

# A Disproportionate Burden: Children Living in Multidimensional Poverty by the Global MPI 2025

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## FOREWORD

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2025 covers 109 countries, which are home to 6.3 billion people, of whom 2.1 billion are children under the age of 18. Across these countries, 1.1 billion people live in multidimensional poverty – deprived in the most basic conditions of health, education, and living standards. Among them, 586 million are poor children. Although children make up only 33.6% of the population covered by the global MPI, they bear a far greater share of poverty, accounting for a disproportionate 51.0% of all multidimensionally poor people worldwide.

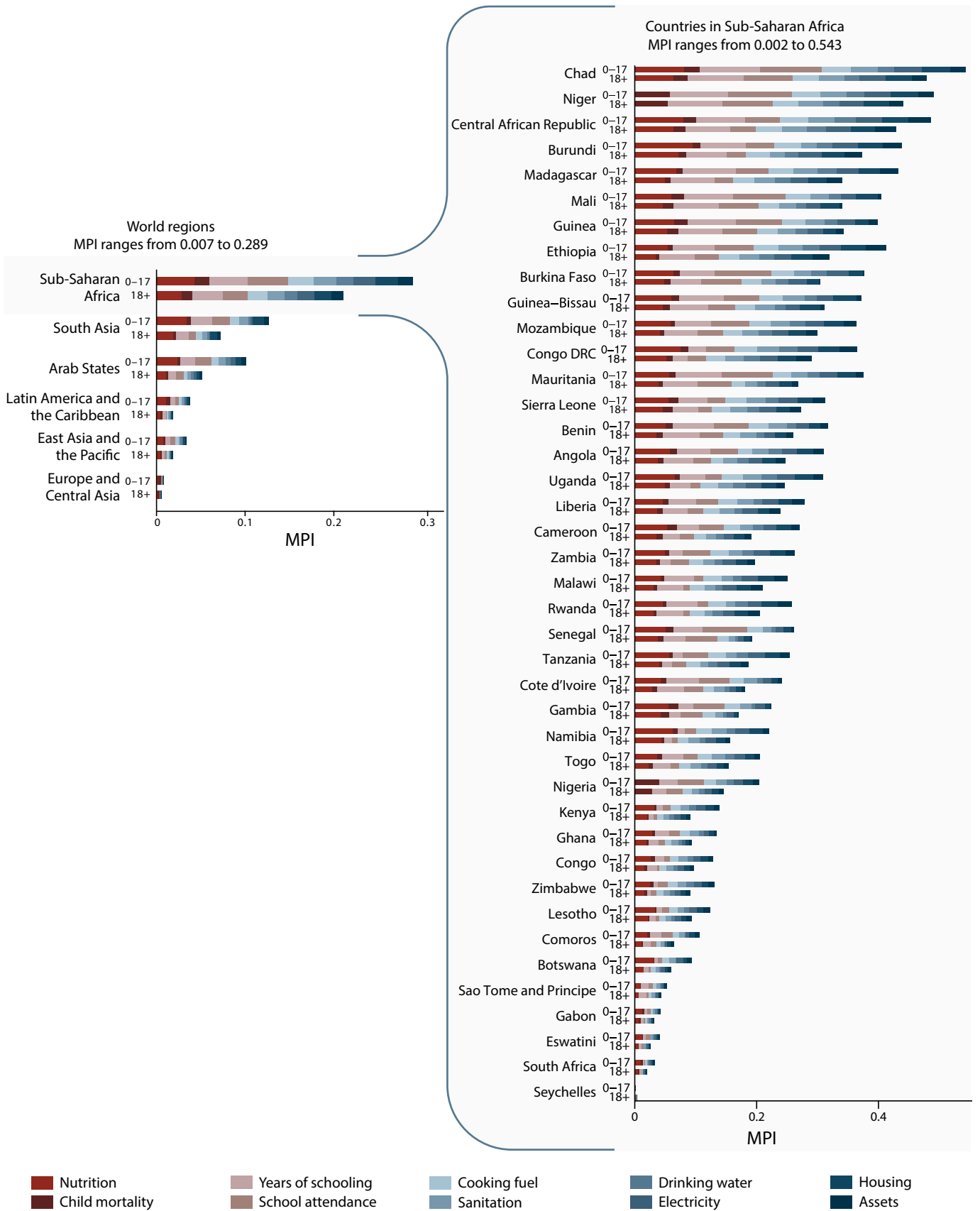
Target 1.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to reduce by half the proportion of men, women, and children living in poverty in all its dimensions by 2030. Understanding where these children live and how their experiences of poverty differ from adults is essential to ensure that the world's youngest are not left behind in efforts to end poverty. This brief presents findings from the global MPI 2025, with a particular focus on children, offering evidence on the scale and distribution of children living in multidimensional poverty to inform targeted interventions and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

