



DECADE OF >>> ACTION

Ending Violence against Children

Reflections on reporting in the
2021

Voluntary National Reviews

violenceagainstchildren.un.org



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

No violence is justifiable
All violence against children is preventable

Preface



Across the world, progress on the protection of children's rights has slowed or even been reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic, undermining achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Evidence shows that violence against children increased during this time while the ability of child protection systems to promptly detect and respond to cases of violence has been compromised.¹

Nearly two years after the beginning of the pandemic, we know the negative effects of the pandemic will have long-term repercussions for children's development, protection, and well-being. With increased prevalence and diminishing capacity and resources to address the challenge, we fear the issue of violence against children may become even more invisible.

Against this backdrop, the 2021 High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) was convened under the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development".

The 2021 HLPF focused on a set of SDGs directly related to protecting children from violence, as well as its drivers. These included the goals on poverty, hunger, health and well-being, decent work (including ending child labour), inequality, and climate action.

The HLPF also reviewed SDG16 and its specific target (16.2) to end all forms of violence against children.

I am strongly committed to supporting Member States' efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda by promoting the sharing of good practices, innovative approaches, and effective policies and programmes on addressing all forms of violence against children and its drivers, through an integrated approach that recognizes the interlinkages between the SDGs.

The VNR process and the HLPF are strategic opportunities to foster this mutual learning and mobilize action on children's rights.

In preparation for the HLPF I met with almost all² Member States presenting a VNR in 2021 to explore how their national process could be child-sensitive and child-inclusive. Where relevant, I also engaged with the United Nations country team and Resident Coordinator to ensure child rights were reflected in their support to the national VNR process. In addition, I participated in several preparatory national policy dialogues, and met with representatives of civil society, and children and young people.

The social development forums organized by the United Nations regional commissions are an important mechanism to support Member States preparing VNRs: in 2021 I addressed each forum to reinforce the call for child-centred implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This theme was reiterated through my participation in the HLPF preparatory meetings organized by the ECOSOC with the support of UNDESA.

¹ Bull World Health Organ. 2021 Oct 1; 99(10): 730–738.

² 37 of the 42 Member States who presented VNRs at the 2021 HLPF

Preface



It is my firm belief that we cannot hope to end the scourge of violence against children if the SDG targets related to poverty, hunger, health, education, justice, gender, social inclusion, decent work, equality, migration, climate change and building peaceful societies are not met. Equally, accelerated progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda will be impeded if we do not end violence against children.

In my discussions with Member States, they expressed strong commitment to strengthening national action for the well-being and protection of children, while recognizing that the economic impact of the pandemic could create fiscal constraints.

Member States echoed the need for a paradigm shift to see spending on children's wellbeing as an investment for an inclusive and sustainable recovery.

This investment in children should be reflected in national development and economic recovery plans, maximising coverage and impact while leaving no child behind.

In all my engagement with Member States, I have stressed the need for an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to strengthening services for children, built on a solid foundation of social protection for vulnerable children and their caregivers, and that this was key to implementing the 2030 Agenda and building back better post COVID-19.

In this second document prepared by my Office,³ we have taken some examples from the 2021 VNRs that show how the SDGs and protection of children from all forms of violence are interconnected; how governments are responding to the challenges of addressing violence before and during the pandemic; and how the integrated approach to prevention and response is working.

This document is not exhaustive, and the examples were chosen to illustrate key themes relating to violence against children and its drivers.

I hope all Member States will find this document helpful. It will be especially relevant to Member States preparing a VNR in 2022 who want to share the progress they are making towards ending all forms of violence against children.

In the lead up to the 2022 HLPF, I will again be engaging with Member States preparing VNRs to encourage and help promote a national process that is child-sensitive and child-inclusive.

Najat Maalla M'jid

Special Representative of the
Secretary-General on Violence against Children

³ The first review conducted by my Office in 2020 can be found at https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/sdgs/vnr_brief_analytical_review_english.pdf

Reflections on Violence against Children in the 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

Introduction

In our briefing note for Member States, “[How to highlight promising practices to End Violence against Children in VNRs](#)”,⁴ we highlighted how the SDGs have key targets aimed at ending different forms of violence against children, as well as to address factors that drive violence. We identified different domains of action that could be shared in a VNR. The following sections provide examples from the 2021 VNRs showing how Member States reported on progress and experience of action to end violence against children in these different domains.

In our reading of the VNRs, we focused especially on Member States’ reporting on progress towards ending violence against children and its contribution to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Wide mobilization and partnerships

Wide mobilization of all partners is key to ending violence against children and achieving the SDGs. In this year’s VNR reports, Member States shared examples of how they are mobilizing various stakeholders including United Nations entities, civil society organizations, children and young people, religious and faith-based communities, the private sector, and donors to ensure no one is left behind.

Most Member States reported taking a multi-stakeholder approach to implementation of the SDGs and preparing their VNRs. Member States including Denmark, Japan and Norway illustrated how they took a systematic approach to collaborating with civil society organizations during their VNR process, all of them including a dedicated section in their report with reflections and opinions shared by multi-stakeholder panels.

In addition, several Member States including Egypt, Indonesia, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe mentioned how they worked with religious and faith leaders in addressing issues related to violence against children.

Member States⁵ also mentioned that they have actively engaged with the private sector in the review process and/or in the implementation of action towards reaching the SDGs.

THE GLOBAL GOALS



⁴ https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2020/vnr_doc_final.pdf

⁵ The list includes Colombia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Namibia, Qatar, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uruguay

Children's involvement in the VNR process

Member States reported on how children are taking part in preparing the VNRs and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and efforts to achieve the SDGs. We also noted that there were mentions of 'young people' and 'youth' without specifying the age group. Examples below are identified where children were mentioned as a distinct group. The annex "Children as Agents of Change - Their Active Involvement in the VNR " takes a deeper look into how Member States reported on children's participation in the VNR process and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



The Czech Council of Children and Youth, which brings together over 100 child and youth organisations, provided the perspective for young people to be included in the VNR. The information concerning young people, including opinions of specific young individuals quoted in the VNR is based on data, surveys and activities of the Council.



The 'SDG Voices Paraguay' initiative aims to give greater visibility to the voices of young Paraguayans, including children, around issues related to sustainable development. In particular, young people and children were invited to express their concerns about the challenges the country faces in achieving sustained development, as well as to identify priority development issues for young people. The responses were shared in social media as well as included in the VNR.



