabling or strengthening channels of trust among and between officials and the public.

> ***"(W)hen human rights are asserted, implemented, and accounted for, they effectively anchor leave no one behind strategies with the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination and firmly lay the groundwork for creating equitable societies."***
>
> *ASG for Human Rights Brands Kehris remarks at 2024 ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment*

This work has often prioritised countries in situations of conflict or instability, where policy shifts towards greater equality and inclusion aimed to feed into efforts to reduce grievances and augment **social cohesion**.

> ***"The stagnation and reversal of progress on more than half the SDG targets has serious implications for global peace and security. It is no coincidence that countries affected by conflict are farthest behind on the SDGs.***
>
> ***We must accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, recognizing that prevention and sustainable development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing."***
>
> *Secretary-General's remarks at the launch of the Policy Brief on a New Agenda for Peace, António Guterres, Secretary-General, July 2023*

Throughout its engagement, the Surge Initiative made it a priority to:

a. **Facilitate the use of and follow up on findings and recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms,** by working with countries to translate them into concrete operational options for national development plans and programmes. On the other hand, Surge's analyses has also helped to inform the work of UN human rights mechanisms.

b. **Reinforce engagement with the development of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and Common Country Analyses by providing country specific technical advice on integrating human rights in those strategic documents,** in line with the vision of the UN's Development System reform, which emphasizes the centrality and added value of integrated advice.

c. **Develop and reinforce partnerships, including non-traditional stakeholders.** With the Surge Initiative the Office has built strong ties with State authorities, UN Resident Coordinators and Resident Coordinator Office economists, UN Country Teams, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and statistical offices, communities, academia, and other key stakeholders including international financial institutions.

d. Secured more meaningful **participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes**, including for example in national and local budget processes and monitoring, to shape changes that directly affect right holders.

3. Shaping this vision

> ***"To recover better from the most wide reaching and severe cascade of human rights setbacks in our lifetimes, we need a life-changing vision – and concerted action to follow up. We all know what has to be done. Inequalities are not inevitable. They stem from policy choices. We need a new social contract and an economic model that puts human beings and human rights at the centre of economic policy – accelerating our path towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We need to increase investment in social protection and universal health coverage, decent work and other human rights, as well as progressive taxation."***
>
> *Statement to the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly, Michele Bachelet, Former High Commissioner for Human Rights, October 2021*

The launch of the 'Decade of Action' to accelerate the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals was key in shaping the vision of the Surge Initiative Team. The UN Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights was equally of central inspiration for this work. In addition, in both 2020 and 2024, the UN system's Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review resolutions emphasised the importance of UN development actors assisting Governments to fulfil their human rights obligations. More recently, the 2023 SDG Summit and the 2024 Pact for the Future underscored the importance of upholding human rights, including through essential reforms nationally and to redress longstanding structural and systemic injustices of the international financial system. These meetings also reaffirmed that promoting and protecting human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Support for the human rights economy has been increasing over recent years, among State authorities, within the UN and throughout civil society – including many prominent economists. In June 2023, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the Human Rights Economy for the first time in resolution A/HRC/RES/53/28, and together with Human Rights Council Resolutions 52/14 and 54/22, increased UN Human Rights resources to fight poverty and address inequalities, to integrate human rights in the realization of the 2030 Agenda, and to advance economic, social and cultural rights, respectively.[10] More recently, the Human Rights Economy was highlighted as a priority in the High Commissioner's vision statement: "Human Rights: A Path for Solutions", and has become institutionalised in UN Human Rights' program of work as one of the strategic directions of its 2024-2027 Organisational Management Plan – informing our work throughout the ongoing four-year planning cycle.

A wide view of the General Assembly Hall during the opening of the Summit of the Future. © UN photo/Loey Felipe



4. Achievements and Impacts

Surge Initiative's Impact (2020-2024)



The Surge Initiative provided financial and technical assistance to over **80 seeding-change country projects** around the world

> 80



The Surge Initiative contributed to **12 National Development Plans/Programmes**

12



The Surge Initiative supported UN in-country presences with analytical contents and operational advice for **168 CCA and/or UNSDCF processes**

168



The Surge Initiative held strategic discussions and engagements with **96 RCO Economists** and took part in several discussions with national authorities on various aspects of human rights-based budgeting

96



The Surge Initiative issued **89 economic blogs for OHCHR colleagues** on the work of the Surge Team and economic issues and their impacts on human rights at the global and regional levels

89

4.1 Achievements and Impacts: Central, East, South and West Africa

Cameroon

Starting in 2020, UN Human Rights' Central Africa Regional Office undertook – with financial and technical support of the Surge Initiative – an assessment of the country's fulfilment of its minimum core obligations[11] regarding the right to health, with a focus on maternal health. This was complemented by a human rights-based analysis of the health sector budget, especially focusing on maternal health programs. Together with the Ministries for Public Health and of Social Affairs, the National Institute of Statistics, the United Nations Population Fund and civil society organizations, and using a participatory and human rights-based methodology, research was undertaken in two emergency obstetric and neonatal care networks in the North and East regions of Cameroon, which are among the poorest parts of the country.

The study built on recommendations to Cameroon by UN Human Rights Mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review of 2018 on the right to health,[12] and by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2019 on progressive and transparent fiscal and budget policies to mobilise domestic resources, address regional inequalities and ensure accessible and quality health-care services for at-risk groups, especially in the context of the exploitation of extractive resources.[13] It also drew on Cameroon's 2019 Voluntary National Review report, in which the government committed to prioritizing the mobilization of domestic resources for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our human rights-based budgetary analysis showed that the share of the national budget allocated to the Ministry of Health decreased from 5.53% in 2015 to 3.6% in 2022 – below the 4.7% planned by the 2022 National Development Strategy for the 2030 Agenda (SDN30), and well below the 15% commitment made in the 2001 Abuja Declaration. The analysis also found that funding for maternal, newborn and child health programs accounted for a significant share of international assistance, making the government over-reliant on external funding rather than designing its own fiscal strategy to maximise resources for the healthcare sector. The analysis noted that most of the health budget was allocated at the central national service level, with lower allocation to health facilities at the regional and district levels. Moreover, regional distribution of the health budget did not adequately reflect socio-economic and health inequalities between regions. For example, although the North, Far North, East and Adamawa regions had the highest incidence of under-five mortality, they received less funding per capita than regions with more extensive and sophisticated health facilities.

The analysis identified weaknesses and gaps related to the organization and supply of maternal health services in 23 structures in the four selected emergency obstetric and neonatal care networks. It identified gaps related to the needs of women and girls at risk of being left behind. It also examined the human, technical, material and financial needs of these selected health networks and proposed recommendations, some of which, laid special emphasis on women and girls of reproductive age who are at risk of being left behind, including women suffering from fistula, women living with HIV, internally displaced or refugee women, women living in rural areas, and Indigenous women.

Specifically, the report recommended that the State mobilize – through more progressive taxation – greater financial resources to fill financing gaps and improve maternal health care and services for women and girls of reproductive age. It noted that this should be complemented by a more equitable distribution at the regional level, budget reallocation and increased government revenues – particularly for those regions and persons currently being left behind – and including by adopting participatory and inclusive council budgets. The study also recommended that the International Monetary Fund ensures that measures such as fiscal consolidation and other restrictions on social spending do not have negative impacts on the Government's ability to meet its minimum core obligations related to the right to health. Finally, the study strongly recommended that the State improve the collection and utilization of disaggregated data on these vulnerable groups of women and girls of reproductive age, ensuring their specific needs are effectively addressed.

A coordination group comprising the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs, the National Institute of Statistics, the National Human Rights Institution, civil society, and UN partners, was established at the project's inception to oversee the implementation of the study's recommendations. Advocacy efforts were undertaken to influence the budget submissions of the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs from 2024 onwards. Sensitization messages have been broadcast through community radios in the targeted health districts to help improve uptake of maternal health services by local women and girls, especially those at risk of being left behind.

The project strengthened collaboration between the National Human Rights Institution and the National Institute of Statistics, leading to the signing in 2023 of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs instructed its representatives, at the decentralized level, to continue prevention activities, ongoing awareness-raising and psycho-social support for these socially vulnerable groups, on the one hand, and to carry out advocacy with decentralized territorial units. These efforts have contributed to the development of a policy on disability inclusion by the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development. The findings and recommendations also helped inform the 2024-2030 Maternal, Reproductive and Neo-natal Health Strategic Plan. Regarding UN engagement, the project deepened the UN's analysis of inequalities in access to health services; provided policy advice to meet Cameroon's minimum core obligations on the right to health; and strengthened UN Human Rights' collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs and the National Institute of Statistics.





Images taken from qualitative data collection activities in the East and North of Cameroon between 6 and 27 March 2022

Chad

In 2021, against a backdrop of violent conflicts between herders and farmers over access to and management of natural resources – in particular land and water, also resulting in part from the impacts of drought, including the decline in rainfall, the drying up of Lake Chad, and the degradation of vegetation and biodiversity – the Surge Initiative provided support to UN Human Rights in Chad to undertake a human rights-based root cause analysis of these conflicts, with a focus on the right to food.

The analysis built on recommendations by UN human rights bodies, including the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – notably its concerns relative to chronic food insecurity; and the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which recommended measures to reduce tensions between nomads and semi-nomads and other groups. In addition, the Universal Periodic Review's third report for Chad recommended: strengthening the development of the rural sector, as well as food and nutritional security, to fight against social inequalities; and measures to guarantee economic growth and sustainable and inclusive development, in particular for the most vulnerable.

The study documented the links between violations of economic, social and cultural rights and conflict and instability. It provided specific recommendations on strengthening governance and the judiciary, and investing in agriculture and food security, as a way to prevent instability and address conflict in a sustainable way. Recommendations also called for land and property management reform, and a higher and more effective investment of resources by the State in these sectors. The report further recommended that the state reflect Chad's human rights obligations in the Land and Pastoral Codes and called for their rapid adoption.

The report was launched on 24 May 2023 at a ceremony that was attended by the Human Rights Advisor to the Presidency, the Deputy President of the Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Council, and representatives of the National Human Rights Commission, the diplomatic corps, international organizations and civil society. In follow-up, UN Human Rights Chad held policy discussions with relevant national stakeholders, including various Ministries as well as the National Transitional Council, the Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Council, the national Committee of Technical and Financial Partners, civil society organizations and the National Human Rights Commission.

The analysis informed the new National Development Plan, the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the National Human Rights Forum.[14] Its principal recommendations were reflected in the final outcomes of the National Inclusive and Sovereign Dialogue in 2022.[15] In addition, in 2024, pursuant to advocacy by UN Human Rights, additional resources were provided to the agriculture and livestock sectors in the 2024 national budget.[16]



In addition, the project helped generate additional funding for UN Human Rights Chad's capacity to work on the right to food and other economic, social and cultural rights, thereby securing follow-up and sustainability to the project in collaboration with State, UN and other partners. UN Human Rights Chad has since been following-up on the study's recommendations – for example through sustained advocacy with the relevant authorities, and by prioritising work on economic, social and cultural rights in its programme of work, including through undertaking an analysis on the impact of the extractive sector on the economic, social and cultural rights of workers and riverine populations, particularly the most vulnerable.

Republic of the Congo

> ***"Through this guide, we understood that all policies are designed and implemented to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, such as the right to education, to health, etc., and that these rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled. Based on this tool, the assessment missions to be carried out by the Court of Audit will pay particular attention to human rights and the situation of vulnerable groups."***
>
> *Statement of the General Counsel of the Court of Audit and Budgetary Discipline, Brazzaville, October 2024*

In the Republic of the Congo, the Surge Initiative accompanied the Senior Human Rights Advisor of UN Human Rights through technical and financial support in contributing support and guidance to the authorities to inform human rights-based budgeting and other public finance policies and decision-making entry points. This was done by raising awareness and the capacity of high-level institutional and constitutional bodies who have a strategic influence on decisions related to budgets and public policies – in particular the National Assembly, the Court of Audit and Budgetary Discipline and councils in charge of youth, persons with disabilities, women and civil society organisations. Support provided focused on how to better integrate human rights in their work with a particular focus on economic, social and cultural rights and the interlinkages with the Sustainable Development Goals. The ultimate aim was to enable these strategic State bodies to evaluate relevant policies from a human rights perspective using a human rights-based approach and making sure to leave no one behind.

UN Human Rights work was undertaken in a context where, despite the fact that the Preamble of Congo's 2015 Constitution provides that international human rights instruments are part of domestic legislation, high level officials often lack sufficient expertise on how the human rights framework connects to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Furthermore, despite the fact that Congo has adopted a National Development Plan for 2022-2026, there is no operational monitoring and evaluation system or tool envisaged on human rights. UN Human Rights' work was therefore undertaken in response to a request for support from the authorities for capacity-building on human rights and the interlinkages with the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as on human rights monitoring and evaluation principles, as relevant to Congo's human rights and sustainable development obligations and commitments.

The dialogues between UN Human Rights and these bodies generated broad interest from across the Government and its institutions to engage with the UN on human rights issues. For example, a first session organized for the National Assembly in March 2023 on evaluating public policies using a human rights lens led to an official request for UN Human Rights to develop a guide for the Court of Audit and Budgetary Discipline to evaluate public policies from a human rights perspective. The guide was finalized in May 2024 and will be launched in 2025. In October 2024, a technical workshop was held with the Court to validate the content of the guide and explain how to use it. This work strengthened the role of the Court of Audit to evaluate public policies according to the organic law of October 2023.[17]

Subsequently, in December 2024, support was provided – with the support of the Resident Coordinator's Office – to build the capacity of the authorities on public policy evaluation and more specifically on how to integrate human rights, with a focus on economic, social and cultural rights, and gender into the strategic budgets plans and documents of the 37 Ministries, including the Ministry of Budget, Public Account and Public Portfolio.

Subsequently, the President of the National Assembly requested UN Human Rights to support the development of a lighter guide for this body to be used for its scrutiny mandate, and the Minister of Budget, Public Accounts and Public Portfolio also requested support from UN Human Rights asking for similar capacity-building to be provided to parliamentarians and regional structures in 2025. Furthermore, following the adoption of the above-mentioned guide for the Court of Accounts and Budgetary Discipline, UN Human Rights will support pilot evaluations in 2025 of health and education national strategies by this Court thereby putting into practical application the guide and capacity built.

Furthermore, the support provided to the Senior Human Rights Adviser included the development of a study on the integration of human rights into national education and health strategies. The study, initiated by the Surge Initiative, will be launched in 2025 by the UN Human Rights Office. It includes a checklist on a human rights-based approach and leave no one behind to inform the development process of future public policies.

> ***"Your collaboration greatly contributed to the success of the workshop, enabling participants to be equipped with the tools and knowledge to integrate human rights and gender into budgets and public policies, thereby strengthening their capacities and laying the foundations for a more inclusive and equitable governance."***
>
> *Letter from the Minister of Budget, Public Accounts and Public Portfolio, Brazzaville on December 2024*

Eswatini

In 2023, UN Human Rights in Eswatini collaborated with the World Bank to analyse and reinforce the integration of a human rights-based approach and a gender perspective into one of their funded energy projects. The project was undertaken in a context where electricity access had fallen by 0.6% from 2021 levels (82.90%, a 2.9% increase from 2020)[18] and the 2023-2028 National Development Plan underscores the need to update energy policies to enhance electricity supply. And yet, in the rural area of Shiselweni region, which is where this project was undertaken, only 74.8% of households are connected to the grid, and supply is unstable and unreliable. The project was led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy.[19] It was informed by Universal Periodic Review recommendations on social protection and energy that had been accepted by the Government.[20]

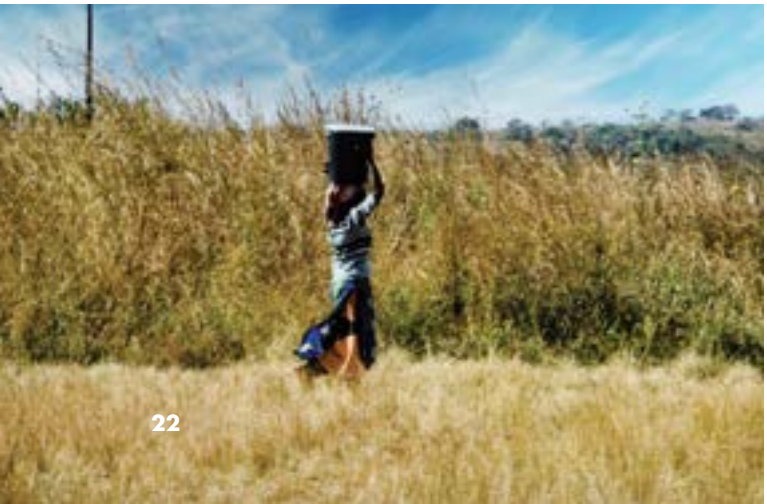
Through desk research, focus-group discussions and participatory workshops, the study developed analysis and advice on reinforcing stakeholder engagement and community inclusion in the design and implementation of the development project, noting the importance of expanding consultations beyond community Chiefs alone. The study recommended that the government collaborate with the World Bank and civil society partners to establish gender-inclusive community consultation mechanisms and develop tools and processes to more consistently include the public's views into projects, ensuring they are co-created with the communities they impact. It also recommended that mechanisms be established to improve access to information and disclose information about projects, including land acquisition, compensation, employment opportunities, and subcontracting, as well as the conditions for accessing final services to be delivered by these projects.

Following the end of this first initiative, the World Bank expressed interest in enhancing civic engagement by establishing, with the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, the Senior Human Rights Advisor of UN Human Rights, development partners, civil society and community-based organisations, a civil society platform to promote inclusive participation, transparency and accountability in the design and implementation of development programs in Eswatini.

