

Joint Statement

Executive Board of UNDP

Evaluation of UNDP support to social protection and management response, Agenda Item 8

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Statement delivered by Mr. Filip De Maesschalck, Minister Counsellor, Mission of Belgium

Madam President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

I deliver this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United States, and my own country, Belgium.

We warmly thank the Independent Evaluation Office for the quality of its evaluation of the UNDP support to social protection as well as UNDP for endorsing all recommendations in its management response.

As the world continues to be gripped by an socio-economic downturn caused by the pandemic, energy crisis, food insecurity, climate change and conflicts, we fully support the increasing recognition of social protection as a key instrument for reducing poverty as well as for allowing sustainable and inclusive economic transition. As enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to social security and is entitled to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for dignity and free development of personality.

As duly mentioned in the evaluation, the UNDP multisectoral approach, its large presence in the field and the linkages between social protection and the six signature solutions of the 2022-2025 strategic plan give a comparative advantage to UNDP which should complement the specific mandates and technical capabilities of specialized agencies.

Even though we commend UNDP for the achievements underlined by the evaluation, we are concerned by a number of shortcomings. Fully supporting all recommendations that need to be addressed without delay, we would like to emphasize the following elements:

- First, UNDP should avoid fragmented and small scale projects that do not allow transformative changes. As recognized in the management response, social protection initiatives must be part of broader, well financed and long term support in order to deliver sustainable outcomes. Accurate assessments of social protection needs and gaps, effective and accountable portfolios, stronger partnerships with authorities, development partners, private sector and civil society must be at the core of the UNDP approach. Even though each country may have different needs, requesting differentiated approaches, some of the success stories underlined in the evaluation can be used as replicable good practices.
- Second, UNDP should strengthen its social protection support to low-income and least developed countries which respectively represented only 13.8% and 24.2% of the total expenditure while they face the greatest challenges and concentrate the largest number of vulnerable people. We encourage UNDP to diversify its financing model for social protection-related support, through concessional loans, social impact bonds, budget reallocations or community-based financing, to help government create greater fiscal space and to better target the most vulnerable. We also encourage UNDP to make a better use of its regional and country offices as they are best placed to assess local challenges and opportunities. We would therefore be eager to receive more details on the practical guidance to be developed for country offices. Furthermore, we would be keen to be further informed on opportunities and challenges met by the Integrated National Financing Frameworks, notably with regard to the inclusion of thematic focus on social protection.
- Third, UNDP should strengthen gender-responsive social protection measures as women and girls are the most vulnerable to crisis and shocks, especially given their overrepresentation in informal sectors and the lack of attention to their difficulties as demonstrated by the global gender response tracker. While recognizing that gender equality has generally been included in programmes as an objective in UNDP's social protection portfolio, focused and long term engagement is needed to allow gender-

transformative social protection measures. Noting the UNDP commitment to advancing gender equality, we would be interested in being informed on the key actions proposed, in particular on the concrete results expected from the Global Learning Lab.

- Fourth, we strongly encourage UNDP to further strengthen and fine-tune its partnerships, based on its comparative advantages, with prominent UN entities in the arena of social protection, such as ILO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. Even though we commend the various partnerships related to social protection already in place, it is obvious that more need to be done to reach an effective, coherent and integrated response at the country level. UNDP's broad mandate and its large presence in the field must be further leveraged to form alliances, notably where cross-sectoral social protection efforts are challenging, such as in the least developed countries or in crisis-affected countries.
- Finally, as a strong supporter of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, we would be keen to have more details on the common roadmap developed with ILO and its added value towards our joint commitment to promote and strengthen social protection worldwide.

We thank you.