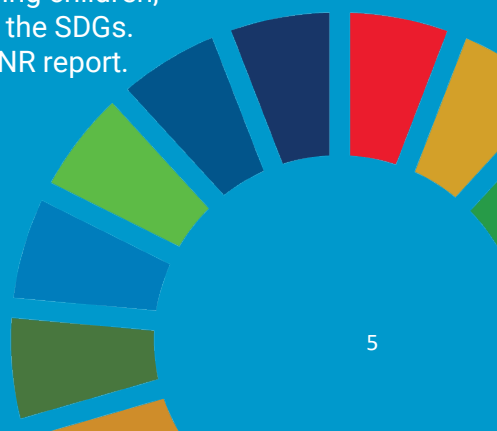
In Sierra Leone, nearly 250 students from government-assisted primary schools were interviewed about SDG4. With the support of UNICEF, a poll using U-Report technology took place to record perceptions of young people (children and youth aged 15-35 years) on the impact of the SDGs in the country.



The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish UN Association and the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations worked together to collect the voices of young people, including children, using social media, on how the world should achieve the SDGs. Information gathered was included throughout the VNR report.



Other Member States, including Cyprus, Indonesia, Mexico, Namibia, Paraguay and Tunisia also specifically reported that children were a part of the development of the VNR; several others indicated youth participation in the VNR process but without specifying the age group, so these may also have included children (i.e. those under 18 years of age).



Aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda while building back better

Increasing numbers of Member States are designing their multi-year national development plans and national sustainable development strategies to align with the SDG goals and targets, building stronger ownership around the SDGs at the national level.



The third VNR coincides with the signing and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Azerbaijan (2021- 2025). The framework is guided by the principles of leaving no one behind and of ensuring a human rights-based approach. It provides the foundation for deeper collaboration and increased effectiveness of United Nations support and focuses on meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



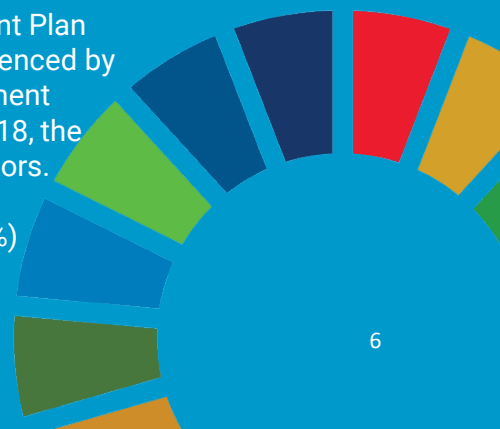
The Government of Bhutan launched the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP) with an overarching objective of working towards a “Just, Harmonious and Sustainable Society through enhanced Decentralisation”. The 12th FYP is guided by both Gross National Happiness (GNH) and the SDGs, and is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - it represents a major step towards implementing the SDGs with priorities such as equitable sustainable socioeconomic development



Qatar’s Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022 is focused on implementing policies concerned with prevention and protection from poverty through the development of a social protection strategy that is consistent with the principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda. The strategy aims to achieve an effective social protection system, which takes care of civil rights, values effective participation in the development of society, and secures sufficient income to maintain dignity and health.



In Cabo Verde, the Strategic Sustainable Development Plan (PEDS) was developed in line with the SDGs. As evidenced by PEDS 2017- 2021, the recent and upcoming Government programmes are much aligned with the SDGs. In 2018, the National Statistical System produced 92 SDG indicators. Of these, 37 (40.2%) were produced by the National Statistics Institute (INE) and the remaining 55 (59.8%) by other national bodies producing statistical information.



Strengthening the protective environment for children

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of children to violence on many fronts. Member States reported that they have strengthened their policies on social services for children, reaching out to the most vulnerable.

Several Member States noted that the child poverty rate is often higher than the national poverty rate, illustrating the vulnerability of children, especially during times of crisis. When a more integrated approach to mitigate life-cycle risks is taken, including through child protection and social protection systems with sustainable funding, children are better protected.

These social service policies contribute to strengthening the protective environment around children by addressing poverty, children's wellbeing and mental health, making education safer and more accessible, supporting parents, making justice systems more child-friendly, and making birth registration more accessible. The following examples show how governments protected the social safety net even during the pandemic.

National legal frameworks

Several Member States highlighted national policy and legal frameworks for children that have a child protection component. We also noted that in some cases the comprehensive national policy on women included a strong component on child protection, highlighting the nexus between violence against women and violence against children.



Children are legislatively protected in the Czech Republic from abuse, exploitation and various forms of violence. In practice, the role of socio-legal child protection bodies function on all levels, from municipal to national. Guided by the National Child Rights Protection Strategy 2012–2018, the entire system has undergone a positive transformation. Within the terms of this strategy, national campaigns such as “A Right to Childhood” have been implemented. Additional material for the 2021-2029 period, which focuses on supporting children's best interests, safe care in a family environment, and equalizing opportunities for disadvantaged children, is being prepared



In Denmark, a children's rights package for the period 2018-2021 was adopted to promote the inclusion and empowerment of children. One of the package's initiatives aims to expand the right of children to be involved and heard regarding their case in the municipal child services system. Another initiative extends the opening hours of a direct hotline for children that provides advice and help. A third initiative aims to raise children's awareness of their rights, increase children's resilience and prevent abuse.

Strengthening the protective environment for children



In Spain, specific guidance on the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents against violence will be provided based on the Organic Law 8/2021, including the promotion of public awareness and active involvement of the whole of society in its prevention, detection, and reporting.

Social protection and poverty reduction



SDG 1



SDG 2



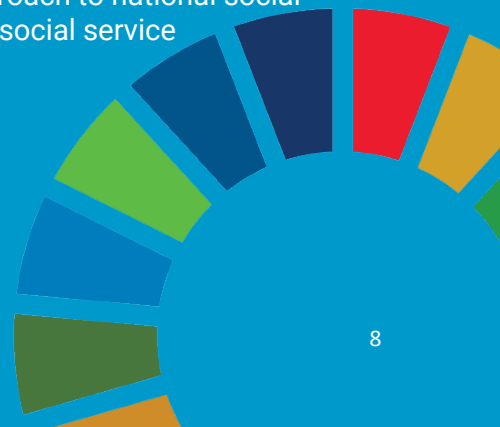
SDG 10



The Support to Social Protection in Angola project strengthens social action interventions to assist people in situations of greater social vulnerability, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, women, and children. The project aims to support the Ministry of Social Action, Family and Women's Promotion and Provincial Governments to improve programmes, policies and technical capacities in the social protection sector.