This led to a follow-up joint World Bank/UN Human Rights collaboration in 2024 on Engaging with Citizens for Improved Results. The objective of this second initiative was to support inclusive good governance and development through enabling participation of citizens and communities – including marginalized and vulnerable groups – in development planning processes and development projects, with initial focus on World Bank projects. The initiative builds the capacity for civil society groups and community-based organisations to engage in development planning processes and strengthens country systems for government-citizen engagement aligned to Outcome 3 of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021-2025) on accountable governance, justice and human rights.[21] This has also led to new and strengthened partnerships for the Senior Human Rights Adviser with the EU, and other partners, ensuring complementarities and leveraging each other's ongoing work in these areas.

> ***"Prioritizing inclusivity and engagement of marginalized communities will ultimately lead to more sustainable development outcomes."***
>
> *OHCHR Policy brief: Citizen Engagement on the Right to Food in Eswatini*

This work also led to an OHCHR publication of a policy brief that discusses the right to food and the challenges Eswatini faces in achieving food security for all its citizens. The policy brief examines the impact of climate change and land issues and proposes a number of recommendations to respond to the situation, including greater citizen engagement to ensure inclusion and greater collaboration between government, citizens, civil society and development partners.



Guinea Bissau

In 2022, in a context marked by increased vulnerability for many groups,[22] UN Human Rights – with Surge Initiative support – succeeded in supporting a leave no-one behind analysis to inform Guinea Bissau's first Voluntary National Review. UN Human Rights provided methodological guidance[23] and supported the organisation of nine Government-led consultations in each of the eight administrative regions of the country and the autonomous sector of Bissau. The consultations ensured representation and inclusive participation from a varied range of stakeholders including civil servants, the private sector, traditional and religious leaders, professional and community-based organisations, human rights organizations, and most importantly, representatives of most disadvantaged groups. Over 300 stakeholders collectively identified and assessed progress against priority Sustainable Development Goals, including access to clean water, health and education services, and combatting poverty and inequalities. The Sustainable Development Goals were, for the first time, translated into Creole and widely distributed.

This initiative was undertaken in follow up to Guinea Bissau's human rights obligations[24] and recommendations[25] by UN Human Rights Mechanisms, including the 2020 Universal Periodic Review recommendations on the need to consolidate inclusive public policies for economic, social and cultural rights; formulate a social protection strategy; promote sustainable economic and social development and reduce the number of people living in poverty; ensure equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres; and mobilize resources and seek international support to enhance the country's capacity to promote and protect human rights.

The consultations enabled stakeholders, including groups left behind, to collectively identify priority SDGs, also in light of the State's human rights obligations.

> ***"Energy and education are the most needed to improve Guinea-Bissau, … If there is no power, our children cannot study. If they cannot study what will become of their future?"***
>
> *Aminata Camará of the Rural Women's Organization*

Guinea Bissau Surge Initiative project – Flyer on Voluntary National Review LNOB consultations



A summary of the discussions was annexed to the State's Voluntary National Review report with some of the principal findings also integrated in its main content.[26] Seventeen leaflets summarizing the findings for each Sustainable Development Goal were distributed among State, UN and other stakeholders.

These first-ever leave no-one behind consultations in Guinea Bissau raised awareness of the need to include marginalized and excluded populations in public governance at national and local levels. They were successful in engaging local and national officials in the sessions and in the report-drafting process. They also contributed to raising public awareness about the 2030 Agenda and its links to human rights. The findings are key to bridge gaps in Guinea Bissau between development, economics and human rights, fostering dialogue with the international community, including the International Financial Institutions, in this regard.

> ***"The Voluntary National Review is a process that should involve all stakeholders, as everyone can contribute to implementation of Agenda 2030, (...) Thanks to the Surge Initiative we were able to support the Government (...) in ensuring an open, participatory and inclusive Voluntary National Review. The voice of (...) groups most left behind was heard."***
>
> *Elisabeth Da Costa, Senior Human Rights Advisor, Guinea Bissau*



Guinea Bissau Surge Initiative project – Flyer on Voluntary National Review LNOB consultations

In 2024, building on the LNOB consultation findings and VNR commitments, the Surge Initiative contributed technical and financial support to the Senior Human Rights Adviser to promote a joint UN Human Rights-RCO human rights-based analysis of the 2016-22 national budgets. This focused on trends in the health and education sectors and their impact on people most left behind. As noted by the UN Resident Coordinator, "in a country such as Guinea-Bissau, where progress towards SDGs – including Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Health) and SDG 4 (Education) – has been challenging, investment in these sectors is crucial."[27]

The assessment found that the budget process – which is overseen primarily by the Ministry of Finance and Economy, together with its Budget and Planning Directorates – did not adequately reflect the health and education priorities identified in the national development plan and sector-specific plans, noting the limited involvement and bargaining power of critical Ministries such as health and education. It found that overall, allocations for the health sector remained low and volatile, averaging 9% – far below the 15% target for Africa.[28] In education, spending averaged 9% of the national budget, well below the 20% international benchmark.[29] Both sectors exhibited disparities in the allocation of resources between urban and rural areas, with rural regions significantly underfunded.

The analysis[30] – which was published ahead of Guinea-Bissau's fourth UPR review – makes a number of recommendations to strengthen institutional coordination among financial oversight bodies (Parliament, the Court of Auditors and the General Inspectorate of Finance); to enhance transparency, equity and participation throughout the budget cycle; and to strengthen the capacity of Members of Parliament to exercise oversight and effectively engage with sectoral Ministries in budget formulation. It also recommends greater public participation in the budget-making process, and suggests that the State empower the people by creating a "Citizen-Friendly Budget" that succinctly presents the national budget in an easily accessible manner, with online availability and translated into Creole. The analysis also recommends better alignment of budgets with Guinea-Bissau's national development priorities and the country's obligations under international human rights law. The analysis was used by the UN Country Team to inform the update of its 2024 Common Country Analysis. It will also be used to inform UN inputs to the National Development Plan whose preparation resumed in early February 2025.

Kenya

> ***"Bringing to the forefront voices of civil society and communities who are often left behind is a powerful motor for change, inclusive governance and sustainable development."***
>
> *Li Fung, Senior Human Rights Adviser to the UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya*

In Kenya, the Surge Initiative has supported human rights-based budgetary analyses of the 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-24 fiscal year budgets. These were undertaken by the Senior Human Rights Advisor, in collaboration with the UN Country Team. In a challenging economic context, including shrinking fiscal space and drought, these analyses aimed to deliver information, human rights tools and policy recommendations to State officials, development partners, the UN Country Team, civil society and the national human rights institution, for reconsidering economic decisions and policies in a manner that provides greater alignment with human rights obligations, leaving no one behind.

These analyses also supported the implementation of recommendations arising from the UN Treaty Bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, including the need for increasing budget allocations and resources as part of efforts to alleviate poverty and realize the Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.[31] The analyses showed that public spending for social protection, health, education, and water and sanitation were below international and regional recommendations on minimum levels of social expenditures,[32] due in part to constant decreases in fiscal space arising from increased debt servicing costs, reduced domestic revenues, and austerity policies. The analyses informed the UN Common Country Analysis and Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes including as relevant to economic transformation, and were shared with the National Human Rights Institution and civil society to inform joint budget engagement and advice on economic, social and cultural rights.

The analyses contributed to deeper engagement with the Government, including the National Treasury, more specifically on ringfencing social sector spending in Kenya's 2024-25 budget. They also enabled engagement with and capacity-building of the SDG Parliamentary Caucus, to inform its participation in budget processes, and its discussion of ring-fencing social sector allocations in the national Medium-Term Plan IV and County Integrated Development Plans.

In 2023-24, UN Human Rights also promoted local participatory budgeting to inform county-level fiscal and economic policies,[33] by supporting the training – based on a guidance document on participatory human rights budgeting developed by UN Human Rights Kenya – of 150 community budget champions in seven counties.[34] These training initiatives were undertaken in collaboration with local civil society organisations and county government officials, and used a human rights based approach to budgeting, aiming to equip selected community budget champions to engage in county-level budgeting processes that determine allocations for basic social services. Participation was facilitated through community meetings, outreach programs and radio talk shows.



Kenya Surge Initiative project – participatory budget consultations



Kenya Surge Initiative project – participatory budget consultations

In Nakuru County,[35] for example, trained budget champions held community dialogues on human rights budgeting and organized a one-day dialogue known as a 'budget café' between human rights budget champions and the county assembly's budget committee. As a result, the committee pledged to share information on budget implementation; to invite human rights budget champions and the public to attend its sessions; to allocate resources for civic education and public participation; to enact a gender bill and childcare facility bill; and to disburse funds for persons with disabilities. The participation of women and youth increased significantly, with over 100 women and youth attending the Nakuru East Sub-County public participation forum (15 July 2023).[36] Following petitions presented by Shabaab residents[37] on the delayed construction of the Early Childhood Development Block at Mama Ngina Primary school and sub-standard drainage construction, the drainage was redone, and the Early Child Development Block is now at the procurement stage. Allocations to health, water and social protection increased in the 2024-2025 budget.[38]

In Marsabit county, North Horr subcounty,[39] UN Human Rights support generated further shifts in the way county budget processes were undertaken. Opportunities were created for engagement with departmental heads (water; environment and climate change; health; agriculture and livestock; administration), and budget champions and communities were able to monitor progress of projects.

The media also proved a critical ally in promoting social accountability and allowing citizens to express their concerns to authorities. In Laisamis subcounty,[40] Government officials, county assembly representatives, religious leaders and civil society engaged in public forums on sensitive governance issues, influencing the allocation of KES 30 million to improve the local hospital infrastructure, construct and equip a laboratory, and refurbish the maternity ward.

> ***"The concept of budgeting as a human rights matter opened the minds and eyes of communities, who assumed that accessing basic services was a privilege reserved for the political class, business people and educated elites. The residents of Laisamis Ward petitioned the Marsabit County Executive to explain why various projects had not been implemented."***
>
> *James Orre, Rebuilding Pastoralist Livelihood, Repal*

This project – which is still ongoing at the time of publication of this report[41] – empowered communities to advocate for their priorities and hold decision-makers accountable in line with their human rights obligations and relevant Sustainable Development Goal commitments.[42] It is a promising practice – which is also replicable in other Kenyan counties and beyond. This, especially after the 2024 protests and related violence – which were sparked by discontentment with the Public Finance bill and worsening standards of living and economic hardships in the country – confirmed the relevance and urgency of investing efforts towards a Human Rights Economy as a means to reinforce social harmony and to prevent unrest and violence. It also highlighted the inextricable link between economic and social rights, and civil and political rights, which was also reflected as a priority in UN Human Rights' strategic programming.

Southern Africa

Since 2020, UN Human Rights' Regional Office for Southern Africa has been working with the Surge Initiative to heighten its focus on economic and social rights and a Human Rights Economy, including to combat inequalities in Southern Africa. The Regional Office's human rights-based analysis informs UN Country Team leave no-one behind assessments within the context of UN Common Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks within the region, such as Mauritius, Seychelles and Namibia[43] – including many areas relevant to a human rights economy.[44] In 2023, our teams produced a baseline to monitor the integration of human rights and leave no-one behind in six new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks developed in the region, using criteria from the CCA/CF review checklist[45] tailored to the sub-regional context, ensuring explicit references to the Human Rights Economy. For example, Mauritius' and Angola' UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks – and Namibia's draft, to be implemented in 2025 – make strong reference to human rights as a force for prosperity.

In 2022, the Surge Initiative supported the Regional Office to undertake a study on the extent of adoption of a human rights-based approach to data in Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa and to make general recommendations to leverage existing socio-economic data to leave no one behind.[46] The aims of the assessment were: (i) to understand the existing socio-economic data landscapes in all three countries; (ii) illustrate some of the gaps in existing socio-economic data, which have been identified by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other UN Human Rights Mechanisms; (iii) outline a human rights-based approach to data for the countries in focus; and (iv) make recommendations on ways to use existing socio-economic data to reveal the extent of intersectional forms of disadvantage and discrimination.[47] The study was launched in September 2023 to representatives of National Statistical Offices of Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa; South Africa's and Mauritius National Human Rights Institutions, and members of the South Africa National Planning Commission. The project led to an advocacy brief, entitled 'An intersectional approach to socio-economic data in Southern Africa: Leveraging data to Leave No One Behind' as well as an infographic.[48] The brief made recommendations to National Statistics Offices, National Human Rights Institutions, National Planning Commissions, National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow Up and the UN to leverage existing socio-economic data by jointly developing innovative partnerships. The recommendations built on commitments made by States during the 2023 SDG Summit, on strengthening international, national and local data systems for collecting high quality, timely, relevant, disaggregated and reliable data on Sustainable Development Goals' progress, and efforts to bolster data and statistical capacities in developing countries.



Then in 2023, the Regional Office and the Surge Initiative collaborated with the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum to develop human rights analysis and recommendations for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) draft Model Law on Public Financial Management. The aim was to ensure that SADC national parliaments conduct their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions for public financial management in a way that is transparent, efficient, and responsive to citizens' needs. Inputs to the draft law emphasised the need for the Model Law

to include clauses on equality and diversity, and for it to ensure that investment in social sectors meet human rights obligations and agreed international and regional benchmarks. The importance of human rights-based domestic resource mobilization, transparency, and the participation of disadvantaged groups in public financial management, were also emphasised. The Model Law largely incorporated UN Human Rights' inputs.

More recently, the Surge Initiative accompanied the Regional Office to analyse financing options for basic income support in South Africa, linked to the right to decent work, and in response to the UN Six Transitions' focus on Jobs and Social Protection. Southern Africa is the most unequal subregion globally; it also has the highest unemployment rate in the world, with 61% of 15- to 24-year-olds, and a staggering 70.3% – according to the expanded definition that includes those who are no longer trying – being unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2024.[49] In 2018, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended[50] that South Africa ensure that people aged 18 to 59 with little or no income have access to social assistance; and that it consider introducing a universal basic income grant. This builds on previous initiatives undertaken by the United Nations and civil society organisations on the feasibility of a system of basic income support. The assessment will also link with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework which includes an Output area dedicated to social protection.

The analysis will result in a policy brief to support the UN Country Team's engagement with State officials, and to provide policy advice on basic income support, in line with the new Government of National Unity's strategic priorities of inclusive growth and job creation, and reducing poverty and tackling the high cost of living.

Furthermore, in 2025 the Regional Office has engaged with the Governments of Namibia and South Africa, as well as civil society, National Human Rights Institutions, the UN and other key actors, and conducted a series of consultations with a view to complementing and strengthening awareness-raising on a Human Rights Economy. This was done in partnership with the New School's Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, with a view to raise awareness on the main goals and pathways of the Human Rights Economy and to explore how they can be fostered in the region.



Zambia

In February 2021, the Surge Initiative collaborated with the UN Country Team, the European Union, and the Government in conducting a COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessment, amidst a debt crisis and risks of instability. The UN Country Team aimed to contribute integrated analysis and recommendations at a time when the International Monetary Fund was engaged in high-level discussions with the Zambian authorities to support the economic recovery plan, which sought to restore macroeconomic stability, attain fiscal and debt sustainability and create more inclusive growth.[51] Working closely with UN Human Rights' Regional office for Southern Africa, the Surge Initiative's macroeconomic advice focused on the impact of debt-servicing on economic, social and cultural rights. It also suggested ways to re-organise the budget to free up the resources to ensure minimum essential levels of basic social services, especially for disadvantaged people identified through a targeted leave no-one behind analysis. In addition, the Surge Team examined the need for affordable, accessible and quality social services, the gendered impacts of regressive tax policies and the importance of stimulus measures reaching women workers who had lost their jobs and businesses, including in micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises. It advised on the shrinking of civic space and governance, and participation gaps as they connected to strategies to fight corruption and achieve greater transparency in public financial management.

In 2022-2024, against a background of increasing debt pressure, the Surge Initiative assisted the Senior Human Rights Adviser in Zambia to undertake a study and issue recommendations to state and non-state stakeholders on advancing the rights to food and education. This included in-depth analysis of fiscal and budget policies including the potential impacts of an International Monetary Fund loan agreement, debt restructuring policies and austerity measures on the ability of the Government to deliver on its economic, social and cultural rights obligations. The assessment aimed to increase the operational understanding of State obligations to fulfil the rights to food and education, and to inform National Development Plans and Zambia's future reporting to UN Treaty Bodies and the 2023-2027 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the period.[52]

The study focused on the following questions: 1) What mix of legislative, policy, budgetary and other actions could sustainably alleviate chronic hunger and under-nourishment, get more children in school, and enhance the availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability of education for all, without discrimination? 2) Could international targets be reached – such as the Maputo Declaration's recommendation that at least 10% of the national budget be allocated to agriculture, and the Education 2030 Incheon recommendation that Governments allocate 15% to 20% of expenditure to education? 3) How can the international human rights framework and human rights-based budgeting contribute to better outcomes? And ultimately 4) What is the impact of Zambia's macroeconomic policies, loan agreements, debt restructuring and austerity measures on the realization of the rights to food and education – especially for women, vulnerable and marginalised groups?

The assessment was undertaken in a context where Zambia is a low-income country with a largely undiversified economy, one of the 54 developing countries with "severe debt problems" or which are "most debt vulnerable",[53] and where poverty and inequality are aggravated by the impacts of debt servicing costs (39% of national revenue).[54] The 2021 and 2024 UN Common Country Analyses noted respectively that: Zambia's hunger status is "serious"; and indicated that 'more than 1.4 million persons experience serious food insecurity and the prevalence of hunger in the country remains extremely high." The 2021 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 noted that 1.18 million people faced acute food insecurity. In 2021, while the primary school completion rate was 91.8%, only 30% of the population completed secondary school, with regional and gender differences.

In 2022, the government announced free primary and secondary education, and introduced actions to improve access to education, but challenges on resources and other aspects persist. Despite Government efforts to protect social spending, Zambia continues to struggle to advance these two rights and Sustainable Development Goals – particularly given that the burden of national debt, and a flagging economy, have closed-off the much-needed fiscal space for investments to realise these rights.

