



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 February 2026

English only

Human Rights Council

Sixty-first session

23 February–2 April 2026

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by United Nations Association of China, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 January 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Investment in Human Capital: A Human Rights Perspective on China's 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development

The Recommendations for Formulating China's 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2026-2030) has elevated "investment in human capital" to a strategic pillar of national development, marking a profound alignment between economic growth imperatives and the core tenets of international human rights instruments. Investment in human capital entails directing more resources to fields that are related to people's well-being, including education, healthcare, social protection, skills development, and inclusive opportunities. Improving people's ability, maintaining their health and facilitating their career development boosts the quality of human capital. Investment in human capital constitutes a tangible commitment to the realization of all human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as the fundamental right to development. This statement aims to unpack the intrinsic relationship between investment in human capital and human rights protection, illustrating how China's strategic focus translates into actionable progress for individuals and communities, while adhering to the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other key international covenants.

At its core, investment in human capital is a direct response to the obligation of states to progressively realize economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCRs), as articulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The right to education, recognized as a foundational ESCR in Article 13 of the ICESCR, is brought to life through targeted investments in equitable, quality education systems. The 15th Five-Year Plan's emphasis on bridging urban-rural and regional education gaps, expanding access to vocational and higher education, and enhancing teacher training directly addresses the principle of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity. For marginalized groups, including rural children, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities, increased funding for school infrastructure, scholarships, and inclusive education programs dismantles barriers that have historically limited their access to education. This not only equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to secure decent livelihoods but also fosters critical thinking and civic awareness, laying the groundwork for the exercise of other rights. Similarly, investment in healthcare, another cornerstone of ESCRs under Article 12 of the ICESCR, strengthens public health systems, expands primary healthcare coverage, and invests in medical research and disease prevention. By improving access to affordable healthcare services, particularly in underserved areas, China is advancing the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, ensuring that no individual is left behind due to illness or financial hardship. The integration of mental health services into public healthcare frameworks further reflects a holistic understanding of health rights, recognizing that psychological well-being is integral to human dignity.

Social protection systems, a key component of human capital investment, serve as a safety net that safeguards economic and social rights for all. The 15th Five-Year Plan's focus on expanding social security coverage, improving pension schemes, and strengthening unemployment and medical insurance directly addresses the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 11 of the ICESCR) and protects individuals from falling into poverty due to unforeseen circumstances such as job loss, illness, or old age. For vulnerable populations, including migrant workers, the elderly, and low-income families, comprehensive social protection ensures dignity and stability, enabling them to participate fully in economic and social life. Moreover, investment in skills development and lifelong learning programs aligns with the right to work (Article 6 of the ICESCR), equipping the workforce with market-relevant skills to adapt to technological advancements and structural economic changes. By prioritizing vocational training for rural migrant workers, women reentering the workforce, and individuals in transitioning industries, China is not only boosting employability but also promoting inclusive economic growth that benefits all segments of society. This approach recognizes that the right to work is not merely about employment, but about securing decent work, characterized by fair wages, safe working conditions, and social protection, which is essential to human dignity and well-being.

While the link between investment in human capital and ESCRs is often more tangible, its contribution to civil and political rights (CPRs) is equally profound and transformative. Civil and political rights, including the right to participate in public affairs, and equality before the law, are predicated on an informed, empowered, and capable citizenry. Investment in education plays a pivotal role in nurturing civic literacy, enabling individuals to understand their rights and responsibilities, and empowering them to engage actively in democratic processes. An educated population is better equipped to participate in public discourse, hold authorities accountable, and contribute to policy-making, whether through community governance or national-level decision-making bodies. For example, literacy programs for adults, particularly in rural areas, not only enhance economic opportunities but also enable individuals to exercise their right to vote and participate in public affairs with greater confidence and understanding. Furthermore, investment in human capital that promotes gender equality, such as ensuring equal access to education and employment for women, directly advances women's civil and political rights. By empowering women economically and socially, these investments challenge gender-based discrimination and enable women to participate more actively in political life. Similarly, targeted investments in the rights of ethnic minorities, including bilingual education and cultural preservation programs, ensure that minority groups can exercise their civil and political rights on an equal basis with the majority, fostering social cohesion and inclusive governance. This alignment with Article 25 of the UDHR, which recognizes the right to participate in the government of one's country, underscores that human capital investment is not just about economic development but about building a more democratic and participatory society.