The 2021-2027 National Strategy for the Development of Social Services in the Republic of Azerbaijan adopts a comprehensive approach to national social service policies. The Strategy provides that national social service policies aim to improve the existing legal support, developing relevant standards and norms, strengthening the logistical capacity and expanding the network of social service institutions, and applying international experience and innovative technologies.





The fight against poverty and hunger and investment in human capital are priorities of the Government of Cabo Verde. Reflecting on the high level of child and youth poverty and, noting that 40 per cent of the population is under 15 years old, additional poverty alleviation measures for families were made in 2021. These measures included the extension of the Social Inclusion Income to 29,000 families in poverty. Also, the food and nutritional security strategy paper was updated in 2014. The National Food and Nutritional Security Council was created in 2013, a Law on the Human Right to Adequate Food was adopted in 2018 and the National School Lunch Programmes are being implemented.



Since the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the Communist Party and the Government of China have given top priority to the eradication of extreme poverty and building a moderately prosperous society. The target set in the Decision on “Winning the Fight Against Poverty” adopted in November 2015 was that by 2020, all those in rural areas living in poverty would have reliable access to food, clothing, compulsory education, basic healthcare and safe housing and all population living under the poverty line and all poverty-stricken counties on the national list would be lifted out of poverty. This target was met at the end of 2020 as scheduled.

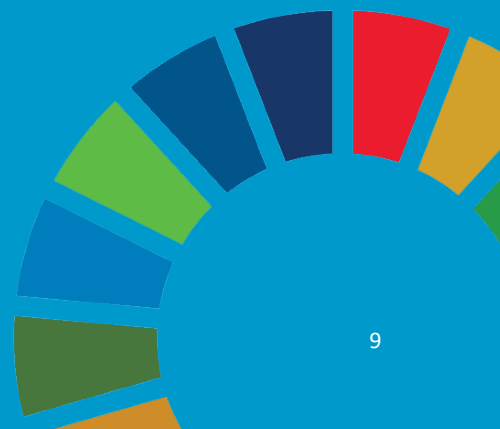


In May 2021, the Danish Government and the Parliament agreed on the “Children First” reform, which provides better assistance to vulnerable children and families than the previous policy. The agreement allocates an additional DKK 2 billion in funding in the years 2022 to 2025, and once fully phased in will provide DKK 734 million in annual funding. The measures include a proposed Danish Child’s Act, which will ensure that children’s voices are better heard.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Indonesia commissioned the National Economic Recovery Programme. The Government response included strengthening the existing social assistance programmes, creating special programmes, and indirectly assisting the poor through various economic recovery programmes. The Family Hope Program (PKH)⁶ is a conditional cash transfer programme, targeting 10 million families by 2020. In 2020, the size of the assistance was increased by 25 per cent. PKH improves access for poor families, especially pregnant women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly, to health and education services.

⁶ The PKH introduced in 2007, is a conditional cash transfer program that now targets 10 million families. The budget allocated for this program has been increased from IDR 19 trillion in 2018 to IDR 29 trillion (\$ 2 trillion) in 2019. In addition to pregnant women and children, conditionalities and benefits for the elderly and people with disabilities were set out for the first time in the Ministry of Social Affairs Regulation Number 1 Year 2018.





The Government of Malaysia recognizes that poverty is multidimensional and cash transfers alone will not resolve the cycle of long-term poverty. The Government introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index in 2016 to measure poverty from a more inclusive perspective, including education, health, standard of living, and income. The Ministry of Health (MOH) initiated various nutrition-based interventions for school children and adolescents through collaboration with multi-sectoral agencies. In 2019, both the MOH and the Ministry of Education piloted the Free Breakfast Programme to provide a nutritious daily meal for all primary school children, which was incorporated into the Supplementary Food Programme (RMT) for low-income families.



The second Harambee Prosperity Plan, launched in 2021 in Namibia, offers strategic measures to empower the people and to support the poor and most vulnerable. Policies such as the Social Protection Policy and the Blueprint on Wealth Redistribution and Poverty Eradication are in place to address poverty. The Social Protection Policy in 2021 aims to strengthen the existing social protection system, empowering women and girls and people with disabilities as a priority for the country. Specific measures will be taken to strengthen the e-learning space for children with physical and intellectual disabilities and special needs.



In Niger, the social protection coverage rate increased from 3 percent in 2012 to 28.75 percent in 2018, as a result of robust implementation of policies including free health care for pregnant women and children under five. The second phase of the "Initiative 3N" covers the period 2016-2020 and focuses on achieving "Zero Hunger by 2021". Also, the Government raised awareness among the communities to address malnutrition and strengthen their mobilization. Insecurity in some regions and poverty create food insecurity and malnutrition especially affecting children below five.



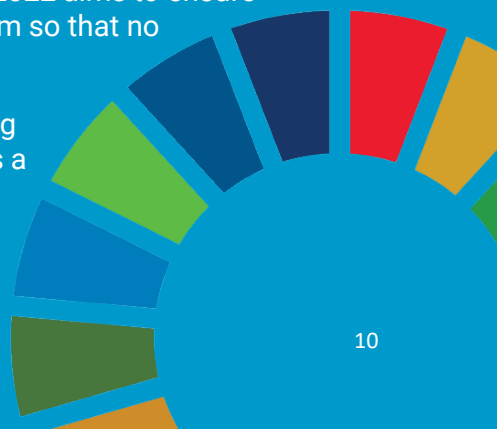
In Paraguay, the Social Protection System (SPS) "¡Vamos!" follows the rights-based approach that seeks to improve the quality of life and strengthen protection for all. This system strengthens the coordination among more than thirty public institutions to increase transparency and improve quality and management of services, benefits and protection for families and the community.



The number of beneficiaries of social welfare programs between 2015 and 2019 in Qatar increased by 50 per cent. The categories of beneficiary include widows and widowers, divorced women, elderly, people with disabilities, people who are unable to work, disadvantaged families, orphans, and other vulnerable groups of society. The Social Protection Sector Strategy 2018-2022 aims to ensure sustainable resources for the social protection system so that no citizens are left behind.



Uruguay presents an approach to social policy serving the most vulnerable population. The Government has a broad regulatory framework that includes different rights related to health, largely focused on the protection of vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents, women and their sexual and reproductive rights, people with disabilities and people of African descent, among others.