The Senior Human Rights Advisor presented the findings of the study in October 2023 to the UN Country Team, the Resident Coordinator's Office, UN



Economists, the Independent Expert on the human rights of persons with albinism,[55] the Ministry of Finance and National Planning and other national institutions, experts, academia, and NGOs. The study and follow-up advocacy with State and non-State partners led to increased momentum for further strengthening of the right to food, including a call for more commitment and investment.

In January 2024, at a Human Rights Council Intersessional meeting on human rights and the 2030 Agenda,[56] the Acting Assistant Director for External Debt of the Ministry of Finance, Maryann L. N. Lwandamina, noted that:

> ***"Despite being in a position of debt distress, Zambia is committed to making the necessary efforts to chart the way to achieving the SDGs as well as uphold human rights. As part of this effort, (…) we engaged in consultations with UN Human Rights Office on advancing the rights to food and education, including through increasing available resources to meet international human rights legal obligations."***

While the study was being developed, the Zambia Law Development Commission issued a commentary on the right to food, and together with the Zambia Council for Social Development – which was the Senior Human Rights Adviser's main partner in undertaking this study – advocated for increased resources.[57] The Senior Human Rights Advisor was also actively engaged in advocating on the findings and recommendations of the study, for example, with the Ministry of Education and WFP on the Universal School Feeding Program, as well as with Zambia's Vice-President, in collaboration with the Zambia's Human Rights Commission. These efforts led to a request by the Ministry for Education for UN Human Rights support to conduct a ten-year costing exercise to assess the financing needs for securing the rights to food and education for all, in direct follow-up to a number of the study's recommendations. The study also contributed to Zambia's decision to increase the envelope for the school feeding program from 39.7 to over a 100 million Kwachas in 2024 and to scale up the Home-Grown School Feeding Program from 70 to 116 districts, by 2026.[58]

The study also reopened the national discussion about the inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights guarantees in the Zambian Constitution.[59] For example, following the finalisation of the project, the Senior Human Rights Advisor begun a legal review to build on Universal Periodic Review recommendations for Zambia to advance economic, social and cultural rights in constitutional reform, and that the State adopt a specific framework law on the right to food. FIAN, an international human rights organization has also assisted with this work, including through awareness-raising activities using social media and radio programmes.[60]

Specific advocacy with the authorities on the human rights implications of debt, particularly as it impacts Zambia's obligation to mobilise the maximum available resources for economic social and cultural rights, has been conducted with the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt, and other UN Special Procedures mandate-holders.[61] This has led to a request by the Zambia's Ministry of Finance to reinforce capacity on human rights and debt management.

As the UN Resident Coordinator, Beatrice Mutali, noted during a meeting with Zambia's Minister of Justice in August 2023, "*The free education policy introduced by Government in 2021 deserves special recognition for its potential transformative impact and is a key component of implementing the ... right to education.*" UN Human Rights and the UN Country team plan to continue to follow-up on the recommendations of the study, and related implementation of a Universal Periodic Review recommendation that Zambia adopt a framework law on the right to food. However, with the departure of the Senior Human Rights Adviser in September 2024, coupled with the organisation's current financial situation, this might prove difficult.

Zimbabwe

Starting in 2022, the Surge Initiative provided support to the Senior Human Rights Advisor in collaborating with the Resident Coordinator's Office and UNICEF to undertake a human rights- and leave no-one behind-based analysis of the budget of the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, with the aim of assisting Government efforts to accelerate implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6. The analysis contributed to informing the Government's development of a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Financing Strategy and Presidential WASH Compact.[62]

Prior to this work, Zimbabwe had endorsed a number of relevant recommendations by UN Human Rights Mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review.[63] They included recommendations that the Government effectively implement the human rights to drinking water and sanitation, as laid out in the Constitution; intensify efforts towards the economic empowerment of rural women while ensuring access to electricity, water and sanitation; and incorporate in the Zimbabwe's Draft National Policy on Domestic Water Supply and Sanitation the principles of the human rights framework created by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The right to water is guaranteed by the Constitution and is a National Development Strategy priority.

With Surge Initiative support, UN Human Rights worked alongside the UN Resident Coordinator's economist to undertake a human rights-based analysis to inform 2023 budget allocations. The analysis – which was adopted by the UN Country Team in December 2023 – contributed to UN inputs to the Government regarding the 2023 budget consultations, as well as the 2024 budget submission, particularly regarding the strategic priorities of the Government in the water and sanitation sector.

For example, the Surge Initiative analysis advised on ways for Zimbabwe to increase expenditures towards the 'life cycle' costs of sustainable WASH services – focusing on poor and rural households, and on women and girls who lack adequate access. Consistent with the Surge Initiative's analysis and recommendations, in the 2024 budget, Zimbabwe allocated resources towards dam construction, to ensure water supply for household and agricultural use (see paras 439 to 451 of the 2024 budget statement for example).[64] Furthermore, the Presidential Borehole Drilling initiative led to the construction of 35,000 boreholes countrywide. Surge also recommended that Government increase domestic resource mobilization by exploring policy options such as progressive taxes on income and wealth; improving fiscal transparency and accountability in revenue generation and the budget cycle; reducing tax expenditures;[65] fighting tax evasion; and eliminating illicit financial flows. Consequently, the 2024 budget introduced a wealth tax of 1% on residential property exceeding USD 250,000 (excluding primary residence).

Surge budget analysis also significantly contributed to the UN's Common Country Analysis and will inform future actions that the Zimbabwe UN Country Team may take in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector.



4.2 Achievements and Impacts: Asia and the Pacific

Lao PDR

In 2022-23, the Surge initiative supported an analysis of the impacts of foreign debt repayment obligations on Lao PDR's ability to finance inclusive, sustainable development and economic, social and cultural rights that was conducted by the UN Human Rights' South East Asia Regional Office in collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator. The project was undertaken in a context of significant foreign debt repayment obligations associated with large investment projects, alongside associated liquidity and solvency challenges; poor revenue collection; low foreign currency reserves; and limited financing options. In 2023, public and publicly guaranteed debt was projected to further increase to over 100 percent of GDP, coupled with sharp depreciation of the Lao Kip, and year-on-year inflation that had risen to the highest level in more than two decades – making it the highest inflation rate in the region.

The study was also undertaken in follow-up to various recommendations by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights following his mission to Lao in 2019. The assessment also built on other strategic entry points, such as the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan on a sustainable development pathway, as well as the 2021 UN Common Country Analysis which had integrated inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and people-focused development as a priority to achieve the SDGs.

The study looked at how increased debt servicing costs, conditionalities and associated investments have directly and indirectly affected budget allocations and expenditures for economic, social and cultural rights. The research aimed to provide a human rights-based assessment of sovereign financing and investment in Lao PDR, a debt and fiscal analysis, and an analysis of the direct impact of debt-financed foreign direct investment through four case studies.[66]

The study found that Lao PDR had sought foreign investment to pursue a macro-development vision that prioritized economic growth through resource extraction, infrastructure expansion, land concessions and lending – a vision that had been supported by regional investors, and neighbouring States. But the resulting Gross Domestic Product growth did not lead to commensurate improvements in the lives of most people, due to inadequate public expenditure on important social services; overly generous corporate tax exemptions; corruption; and over-dependence on debt-financed infrastructure projects to alleviate poverty.

The study recommended deeper analysis of data gaps on debt and budget social expenditure and revenue, together with more disaggregated demographic data; broader consultations with rights holders; and further investigation into the links between budgets and debt with the realization of specific rights.

The report supported a medium-term strategy on foreign debt and human rights, contributing to shifts in UN programming and policy advice,[67] and informing the UN Country Team's contribution to the development of the 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. Furthermore, after the study, the World Bank followed through with further analysis of the impact of debt on the right to education, concluding that "*primary education is no longer universal in Laos: an increasing number of children are dropping out and those who stay are not learning.*"[68]

The findings of the study also informed the High Commissioner for Human Rights' visit to Laos in June 2024, during which he highlighted the impacts of foreign debt repayment on human rights:

> ***"Debt is a human rights issue. Over half of the world's poorest countries are in or near full-blown debt distress – contributing to a reduction in overall fiscal space. We have been pushing hard for the human rights lens to be used in the work of international financial institutions and in the debt architecture – and this should be an urgent priority."[69]***

Malaysia

In 2021 and 2022, during the pandemic the Surge Initiative supported the former Human Rights Adviser to commission, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office Economist, a research study on the right to social security, with a view to ensuring income protection of vulnerable workers and informing the national budget process. The study focused on informal sector workers, specifically migrants and refugees, including those who were in irregular situations. The project was undertaken in the context of Covid-19 lockdowns, where restrictions on work had placed exceptional burdens on these populations, but also with a long-run background of poor coverage of social insurance for informal and migrant workers, and one where social assistance mechanisms are unable to deliver an income floor. These weaknesses were underpinned by long-term under resourcing of social protection, whereby Malaysia's fiscal position has long been constrained by a declining share of tax revenue, alongside some inefficiencies in spending.

In response to the pandemic and its impact especially on vulnerable people, the Government introduced additional social assistance payments (for around 60 percent of the population), which delivered benefits to informal sector workers (but also excluded all non-nationals – and hence migrant workers – whether documented or undocumented – and refugees). The project sought to use the momentum of this additional spending and build forward from the pandemic, to strengthen Malaysia's social security system – and move towards a fully human rights-compliant social protection system.

It is important to note that even though Malaysia has not ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, it is party to several related conventions of the ILO as well as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with



Disabilities (CRPD), and has committed to align its development policies to the SDGs and to the pledge to Leave No One Behind. In this regard, the analysis, draws on various recommendations of the 2018 UPR and CEDAW reviews of Malaysia, as well as recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights who visited the country in 2019 and made suggestions on establishing a social protection floor while enhancing attention to the situation of migrant workers.[70]

The study's report – titled "*Moving in the right direction for all workers. Enabling a human rights-based social contract for informal sector workers and migrants in Malaysia*" – adopted an innovative methodology that combined human rights and economic analyses. Additionally, it shows, via macroeconomic modelling, that efforts to secure the right to social security can simultaneously improve economic performance. Indeed, the study finds social protection programmes can enhance productivity and growth in the short and long run.

Its modelling-based analysis finds that providing social security to informal and migrant workers positively boosts Gross Domestic Product, in the short run, via multiplier and stabilization effects. The report further argues that inclusive social protection has tangible long-term macroeconomic payoffs also via reduced risk aversion and greater formalization, delivering enhanced productive capacity and competitiveness. The report concludes that ensuring social security among informal workers and migrant workers would enable Malaysia to live up to its human rights commitments, make significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and at the same time generate economic benefits. It recommends progressively expanding social protection (social insurance and assistance) to different groups of informal sector workers, including making emergency provision for migrant workers in irregular situations.[71]

The report was shared with the Ministry of Economy, SUKHAM (the National Human Rights Institution) and the World Bank, generating a discussion on strategies for follow-up on relevant recommendations. It also informed the 2024 UN Common Country Analysis and the Universal Periodic Review of Malaysia.[72] In 2024, the Resident Coordinator commissioned an update of the analysis, with the aim to make the study public.

"This study commissioned by OHCHR on the socioeconomic rights of informal sector and migrant workers is a prime example of the scope and value of incorporating human rights practice within economic policy advice. Its findings, as in similar topics, underline the confluence between good economics and upholding rights – socioeconomic inclusion is good for employment, investment, and productivity, and ultimately good for growth."

Richard Marshall, RCO Economist, Malaysia

Mongolia

> ***"The most significant progress is that people with disabilities have monitored housing conditions for themselves and others, as well as government policies and their implementation, and identified key challenges. Based on the monitoring outcomes, it was suggested that the government policy be updated, the participation of people with disabilities in its implementation be ensured, and the housing programme's financing be resolved. Consequently, I am pleased that the policy and programme have incorporated the enhancement of housing conditions through the financing of the National Wealth Fund. The monitoring findings also astounded the organizations of persons with disabilities that advocate for people with disabilities, who consistently called for the enhancement of their housing conditions."***
>
> *Mr. Ya. Avirmed, Head of Tugeemel Khugjil (Universal Progress)*

In 2022/2023, the Surge Initiative assisted UN Human Rights in Mongolia to enhance its monitoring of the housing rights of persons with disabilities. The analysis was undertaken in collaboration with the NGO Tugeemel Khugjil, and identified critical gaps in legal and policy frameworks, and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in relation to their right to adequate housing. These included limited access by persons with disabilities to decent and affordable housing in *ger* areas – traditional Mongolian dwelling areas – that are not connected to central heating, water supply, and sewage system; a lack of clear policies concerning regulations and safeguards for persons with disabilities, and how many have been able to benefit from, new housing constructions; and the need to pay greater attention to the specific needs of persons with disabilities in housing policies and mortgage procedures.

Mongolia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and a number of recommendations by UN human rights bodies have called on Mongolia to strengthen its protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, including their right to adequate housing.[73] Protection of the rights of persons with disabilities was also identified as a priority concern in the UN's 2021 Common Country Analysis, with disability inclusion among the priorities of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2023-2027.[74]

The study was undertaken to support Government efforts to implement the 2016 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which embraces the right to independent living, and contains provisions on access to concessional mortgage rates, community-based social welfare services, and services to support independent living. The study looked into implementation challenges regarding coverage, accessibility and infrastructure. For example, the national housing policy foresees that 5% of public housing is reserved for persons with disabilities, but the effective quota is still at 0.5% of the total. And data on adequate housing and concessional rental opportunities by persons with disabilities and their number in waiting lists are not systematically collected.

Following the presentation and specific advocacy about the study, UN Human Rights also helped the UN Country Team design a joint UN project, in an effort to more firmly place housing rights in the policy spotlight and advise various levels of government on human-rights based housing programmes for persons with disabilities. Efforts were also undertaken to strengthen the capacity of disability-focused civil society groups, including to prepare a shadow report for the 2023 review of Mongolia by the Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

These efforts contributed to the adoption of a Programme to Support the Housing of Disabled People in July 2023. This programme went into effect in 2024 for an initial two-year period, aimed at including as many persons with disabilities and their families in State housing projects and to improve their living conditions and quality of life. The programme will aim to increase the current quota for persons with disabilities from 5% to 15%. A national agency for

the development of people with disabilities was also created to draw up a national action plan to implement recommendations from the Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UN Human Rights will work with the newly formed Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Protection to finalize the national action plan. Discussions are also underway with the National Human Rights Commission on the follow-up to UN recommendations on the housing rights of persons with disabilities.

"To ensure that all Mongolians share the benefits of the country's natural resources, the government initiated a new law to create the National Wealth Fund. The "Future Heritage Fund," the "Development Fund," and the "Savings Fund"[75] are the three distinct parts of the National Wealth Fund. With this framework, the "Savings Fund" will play a pivotal role in facilitating and supporting the advancement of the right to adequate housing for people with disabilities. In this regard, the relevant government ministries approved "a program to provide adequate housing for people with disabilities" in 2023."

Mr. Undrakhbayar Chuluundavaa, Social Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Mongolia



Timor Leste

In 2022, the Surge Initiative provided the Human Rights Advisor with financial and technical support to undertake a review of the accessibility of social protection measures for women informal sector workers, with a focus on women in domestic work and those working in agriculture or as market vendors. This work was undertaken in collaboration with ILO, and the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

In 2016, the establishment by law of Timor Leste's General Social Security Contribution Scheme for workers and their families reformed the social protection system, but by 2022 only 30.6 % of the population was effectively covered by at least one type of contributory or non-contributory social security scheme. In 2022, the government launched the 2022 National Strategy for Social Protection to expand support for vulnerable groups, and the UN Country Team committed to assist its implementation, identifying informal sector workers (particularly women) as vulnerable and in need of social protection. This analysis also built on a number of recommendations by UN human rights mechanisms, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, who visited the country in 2011 and highlighted the importance of social protection programmes reaching the most vulnerable.[76]

The study recommended that the government adopt new strategies, developed through meaningful consultation and participation, to facilitate the inclusion of more employees and self-employed people in social protection schemes, with special focus on women. It also suggested a transition from temporary measures of social assistance to sustained social insurance, emphasizing the importance of including in further plans the development of adequate and accessible social security schemes.

In addition, the human rights-based macroeconomic analysis that was also undertaken as an integral part of the Surge assessment, noted that given that informal sector workers have limited contributory capacities, their inclusion in social security schemes would need to be subsidised, and potentially accompanied with other policy proposals such as an uplift in benefit levels to reflect inflationary trends. The report noted that this could require additional resources from the government's budget. Furthermore, recognising the significant fiscal challenges faced by Timor Leste, primarily due to its heavy reliance on diminishing oil revenue, the study recommended re-evaluation of how the remaining sovereign wealth fund is used, so as to ensure fiscal sustainability while upholding human rights obligations, including the right to social security, decent and inclusive work, and other economic, social and cultural rights.

The project helped to raise awareness and engagement by the State on aligning social protection plans and strategies with human rights obligations and Sustainable Development Goal commitments. It also led UN Human Rights to develop sustained policy dialogue and a partnership with the Ministry of Social Solidarity.



Regional: South and South-East Asia

Surge assisted UN Human Rights' Regional Office for South-East Asia to work on a study aimed at the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of precarious forms of migration from and in South and Southeast Asia, with a specific focus on Lao PDR and Bangladesh. The study comprised an overview of migration trends in South and Southeast Asia; a human rights-based analysis of the socioeconomic drivers of precarious forms of migration in and from these regions, with particular focus on the rights to work, health and education, as well as poverty and climate change; and a regional macroeconomic analysis.

In addition to understanding the drivers of precarious migration that result from lack of access to human rights, the study also aimed to contribute to advocacy for access to economic, social and cultural rights for all in South and Southeast Asia, so that migration can become a genuine choice and not the only way for people to enjoy their human rights. The assessment also aimed to create a community of practice of stakeholders engaged in research, advocacy and policy development about the links between human rights fulfilment and migration drivers at the country, local and regional levels.