## CHILDREN FACE HIGHER MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY RATES IN MOST COUNTRIES

In 77 of the 109 countries included in the global MPI, children experience higher multidimensional poverty than adults, underscoring their systematic disadvantages. This applies to both the headcount ratio of poverty (the proportion of people living in poverty) and the overall MPI value, which reflects not only how many people are poor, but also the intensity of their deprivations. In this briefing, we use the word 'poverty' to refer to multidimensional poverty according to the global MPI.

In 18 countries, the gap between the incidence of child and adult poverty is more than 10 percentage points, with 13 of these 18 countries located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, children face higher poverty levels than adults in 37 of the 41 countries (figure 1). The largest disparities are found in Mauritania, where the incidence of child poverty is 15 percentage points higher than adult poverty and the number of poor children exceeds poor adults by 686,000. In Namibia and Senegal, the gaps are similarly wide, 13 percentage points, translating into 47,000 and 1.1 million more poor children than poor adults, respectively. In South Asia, the widest gaps are observed in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the incidence of child poverty exceeds adult poverty by 12 and 11 percentage points with 5.8 million and 4.8 million more poor

Figure 1. MPI value and incidence of child poverty is higher than that of adults in 37 of 41 Sub-Saharan African countries



Source: Author's computations based on data presented in Global MPI 2025 Data Table 3: 'Age Results MPI 2025' from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025).

children than adults, respectively. By absolute numbers, the starkest contrasts emerge in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, where there are 11.9 million and 10.9 million more poor children than adults.

Conversely, in a small group of countries such as Uzbekistan, Indonesia, and the Seychelles, poverty rates are almost identical for children and adults. A handful of cases (such as Cuba and the Seychelles) show slightly higher poverty among adults. The most significant of these is India where there are 35.6 million more poor adults than poor children.