The Government of Egypt scaled up social protection programmes and safety nets to increase the coverage of the most vulnerable. The proportion of total Government spending on basic services has increased from 13.6 per cent in 2018 to 29.8 per cent in 2020. Efforts towards poverty reduction are not limited to social safety nets but also include food, electricity, and gas subsidies, all of which contribute to reducing income inequalities. The “Takaful” (Solidarity) and “Karama” (Dignity) cash transfer programmes were inaugurated in 2015. The “Takaful” is a conditional family income support programme and “Karama” is an unconditional cash transfer for the most vulnerable. Beneficiaries of the programme increased from 60,000 families in 2015 to 3.7 million by May 2021, with predominantly female beneficiaries; the budget dedicated for the programme nearly tripled from 2015 to 2021.



Access to Universal Health Coverage: other Member States, including Japan, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Marshall Islands and Norway mentioned the importance of Universal Health Coverage for all people as a part of strengthened social protection. Member States noted that Universal Health Coverage must be comprehensive and include an array of related services, including mental health, and sexual and reproductive health.



SDG 3 Caring for children’s mental well-being



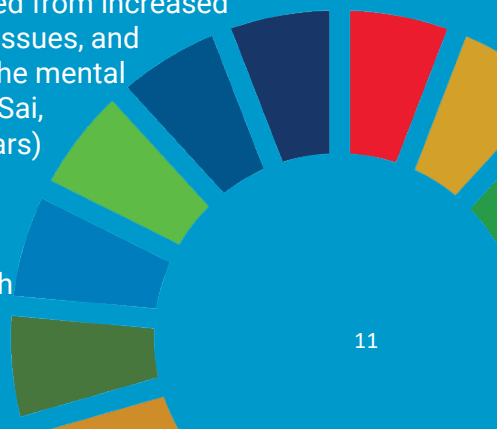
Antigua and Barbuda introduced a Psychosocial Support in Schools Programme to ensure that the psychological health of students is cared for; teachers have been trained and provided with tools to enable them to support students in need.



The Government of Lao PDR is paying attention to the mental health of all citizens due to the recent impact of natural disasters and now the impact of COVID-19. During this recovery period, the Government is working with partners to ensure enough skilled mental health workers are able to respond to the surge in demand. Recent additional investments in this area are the toll-free Lao Women Union counselling helpline and the Lao Youth Union counselling helpline.



During the pandemic the San Sai Nam Nueng,⁷ in partnership with the San Sai Public Health Working Group and Volunteer Service Overseas Thailand, found evidence that the pandemic had brought an increase in cases of depression among youth and children in the area. Cases stemmed from increased stress, psychological issues, relationship and family issues, and financial stress. The group initiated a field study on the mental health and stress levels of children and youth in San Sai, with 289 children and youth (aged between 11-25 years) participating. Consequently, a consultation was organised with relevant agencies to allow for integrated planning to address this issue, in order to develop the plans into a mechanism for mental health support in the future.



⁷ The San Sai Nam Nueng Group was founded in 2008 from children and youth from 18 villages in San Sai tambon, Fang amphoe, and Chiang Mai.



In 2021, the Government of Zimbabwe allocated 13 per cent of the National Budget to the Ministry of Health and Child Care. In the primary and secondary sector, a Schools-Based Life Skills Empowerment Strategy 2020-2025 is being implemented. The strategy addresses a broad range of psychosocial issues, including gender-based violence while improvements are being made to the implementation of the Protocol on the Multi-Sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse and Violence in Zimbabwe (2012) through schools.

Supporting parents and family



SDG 1



SDG 3



SDG 4



SDG 5



SDG 10

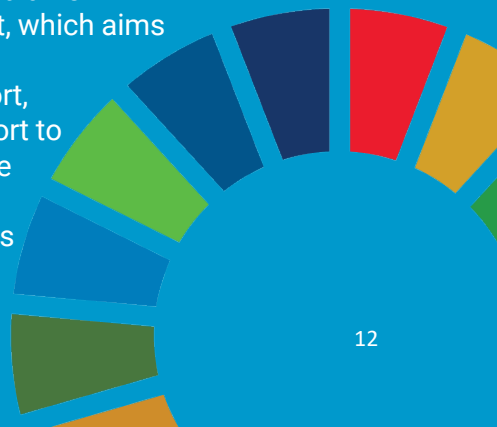


The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) of Cyprus has created counselling material for schools and for parents in order to support the achievement of quality education and mitigate the impact of the pandemic. The EPS has offered training for most of its staff for crisis intervention in schools, developed and implemented by the International School Psychology Association (ISPA).



In August 2018, the Government of Sweden adopted a new National Strategy for Developing Parenting Support, which aims to promote children's health and development.

The emphasis of the strategy is on universal support, which targets all parents, while incorporating support to parents whose children are in at-risk groups or have urgent problems. The aim is for all parents to have Access to parenting support throughout their child's upbringing.





In Uruguay, the Pan American Health Organization's Strong Families Programme offers primary prevention family interventions for adolescents and young people to prevent risky behaviours, such as substance use, aggression and violence, and self-harm and suicide.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16 Access to reporting and referral

Member States reported on increased vulnerability of children to violence due to confinement and movement restriction measures during the pandemic, and the need for increased access to reporting and referral services.



In Angola, the SOS Criança 15015 hotline was activated in June 2020 in partnership with the National Children's Institute, as an accessible mechanism for reporting cases of violence against children.



By 2019, the National Women and Children Welfare Committee, and the municipal level Women and Children Committee were established across all 20 districts and four municipalities of Bhutan. A helpline (1098) for women and children in difficult circumstances has been launched in October 2018 to provide immediate counselling, legal and referral services around the clock.



Additional Member States, including Lao PDR, Madagascar, Malaysia, San Marino, Sierra Leone and Sweden mentioned the importance of community-based services and hotlines as a way to provide access to referral and reporting mechanisms.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4 Safer and more accessible schools for all

Member States reported on action taken to strengthen the achievement of SDG 4 and to guarantee safer and more accessible learning environments for all. In addition, many reports pointed out that the issue of the digital divide has been highlighted by the pandemic as children moved to remote learning. When addressing how to bridge the gap in access to digital resources, it is also important to recognize and respond to the increased risks to children from forms of online violence.



Since 2013 a total of 108,000 schools in poor areas have been renovated in China, making it possible for all school-age children in poor areas to attend primary schools and kindergartens in their villages.