In 2020, nearly one fifth of the world's international migrants originated from South and South-East Asia.[77] While there is considerable research into the fulfilment of migrants' economic, social and cultural rights in countries of destination – as well as research on drivers of forced displacement that relate to civil and political rights – there is limited information on the link between deficits in economic, social and cultural rights in countries of origin and people's decision to leave their country.





Acknowledging that the decision to migrate internationally generally results from many interlinked factors – and that the ability to do so may require resources (funds, information, social capital), the study explored the socioeconomic context in countries of origin in the region – including poverty, lack of access to social protection, high unemployment and low wages – to better understand how these factors motivate people to leave their countries, including in circumstances that may expose them to further human rights abuses. The study also looked at structural inequalities and gender-based discrimination, as well as factors that further limit access to economic, social and cultural rights in countries of origin, putting large groups of the population in situations of vulnerability.

Building on the work of UN human rights bodies, including the UN Special Rapporteurs on the rights of migrants, and on extreme poverty,[78] as well as UN Human Rights' Principles and Guidelines on the Human Rights Protection of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations,[79] the study was also anchored in Objectives 1 and 2 of the Global Compact on Migration.[80] It sought to understand how lack of access to economic, social and cultural rights at the national level, alongside a context of chronic underinvestment in social services, debt distress and associated macroeconomic factors, may compel people to migrate across borders – including through low-wage temporary labour migration corridors, as well as irregular pathways. It explored how migrants in vulnerable situations become vulnerable to further human rights abuses along the migratory journey and in destination countries. In addition, migration may create intergenerational impacts on their families left behind, as well as on the economies and societies of their countries of origin.

To inform the two country case studies and contribute to the regional study, workshops were held with State and non-state stakeholders in Lao PDR[81] and in Bangladesh,[82] in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Offices, and an expert discussion was also convened with academics, UN bodies and civil society. These initiatives were welcomed by participants as opportunities to engage with a variety of stakeholders on an issue that is pressing for countries in South and Southeast Asia and to work collectively towards solutions. The final findings and recommendations will be published in 2025 following which OHCHR will convene multistakeholder workshops to disseminate the findings in Lao PDR and Bangladesh along with regional-level dissemination activities. In addition to the country case studies, the report will include examples of practice from countries across South and Southeast Asia, to advance dialogue with Governments and UN Country Teams across the region.

Viet Nam

Viet Nam has achieved significant economic development in recent decades, lifting millions of people out of poverty.[83] However, development and poverty reduction have been uneven across population groups and regions, with high levels of chronic poverty persisting among ethnic minorities, especially children and older persons; as well as among persons with disabilities and non-registered migrants. In its Voluntary National Review, the Government identified digital transformation as a potential lever to transform its economic development model to become more sustainable, inclusive and resilient, and to accelerate the accomplishment of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Against this backdrop, in 2024 the Surge initiative supported a study on "Unlocking Digital Transformation for Viet Nam's Inclusive and Sustainable Development" that was conducted by the UN Resident Coordinator in collaboration with the UN Human Rights' Southeast Asia Regional Office. The study analyses how the rapid growth of Viet Nam's digital economy can contribute to economic diversification and create more jobs for the growing labour force. At the same time, it notes the potential negative impacts of digital transformation on ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities, migrant workers and other disadvantaged groups, such as job security – as many digital economy jobs are characterized by precarious work arrangements, low wages, and a lack of social protection or collective bargaining rights, as well as a growing digital divide. The study notes that the rapid pace of technological innovation risks exacerbating inequalities, as workers with low digital skills or limited access to technology may be left behind. These negative impacts could exacerbate inequalities, including by widening income and wealth gaps between the rich and poor. The study provides recommendations to the Government, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders in this respect. In addition, referring to findings of UN human rights mechanisms, the study points out other risks linked to digital transformation, including excessive restrictions on freedom of expression, online and offline, and access to information, the expansion of state surveillance powers, and violations of the right to privacy – which could disproportionately impact journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society actors.

On 22 December 2024, the Politburo of Viet Nam Communist Party issued Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW on "Breakthroughs in Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digital Transformation, establishing the Central Steering Committee on Science, Technology, Innovation, and National Digital Transformation". Resolution 57 mandates that the entire political system internalize the principles of innovation and focus on dismantling impediments to science and technology progress. It empowers scientists with unprecedented autonomy, granting them ownership of research outcomes and the authority to determine valuations during technology transfer. As a result, the study has become even more relevant and has informed UN policy dialogue with development partners on "digital transformation" as one of the six transitions being implemented towards acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals. The findings and recommendations of the study were reflected in the 2024 UN Common Country Analysis update. In a more recent development, the study informed the in 2025 of the UN Special Envoy on Technology, Amandeep Gill – which is being undertaken in follow up to Secretary-General's visit to Viet Nam in 2022 – and is seen as an opportunity to deepen engagement in the implementation of the Global Digital Compact, and in particular digital transformation and artificial intelligence governance in the country.

Moving forward, the study's findings and recommendations will help the UN support the Government in integrating digital transformation into development planning, its sectoral digital transformation policies, and the allocation of resources to implement mitigating measures and safeguard wellbeing of the vulnerable groups. Furthermore, as the UN Country Team prepares to develop a new Common Country Analysis and the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in 2025-2026, the recommendations emanating from the study will provide an entry point for discussion within the UN Country Team on policy options and programmatic measures to ensure inclusive and equitable digital transformation.

4.3 Achievements and Impacts: Europe and Central Asia

Central Asia

In 2024, the UN Human Rights' Regional Office for Central Asia collaborated with the Surge Initiative to undertake a project focusing on issues of pollution from fossil fuel use, at the intersection between the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the right to health in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It focused on people whose rights were most affected by pollution and other form of environmental degradation. The project also looked at questions of accountability, including financial accountability, for State and business actors to their human rights obligations and voluntary commitments. It included a pilot human rights-based budgetary analysis of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in Kyrgyzstan, aiming to contribute to an economy that enhances human rights.

The analysis was undertaken in a context of increasing momentum in Central Asia in recent years, with the UN and civil society paying more attention to environmental issues, and governments making more commitments in this sphere, as the impact of the triple planetary crisis gathers pace, with urbanization and other forms of development increasing pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss. All UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks include the environment as a key priority, but the Surge Initiative project focused on two selected countries as a pilot, with the goal of working to expand this type of engagement to the Central Asian region over time.



The Surge Initiative project mapped, for each country, current commitments and context-specific realities, risks and opportunities, as as well progress in implementation, work by other stakeholders (civil society organisations, national human rights insitutions and the UN); and identified entry points, areas of added value and priorities for engagement.

The analysis helped build partnerships and networks on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The UN Human Rights' Regional Office for Central Asia began a collaboration with the UNEP Regional Office in promoting clean air as one of the substantive elements of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the region[84] and contributed to the 3rd Central Asian Air Quality conference[85] by adding a session on human rights, with the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to a healthy environment. At the time of drafting this report, the Regional Office was planning to jointly organise a dialogue with UNEP in 2025, in collaboration with the government of Kyrgyzstan, civil society and international development partners, to introduce the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment into the regulation of air quality, and was in the processing of finalising a legal review of air quality in this regard. The Regional Office is also contributing to a multi-stakeholder dialogue – "Clean Air Progress Review" which is being organised by the Resident Coordinator in Kyrgyzstan – through the provision of key messages on the right to a healthy environment and importance of enhancing air quality legislation.

In Kyrgyzstan, the project contributed to mainstreaming the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment into UN processes, including the UN Common Country Analaysis, through analysis on environmental issues related to the protection of procedural elements of the right. The Regional Office also worked with the UN Country Team on Nationally Determined Contributions in relation to public participation in climate action and environmental protection.[86] The project also strengthened the Office's capacity to monitor and document violations against environmental defenders.

The findings informed submissions to UN Treaty-based and Charter-based bodies. The UN Country Team's Univeral Periodic Review report on Kyrgyzstan highlighted a lack of public participation in environmental law-making processes; limited access to environmental information and environmental impact assessments; and the need to strengthen the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. The Regional Office supported the submission to the Government of Kyrgyzstan of a UN Special Procedures communication on uranium mining. The Concluding Observations by the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reflected concerns related to the procedural elements of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.[87] In Uzbekistan, the Office advocated for the ratification of the Aarhus Convention – which was ratified on the 22nd of February[88] – and conducted consultations with environmental organizations and defenders to plan capacity-building programs on their engagemnt with UN Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies. It is also hoped that the pilot human rights-based budgetary analysis on the right to a healthy environment in Kyrgyzstan could be replicated in other countries of the region.

UN Human Rights has also increased public awareness on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by regularly issuing information materials on social media[89] and in media interviews. The project has also helped build partnerships with environmental civil society organisations, with environmental defenders and activists now turning to the Regional Office for engagement with international human rights protection mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur under the Aarhus Convention. This area of engagement has been prioritised in UN Human Rights' annual plan for the region in 2025, including in terms of capacity building for civil society on administrative law; strategic litigation; and engagement with international human rights bodies. This will dovetail with UNDP's regional project on environmental justice, which focuses on building the authorities' capacity to act on environmental issues. The Regional Office also plans to build the capacity of environmental organisations and young environmental activists, to enhance participation in and monitoring of budgetary processes.

Moldova

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Surge Initiative assisted the Human Rights Adviser and her team to make a significant contribution to the UNCT's Covid-19 Socio Economic Response Plan. The support ensured the Plan's integration of a human rights-based approach, building on existing recommendations from the UN human rights mechanisms[90] and focusing on the situation of numerous 'at-risk groups' experiencing marginalization and discrimination.

This work expanded the number of vulnerable groups that were included in the Socio-Economic Impact Analysis - from the five initially planned to eight.[91] The human rights indicators[92] developed for the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan were again used in January 2021 for a sociological survey involving over 1,000 participants on the Right Bank of the Nistru river, assessing people's perception of the impact of COVID-19 on their human rights. A further in-person survey was conducted with 219 Roma individuals to ensure adequate representation of the views of one of the country's most vulnerable groups. Additionally, a targeted perception survey with over 300 people in the Transnistrian region provided essential information on the human rights impact of COVID-19 in that area. The findings and recommendations of the analysis shaped advocacy and action to advance human rights – especially of vulnerable groups – during and following the pandemic.

In conjunction with this work, the Human Rights Advisor and team also developed and widely distributed specific guidance and information materials on: the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities, the role of social protection in the COVID-19 response, human rights-compliant crisis communications, labour rights in the context of COVID-19, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and a policy brief on older persons in the context of COVID-19.[93] These guidance documents – which provided specific and concrete recommendations on measures, actions, considerations and prioritisation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the immediate, medium and longer-term response and recovery to COVID-19 – were key to informing the socio-economic response plan.[94]

Subsequently, this work also resulted in an in-depth analysis, including from a macroeconomic perspective, identifying the most vulnerable groups at risk of disproportionate social and economic impact,[95] The



assessment identified specific barriers faced by disadvantaged groups and provided policy suggestions on human rights based approaches to these obstacles for the emergency and recovery phases.[96] Nine separate and more in-depth analyses on the rights to health, social security, education, food/adequate housing/freedom from poverty, water and sanitation, work and labour rights, freedom from violence and abuse, freedom of expression (including access to information), and freedom of movement, were annexed to this analysis.

The analyses generated significant donor interest and led to strengthened UN system-wide collaboration in support of vulnerable groups. In concrete terms, the work resulted in the development of three joint UN projects in 2020, led by UN Women, ILO, UNDP, IOM, and UNICEF, all with considerable contribution from UN Human Rights.

The Moldova Socio-economic response plan has been recognized within the UN System as a good practice. For instance, it was singled out as such by a review of UN COVID-19 responses conducted by the Executive Office of the UN Secretary General and in the relevant UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluation report.

This work informed the 2021 UN Common Country Analysis[97] and key policy documents, such as: the National Program for Development of Inclusive Education 2024-27, the National Program of Support for Roma Population 2022-25; the National Program 2023-25 for the implementation of the Strategy for strengthening of interethnic relations 2017-27; and the draft Human Rights Framework (Action Plan) in the Transnistria region for 2025-28. The findings on Roma's access to education, healthcare, employment, social services, and their participation in socio-economic life during the pandemic, were also reflected in the 5th Opinion (18 October 2023) of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities.

Additionally, in 2024, UN Human Rights Moldova ensured that data on Roma informed the development of the Mapping of UNCT engagement in support of the Roma population in the Republic of Moldova and in support of the implementation of the 2022-2025 National Programme for Roma, in line with the 2023-2027 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

In 2023/2024, building on work aiming to advance the promise to leave no one behind, UN Human Rights led a situational analysis on the approaches to care and support for persons with disabilities.[98] In follow up, UN Human Rights Moldova has worked with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, organizations of persons with disabilities, and civil society groups active on disability issues to develop a road map for the transition to a human rights-based model of support and care in Moldova.

This work has resulted in enhanced evidence-based advocacy, with longer-term expected impact including improved access to quality support and care systems by persons with disabilities in Moldova. The work has already directly informed the draft 2024-2028 National Programme on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, which provides for increased access of persons with disabilities to support and care systems and increased protections for care workers, including people working in informal and unpaid care.

Going forward, UN Human Rights Moldova is working alongside the UN Country Team to support implementation of the roadmap, feed into social assistance reform, and – upon request of the authorities – deliver capacity building programmes for specialists on protection of persons with disabilities and older persons, from 10 Territorial Social Assistance Agencies and 33 Territorial Social Assistance Structures.

In 2025, UN Human Rights Moldova aims to continue close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and Territorial Social Assistance Agencies, to engage 1,600 social assistants in programmes to increase their knowledge and skills in providing older persons with human rights-based support and care. Furthermore, UN Human Rights Moldova intends to work with the Ministry on identifying options for building the capacity of more than 7,700 personal assistants, to enable them to offer increased access to quality care and support to persons with disabilities. UN Human Rights Moldova will also work with two State Universities from Chisinau to develop training courses and materials focused on a human rights-based approach to support and care. This will include lectures to prepare future social workers to advocate for and implement effective support and care systems for those in need.

Through these efforts, UN Human Rights Moldova is not only addressing immediate needs of persons requiring care and support as well as those providing it, but also laying the groundwork for sustainable change, fostering an inclusive society where the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and older persons are upheld.

North Macedonia

> ***"Ten years ago, the road was in really bad condition. Now we have this inadequate narrow road, but we are grateful for it. We do not have safe drinking water, what we drink is practically sewage. The water system is in place, but without a filter (pump), which cannot cover the needs of 500 households that are living here. The electricity system was created 60 years ago and is old and inadequate. Instead of using 220 voltage, we use 110-120 voltage. You cannot turn on the washing machine and the water boiler at the same time."***
>
> *A resident living in a village with poor infrastructure and access to safe drinking water and electricity*

In 2024, the Human Rights Adviser in North Macedonia undertook a leave no one behind analysis with the support of the Surge Initiative, aiming to seed change for more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development by drawing attention to people that are left furthest behind. This analysis[99] undertaken in cooperation with the UN Country Team and with the support of the Resident Coordinator, was based on extensive research and consultations, analyzing information shared by the Ombudsman, the Antidiscrimination Commission, local service providers such as the municipal councils and centers for social work, as well as civil society organizations and representatives of population groups at risk of being left behind (e.g. Roma, persons with disabilities, older persons etc.).

A pressing need for this work was due to significant data gaps[100] which hindered the development of evidence-based policies and effective targeted actions for advancing the human rights and wellbeing of those living on the margins of society. The immediate goal for the analysis was to equip the UN with evidence-based data – which takes into consideration the specific needs of persons at risks of being left behind – to effectively contribute to national development processes. In this regard, the analysis hopes to contribute, for example, to a more targeted and effective implementation of the country's 2024-2044 National Development Strategy – thereby helping deliver on North Macedonia's development trajectory and guide the formulation of sectoral strategies for the next twenty years.

Leveraging the findings and recommendations of various international human rights mechanisms,[101] while addressing the country specific context,[102] the following ten population groups were identified as being left behind: women, older persons, youth, children, persons with disabilities, Roma persons, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, persons in rural areas, persons deprived of liberty, and person with rare diseases. The assessment also looked at the root-causes of their vulnerability and exclusion, highlighting the underlying causes of marginalization for each of these groups.

Understanding the root causes of exclusion for each of the identified groups allowed for formulating concrete and actionable recommendations, which are organized – per population group – in three broad clusters: policy and legal framework,[103] institutional capacities and governance,[104] and education and awareness raising.[105] Amongst the principal and cross-cutting recommendations is ensuring that the identified vulnerable groups are consulted as agents of change and active contributors in the development efforts – they need to have a voice in decisions that have direct impact on their lives.