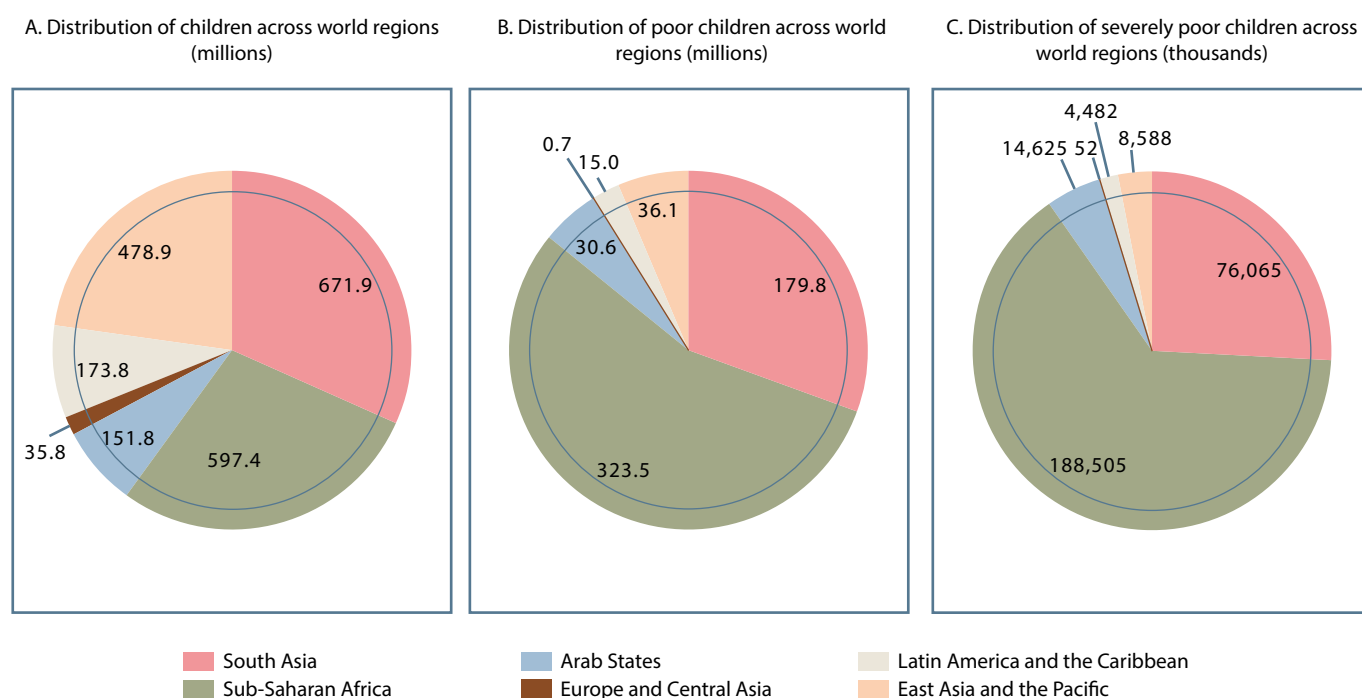
In 27 countries, the incidence of multidimensional poverty among children is 50% or higher, meaning that more than half of the children in these countries are growing up in acute multidimensional poverty. The highest rates are observed in Chad (86.6%), the Central African Republic (82.9%) and Niger (82.4%), where more than eight in ten children face extreme deprivations that limit their capabilities now and are likely to cast a long shadow into the future.

### CHILD POVERTY ACROSS REGIONS

Children constitute varying shares of the population across all regions, but their burden of multidimensional poverty is highly uneven (figure 2). Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia together are home to the largest child populations and account for the overwhelming majority of poor children globally. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 324 million children live in acute multidimensional poverty, representing 57.3% of the region’s poor population. Among them, 189 million children are severely poor, deprived in half or more of the MPI’s weighted indicators. In South Asia, children make up a smaller share of the population (34.4%) but still account for 46.1% of all poor people – around 180 million poor children, including 76 million who are severely poor. Strikingly, 83.6% of South Asia’s poor children live in just two countries: India and Pakistan.

In the Arab States, 41.1% of the population are children, and 56.4% of people living in poverty are under 18 – showing a pattern similar to Sub-Saharan Africa, though with smaller absolute numbers (around 31 million poor children). The same trend is observed in the remaining regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific, children represent smaller shares of the overall populations (29.5%,

Figure 2. Distribution of children, poor children and severely poor children across world regions



Source: Author’s computations based on data presented in Global MPI 2025 Data Table 3: ‘Age Results MPI 2025’ from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025).

32.6%, and 22.9%, respectively), yet account for larger proportions of multidimensionally poor people (45.1%, 43.1%, and 34.7%, respectively).

Looking within these regions shows that even in countries with relatively low MPI values, children often make up a large share of those living in poverty. This is evident, for example, in Argentina, Jordan, Montenegro, and Tonga where the incidence of poverty is 1.5% or lower, yet children still account for more than half of the population living in poverty.