In Namibia, high budget allocation for the education sector reflects the Government's priority of providing free primary education. The National Safe School Framework was launched in September 2018. A Free Grant policy was established in support of the continuous implementation of existing universal primary and secondary education.



The educational curriculum at all levels in Paraguay addresses the rights-based approach, the promotion of good treatment and equality between men and women, with emphasis on the prevention of violence against children and women, and the prevention and elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In addition, Bill 134 that establishes human rights education as a curricular discipline in the educational system is under consideration.



In Tunisia, difficult social conditions and poverty are the main causes of children dropping out of schools. A “second chance school” was opened in March 2021 to serve children aged 12 to 18, who dropped out of school without obtaining a graduation certificate or a vocational training diploma. This programme will be expanded gradually throughout the country.



Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all is a priority for the Zimbabwean Government. The newly enacted Education Law (6 March 2021) introduced changes aligned with the new Constitution, and to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Key changes include provision of free basic education for all children, from early childhood to primary and secondary level.



SDG 16 Birth registration

Birth registration is a gateway to various forms of social services and protection for children, such as the health, education and justice systems. Children who are not registered face a greater risk of exclusion from society. Member States noted that the pandemic is intensifying these barriers making it even more difficult for those not registered to access basic services.



The late registration of children after birth is a challenge that has been addressed in Cabo Verde: 99 per cent of children under 5 were registered in 2019. It is noted that obtaining documentation such as birth certificate, ID and other documents can be difficult. Newborns are registered at the hospital or maternity ward immediately after birth by a civil registry official, reducing the risk of delays.



In Indonesia, 88.11 per cent of children (aged 0-17) obtained birth certificates in 2020. The Population Administration Law ensures free access to issuance of birth certificates. However, children from the poorest households still experience barriers in birth registration. The birth registration trend for children under five is slowing. Only 77.2 per cent of children under five had a birth certificate in 2020 and the percentage having birth certificates is lower in rural areas. During the pandemic, the Government mandated registry offices across the country to prioritize online services.



SDG 16 Justice systems that are child and gender sensitive



Children coming to court continue to undergo difficulties in Bhutan, as only Thimphu District Court currently has a specialized Family and Child Bench. The infrastructure necessary to administer child justice is lacking in courts outside the capital. To address this critical gap, the justice sector agencies have developed a Child Justice Concept Paper, which sets out some concrete next steps towards establishing a functional child justice system. A comprehensive Child Justice Action Plan has also been developed.



Since 2014, the Office of the Attorney General of Cuba has established a telephone line attended by prosecutors and specialized personnel to offer legal guidance and receive complaints on different matters, including issues of violence, particularly against women and girls.



Since September 2020, specialized operational units that exclusively investigate cases of violence in the family were created in all Police Divisions. The establishment of these units aims to further increase the specialization and expertise in the police regarding violence in the family. Adoption of new technologies for the victims of violence in the family has been accelerated. A web application aiming to further help the victims of domestic violence is being developed by the Cyprus Police.



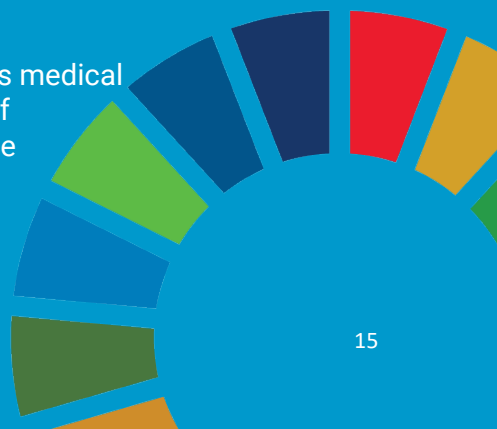
As part of the new multi-year agreement, the Danish Government is establishing a national investigation unit that brings together the most specialized police and prosecution competencies to strengthen investigations of organized crime, including human trafficking and smuggling.



Facility overcrowding in the prison system in Indonesia is one of the risk factors of COVID-19, yet 1,660 children had their imprisonment sentences carried out during this time. To mitigate this risk, 992 children, which accounts for half of children in detention and imprisonment, were released in June 2020. Regarding the protection of children in conflict with the law, the Government has issued a policy that governs the rights of child victims and witnesses. In addition to the basic human rights, the policy ensures that child victims and witnesses have access to medical and social rehabilitation services both within and outside the institution, guaranteeing physical, mental, and social security, and access to information regarding the progress of their case.



The Institute of Legal Medicine in Nicaragua provides medical legal attention at the Clinic for Attention to Victims of Violence, which was created to facilitate and expedite medical, psychological and personal protection for women, girls and adolescents who are victims of violence. A series of protocols in support of children in contact with the judicial system was approved.





The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board, established in 2015, focuses its interventions on promoting access to justice for the underprivileged, including juveniles, both in pre-trial detention and prisons, providing them with free legal representation, legal advice, and related services. Juveniles and people with disabilities automatically qualify for the programme. The work of the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board has been crucial in advancing the welfare of vulnerable groups.

Addressing specific forms and settings of violence

Various forms of violence against children are addressed in different parts of the SDGs with key targets; the following are some examples of how Member States addressed these different forms of violence.



SDG 4

Violence in educational settings, including bullying



In Cyprus, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of School Violence has been adopted (2018-2022) and preventive programmes against bullying were conducted in 20 schools.



As a follow-up to the Global School-based Student Health Survey and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study in 2019, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has scaled up efforts to address bullying in school. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers, and Children in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports developed a national guideline on preventing and responding to violence against children in schools, which was approved by the Deputy Prime Minister at the end of 2020.

Gender-based violence, domestic violence and harmful practices, including FGM and child marriage



In addition to the following examples, Member States also reported on law reforms that criminalize gender-based violence and domestic violence, as well as strategies on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, highlighting the nexus between gender-based violence and violence against children.



Some of the concrete efforts made by the Government of Chad include the adoption of the National Gender Policy and its National Action Plan 2019-2023; the National Strategy for the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence; the law prohibiting child marriage; the passing of the decision mandating the creation of the radio station "the voice of the Chadian woman," housed in the National House of Women; and the Roadmap for the Fight against Child Marriage 2019-2021.



