UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

SURGE INITIATIVE
SEEDING CHANGE FOR A
HUMAN RIGHTS ECONOMY
In partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute

What is the Surge Initiative?

Launched by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2019, the Surge Initiative aims to accelerate the realization of economic and social rights and creates conditions to build back better, leave no one behind (LNOB) and reduce inequalities, contributing to the human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Surge Initiative focuses on engagement at the country level, working closely with UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and in the context of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and Common Country Analyses (CCAs). By bringing together economists and development, economic and social rights experts, the Surge Initiative:

- ***Provides specialized advice and analysis to operationalize economic and social rights***, as relevant to furthering the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- ***Seeds change for an economy that enhances human rights,*** by developing and applying a human rights-based approach to macroeconomics through country projects;

- ***Maximises the findings and recommendations of the UN human rights mechanisms*** by translating these into strategic options to inform country development policies, plans and programmes;

- ***Advises on medium- to long-term economic policies*** to ensure compliance with Member States' economic and social rights obligations, including by providing budget analysis on expanding fiscal space for social spending; and

- ***Contributes to the 2030 Agenda LNOB pledge*** by prioritizing engagement that addresses economic and other inequalities, including through addressing data gaps and analysis.

This is done through the provision of support to OHCHR in-country presences, UNCTs, Resident Coordinator's Offices (RCOs), state authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), national human rights institutions (NHRIs), national statistical offices (NSOs), affected communities and other key stakeholders including, for example, international financial institutions.

The Surge Initiative is funded from OHCHR's core budget as well as the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Human Rights Mainstreaming Multi-Donor Trust Fund, Switzerland, and China.

Since August 2021, OHCHR and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights (RWI) have entered into a unique cooperation agreement. RWI supports the Surge Initiative to combat inequalities in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, by expanding partnerships, outreach and visibility of the Surge Initiative's work.

Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund

Contact Us

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Surge Initiative's Impact

Since its inception, the Surge Initiative has provided financial and technical assistance to 52 seeding-change country projects around the world. — **52**

Since its inception until March 2022, the Surge Initiative contributed to 5 National Development Plans/Programmes. — **5**

Since its inception until March 2022, the Surge Team supported UN in-country presences with analytical contents and operational advice for 98 CCA and/or UNSDCF processes. — **98**

Since its inception until March 2022, the Surge Team held strategic discussions and engagements with 38 RCO Economists and took part in several discussions with national authorities on various aspects of human rights-based budgeting. — **38**
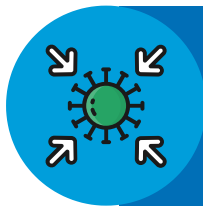
Since its inception until March 2022, the Surge Team participated and provided inputs and recommendations to 47 UN Regional Monthly Reviews. — **47**

Since its inception until March 2022, the Surge Initiative has issued 61 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. — **61**

In 2020, the Surge Initiative provided guidance and advice to OHCHR in-country presences and UNCTs on addressing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 concerning 38 countries, including through 30 UNCT COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) and socio-economic response plans (SERPs). — **38**

Since its inception until March 2022, 2 tools were developed for UNCTs to strengthen the integration and operationalisation of economic and social rights, human rights-based macroeconomic analyses and the interlinkages with the 2030 Agenda in the COVID-19 response and recovery.* — **2**

*This includes the Checklist for a Human Rights-Based Approach to Socio-Economic Country Responses to COVID-19 and OHCHR: Building Back Better: A Human Rights Approach to the SERF Pillar 4: Macroeconomic Response. The latter is only available on the UNSDG Knowledge Portal.

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Country Examples

Curbing Inequalities and Protecting Economic and Social Rights in *CAMBODIA*

In Cambodia, the Surge Team provided support to the OHCHR in-country presence and the UNCT more broadly on integrating human rights-based macroeconomic analyses for the country's socio-economic recovery plan, within the framework of leaving no one behind and incorporating a gender-sensitive perspective. The Surge Initiative's inputs identified the need for counter-cyclical measures to ensure minimum essential levels of the rights to health and social protection and the use of tax policies to generate maximum available resources, while highlighting the different impacts on workers in the informal or formal sectors. This work strengthened collaboration among members of the UNCT in addressing uneven development, and paved the way for joint strategic advocacy to expand fiscal space for the realization of economic and social rights, especially for marginalized communities. An example of this collaboration was a recent UNCT public information note which shows that the UNCT has firmly prioritized the protection of economic and social rights and is working in close collaboration with the Royal Government of Cambodia to curb inequalities and inform critical changes.