Cultural rights, as enshrined in Article 15 of the ICESCR, are also significantly advanced through investment in human capital, reflecting a commitment to cultural diversity and the right of all individuals to participate in and enjoy cultural life. The 15th Five-Year Plan's focus on preserving cultural heritage, supporting artistic innovation, and promoting multicultural education directly contributes to the realization of these rights. Investment in cultural infrastructure, such as museums, libraries, cultural centers, and digital archives, ensures that individuals have access to cultural resources and can engage with their cultural heritage. For ethnic minorities, this includes investments in preserving traditional languages, arts, and customs, enabling them to maintain their cultural identity while participating fully in national development. Additionally, investment in scientific research and innovation aligns with the right to share in scientific advancement and its benefits (Article 15 of the ICESCR), driving technological progress that improves quality of life and expands opportunities for all. From medical breakthroughs that advance the right to health to digital technologies that enhance access to education and information, these investments ensure that the fruits of scientific progress are shared equitably, leaving no one behind. This holistic approach to cultural rights recognizes that culture is not static but dynamic, and that investment in human capital enables individuals to both preserve their cultural roots and contribute to cultural innovation.

The right to development, a fundamental human right recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development, serves as the overarching framework that unifies investment in human capital and the realization of all other rights. The right to development emphasizes that every human person is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development, with a focus on people-centered, inclusive, and sustainable growth. China's emphasis on investment in human capital in the 15th Five-Year Plan embodies this people-centered approach, placing individuals at the heart of development. By investing in the capabilities and potential of every person, China ensures that development is not merely about economic growth but about enhancing human well-being and expanding human freedom. This approach creates a virtuous cycle: as individuals enjoy better education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, they become active agents of development, contributing their skills and talents to economic and social progress. In turn, this progress generates greater resources for further investment in human capital, advancing the realization of all human rights. Moreover, the inclusive nature of human capital investment, targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensures that development benefits are shared equitably, fulfilling the obligation to leave no one behind as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This alignment between China's national planning and international human rights standards underscores that the right to development is not an

abstract concept but a tangible goal that can be achieved through strategic, rights-based investments in people.

To fully realize the human rights potential of investment in human capital, it is essential that such investments are guided by the core principles of human rights: non-discrimination, equality, participation, and accountability. The 15th Five-Year Plan's focus on targeted investments for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, rural populations, ethnic minorities, and children in need, reflects a commitment to non-discrimination and equality, ensuring that no individual is excluded from the benefits of development. Additionally, the inclusion of public participation in policy-making processes, such as consulting communities on education and healthcare initiatives, ensures that investment in human capital is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, upholding the principle of participation. These principles are not just ethical imperatives, they are essential to the success of investment in human capital, as they foster trust, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

To sum up, the elevation of investment in human capital in China's 15th Five-Year Plan represents a profound commitment to human rights, aligning China's national development strategy with the universality and indivisibility of human rights. By prioritizing education, healthcare, social protection, skills development, and cultural preservation, China is advancing the realization of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, as well as the fundamental right to development. This people-centered approach recognizes that human beings are not just factors of production but the ultimate beneficiaries of development, and that investing in their capabilities and potential is the most sustainable path to prosperity, equity, and dignity. As China moves forward with the implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the integration of human rights principles into investment in human capital will continue to drive progress towards a more inclusive, just, and rights-respecting society. In doing so, China is not only fulfilling its domestic obligations but also contributing to the global pursuit of human rights for all, demonstrating that development and human rights are mutually reinforcing and indispensable to building a better future for humanity.