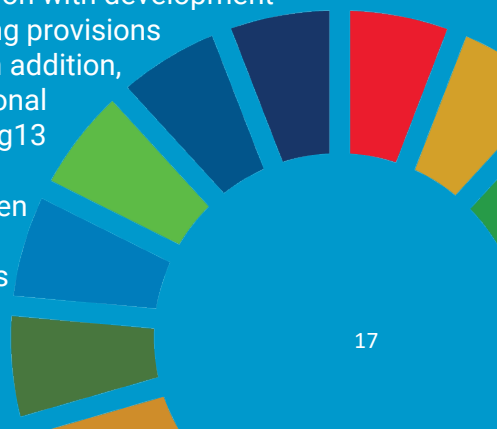
In 2019, as a part of the Danish Government's work on combating violence against women and girls, psychological violence was made a criminal offence on an equal footing with physical violence.



As a part of the efforts to address multidimensional poverty, the Government of the Dominican Republic is working on the reduction of child marriage and early unions. Law 1-21, promulgated by the Executive Power on January 6, 2021, prohibits persons under 18 years of age from marrying.



Egypt has been directing attention to the eradication of FGM through legal action, as well as raising awareness on this issue. The National Committee for the Eradication of FGM was established in May 2019. The members include representatives of relevant ministries, judicial authorities, Al-Azhar, the Egyptian Churches and civil society organizations, in cooperation with development partners. In 2021, the Senate approved a bill amending provisions of the Penal Code to toughen the penalty for FGM. In addition, a door-knocking campaign was launched by the National Council for Women aiming to eliminate FGM, reaching 13 million people. The "Protect her from Circumcision" campaign launched by the National Council for Women reached 18 million people in 2020 alone. The campaign aims at educating women and families in rural and urban areas on the dangers of FGM and the harmful effects it has on the girl's wellbeing.





A study on the impact of the pandemic on gender-based violence was conducted in Iraq by the Women's Empowerment Department of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, in cooperation with UNFPA.

The study found that the main forms of gender-based violence in Iraq are domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment of minors, and suicide related to spousal abuse.



In Madagascar, in January 2020, law N2019-008 updated the age of marriage to 18 years old for both boys and girls. The draft decree implementing this law as well as the revision of the decree on the creation of the platform to fight gender-based violence are being considered at the Commission for the Reform of the Penal System.



Concerned by the linkage between education and child marriage and gender-based violence, the Government of Niger has put considerable efforts to keep girls in school with free education up to the age of 16 and to promote the use of modern contraception to mitigate the high rate of teenage pregnancy.



In Sierra Leone, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill which criminalizes all child marriage was enacted at the end of 2020. In the last two years, the "Hands off our Girls" campaign was launched with active engagement with traditional and religious leaders. The VNR reports significant reduction in adolescent pregnancy, crediting the work of the National Secretariat for the reduction of teenage pregnancy and media campaign.



The Government of Sweden has established a national centre of expertise to combat honour-related violence and oppression. In 2019, the rules for recognising foreign child marriages were tightened. In 2020, a specific child marriage offence and a ban on leaving the country to protect children at risk of child marriage or genital mutilation abroad was introduced. The Government will develop indicators to follow up honour-related violence and oppression that will enable national follow-up of SDG target 5.3.



The 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe prohibits child marriage, and the 2018 Harmonized Marriages Bill aligns marriage laws to the constitution.

The Government has been engaging with faith-based organisations and traditional leaders to raise awareness on the constitutional provisions to end child marriage.

Traditional leaders have come up with their own communiqué on ending child marriage committing their leadership on this issue.



Child trafficking



SDG 5



SDG 8



SDG 16



Between 2015 and 2020, reports of trafficking in persons in Bolivia decreased due to actions taken on awareness-raising, identification and reporting, and provision of care and protection to victims. The established action protocols and inter-institutional coordination guarantee the social reintegration and follow-up services offered to the victims, and training of police officers and prosecutors in the operational investigation of these crimes.



In Egypt, the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking launched the second part of the national campaign “Together Against Human Trafficking” in 2020. The campaign urges citizens to report the crime through the hotlines of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, the National Council for Women, the National Council for Human Rights, or by informing the authorities.



Namibia passed a comprehensive Trafficking in Persons Act in 2018 to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children.



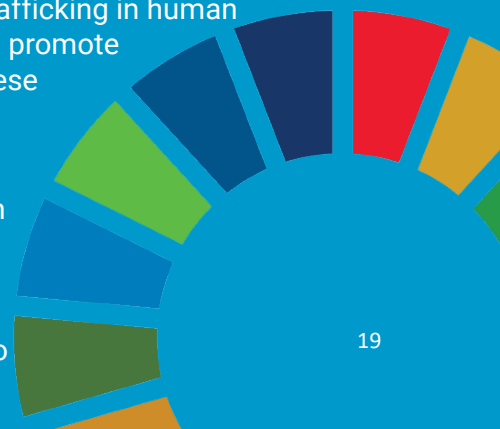
The German Institute for Human Rights has been developing a blueprint for independent national reporting agencies on gender-based violence and human trafficking. The working group on human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation developed a joint strategy in 2017 to ensure sustained implementation of the international agreements and conventions. The National Service Centre against Labour Exploitation, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking coordinates activities across the country. In addition, the Sexual Violence against Children Act was adopted. New criminal offences were defined, and the associated penalties increased with the entry into force of this law in 2021.



Spain has introduced a comprehensive law against trafficking in human beings in all its forms, which establishes measures to promote protection, prevention and reparation in relation to these forms of violence.



Tunisia has adopted the Organic Law No. 2016-61 of 2016 on the prevention and fight against trafficking in persons which aims to prevent and combat all forms of exploitation, especially of women and children. It aims to promote national coordination and international cooperation in this area. An institution to combat trafficking in persons has been established.



Violence against children online



SDG 9



SDG 16



SDG 17

Member States noted that several aspects of children's lives, including their education and interaction with their peers, moved to the online space during the pandemic. While there is significantly increased activity by children online, only a few reports mentioned measures taken to strengthen protection and safeguarding of children while they are online.



In Mexico, reforms to the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence and the Federal Criminal Code criminalize digital and media violence, with the classification of the crime of violation of sexual intimacy.



In San Marino, Law no.16 of February 2021 "Amendments to the Criminal Code - Introduction of the offence of illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos (revenge porn)" was approved. This law introduces the specific offence of illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos often referred to as "revenge porn".



SDG 8 **Child labour**

It is encouraging that more Member States reported on child labour in their 2021 VNRs. The latest global estimates suggest that the trend in child labour is increasing for the first time in two decades.⁸ Member States reported on child labour trends, as well as initiatives to address it.