Expanding Fiscal Space for Increased Social Spending in *ZAMBIA*

In Zambia, the Surge Team, alongside the Senior Human Rights Advisor (SHRA) supported the joint Government-UN-EU-World Bank Task Force, which conducted a COVID-19 pandemic recovery needs assessment amid a debt crisis and risks of instability. The Surge Initiative's analysis of the impact of debt-servicing on economic and social rights and possible options to expand fiscal space for increased social spending through progressive taxation were incorporated into the recommendations of the COVID-19 needs assessment report, leading to a decision by the Government to continue increasing its social sector spending.

Collecting Disaggregated Data to Leave No One Behind in *SERBIA*
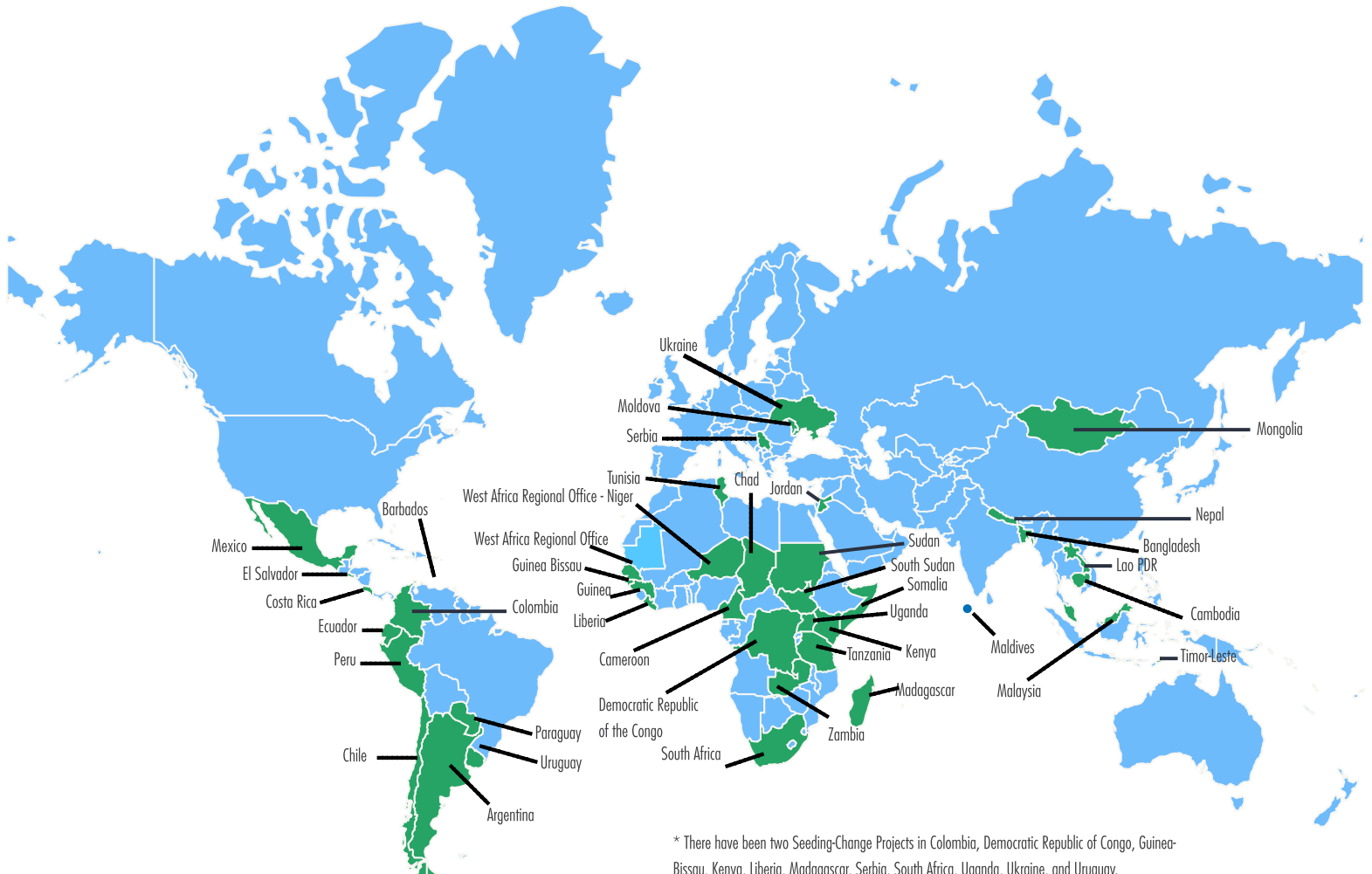
Additional resources provided by the Surge Initiative enabled the Human Rights Advisor and his team in the RCO in Serbia to step up analysis on the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups. The mapping exercise provided essential data on almost 170,000 Roma, who live in sub-standard settlements, and made practical recommendations to improve critical economic and social rights, such as access to water and sanitation. This mapping, conducted in collaboration with concerned communities, supported local government efforts to remove obstacles faced by Roma communities in accessing these essential rights.