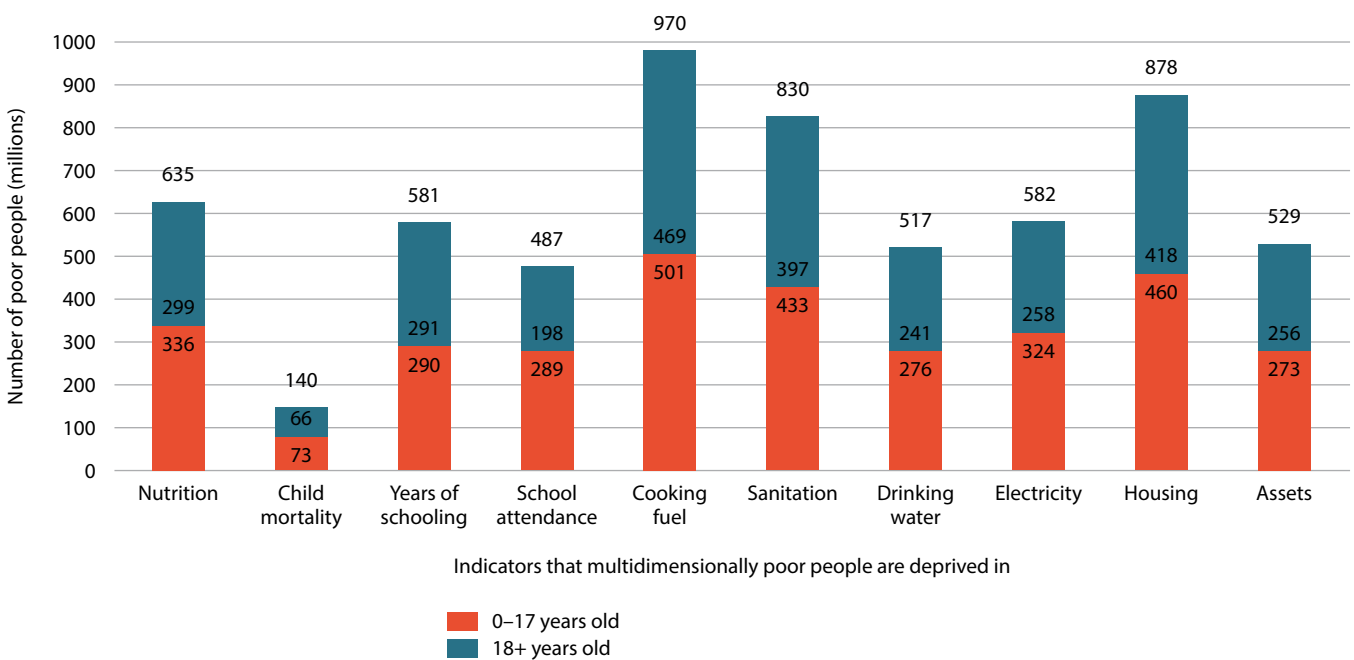
**CHILDREN ARE MORE DEPRIVED THAN ADULTS IN ALMOST ALL MPI INDICATORS**

In nine of the ten indicators included in the global MPI, the number of children living in households that are both poor and deprived in those indicators is greater than the number of adults in the same situation (figure 3). In the remaining indicator (years of schooling), the numbers are equal. This pattern highlights the disproportionate burden of multidimensional poverty experienced by children across multiple aspects of their lives.

For instance, among the 635 million poor people living in households where at least one person is undernour-

ished, 53.0% – equivalent to 336 million – are children. Similarly, of the 487 million poor people in households deprived in school attendance, 50.0% – 289 million – are children compared to 189 million adults. In housing and basic services, children again bear a disproportionate burden. Over half of those lacking improved sanitation or safe drinking water are under 18. And in an information age, 55.6% of those living in households without access to electricity are children. These patterns reveal how multiple deprivations converge in childhood, compounding disadvantages that can persist across generations.

**Figure 3. Number of children and adults who are multidimensionally poor and deprived in each MPI indicator**



Source: Author’s computations based on data presented in Global MPI 2025 Data Table 3: ‘Age Results MPI 2025’ from Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025).

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the global MPI 2025 point to the disproportionate burden of multidimensional poverty carried by children compared to adults. Around the world, children under 18 face higher deprivations than adults in their health, education and living standards. The importance of disaggregating multidimensional poverty data by children cannot be overstated as it uncovers hidden inequalities that are otherwise masked in the aggregate data and facilitates precise targeting of child-centric interventions. The experience of multiple overlapping deprivations during childhood potentially affects their physical and mental health and their opportunities to flourish later in life leaving at least 586 million children at risk of being permanently trapped in poverty. This briefing underscores a clear and urgent call to place children at the centre of poverty alleviation strategies and policy recommendations. It demonstrates the importance of prioritising evidence generation with greater specificity and granularity to address the overlapping deprivations faced by millions of children in developing countries.