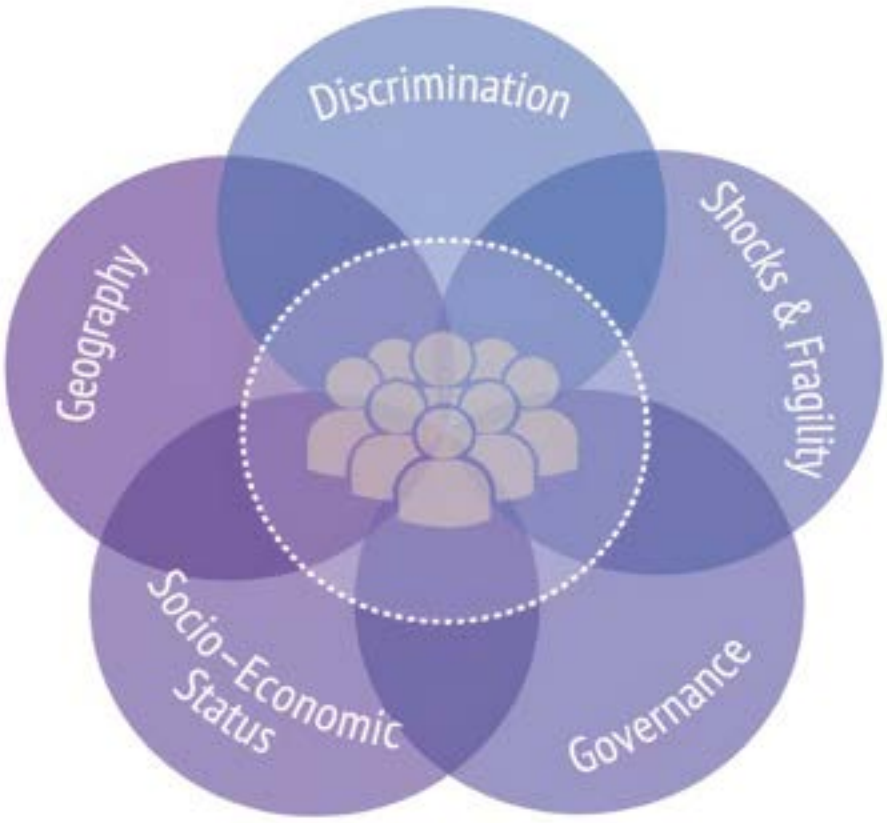
To ensure the voices of those most marginalized are accounted for, UN Human Rights conducted broad outreach and consultations with the concerned communities and their representative organizations, translating their insights and recommendations into concrete proposals for action. This approach grounded the analysis in the lived experiences of people who have been left behind, addressing the barriers, discrimination and exclusion affecting the enjoyment of their rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights.

"I must take care of my ill husband, because he is on oxygen support and needs constant help. This prevents me from leaving the house even to take care of my basic needs. I need help. I have requested social financial support from the Center for Social Welfare months ago, but I have received no response."

A Roma woman with permanent work disability

The findings of the assessment and its recommendations for tailored, evidence-based solutions – to the State, the Ombudsman, the Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination, and the UNCT – are reflected in the UN's 2024 Common Country Analysis. The analysis will also inform the 2026-2030 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, where human rights, equality, non-discrimination, and leave no one behind principles will underpin UN's support to the country's development priorities.

These efforts can also have a catalytic impact on joint EU-UN efforts to prioritize the rights of people excluded from mainstream society, also aimed at accelerating national developmental changes and reforms. UN Human Rights will continue to use this assessment for its advocacy with the Government, the Ombudsman, civil society, academia and international partners, informing their own advocacy and guiding the development of policies and actions for advancing human rights for groups at risk of being left behind.



Serbia

> ***"My life has changed dramatically. We now have running water in our house, I can wash dishes at my sink. I no longer have to boil the well-water or handwash clothes in the freezing cold. Fetching water from city taps is a thing of the past. We live like normal people now."***
>
> *Danijela Marković, a resident of Gorjna Grabovica*

Supported by the Surge Initiative and building on the findings of UN human rights mechanisms,[106] UN Human Rights Serbia has since 2020 been prioritising work on leave no-one behind and combating discrimination, including in access to economic, social and cultural rights. This work resulted in three leave no-one behind analytical reports and the development of a practical tool for national policymakers during and in the aftermath of COVID-19: (i) a mapping of substandard Roma settlements, (ii) an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the position and rights of workers with a focus on workers in the informal economy, (iii) an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on nine vulnerable groups[107] and (iv) a leave no-one behind tool to inform State policy, strategies, laws and related actions.

In 2020 following the outbreak of COVID19, UN Human Rights worked with State officials, Roma representatives, and civil society organizations to finalise a mapping of 702 substandard Roma settlements (167,975 inhabitants across 94 local self-government units). For the first time, the mapping collected verified data on substandard Roma settlements, giving the UN and national and local authorities a clear overview of living conditions in informal Roma settlements, focused on access to safe water, to the sewerage network, electricity, and sustainable sources of income.

The mapping became an integral part of the UN's immediate COVID-19 response, guiding the distribution of humanitarian aid – with over 72.000 lifesaving packages of food, drinking water, hygiene products and protective equipment provided to settlements in Valjevo, Kostolac, Lajkovac, Nis and Belgrade. The mapping also influenced the UN's longer-term recovery strategies, including the 2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Its data helped update the Government's geographic information system database of illegally constructed buildings, and assisted the Prime Minister's Office and local governments in removing the obstacles faced by Roma in accessing basic services – leading to direct impact on their enjoyment of economic and social rights.[108] The initiative thus significantly contributed to advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in a country where Roma are recognized as a particularly marginalized group.

The mapping further informed the State's Revised Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia (2022-30) and the EU strategy on Roma inclusion in Serbia, as well as local initiatives, including in the city of Belgrade. It led GIZ to allocate funding for projects aimed at addressing data gaps. The mapping also informed the Alert Platform, a tool for civil society, donors and communities to share information on vulnerable groups, to ensure timely and efficient relief when needed. The mapping also facilitated the inclusion of the 702 Roma settlements in the 2022 Census, which was conducted with the National Council of Roma National Minority.

Furthermore, following years of effort to support and empower the Roma community to advocate for their rights and meaningfully engage in decision-making, the Mayor of Nis and representatives of the Roma community from the substandard settlement of "Crvena Zvezda" in Nis reached an important agreement on 4 July 2023 to designate a specific parcel of land within the informal settlement for social housing purposes, protecting them from the risk of evictions. More recently, in another success story that can be linked to the Roma mapping, 150 households with over 400 inhabitants from the Roma informal settlement in Gornja Grabovica, gained access to safe drinking water after more than a century – including dozens of children in the settlement's sole primary school – attended by over 40 children between the ages of 7 and 10.

"*We Roma have rights too*", said Mevla Čupi, one of 550 residents of the settlement. "*UN Human Rights showed us how to fight for our rights. Now, no one can force us out.*"

Similarly, analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on nine vulnerable groups[109] produced important data and informed the UN Sustainable Development

Cooperation Framework and Common Country Analysis processes, enhanced collaboration with the Government's Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, and also served as the baseline for the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights' 2020 Report on the Human Rights of Youth in Serbia. At the launch of the mapping by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the Ministry for Public Administration and Local-Self Government and the UN Resident Coordinator,[110] the Minister for Public Administration committed to follow-up on the findings, which included recommendations on measures to tackle drivers of exclusion; strengthening national capacities; and enhancing public participation in the design and monitoring of the COVID-19 response and beyond.

In follow-up, upon request by the authorities and in consultation with a wide range of actors – including the Public Policy Secretariat, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 200 civil society groups and numerous academics – UN Human Rights helped develop a leave no-one behind tool as a practical guide for national policymakers to enhance integration of a human rights-based approach and the leave no-one behind principle in national and local law and policy. The tool includes a step-by step approach, with checklists,[111] to identify vulnerable groups, leaving no one behind when holding consultations, and collecting and analysing data. This tool was included in the Action Plan for implementation of the new Antidiscrimination Strategy. It has also informed the preliminary stages of development of the National Human Rights Strategy.[112]



Ms. Danijela Marković is washing the dishes at her sink in her house. © Stefan Vidojević / MaxNova Creative

Several cities, including Sabac, have shown interest in incorporating the tool into their Local Development Plans. UN Human Rights will continue working with the Secretariat for Public Policies in advancing the use of the LNOB tool in other law and policy development processes going forward.

At the launch of the tool on International Human Rights Day in December 2022, at an event organized by the National Assembly entitled "*Leave No One Behind – 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*",[113] the Prime Minister stated that "(…) *leaving no one behind is one of the fundamental principles of our whole policy. Serbia is the first UN member state to have developed an instrument to introduce this principle (…) in all legal and strategic documents.*" The Minister for Human and Minority Rights declared that *implementation of this principle was "the main goal of its activities"* and committed to making the leave no-one behind tool mandatory in policy and law-making.

> ***"(…) This tool will be used for all future law and policy development processes (…) in all strategic plans related to the green transition, strategies for employment, disabilities, and housing. (…) will bring genuine changes, including in new human rights challenges such as Climate Change."***
>
> *Francoise Jacob,* UN Resident Coordinator at the launch of the LNOB tool in 2022

Building on this work, UN Human Rights conducted in 2024 a human rights and leave no-one behind analysis as part of the development of a comprehensive UN Common Country Analysis, which will inform the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The analysis identifies 15 groups at risk of being left furthest behind in Serbia, as well as groups for which no data currently exists – meaning that they are unrecognized and invisible to policy-makers. This effort is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the UN Country Team's priorities for the 2026–2030 Cooperation Framework.[114]

Ukraine

In Ukraine, the Surge Team supported the UN Human Rights' Monitoring Mission in Ukraine in a variety of initiatives and activities with the general aim of strengthening work on economic and social rights and the 2030 Agenda, including in the COVID-19 response, while stepping up collaboration with the Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team. In this regard, in 2020, the Surge Initiative supported UN Human Rights in Ukraine in developing detailed human rights recommendations for a UNCT policy paper on social protection. The policy paper, which was launched at a high-level event hosted by the RC in April 2021,[115] aimed to initiate a dialogue with national authorities and contribute to (then) ongoing reforms of the pension system. With worsening levels of poverty in the country due to the pandemic at that stage, the brief put forward a set of comprehensive policy suggestions to remedy low coverage and a lack of access for the poorest and socially excluded and to design a universal social protection system that offers coverage to all, without discrimination. The Surge Team also supported an assessment by the UN Human Rights' Monitoring Mission in Ukraine of the human rights implications of the International Monetary Fund Stand-By Arrangement, and its contribution to a UN Country Team position paper on engagement with the international financial institutions. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine showed how a relatively drastic increase in utility prices put certain vulnerable groups and individuals at risk of being cut off from the utilities due to their inability to cover the bills. UN Human Rights also supported the World Bank by sharing evidence-based information on obstacles to housing and utility subsidies for households living in situations of vulnerability.

In February 2021, the Surge Team supported the UN Human Rights in Ukraine, with additional analysis of reforms of gas and heating subsidies, and their impact on the rights to housing and social security for vulnerable groups in Ukraine. This analysis included recommendations to the UN Country Team, as well as the Government, to ensure that all members of society may access essential levels of adequate housing, especially in terms of affordability and accessibility of utility services, and habitability of housing, without discrimination.

In February 2022, the Surge Initiative supported UN Human Rights in Ukraine by conducting a human rights-based budgetary analysis of the allocations for social security. This analysis informed the briefing paper on the human rights situation of older persons in Ukraine in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation.

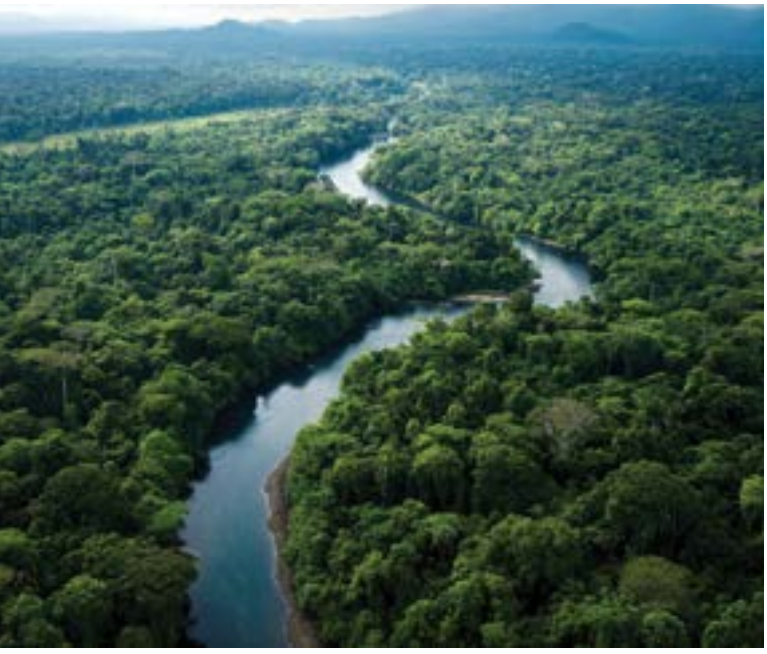


4.4 Achievements and Impacts: Latin America and the Caribbean

Brazil

While inequality, poverty and climate change pose significant challenges and threats to Brazil's sustainable development, its biodiversity – the world's largest – provides unique solutions. Brazil recognizes this potential and has prioritized the bioeconomy as an effective approach to encourage economic growth within planetary boundaries, promote social justice and mitigate the effects of climate change.[116]

As put forward by Brazil, a bioeconomy aims to promote development that uses environmentally, socially and economically sustainable biological resources to contribute to water, food and energy security of the population. It promotes forestry and socio-biodiverse economies based on the identification, innovation and valorisation of their socioeconomic, environmental and cultural potential, together with greater income for and participation in markets by Indigenous Peoples, traditional communities and family farmers. This also aims to strengthen the competitiveness of national bio-based production and biodiversity, as well as the transition to a low-carbon economy. However, a lack of legal and regulatory frameworks and consideration of the human rights framework may lead to risks to the protection and enjoyment of human rights, for example, linked to the potential negative impacts of large-scale bioeconomy practices, such as monoculture and commodity production, on biodiversity, local communities and food security.



On 5 June 2024, Brazil launched a National Bioeconomy Strategy (Decree 12.044) aimed at promoting cooperation between states, municipalities, the Federal District, civil society organisations and private entities. It also created a National Bioeconomy Commission composed of 17 Ministries and civil society representatives, mandated to develop and implement a National Bioeconomy Development Plan. This strategy aims to encourage the sustainable use, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity; decarbonization of production processes; and provides incentives for biomass processing systems and processes without conversion of the original native vegetation, together with bio-industrialization that is aligned with Brazil's New Industrial Policy and regenerative agriculture.

Against this backdrop, the Surge Initiative assisted UN Human Rights in Brazil to undertake a project to analyse the opportunities and implications of Brazil's new bioeconomy strategy on human rights. Through this project, UN Human Rights has advised the design of the National Bioeconomy Development Plan and the National Socio-Bioeconomy Plan, increasing awareness of the process amongst civil society actors, and building the capacity of Indigenous Peoples, quilombolas, traditional communities and family farmers, to inform the process. UN Human Rights put forward recommendations[117] to ensure that human rights, including the right to a healthy environment and the vision of a human rights economy, inform the development of bioeconomy frameworks and projects, to reinforce sustainable development with human rights considerations, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition to more sustainable societies. In this regard, UN Human Rights has been working closely with rights holders and the Ministries of Environment, Agrarian Development and Science, Technology & Innovation to identify the most useful ways to support the implementation of both plans, laying the ground for this work.

Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, in 2020-2022, the Human Rights Adviser implemented a Surge seeding-change project in collaboration with the Indigenous National Adviser, aimed at establishing an early warning and prevention monitoring system to address cases of Indigenous leaders threatened for defending their lands and territories – notably in response to the murder of two Indigenous leaders (Sergio Rojas in 2019 and Jherry Rivera in 2020), particularly in the Indigenous territories of Buenos Aires (Cabagra, Salitre, Terraba) and Pérez Zeledón (China Kichá). This system, based on the monitoring of the right to land, also aimed to reduce the escalation of violence in the region, including by enabling immediate action by the police and judiciary in response to threats against Indigenous leaders, including women, by addressing key common risks identified by Indigenous leaders and local and national State officials. In this way its goal was that of contributing to social cohesion and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the prioritized communities based on international human rights standards for Indigenous Peoples.

This work was undertaken with the participation of Indigenous leaders, including women, the local police and national authorities, such as the Vice Minister of Political Affairs and Citizen Dialogue of the Presidency of the Republic of Costa Rica in charge of Indigenous Peoples issues and the Ministry of Public Security, the judiciary, the National Human Rights Institution and other key actors including the UN System.

Despite the State´s legal recognition of Indigenous territories, a significant portion of these lands in Costa Rica remains occupied by non-Indigenous Peoples.[118] Due to the lack of regularization of the land by the State[119] and the need for an efficient land restitution programme, Indigenous leaders have begun a process of recovery of their own lands through "de facto reappropriations." Various UN human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN and other stakeholders have raised concerns on this situation and called on the authorities to ensure and protect the right of Indigenous Peoples to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and natural resources that they possess, including through such legal recognition and protection as may be necessary.[120]

In 2015, precautionary measures were granted by the Inter American Commission of Human Rights in favour of the Bribri and Teribe Indigenous Peoples.[121] Similarly, in its report to the Universal Periodic Review in 2019, the UN Country Team pointed out that Indigenous land recovery and boundary-marking processes were progressing slowly. It recommended that the State take action to address the land recovery issue, particularly in the cantons of Pérez Zeledón and Buenos Aires.[122] UN Human Rights' work also drew on the wealth of recommendations that had been made by the High Commissioner during her visit in 2019, and by the UN Human Rights Assistant Secretary-General in 2022, including on the need to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples in accessing their lands.[123] In 2024, these issues were raised again and the Universal Periodic Review process renewed its recommendations with regards to this matter.[124]

As a result, the monitoring of access to land and other economic and social rights of the prioritized communities was strengthened, which in turn informed advocacy with local and national authorities for specific protection risks and concerns – for example, regarding threats against the Indigenous leaders, including women, defending their lands.

The project contributed analysis to the UN Common Country Analysis on emerging issues, early warning and prevention, with specific focus on access to land and the Sustainable Development Goals. It informed the UN Country Team's protection and prevention strategy, including on Indigenous Peoples and their access to land in line with the Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights. The project's monitoring led to the mapping of factors that generate tensions and disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples, including in the context and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project also created opportunities for dialogue between Indigenous leaders, local authorities and the judiciary on preventive and remedial action, building communication bridges between Indigenous communities and the State. It also contributed to building trust with the judicial authorities, assisting the development of an access to justice policy in line with international standards – a process that was funded by the Universal Periodic Review Trust Fund. The funding for this work, which was initially provided by the Surge Initiative, subsequently continued via DPA, UNFPA and the Resident Coordinator's Office.