Progressive Realization of the Rights to Food, Education, and Water in *JORDAN*

Further to various UN human rights mechanisms recommendations, and through Surge Initiative funding and technical support, the SHRA in Jordan is finalizing the development of an internal UN paper on the maximum available resources to ensure the progressive realization of the rights to food, education and water, in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2, 4, and 6. The main purpose of this paper is to inform the UNSDCF of Jordan, its priorities, related theories of change and to guide future programming and financing towards a greater realization of these human rights. The project enjoys the support of the Resident Coordinator and is being undertaken in collaboration with the UNCT. In addition, in 2021, the SHRA and the Surge Team contributed to the development of a UNCT Jordan Policy Brief - Healthy Diet for All. The brief - which includes human rights messaging - was launched on the occasion of the Food Summit to inform the development of a new national nutrition strategy. It was developed by WHO, WFP, UNICEF, FAO, RCO and OHCHR and its content consulted with the Ministry of Health. This is a first policy brief as part of a broader project led by the SHRA/RCO Head of Office to enhance the visibility of the UN's work in Jordan, formulate key messages around UNCT priorities together, empower different stakeholders, and offer them tools for advocacy and familiarize them with UN norms and standards (especially on human rights).

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Surge Initiative's 52 Seeding-Change Projects

Ukraine
Moldova
Serbia
Tunisia
West Africa Regional Office - Niger
Chad
Jordan
Mongolia
Barbados
West Africa Regional Office
Nepal
Mexico
Sudan
Bangladesh
Guinea Bissau
South Sudan
Lao PDR
El Salvador
Guinea
Somalia
Costa Rica
Colombia
Uganda
Cambodia
Ecuador
Liberia
Tanzania
Kenya
Peru
Cameroon
Maldives
Timor-Leste
Madagascar
Malaysia
Democratic Republic
of the Congo
Paraguay
Zambia
Chile
Uruguay
South Africa
Argentina

*There have been two Seeding-Change Projects in Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Serbia, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine, and Uruguay.

"The pandemic is laying bare inequalities in Cambodia - inequalities in income, health, gender, and education. OHCHR in Cambodia has been instrumental in supporting the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team addressing these inequalities through their work and advice on economic and social rights. Be it on the right to social security for factory workers, the right to food during the lockdown, the right to adequate housing for communities that face forced evictions, or a leave-no-one-behind training for the UNCT. It has helped the UN Country Team look at the root causes of injustices and advocate for a renewed social contract.

– Pauline Tamesis, UN Resident Coordinator, Cambodia

"We are looking forward to supporting the UN Human Rights in this tireless fight against inequality and disrespect for human rights. We believe that our human rights expertise, our presence and strong partnerships in many countries in all continents as well as our academic networks jointly will contribute to the realization of this project.

– Morten Kjaerum, Director, RWI

"To recover from the biggest development setback in our lifetime, we need to change the economic approaches and models that have produced untenable social costs, tearing apart the social fabric of societies, fuelling instability and amplifying mistrust towards institutions. We need an economy that invests in human rights and works for everyone.

– Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Statement at the 4th Human Rights Council Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development