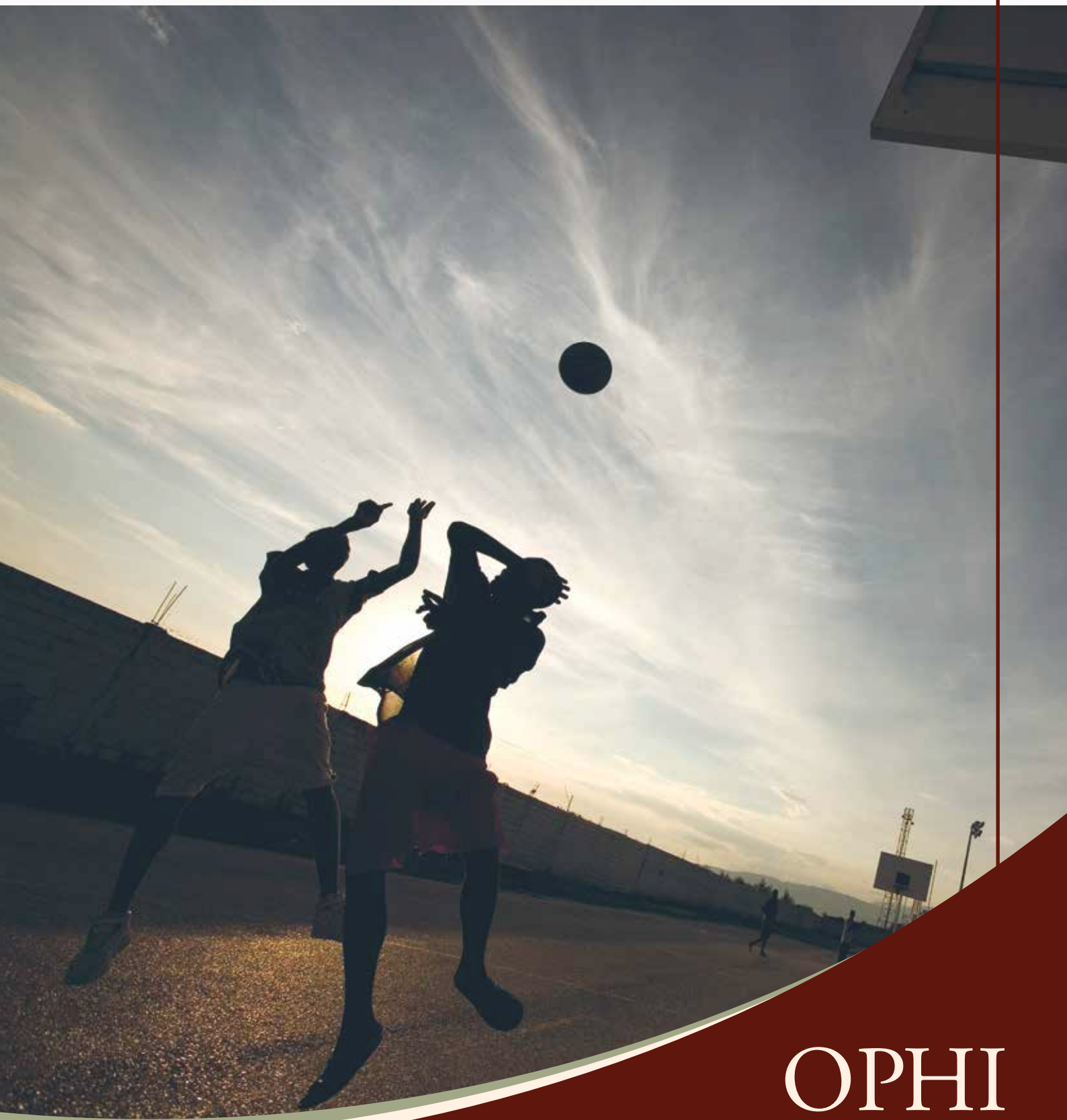
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- Alkire, S., Mishra, R., Selden, L. and Suppa, N. (2025). ‘[The global Multidimensional Poverty Index \(MPI\) 2025: Disaggregation results and methodological note](#)’, OPHI MPI Methodological Note 62, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.
- Global MPI 2025 Data Table 3: ‘[Age Results MPI 2025](#)’.

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