Paraguay

"I consider (…) the Human Rights Diploma with a focus on Social Protection (…) to be of utmost importance, (...) a propitious space to exchange both national and international experiences related to the planning, development and execution of public policies that affect practical problems of society and that must also be addressed taking into consideration human rights and social protection. In the diploma course, various aspects of the reality of Paraguay were analysed, (…) under the prism of (…) human rights (…), proposing alternatives to incorporate this perspective in the possible solutions that are proposed to the various social requirements. With this course, Paraguay also reaffirms its vocation to continue consolidating the defence of human rights and social protection as the central axis of its public policy, with the aim of serving society as a whole with a better democratic quality."

Rafael Caballero Campos, Vice Minister of Justice, 2024

In 2020, with Surge support, the Human Rights Advisor in Paraguay carried out a human rights analysis of the social protection system (2020-21), including a review of policies and programmes adopted during the pandemic. Social protection programs had been initiated to support poor families, with access to unemployed workers, and in 2010, a program for the elderly was also launched. However, overall, the social protection system remained fragmented, not equitable and with limited inclusivity. For example, around 66 percent of Indigenous Peoples lived in poverty, and 34.4 percent in abject poverty, but fewer than 4 percent benefitted from the State's Indigenous People social protection system.[125] The majority of Indigenous Peoples lacked access to basic needs such as adequate food, education, housing, justice and health, despite human rights obligations and Sustainable Development Goal commitments.

The study provided an overview of social protection mechanisms, using a human rights, gender, lifecycle (schemes for children, women, seniors) and territorial perspective that resulted in detailed recommendations for a social protection system that is more inclusive and comprehensive in its coverage. These included improving interinstitutional coordination, and reform options based on regional good practices. UNICEF, the UN Population Fund, UNDP, the FAO and the UN Human Rights Advisor, led by the Resident Coordinator, engaged with the Technical Unit of the Social Cabinet [Unidad Técnica del Gabinete Social] and the Ministry of Social Development [Ministerio de Desarrollo Social] to promote extension of the Government programme "*Vamos!*" to segments of society thus far excluded from social protection, including youth, Indigenous Peoples, women, older persons, children and persons with disabilities.

In follow-up to this assessment, UN Human Rights partnered with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the National University of Asunción to set-up a post-graduate course on "Human Rights and Social Protection, to integrate human rights in the education of future decision-makers relevant to social protection. In 2025, the course is in its third year, having already trained 120 students (40 per year). The findings of the study were also widely distributed to the authorities, civil society and in universities.

"I work in a public charitable institution – DIBEN – and we provide services in the health area (…). Our institutional policy was limited. Thanks to the new concepts learned in the diploma course, I suggested changes in the intervention approach and also at the conceptual level on social vulnerability. Currently, we are working on our internal procedures to incorporate these changes and expand our horizons as an institution based on social protection and access to universal health."

Nelly Ramirez, a former student

Peru

In Peru in 2023, UN Human Rights collaborated with the National Human Rights Institution to undertake an assessment of the socio-economic factors driving social conflicts in the country's six most conflict-prone regions: Loreto, Piura, Ancash, Cuzco, Puno and Apurimac. The analysis built on the findings and recommendations of various UN human rights mechanisms,[126] and looked at socio-economic indicators related to the right to education, healthcare, water and sanitation services, and poverty. The aim was to understand the root causes of ongoing conflicts. In addition, human rights-based budget analyses focused on health and education were also undertaken in the two regions of Apurímac and Puno,[127] informing and complementing the root cause analyses and providing a pilot for replicating similar analyses in other regions.

The project found that social conflict is often perpetuated by the State's failure to implement agreements reached in conflict situations. It demonstrated a pattern of conflict linked with the negative impacts of mining or hydrocarbon extraction activities on the environment, and on access to natural resources (63% of conflict cases).[128] It also observed that 5 of the 6 most conflict-prone regions have a higher percentage of ethnic minority, Indigenous and/or Afro-descendant people than the national average. In the regions studied, the report found that illiteracy rates among women and men, chronic malnutrition and anaemia in children and lack of access to drinking water are also higher than the national average.

The analyses supported the National Human Rights Institution's efforts to monitor and prevent conflict. Following the assessment, the National Human Rights Institution continued to deepen analysis of social conflicts for early warning and conflict prevention, establishing a database of agreements reached with State bodies in these contexts. Building on the findings of this first project, UN Human Rights has started work with the Institution to evaluate specific barriers to the implementation of agreements related to the right to a healthy environment.

In addition, following UN Human Rights' reports, the organization Idea International has broadened the conflict analysis to all other regions in the country. The findings of the study also informed the (2023 update) of the UN Common Country Analysis (leave no-one behind chapter).



Uruguay

In 2022, the Surge Initiative supported the Human Rights Adviser in Uruguay to undertake a project to develop economic, social and cultural rights indicators for the MIRADOR DESCA.[129] This platform was established jointly by the National Human Rights Institution,[130] the National University and UN Human Rights to strengthen monitoring of economic, social and cultural rights in the country, with a focus on specific groups. Among other things, the Surge Initiative supported the monitoring of the rights of people of African descent[131] and the undertaking of a qualitative analysis report on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, based on existing data and a self-administered survey of people of African descent.

This work was undertaken in follow-up to a previous Surge Initiative project in 2020, which helped to set up a UN Country Team's monitoring mechanism of the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people most left behind in Uruguay. The 2020 initiative aimed to create a permanent multi-agency monitoring mechanism and prevention framework, for integrated analysis, including human rights-based data analyses and consultations with civil society organizations and groups left behind – to alert the Country Team regarding inequalities, discrimination and obstacles faced by these groups.

It also built on recommendations by the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other UN human rights bodies concerning inequalities and discrimination and disproportionate levels of poverty and social exclusion, as relevant to Afro-Uruguayans and other people of African descent.[132] The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of older



© Daniel Rodriguez/adhocFOTOS

persons and the Inter American Commission on human rights had also stressed concern about the persistence of structural discrimination against persons of African descent that hinders their exercise and enjoyment of, for example, their economic, social and cultural rights.[133] The project also built on the Programme of Activities of the International Decade of People of African Descent, the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, the 2030 Agenda, as well as the 2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework which made it a priority to ensure that Afro-descendants are not left behind.

As a result of the study, indicators regarding the economic, social and cultural rights of people of African descent were integrated in the Mirador DESCA. This enabled rapid identification of continuing gaps in data, as well as analysis of Afro-descendants' enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, with a focus on women, older persons and other groups at greater risk of being left behind. The analysis strengthened our advocacy with the authorities including the National Human Rights Institution and the Ministry of Social Development, to advocate for enhanced data on people of African descent.

This project has also led to improved coordination among civil society and institutions working on Afro-Uruguayans and other people of African descent, deepened and strengthened collaboration with the National Human Rights Institution and academia as well as the Ministry of Social Development and the "Consejo Consultivo Nacional de Equidad Racial Étnico y Afrodescendencia". The report also informed the 2023 visit to Uruguay of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, the country review by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination where the MIRADOR DESCA was actually referenced in the Committee's session on Uruguay (2023) and in the National Human Rights Institution report to the Committee. Data also informed the 2023 UPR process,[134]with the National Human Rights Institution report to the Universal Periodic Review stating in paragraph 14 that '*(t)he gaps between the Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant population in the realization of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights have decreased, but they are still significant (18),[135] mainly observed in the indicators of employment, social security, education and housing.*'

The project constitutes a promising practice that could be replicated in other countries in the region that are similarly working on improving data collection from a human rights perspective. It was presented at a UN Human Rights webinar on the role of National Human Rights Institutions and protection mechanisms in the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, which saw the participation of National Human Rights Institutions from the Latin American and Caribbean region.[136]

"The Surge project was highly positive (…) The Uruguayan government has used the information from the Mirador DESCA for various activities and reports at the national level and with different bodies within the Inter-American and universal human rights systems. (…)"

The Surge project enabled specific progress in making visible the gaps in the fulfilment, realization, and enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights by the Afro-descendant population in Uruguay."

Gustavo Méndez Barbato, Faculty of Social Science, University of the Republic, and Magdalena Gutiérrez (NHRI), members of the Mirador DESCA Team

4.5 Achievements and Impacts: Middle East and North Africa

Jordan

With support from the Surge Initiative, the Senior Human Rights Adviser collaborated with the UN Country Team and the Jordan Economic and Social Council,[137] to develop a UN Country Team policy brief on "Domestic Resource Mobilization, A Human Rights-Based Approach to Tackling Inequalities." The policy brief presents key findings from an assessment of tax policies since 2000, with a particular focus on revenue collection and its alignment with the State's obligation to mobilize the maximum available resources for the progressive realization of economic and social rights, and the role of taxation in reducing inequalities.

Previously, Jordan's 2021 UN Common Country Analysis had recommended a more inclusive approach to decision-making, to improve Jordan's economy and to meet national development objectives. UN human rights mechanisms and others had repeatedly recommended that the State analyse budget allocations and provide adequate financial resources to realize the human rights, and particularly economic and social rights, of women, persons with disabilities and children; to mainstream gender equality; to strengthen the National Human Rights Institution and national bodies serving women's rights; and to invest in the right to

Human Rights Economy Mural – UN Jordan street art illustrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



health, inclusive education, and impartial and accessible justice systems.[138] Jordan adopted many related national strategies including the Social Protection Strategy of 2019-2025, which at the time of drafting this report was being updated to align with Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision.

Against this backdrop, amongst the UN Country Team priorities is sustaining financial resources to building forward better, and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework of 2023-2027 which includes, as one of its four priorities, "enhancing opportunities for inclusive, green economic growth in Jordan".

The policy brief focused on the following questions: Was the Government raising enough revenue to finance the fulfilment of SDGs and in pace with its economic growth? Was it investing adequately in the realization of human rights, including its obligations of non-discrimination and addressing inequalities? How could expenditure and the tax system work better to redress inequalities? And did the tax system abide by the human rights guiding principles of transparency, participation and accountability in the way it mobilizes resources? The brief recommended measures to reinforce transparency, participation and accountability. It called for the review of fiscal laws, policy and practices, towards a more progressive and redistributive tax system, and proposed ways to increase public investments in education, health, water and sanitation, food security and climate mitigation. In this manner, it was closely aligned with Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision, particularly its second strategic pillar: improving quality of life for all citizens. By focusing on enhancing revenue generation to strengthen economic, social, and cultural rights at the national and local levels,[139] the project directly supports the Vision's goals of job creation, higher incomes, and inclusive development. Additionally, the recommendations emphasized participation in fiscal and economic decision-making in line with the Vision's commitment for active citizen engagement and the development of a more equitable and sustainable ecosystem.

The analysis was validated in January 2023 by 30 State and non-State stakeholders and publicly launched in March 2023.[140] It informed UN country analysis and programming, as well as the UN joint submission to Jordan's Universal Periodic Review in January 2024, which included a chapter on the human rights economy.[141] Two recommendations addressed to Jordan during the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Report encouraged the continued protection of the most vulnerable groups in Jordan, be it through the social protection umbrella or through implementing the Economic Modernisation and the Public Sector Modernisation Vision, to promote social and economic rights (136.91; 136.92). The analysis also garnered significant media and public visibility, fostering a national debate on public financing for human rights.[142]

> ***"We are committed to advocate for human rights impact assessment on current and future reforms, economic policies, focusing on the link with socio-economic development and the living standards and on those who are or might be left behind."***
>
> *Prof. Musa Shteiwi, President of the JESC, addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in January 2024*

At a second phase to the project, the Senior Human Rights Advisor, UN-Habitat and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office partnered with the Cities and Villages Development Bank to analyse municipal revenues and expenditures, to inform public administration and decentralization reform, address geographic inequalities and allocate resources to those furthest behind – in line with the required human rights obligations. [143] On 16th January 2025, a validation workshop was co-organized by UN Human Rights, UN-Habitat, and the Cities and Villages Development Bank to present the findings and validate the recommendations of the final assessment entitled "Public Finance for Human Rights: The Role of Municipal Revenues in Jordan". The workshop gathered representatives from various Ministries and other public institutions – including local authorities and the national human rights institute – as well as civil society organizations.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Human Rights promoted 17 murals[144] illustrating various human rights articles from the Declaration and the Human Rights Economy[145] in in Al Hashmi neighbourhood in Amman,[146] contributing to the engagement of Jordanian officials, civil society and 11 UN agencies to conceive, develop and amplify its messages.

Lebanon

In 2022, UN Human Rights supported the development of a UNCT Position Paper to the IMF on social protection, gender equality, the rule of law, environment and climate change. This aimed to contribute to International Monetary Fund technical discussions on required macroeconomic reforms. At the time, the economic situation in Lebanon was critical, with a Gross Domestic Product decline of 19 percent in 2020; soaring inflation;[147] severe devaluation of the local currency; and an increase in poverty and extreme poverty estimated at 45 percent and 22 percent respectively.[148] In underscoring the importance of a human rights based approach to economic reforms, the position paper recommended ring-fencing economic and social rights in the context of austerity measures, and human rights impact assessments, integrating gender analysis, to evaluate and address the possible adverse effects of economic reform measures on all human rights. A recommendation on the need to strengthen national human rights mechanisms, including adequate resources for the National Human Rights Commission of Lebanon, was taken on board by the Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework led by the UN system, the World Bank and the European Union.



Libya

In Libya in 2023 and 2024, the Surge Initiative assisted UN Human Rights in identifying the legacies of past expropriation laws,[149] including their effects on internally displaced people, and assessed the effects of various Government responses and measures adopted to address related grievances.

The project was undertaken in a context where previous redistribution policies had led to deepening grievances, administrative challenges and economic imbalances. Following the overthrow of the former regime, violent confrontations over disputed property took place, while militias took control of various lands and buildings in the absence of any legal framework, leading to massive, forced displacement in several areas. The practice of property violations was complicated by the lack of proper documentation, and disputes over land ownership fuelled local conflicts. Fully undoing the laws that allowed these confiscations and addressing their consequences through a process of compensation and restitution, will be one of the most divisive issues facing Libya's reconciliation process, as it may require the rehousing of tens of thousands of inhabitants, with significant costs linked to a substantial compensation programme.

Through a series of focus group discussions, interviews, and two workshops in Tripoli and Benghazi, the Surge Initiative project supported the development of an analysis – undertaken in collaboration with the Presidency Council, legal experts, and the Real Estate Registration Authority. The study mapped the various laws of concern and their effects, and assessed existing and past responses, mapping grievances and their links to displacement, and making recommendations for future redress, as part of a comprehensive transitional justice process.

The assessment proposes structural reforms to prevent future violations of housing, land and property rights. It was shared with participants – including the most relevant state authorities such as the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of State for Internally Displaced Persons Affairs, and the Law 4 Victims Association – at a workshop in Tripoli in August 2024.

In 2024, the Surge Initiative contributed further financial support to enable follow-up to this work by UN Human Rights Libya, to assess the work of the 2006 Commission (the Law 4/1978 Compensation Commission) which for over a decade managed to resolve thousands of housing-related grievances inherited from the Qaddafi era, either through restitution or compensation, via a mapping and analysis of information on its database. After 2011, and as the Government of National Unity revived the Commission, analysis of this dataset could advance housing, land and property rights as part of transitional justice for the future of Libya. The analysis will seek to understand what specific requests were received, and by what type of victims, as well as which areas were specifically concerned. It will also assess how long it took for the Commission to address them, what the outcome was (compensation, restitution), and whether that outcome varied by location or period. Based on that analysis, as well as field research and qualitative interviews with members of the Commission, an accurate assessment will contribute to key recommendations for the success of the newly revived Commission, as well as for future transitional justice more generally.[150]

5. Reflections and lessons learned

> ***"Our economies are failing us. Mind-boggling inequalities, unbelievable wealth enjoyed by a privileged elite, alongside grinding poverty experienced by millions. This is a human rights crisis. Through the Human Rights Economy concept, we can perform the reset so urgently needed."***
>
> *Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, panel on advancing women's equality, July 2024*

In recent years, UN Human Rights has made it a priority to step up work on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It has added economists to its workforce and has received additional capacity and resources through landmark resolutions of the Human Rights Council. These resolutions underscored political commitment to bring human rights to the heart of development efforts and economic and social policies to reduce poverty and counter inequalities. The Office Management Plan (2024-27) has made the vision of a Human Rights Economy, as well as fostering inclusion and equality, strategic directions of the Office, with a commitment to support countries to align development finance and their economic policies with obligations under international human rights law, leaving no one behind.

Against growing funding cuts, the strengthening of UN Human Rights' work on a human rights economy is crucial, as the environmental degradation and the climate emergency accelerates, hunger is on the rise, extreme poverty continues at unbearable levels, and skyrocketing inequalities and the concentration of wealth in the hands of few, drive political instability, extremism, and amplify mistrust towards institutions.

As the human rights economy is a strategic priority for the Office, we offer a few salient thoughts about some of the shifts that the Surge Initiative generated – and which the Office can now build on.

Breaking silos: Infusing human rights in economic, social and environmental policies and practice

Surge Initiative projects have shown that there is significant support by States, UN entities, civil society and other stakeholders in breaking down silos, to ensure that economic, social and environmental policies and practice are anchored in and informed by human rights law and norms. There has been growing recognition that this is essential to secure adequate investment in public services, achieve progress in reducing inequalities and reconciling the focus on economic growth with the protection of the environment. By helping to re-center economies on delivering on the rights of people and the protection of the planet, human rights are increasingly seen as a solution to the multiple crises that the world is facing today. Through the Surge Initiative the Office has developed and used tools and methodologies that can help countries to address existing shortcomings. The examples highlighted in this report show the practical application of these tools and methodologies in specific country contexts and the added value that they deliver.

Leveraging human rights to protect the fiscal space for the Sustainable Development Goals

The Surge Initiative has raised awareness and operational understanding of a wealth of human rights norms and standards that apply to economic and social policy choices, but may be little known, especially by economic policy makers and practitioners. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for instance, requires States to ensure that 'maximum available resources' are allocated to the 'progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights', forbids discrimination and allows backsliding only in very exceptional and well justified circumstances. These and other requirements – despite being legally binding – are still rarely invoked. They should be systematically applied by States as policy guardrails. This is especially the case when countries are required to put in place fiscal consolidation measures during economic downturns and are confronted with difficult trade-offs. In such cases it is critical that policy choices uphold the rights of people, notably of the most marginalised population groups.