Child labour and neglect are the main forms of violence against children reported in Angola. The Government is committed to take measures to eradicate forced labour, modern forms of slavery and human trafficking. The Government aims to secure the legal framework to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers and end all forms of child labour by 2025.

⁸. International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward, ILO and UNICEF, New York, 2021



In 2019 in Chad, 39 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 participated in an economic activity or household task, compared to 51.5 per cent in 2015. This decline reflects significant progress in eliminating child labour, including very close monitoring and implementation of enforcement measures by public authorities. There are higher rates of girls involved in child labour than boys and more in rural areas compare to urban areas. Increased efforts include the official criminalization in 2018 of human trafficking, including sexual and labour exploitation.



Various strategies have been enacted to end all forms of child labour, including the implementation of the Integrated Information System for the Registration and Eradication of Child Labor and its Worst Forms (SIRITI) under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour in Colombia. This system offers a basic framework for building an inter-institutional response to the issue. Through this system, around 1,134,000 children and adolescents who suffered violations of their rights have been registered in 2020.



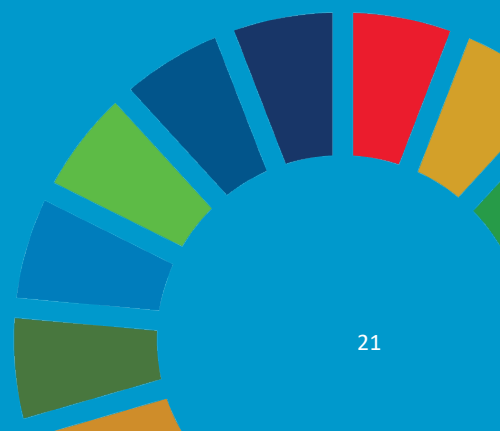
In Madagascar, efforts have been made to end child labour since 2016 through various activities such as capacity building in 32 communes in the Sava region, the 2018-2020 campaign against trafficking, and trainings for labour instructors on the new legal framework and cooperation with Alliance 8.7, the global partnership to achieve Target 8.7 of the SDGs.



The child labour survey of 2017 in Sierra Leone recorded a significant reduction in the prevalence of child labour from 44.4 per cent in 2013 to 29.3 per cent in 2017. During this time, the Government introduced free quality education policy and discouraged parents from sending their children for street trading and other forms of labour. Efforts have been made by the Government at local level to further discourage child labour and encourage education, monitored jointly by Family Support Units in the police and the Ministry of Social Welfare. A particular focus over the period 2019-21 has been on mining fields and night clubs.



In October 2019, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse was ratified in Tunisia, and it entered into force in February 2020. Since 2018, a pilot programme on monitoring and coordination system has been set up in two provinces; also, various awareness-raising campaigns to end child labour have been launched.



Protecting children in vulnerable situations

The 2021 VNRs highlighted different forms of violence against children, as well as children's vulnerability to violence in different settings and how Governments are addressing them. In the following section we share examples of children in vulnerable situations or at heightened risk of violence such as children on the move, migrant children, children with disabilities, indigenous children, children belonging to ethnic or racial minorities, and children in sexual minority groups.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG 10 Safe and orderly migration



In 2021, the Government of Colombia launched the Statute on Temporary Protection for Migrants (ETPM), which allows migrants from Venezuela to change from a temporary protection status to a regular migrant status. The ETPM establishes the rights and duties of migrants, better tools for identification and better design and focus of public policies.

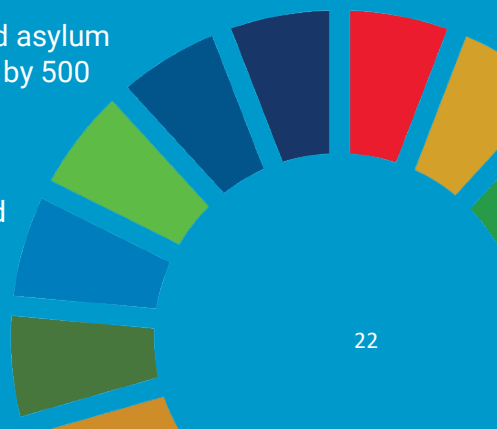


The protection, welfare and social integration of migrants and asylum seekers are major priorities for the Cyprus Government. Asylum Migration and Integration Fund projects provide social protection for unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers. Migrant Information Centres serve as a one-stop shop for services and provide guidance on housing, access to health and education services, family support, completion of official forms, and translation and interpretation. Centres are working to provide better access to services, guidance/counselling, social and psychological support as well as child-care. Access to inclusive, mainstream, and non-segregated education is being addressed through an upgraded educational policy aiming at the smooth integration of students with a migrant background into the educational system.



Between 2018 and 2020, the number of refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Tunisia increased by 500 percent, representing more than 45 nationalities. The Government published a circular in May 2019 allowing refugees registered with UNHCR to access basic services such as shelter, education, health, and social security.

Other Member States including Angola, Chad, Namibia, Thailand, and Uruguay addressed this issue in their report as well.





SDG 13 Climate change



The environmental situation in Madagascar, including recurrent weather shocks such as droughts, affects children and pushes them into child labour especially in the southern regions. About 50 per cent of children from 5 to 17 years old are involved in some form of work, which deprives them of schooling affecting their mental, physical and social growth.



The Tile Til Eo Committee (TTEC) provides oversight of the Republic's response to climate change and reduction of climate and disaster risk in the Marshall Islands. The work of the TTEC is conducted through working groups and taskforces as appropriate. The Mitigation and Adaptation Working Groups include women's issues and gender, human rights, capacity-building, climate financing, and youth and children. The TTEC provides guidance and advises on policy planning and national responses to implement the 2050 National Climate Strategy.



In its VNR, the Government of Tunisia emphasizes the importance of education on environmental issues, including the creation of environmental clubs targeting 13,000 children.

Other forms of vulnerability to violence



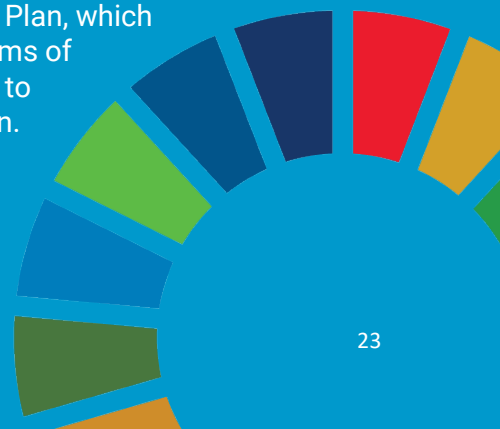
The Programme for the Inclusive Development of Reception Areas 'South Zone' serves people in vulnerable situations including indigenous people, refugees, displaced persons and returnees in various regions of Chad, combining humanitarian and development activities.