The Surge Initiative has also played a crucial role in the formulation[151] and translation of[152] the wealth of targeted advice from UN Treaty Bodies, the UN Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review on tackling extreme poverty, inequalities, marginalisation and social exclusion, and protecting human rights in debt-stricken countries, while taking into consideration relevant links with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets as well as the pledge to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first.

Reforming the international financial architecture is key to a human rights economy

Building human rights economies at the national level will require transforming the international financial architecture and global economic governance in what the UN Secretary-General has called "a giant leap towards global justice." Surge Initiative work has shown the value of pursuing global policy advocacy aimed at reforming an outdated and dysfunctional international financial architecture. Lessons learned from Surge country engagement informed policy-recommendations and key messaging on integrating human rights into the reforms of the international financial architecture, including advocacy towards a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, which in August 2024 embraced human rights as one of its principles. Building on the 4th Financing for Development Conference, there is a historic opportunity to align development finance with States' human rights obligations including with regard to designing a global debt architecture that proactively supports the realization of human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

> ***"Untaxed wealth means underfunded public services. We need to act urgently on #CompromisodeSevilla and reform global tax rules for a human rights economy that prioritises people and planet over profits!"***
>
> *Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commission for Human Rights, July 2025*

Reinforcing human rights policy advice in UN development country programming

Through its team of experts on sustainable development, economic, social and cultural rights and development finance, the Surge Initiative has forged greater collaboration with UN economists, including in Resident Coordinator offices. It has also more systematically contributed to UN economic, environmental and sustainable development policy advice and programming.

Since its inception, the Surge Initiative has contributed country tailored inputs and policy solutions across over 168 UN Common Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. This has resulted in stronger human rights integration into UN policy advice to national and sub-national governments on budgets, taxation for the Sustainable Development Goals and other critical aspects of economic policy. Targeted Leave No One Behind analyses and operational tools have been developed in support of UN social, economic and environmental engagement. Evidence and analytical inputs have been provided on a wide range of issues, such as designing more inclusive social security systems, adjusting housing strategies so they better cater for persons with disabilities or extending health coverage to women and girls in situation of extreme poverty. By placing the situation and needs of the most disadvantaged groups at the centre of its analysis and advice, the Surge Initiative has often been a catalyst to nudge actors on the ground to move from policy to operationalising the pledge to leave no one behind.[153]

Demonstrating the indivisibility and interconnectedness of all human rights

Surge country projects have shed further light on the interconnectedness and inseparability of economic, social and cultural rights with civil and political rights, and similarly, across the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. States' economic austerity measures frequently impact people's well-being and livelihoods, including by cuts to basic public services, and have often resulted in instability and violence. Similarly, UN Human Rights` work has also put a spotlight on the fact that developing economic, social and cultural rights policies and practice and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals are inextricably linked with the rights to information, participation, free expression and accountability.

Empowering disadvantaged groups to engage in policy-making

Progressive change comes from people's mobilisation and from social movements. By focusing consistently on the rights of people who are disadvantaged and left behind, the Surge Initiative foregrounds the concerns of people most directly affected in policy formulation and planning. No effective national action plan on rights of Indigenous People, for example, can be drawn up unless those concerned have a seat at the table and a voice in decisions.

Working in collaboration with and in support of grassroots organisations, the Surge Initiative has empowered many local actors by promoting meaningful participation in critical decision-making processes. It has strived to ensure that responses are grounded in the lived realities of affected communities. Through Surge Initiative engagement, civil society organizations, youth, women and representatives of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, became more aware of their rights to access information and to meaningfully participate in, and influence the conduct of, public affairs, including the allocation of public resources to priority social services. Capacities to hold decision-makers to account, including through the exercise of their rights to the freedoms of speech, assembly and association, were reinforced.

UN Human Rights' activities additionally demonstrated the added value of injecting economic, social and cultural rights analysis and the interlinkages with the Sustainable Development Goals in humanitarian contexts, including in unstable situations, or in public healthcare emergencies. Promoting the human rights of the people most left behind in a concrete and participatory manner, especially in relation to essential services, builds trust between people and the officials whose role is to serve them – making this an effective and sustainable prevention strategy for stability.[154]

Expanding and diversifying partnerships for a human rights economy

Human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals can be realized only with the support and advocacy of strong global partnerships and with adequate financing, in the true spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals. Through the Surge Initiative, UN Human Rights has prioritized collaboration and partnership – including with two important new partnerships with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute and the New School, among others, developing its methodologies, analysis, and responses on the basis of consultations and engagement with the public, State officials, UN colleagues, civil society organizations and other actors. Surge projects have enabled engagement with new sectors in Government and State institutions, such as ministries of finance and planning; economic and social councils; Sustainable Development Goals implementation bodies, and officials engaged in health and education, labour and social affairs, water and sanitation, agriculture and livestock, energy, the environment, housing and urban development; national planning commissions and national institutes of statistics, as well as local authorities. Its work with the Jordan Economic and Social Council and academic programmes in Paraguay and Uruguay are examples of open-ended engagement with new allies.

Guinea Bissau Surge Initiative project – Flyer on Voluntary National Review LNOB consultations



Endnotes

1 Para 1, UN Secretary-General's 2025 SDG Progress Report.

2 Ibid at paras. 2 and 3.

3 Ibid at para. 9.

4 A World of Debt, UNCT 2024 report.

5 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

6 UN Inter-agency Review of New Generation Common Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks | OHCHR

7 See CESCR's General Comment no. 3 on The Nature of States Parties' Obligations, including for references to other pertinent human rights obligations including on: ensuring 'minimum core obligations' and allocating the 'maximum available resources' for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

8 The Surge Team has also collaborated closely with various Sections and Divisions across UN Human Rights, including from teams working on operations; Human Rights Mechanisms; methodology, education and training; women's human rights and gender; persons with disabilities; migration; environment and climate change; children and youth; business and human rights; and the right to development.

9 This report is informed by a desk review of available documentation, and interviews with members of the Surge Team, UN Human Rights presences and some of their key partners within States, UN teams, and civil society. The projects in-focus are but some examples of UN Human Rights' work and do not, by any means, aim to cover all of the Office's and other partners' action in these areas.

10 See also Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/58/9 that underscores the importance of "designing and implementing economic policies that advance the realization of human rights for all", as well as the joint statement delivered by Honduras (on behalf of Bahamas, Bahrain, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Maldives, Mongolia, Panama, Spain) that underscores support for the Human Rights Economy and the work of the Office in this regard.

11 According to the CESCR's General Comment no. 3 on The Nature of States Parties' Obligations: there is "a minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights is incumbent upon every State party. Thus, for example, a State party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant."

12 The UPR recommended to accelerate the implementation of health coverage for all; eradicate discrimination in healthcare; make health centers and hospitals available with improved infrastructure and access, especially for rural populations, with focus on adequate services for women.

13 CESCR recommended to develop a progressive and socially just fiscal policy and increase the fees charged to foreign investors exploiting forests and extractive resources. It also recommended that the definition of fiscal policies and budget proposals be conducted in a transparent and participatory manner (para.15 of E/C.12/CMR/CO/4).

14 Organized by the Ministry of Justice with the support of UN Human Rights in April 2022 in N'Djamena.

15 For example on: finalising, adopting and implementing the Land and Pastoral Codes in line with human rights standards including gender equality for equitable and sustainable access to land and other natural resources such as water, essential for agriculture and livestock; combatting corruption; improving and ensuring optimal execution of annual expenses allocated to the agriculture, livestock, water, environment sectors; monitoring and evaluating public investment expenditure on infrastructure, development and equipment necessary for the availability and accessibility of water, land, and pastures; and finally improving the right to food of the most vulnerable including by putting in place the necessary investments and support measures for small producers in the agricultural sector to ensure their means of livelihood.

16 Compared to 2023, this reflects an 86,44% increase in the agricultural budget and 45,58% in the livestock budget.

17 See article 3: évaluer l'économie, l'efficacité, et l'efficience de l'emploi des fonds publics ou regard des objectifs fixés, des moyens utilisés et des résultats obtenus, ainsi que la pertinence et la fiabilité des méthodes, indicateurs, et données permettant de mesurer la performance des politiques et des administrations publiques.

18 Macrotrends: Eswatini Electricity Access 2000-2025: https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/swz/eswatini/electricity-access-statistics#:~:text=Access%20to%20electricity%20is%20the,a%200.6%25%20decline%20from%202021.

19 In 2019, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy and the Ministry for Finance secured funding from the WB for the Network Reinforcement and Access Project (NRAP) to improve electricity supply and increase access to the Shiselweni region, by constructing transmission lines and substations.

20 UPR recommendation 118.131 to strengthen social protection floors catering for the vulnerable and marginalized groups in society.

21 Two of the main expected results of this outcome area are: 1) Strengthened capacity of civil society organizations, oversight bodies and government at national and regional levels on good governance and human rights; and 2) Strengthened capacity of rights-holders – particularly women, children, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable and marginalized groups who are at risk of being left behind – to participate in decision-making processes, claim their rights, access justice and seek redress is strengthened.

22 In a highly unequal country where over 70% of the 1.8 million population is poor – and the richest 10% share 42% of the national income – the pandemic worsened living standards and increased joblessness, with women, youth, children and rural dwellers most vulnerable to shocks, including climate change-related events. Then in 2022 – in a context of political violence, instability and insecurity, when the UN Secretary General underscored the importance of addressing violations to economic, social and cultural rights to prevent conflict and tensions (S/2020/755) – the State reduced social spending and adopted austerity measures.

[23] Discussions with the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration resulted in a methodological note guiding the exercise. The Directorate of Planning coordinated with ministries, planning delegates and regional authorities. The RCO and its economist guided the drafting of the leave no-one behind analysis, also benefitting from WHO and UNICEF inputs, given the specific focus on the rights to health and education. Findings were integrated in the VNR State report. A summary of discussions was annexed to reflect the voices of right-holders and groups left behind. CSOs participation in the HLPF was facilitated.

[24] To date, Guinea Bissau submitted one report to CEDAW (2009) and one to the CRC (2013). The initial report to the CESCR is due since 1994.

[25] For example, at the end of her visit to Guinea-Bissau in 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights recommended that Guinea Bissau Develop platforms for public participation which are relevant, coordinated and accessible, in order for the public to access information and participate in governance and development in a meaningful manner. This will improve accountability and transparency in development, enabling rights holders and duty bearers to engage in constructive dialogue.

[26] The State's VNR presentation at the HLPF included an intervention by a civil society actor, and the review was broadcast live in Guinea Bissau followed by a panel discussion, again with the inclusion of a human rights activist.

[27] Page 9 of Human RightsBased Analysis of Guinea Bissau's Budgets from 2016 to 2022.

[28] In 2001, African Union countries set a target of allocating at least 15% of their budget each year to the health sector, known as the Abuja Declaration.

[29] The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action which urges governments to allocate at least 15% to 20% of total public expenditure to all levels of education.

[30] See also the Portuguese version.

[31] For instance, see para.18 of E/C.12/KEN/CO/2-5 KENYA: '18. The Committee recommends that the State party … increase the level of public funding, at both the national and county level, to ensure the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights, particularly the rights to housing, water and sanitation, social security, health and education, and (…) make all efforts to improve its budget execution process with a view to spending all the allocated funding in a timely, effective and transparent manner. (…).' See also UPR recommendations from the HRC 35th session: 142.189 and 142.53 South Africa and Tanzania respectively.

[32] For example: Health: the Abuja Declaration and WHO stipulate investments of 15% of the national budget and 5% of GDP. Education: 20% of the budget and/or 6% of GDP (Incheon Declaration).

[33] County Integrated Development plans, Annual Development Plans, Climate Change Adaptation Policy and Climate Change Fund Act.

[34] Nakuru, Marsabit, Makueni, Lamu, Baringo, Garissa and Wajir.

[35] Information provided by Paul Masese, Centre for Enhancing Democracy and Good governance (CEDGG) local implementing partner in Nakuru County.

[36] The County Budget Transparency Survey 2023 showed an improvement in transparency index for Nakuru County from 51 in 2022 to 62/100 points in 2023.

[37] Six communities submitted petitions (Kapkures, Biashara, Molo, Gilgil, Maela and Kiptororo Wards).

[38] The allocation to the health sector rose from 36.9% of the 2023/24 budget to 37.1% in 2024/25. The water allocation increased by Kshs. 43 million. The allocation to social protection increased to 2.2%, up from 1.9% in 2023/24. The Nakuru county government also allocated Ksh. 27.5 million for persons with disabilities (for purchasing assistive devices and to support livelihoods of persons with disabilities).

[39] Information provided by Mamo Abudo, Development and Humanitarian Assistance for Sustainable Environment (DHASE), local Implementing partner in Marsabit, North Horr Subcounty.

[40] Information provided by James Orre, Rebuilding Pastoralist Livelihood (Repal) local implementing partner in Marsabit, Laisamis Subcounty.

[41] The ongoing phase of the project continues to focus on further building the capacity of civil society organisations working at the sub-national level to track and monitor budget allocations and expenditure to better hold government to account and to strengthen advocacy for alternative policy choices contributing to the enjoyment of human rights.

[42] SDG targets 1.b (sound policy frameworks to accelerate investment in poverty eradication); 10.2 (social, economic and political inclusion of all); 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions); 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making)

[43] Including Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, and Zambia.

[44] ROSA developed a template for leave no-one behind analysis that operationalizes the leave no-one behind guidance note for UNCTs through a human rights-based approach and related human rights sources, including from Human Rights Mechanisms recommendations.

[45] UN internal guidance developed following a 2022 Human Rights-Based Approach, Leave No One Behind and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment review by the UN of CCA/CFs.

[46] All three countries are State Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and actively report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR).

[47] CESCR Concluding Observations (COBs) for Mauritius (2019), Namibia (2016) and South Africa (2018) were assessed and cross referenced to SDG targets and relevant COBs of other treaty bodies and human rights mechanisms.

[48] This highlights the principal recommendations of the brief to all relevant stakeholders as well as outlining the principal tenets of a HRBA to data.

[49] Statistics South Africa (2024). Quarterly Labour Force Survey, quarter 4.

[50] See E/C.12/ZAF/CO/1.

[51] Zambia had been hard hit by the COVID-pandemic, had defaulted on a Eurobond, and was experiencing sharp rises in food prices. All the while, there was retrogression in the enjoyment of the right to adequate food, forcing Zambians to reduce their food intake, and shrinking fiscal space for social spending. The Government's budget for 2021 had allocated 39 percent of the budget to debt-servicing.

[52] And other key processes such as Zambia's eventual reporting to the CESCR and the implementation of the UNSDCF for the period 2023-2027.

[53] Lars Jensen, "Avoiding 'Too Little Too Late' on International Debt Relief", Development Futures Series Working Papers (New York, UNDP, 2022).

[54] In 2021, the Zambian government spent more on debt servicing than the education, health, water and sanitation sectors combined. Debt servicing accounted for 39% of national budget at the time. How the UK Can Lead in Preventing Future Zambia-like Debt Crises.

[55] Following the consultations of 2024, the Independent Expert on the human rights of persons with albinism, submitted a report on the right to education of persons with albinism to the HRC.

[56] 5th Intersessional on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda on 'Integrating Human Rights into the International Financial Architecture Reforms: A cornerstone for Realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[57] Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and Daily Mail newspaper.

[58] Following strategic advocacy for a universal, nutritious school feeding program, including in the context of UDHR 75, the Government requested WFP's support to conduct an impact evaluation of the Program. OHCHR was involved in discussions with WFP and other partners to collect data for the evaluation.

[59] OHCHR organized a dedicated discussion on this in August 2024 with State officials, CSOs, and academia.

[60] For example on HOT FM, Five FM, Kwitu FM, Nyimba Valley FM, 5FM Radio Zambia.

[61] See for example: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/04/un-experts-concerned-over-delay-zambias-debt-restructuring

[62] At the time of drafting of this report, both documents (drafts were finalized in 2023) had not yet been formally endorsed for publication.

[63] A/HRC/50/9 (UPR 2022); A/HRC/34/8 (UPR 2016) and A/HRC/19/14 (UPR 2011)

[64] https://zimtreasury.co.zw/budget-documents-2024/

[65] These could include tax deductions, exemptions, credits, and preferential tax rates which present a significant revenue loss.

[66] Xayaburi Dam, Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy Saddle D Dam, Laos-China Economic Corridor (LCEC) and High-speed Railway, and Luang Prabang Airport.

[67] Findings informed the CCA planning cycle and CCA updates in 2022–23 and will inform the next CF.

[68] Preventing a Lost Decade in Education in the Lao PDR.

[69] High Commissioner for Human Rights End of Mission statement, also referred to in a public lecture he delivered at the University of Laos.

[70] "Overall spending on social protection needs to be significantly expanded. The existing social protection programmes spread over many ministries are poorly coordinated, heavily siloed and often ineffective. They should be replaced by a social protection floor reflecting the ILO approach." And "Migrant workers, especially but not only those who are undocumented face serious violations of their labour and other rights. There is a need for a comprehensive new approach that acknowledges the real extent of foreign labour dependence, regulates working conditions more effectively, ensures real minimum wages and treats workers and their dependents humanely." (paras. 90 and 92, A/HRC/44/40/Add.1)

[71] More broadly, the report makes a number of major policy recommendations, which provide for a phased movement towards the realization of the rights of all workers – e.g. to gradually expand the social insurance system (EPF and SOCSO) to migrant workers; to expand the JaminKerja employment initiative to include job-seeking documented migrant workers. The report underlined that this progressive set of recommendations should be complemented with fiscal reforms (revenue enhancements and optimizing expenditures), and rationalization of the administratively complex and often overlapping programmes.

[72] For example, see A/HRC/56/11/Add.1: Recommendation 55.168 Continue implementing integrated social security support programmes (Ethiopia); and Recommendation 55.319 Commit to creating conditions for access to basic public services and employment for vulnerable groups of the population, in particular, Indigenous groups and migrants (Cabo Verde).

[73] For example, UPR recommendations from 2020 called on the Government to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and adopt and implement comprehensive law to combat discrimination that would apply to both direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private sphere; CPRD recommendations from 2015 called for the strengthening of the State's monitoring and enforcement mechanisms on accessibility.

[74] UNSDCF Outcome 2; Indicator 2.3.

[75] The Mongolian Parliament approved the Law on National Wealth Fund of Mongolia on 19 April 2024: https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail?lawId=17140188869101 – The National Wealth Fund of Mongolia was established to ensure the equitable and sustainable distribution of income generated from Mongolia's natural resources to all citizens. The fund aims to manage and invest these resources to benefit both current and future generations. Regarding housing programs, the National Wealth Fund will support various housing policies, including urban planning, infrastructure development, and mortgage loan systems.

[76] See A/HRC/20/25/Add.1 for additional recommendations from the UN Special Rapporteur including to: (a) Increase coordination among existing social protection initiatives, ensuring national coverage, transparency, accountability and access without discrimination; (b) Ensure that payments are distributed regularly and that the existing programmes are expanded to reach all eligible beneficiaries, particularly those in rural areas; (c) Ensure that targeting methods do not result in discrimination and exclusion or perpetuate existing asymmetric power structures; (…) (f) Develop employment schemes to address the structural barriers that prevent specific groups (youth, women, persons with disabilities and others) from actively participating in the workforce.

[77] UNDP, International Migrant Stock 2020.

[78] Reports by UN Special Procedures have been key both to better understand existing barriers in access to ESCRs in countries of origin and to establish a link between these barriers and people's decision to migrate. The mandates of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, including reports from visits to Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights following visits to Bangladesh, Malaysia and Lao PDR, were particularly relevant.

[79] https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/principles-and-guidelines-human-rights-protection-migrants-vulnerable

[80] Member States have agreed to strengthen the global evidence base on international migration by improving and investing in the collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate, reliable and comparable data (Objective 1) and to eliminat[e] the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin as well as to strengthen joint analysis and sharing of information to better map, understand, predict and address migration movements, such as those that may result from [a range of] precarious situations (Objective 2).

[81] Including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Investment, and Youth.

[82] Including the Ministries of Labor and Employment; Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment; Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

[83] In its second VNR of 2023, Viet Nam noted that progress has been made in various SDGs, especially the targets related to multidimensional poverty, access to clean water and sanitation, and industrial and infrastructure development.

[84] Substantive elements are safe climate, clean air, safe and sufficient water, healthy and sustainable food, non-toxic environment, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. Procedural elements are access to information, public participation, access to justice.

[85] Please find link to access the SR's presentation: https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/en/279159-un-special-rapporteur-urges-central-asian-nations-join-forces-tackle-air-quality-crisis. Please also see, for example, a social media post from the ROCA: https://www.instagram.com/p/DAll-hqogAA/?img_index=1

[86] The CCA will be available publicly at the end of 2024.

[87] See https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/180/46/pdf/g2418046.pdf. CESCR recommended to carry out systematic and independent human rights and environmental impact assessments, in consultation with affected communities, in the context of large-scale development, investment and natural resource exploitation projects, and provide information to the public, in a transparent and comprehensive manner, on the impact of such projects on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and on the environment, in particular regarding activities related to the geological study of extractive resources for the purpose of prospecting, exploration and development of uranium and thorium deposits.

[88] https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/02/22/uzbekistan-ratifies-aarhus-convention-to-strengthen-environmental-rights

[89] https://www.instagram.com/p/C8EFtseOCdN/; https://www.instagram.com/p/C8Ej9q1OiN-/?img_index=1; https://www.instagram.com/p/C70lCczOk9x/ https://www.instagram.com/p/C6VYTjGoeFW/; https://www.instagram.com/p/C8BennyObS8/?img_index=1;

[90] For example: the 2020 CEDAW review of Moldova where a number of important findings and recommendations were made with relevance to the COVID-19 response and recovery, including as concern women's disproportionately low pension benefits, which increases their risk of poverty, and the limited access to social protection for women belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as Roma women and rural women; and the 2017 CESC review of Moldova on the lack of information about social security programmes and their complex application procedures, which prevent disadvantaged and marginalized individuals, particularly Roma and persons in rural areas, from benefiting from those programme.

[91] Children and youth; vulnerable women; groups Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET); youth; returning migrants; older persons; freelancers and entrepreneurs; and poor households.

[92] Which focused on the rights to health, education, social security, water, sanitation, adequate housing, work and related labour rights, access to information, participation, freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse, and freedom of expression and movement.

[93] All of these policy briefs were translated into Russian to ensure access to representatives of ethno-linguistic minorities. Four guidance documents were also put into an easy-to-read format, with two being made available in the Braille language. Approximately 32,440 copies of guidance and information materials were distributed to rights-holders by the National Agency for Social Assistance, in addition to 56 partner NGOs,[4] including from the Transnistrian region.

[94] Which notes on page 9 that the assessment's guiding questions were informed by and strengthened through the development by the UN in Moldova of background policy notes on COVID-19, including those mentioned above that were developed by UN Human Rights.

[95] This work was not de facto part of the Surge Initiative seed project, but was closely interlinked and reinforced the overall aims and objectives of the project and formed part of the same workstream. This included population groups (children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+, persons in detention etc.) and professional groups (healthcare workers, social workers, postal workers, grocery-store workers, SME owners, small farmers etc.).

[96] Particularly focusing on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; right to education; right to social security; right to food; right to adequate housing, right to freedom from poverty; right to water; right to sanitation; right to work and labour rights; right to freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse; right to access to information and freedom of expression; and right to freedom of movement.

[97] See also: integrating leave no-one behind and human rights in the analysis.

[98] Its results were validated by representatives of the Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities themselves, as well as personal assistants, the People's Advocate Office, Equality Council and relevant state institutions.

[99] Available online in three languages – English, Macedonian and Albanian.

[100] The national census conducted in 2021 came 19 years after the first and until then only census since the country became independent (2002). When preparing the Analysis, three years after the 2021 census, only raw census data was available, and disaggregated data was yet to be produced. Therefore, the analysis addressed a critical need for data and analysis that can account for the specific living situation and needs of different population groups.

[101] See for example the 2024 Universal Periodic Review on North Macedonia (A/HRC/57/11), including recommendation 117.198: Take further steps to protect the economic, social and cultural rights of migrants and minority communities; and recommendation 117.177: Strengthen the implementation of the equality and non-discrimination strategy for members of disadvantaged groups such as the Roma community for improving their access to education, health care, social security, housing and employment. Similarly, recommendations by Treaty Bodies were also considered, for example by CEDAW concerning programs that promote equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels in public and private sectors, especially ensuring that Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities are included.

[102] North Macedonia has been facing the impacts of a prolonged economic crisis and was additionally hit by the economic shock caused by historically high inflation in 2022 (14,2%), a consequence of price spikes caused by the war in Ukraine. A significant at-risk-of-poverty rate (23% in 2021) and a relatively high Gini coefficient (30,3%) offset the achieved declining trends of poverty and inequality. Quality of life and limited social inclusion remain of concern, with pronounced inequalities visible between the rural and urban population as well as in relation to specific population groups at risk of being left behind, despite the average positive trend in eradicating poverty. The Analysis focused on identifying these groups and providing actionable recommendations to address their situation.

[103] For instance, the Analysis recommends that advancing the situation of older persons requires the development of specific active ageing policies as well as amending the Labour Law to decrease formal discrimination of retiring women; and allow for flexible work arrangements for older persons to avoid losing pension benefits.

[104] For instance, recommendation address the situation of persons with disabilities include strengthening the capacity of all institutions involved in the implementation of the 2023-2030 National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; enhancing the capacities of the National Statistical Office, and the Ombudsman in systematic and disaggregated collection and analysis of disability related data by government institutions.

[105] For instance, the Analysis recommends providing targeted educational programs for rural women, focusing on developing skills in sectors beyond agriculture, such as technology, healthcare and education, to help expand their employment opportunities.

[106] Infographic reflecting the relevance of human rights recommendations in responding to the pandemic.

[107] Roma men and women, youth, homeless persons, LGBTI people, persons with disabilities, persons deprived of liberty, people living with HIV/aids, human rights defenders, journalists and the media.

[108] Mevla Cupi, Roma settlement in Crvena Zvezda. © Stefan Vidojević from MaxNova Creative.

[109] Conducted with the MHMRSD and SIPRU, CSOs and communities.

[110] Attended by 75 Roma organizations, local self-governments, CSOs, international organizations, the National Statistical Office, the academia, and UN entities.

[111] Among them, a checklist of sources of information, including HRM.

[112] At the time of drafting this report, the development of the National Human Rights strategy is currently suspended pending the formation of a new government. It is expected that the LNOB tool will be further utilized once the elaboration of the Strategy continues.

[113] The launch was organized by the MHMRSD, the UNCT and the OSCE Mission in Serbia, and brought together 150 participants, national authorities, UN and partners, CSOs, academia, religious leaders and vulnerable groups.

[114] Such contributions to CCAs and UNSDCFs – as is also described with regard to UN Human Rights engagement in Southern Africa – is generally replicated by UN Humann Rights across the globe. For example, in 2024, UN Human Rights led a leave no-one behind analysis for the UNCT in North Macedonia, which is expected to move the needle meaningfully on advocating for, designing, and implementing policy solutions resulting in meaningful change for those furthest behind in and beyond 2025, including by also contributing to shaping the priorities of the 2026–2030 UNSDCF.

[115] This high-level event was the second Hernán Santa Cruz dialogue, part of a global lecture series launched by UN Human Rights in October 2020, aiming to raise awareness and stimulate discussions within communities to strengthen the realisation of socio-economic rights. The dialogue is based on the vision and mission of Hernán Santa Cruz, whose important contribution was his successful advocacy for the inclusion of socio-economic rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[116] With the world's greatest biodiversity, Brazil has a solid public policy and constitutional and legal framework to protect the environment, including article 225 of the Federal Constitution, the Biodiversity Law, the National Biodiversity Policy, the Climate Plan, the National Productive Forests Program, the National Food Supply Policy, among others.

[117] See, for instance: https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/92d6ae7c-2257-427f-a5a1-1f1223c89a47/content

[118] See: "Violations of Indigenous Peoples' territorial rights: The example of Costa Rica: https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2014/02/violationsterritorialrightscostaricaenglishfe b2014.pdf. A high percentage of the land of the 24 national Indigenous territories was occupied by non-Indigenous people, reaching 88 per cent in Terraba and 97 per cent in China-Kichá. See also UPR Summary of Stakeholders submission (paragraph 75).

[119] See: Surinam o Yakye Axa vs. Paraguay: the IAHRC underscored the State's obligation to effectively delimit and return ancestral lands to Indigenous peoples. CERD shared Costa Rica's concern at the trend towards the concentration of Indigenous land in the hands of non-Indigenous settlers and urged the Government to strengthen its efforts to guarantee Indigenous Peoples' right to land tenure. Costa Rica should take the necessary steps to implement Constitutional Chamber decision No. 3468-02 ordering the delimitation of the lands of the Rey Curré, Terraba and Boruca communities and the recovery of Indigenous lands lost through improper transfer. In 2013, CERD expressed concern at acts of violence committed against the Terribe and Bribri peoples and the illegal occupation of their lands It requested Costa Rica to guarantee the right to land of Terribe and Bribri people. See: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/indigenous/docs/pdf/AncestralLands.pdf

[120] See for example: A/HRC/51//28 Add1, During his visit to Costa Rica in 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples raised concerns about the challenges Indigenous Peoples faced to access their lands, and the lack of effective compensation. Three UN Human Rights committees recommended that Costa Rica take administrative and legal action to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to their traditional territories See: E/C.12/CRI/CO/5, paras. 8 and 9 (c); CCPR/C/CRI/CO/6, paras. 41 and 42 (c) and (d); and CERD/C/CRI/CO/19-22, paras. 27–28. See also CEDAW/C/CRI/CO/7, para. 37 (a). See: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/indigenous/docs/pdf/AncestralLands.pdf where the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights noted that, "the lack of effective delimitation and demarcation of Indigenous territories, even if there exists a formal recognition of their members' right to communal property, causes "a climate of constant uncertainty."

[121] See: https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/mc321-12-es.pdf

[122] See: A/HRC/WG.6/33/CRI/2.

[123] See: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/12/bachelet-encourages-costa-rica-continue-creating-spaces-dialogue-and-social

[124] UPR Review Costa Rica 2024: 119.142 – Implement immediate and effective measures to end illegal occupation of Indigenous territories and support the protection of Indigenous human rights (Iran (Islamic Republic of)); 119.143 – Guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including by strengthening the protection and safety of Indigenous leaders against threats and attacks and by respecting Indigenous land rights (Norway); 119.144 – Continue efforts to guarantee respect for the human rights of Indigenous communities and to prevent and eliminate violence against Indigenous leaders (Italy).

[125] See https://www.ohchr.org/es/stories/2023/09/paraguay-social-security-creates-safety-net-and-builds-rights-all. See also p. 57 of DGEEC (2018). Población Indígena. Principales Resultados. Encuesta Permanente de Hogares 2016 y 2017. Fernando de la Mora, DGEEC (2019). Condiciones de vida 2009-2018. Fernando de la Mora.

[126] The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent found in 2020 that Afro-Peruvians face structural discrimination in education, employment, access to land, housing, food, health, and adequate standard of living. Women, numerous in domestic work, are subjected to sexual violence, discrimination and racism. The Ombudsman's office and CSOs raised concerns about the invisibility of Afro-Peruvians in the health and socio-economic response to COVID-19, and inequalities, exclusion and discrimination.

[127] These regions present the highest levels of poverty and limited access to basic services, especially education, health, and water and sanitation. The analysis of budget allocations covered 2018 to 2022.

[128] See Defensoria del Pueblo N° 154, N ° 166, N ° 178, N ° 190, N ° 202, N ° 214, N ° 226, N ° 238.

[129] MIRADOR DESCA was established via a collaboration between the NHRI, the national university and OHCHR In 2021 to facilitate the monitoring of gaps in the realization of human rights, to support advocacy and inform public policies or legal reforms to address inequalities.

[130] Institución Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Defensoría del Pueblo.

[131] The country's largest ethnic and racial minority (8% of the population).

[132] See paras. 17 and 18 in CERD/C/URY/CO/24-26.

[133] See for example E/C.12/URY/CO/5 and A/HRC/42/43/Add.1.

[134] The State report stated in paragraph 105: 'In 2021, the "Viewpoint" (Mirador) project on economic, social, cultural and environmental rights was launched. The purpose of the project, which was developed by the NHRI and Office of the Ombudsman and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of the Republic, is to present information on the commitments undertaken by Uruguay in respect of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and to monitor the progress made and the gaps affecting groups in vulnerable situations. The information is systematized with data from national and international sources.' The UNCT report stated (paragraph 18): 'The Afro-descendant population represents approximately one tenth of the population of Uruguay. In 2022, the poverty rate reached 17.6% in Afro-descendants, while it was 9.1% in the population that self-identified as "white" (…). These gaps are also found in education (39) and employment indicators.' Footnote 39 links to Mirador DESCA, Afro-descendants module.

[135] The footnote 18 links to Mirador DESCA, Afro descendants' module.

[136] As well as of GANHRI, represented by RINDHCA (Red Instituciones Nacionales Derechos Humanos Continente Americano).

[137] The JESC is an advisory body to the government on economic and social issues.

[138] The project was designed to foster the implementation of relevant recommendations by UPR, CEDAW, CRC, UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, CRPD and CAT.

[139] As explained further below.

[140] Including the Tax Department, Ministry of Social Development, NHRI, CSOs, academia and media.

[141] See p.14 Universal Periodic Review Fourth Cycle 2023 - Jordan | United Nations in Jordan.

[142] Policy brief examines human rights approach to addressing inequality | Jordan Times

[143] UN and partners sign agreement to enhance urban services and strengthen municipal capacity in Jordan | United Nations in Jordan

[144] HR75 Wrap-up: Middle East and North Africa | OHCHR

[145] Murals: Human rights-based economy

[146] See Underground Amman | Explore The Untold; Underground Amman Street Art Tour (@undergroundamman) • Instagram photos and videos

[147] Specifically, the price of food products was inflated to 400 percent, according to December 2020 data from the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics.

[148] According to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia which had at that stage calculated that more than 55 percent of Lebanon's population was trapped in poverty and struggling to meet basic needs. UN ESCWA had also indicated that "[e]xtreme poverty has registered a threefold increase from 8 percent in 2019 to 23 percent in 2020", UNESCWA Policy Brief: E/ESCWA/2020/Policy Brief.15

[149] Law No. 4 of 1978 limited individuals' right to own more than one house or piece of land. The State reassigned excess properties and land without compensation. In 2006, a High Committee for the Compensation of Properties was created but many complaints remained unaddressed. Law No 16/2015 abolished Law No. 4, but the civil war stopped the reform process.

[150] While Law 29/2013 on transitional justice technically abolished the 2006 Commission, it was never implemented and thus the Commission remained de facto in place until now. Recently, the Government of National Accord and its successor the Government of National Unity issued decisions reactivating and strengthening it, but without prior assessment of its impact.

[151] See, for example, work undertaken in Jordan and Uruguay.

[152] All Surge initiative projects follow-up from the findings of UN Human Rights Mechanisms findings and recommendations relevant to the countries concerned or generally in relation to human rights norms and standards.

[153] See for example, UN policy briefs and analysis developed as a result of Surge projects in Kenya, Jordan, Serbia, Uruguay, Peru.

[154] See for example work undertaken in Peru and Chad.



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