In Colombia, for the first time, the Pact for the Inclusion of All Persons with Disabilities was included in the National Development Plan, which establishes specific actions in the medium term in terms of education and productive inclusion, as well as access to physical environments, transportation, and information.



The evaluation by the multistakeholder roundtable noted that one in six (about 16%) of foreign national children and adolescents are not enrolled in school in Japan, a situation that may be further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.





In Nicaragua, two laws and seven legislative decrees were approved aiming for increased access to technical and professional skills training to acquire decent work and to develop entrepreneurship for young people and adults. These instruments ensure equal access to all levels of education and professional training for vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants and children in situations of vulnerability.



Vulnerable children and youth are at a high risk of being excluded from important social arenas. Several efforts have been launched by the Government of Norway to promote equal opportunities for children and youth. In the autumn of 2020, the Government presented a strategy that focuses on increased participation for children, young people and parents in low-income families in kindergarten, school, afterschool programmes and leisure activities. Increased participation in these arenas could prevent poverty and societal exclusion from being passed on to the next generation.



In Spain, measures are taken for vulnerable groups, including the reform of the regulations that favour the integration of unaccompanied children and adolescents when they reach the age of majority.



The Youth Council of Thailand has advanced efforts to protect children against teenage pregnancies in all provinces by raising awareness at the local level. This has helped to lower the teenage pregnancy rates. The Youth Council has also helped to organise a Youth Assembly to discuss LGBTI rights, allowing LGBTI youth to provide recommendations for policymaking in order to further gender equality in Thailand.

Data

Member States noted the need for more accurate, disaggregated data to enhance the prevention and response measures to protect children from violence.

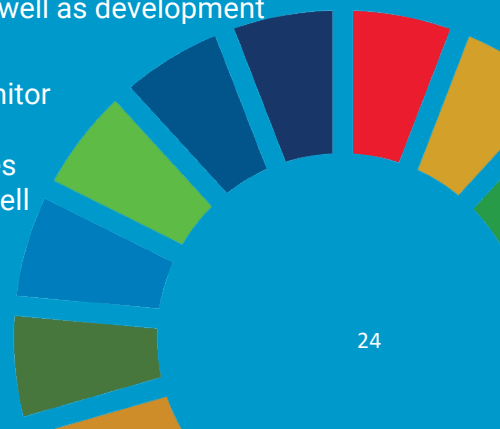


In Antigua and Barbuda, the National Statistical Office is leading the process of creating mechanisms for data mining for the SDG indicators to assist the monitoring and evaluation framework for SDG implementation in collaboration with relevant Government ministries and agencies as well as development partners and civil society organizations.



The Dewa Platform is an integrated dashboard to monitor Gross National Happiness (GNH), SDGs, and national development progress in Bhutan. The platform enables more up-to-date analysis of SDG indicator status as well as the current state of data gaps and availability.

The dashboard aims to bring together consolidated data across a wide spectrum, including updated data for indicators in the 12th Five Year Plan, National Key Result Areas and GNH.



Data



The National Children and Adolescents Life Experience Survey 2018 was conducted in Indonesia together with a similar study on women. These cross-sectional studies found that violence against children and violence against women were severe problems that had affected many women and children. The studies found that one in every three women and girls aged 15-64 have experienced physical or sexual violence throughout their lifetime. Furthermore, the studies found that 62 per cent of girls and 61.7 per cent of boys aged 13-17 have experienced violence. The Government is currently analysing the data from both studies to obtain information on the causes, risks, and protective factors to inform programmes and policies.



The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand will develop a database on violence against children, women, and families under the Family Big Data project, which will be the central database for family services linking all relevant agencies.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Some final reflections

Much progress has been made towards the realization of the rights of children since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, but the pandemic threatens to delay or even reverse the gains achieved.

As we take stock of responses to the pandemic so far and try to look ahead, the “building back better” phase must be seen as an opportunity to build a new social contract that is not only adult-centred but also child-centred, that paves the way for more sustainable and resilient economies and promotes human capital development.

The following reflections derive from our engagement with Member States and our reading of the 2021 VNRs, where we focused on the interlinkages between the SDGs and protection of children from all forms of violence; how Governments are responding to the challenges of addressing violence before and during the pandemic; and how the integrated approach to prevention and response is working.

An integrated approach to children’s well-being is essential

Children face various risks of violence in all settings. The broad range of drivers and manifestations of violence mean that it is linked to all 17 SDGs; therefore, an integrated approach to addressing the SDGs is essential to ending violence against children. This requires ensuring integrated, cross-sectoral services, that encompass childcare services, education, healthcare including mental health, justice, family support as well as social protection for children and their caregivers. It is crucial that policy frameworks addressing the protection of children from violence are fully integrated into national development plans.

There are good practices and achievements on how an integrated approach can strengthen the protection of children and their well-being, that are not being included by Member States in their VNRs. We hope that by highlighting the interlinkages of SDGs and the efforts to address violence against children and strengthening their protective environment, and the importance of an integrated approach to address them, Members States will be encouraged to report on these initiatives in their VNRs as part of accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Highlighting the efforts to prevent and tackle all forms of violence against children

More and more Governments are reporting their progress on ending violence against children in their VNRs, such as child marriage, FGM, child labour, and child trafficking. It should be recalled that violence occurs on a continuum both offline and online.

One child can experience multiple forms of violence in various settings. SDG implementation and reporting of the SDGs should reflect the full spectrum of violence to which children are exposed.

Protecting the most vulnerable

Many Member States identified and highlighted the plight of children in vulnerable situations (e.g. children on the move, children living on the street, children with disabilities, children belonging to ethnic, linguistic, and indigenous minority groups, and children belonging to sexual minority groups.) but there was only limited reporting on what is being done to address their situation and strengthen the protective environment. We encourage Member States to share their actions and experiences addressing children in vulnerable situations in their VNR.

Importance of cooperation with regional organizations

Many 2021 VNRs mentioned cooperation with regional United Nations or inter-governmental bodies in addressing issues related to violence against children, especially in joint studies and gathering data. The Office of the SRSG-VAC followed all of the 2021 regional social development forums and was encouraged by the attention given to sharing good practices and knowledge on children's issues with Member States.

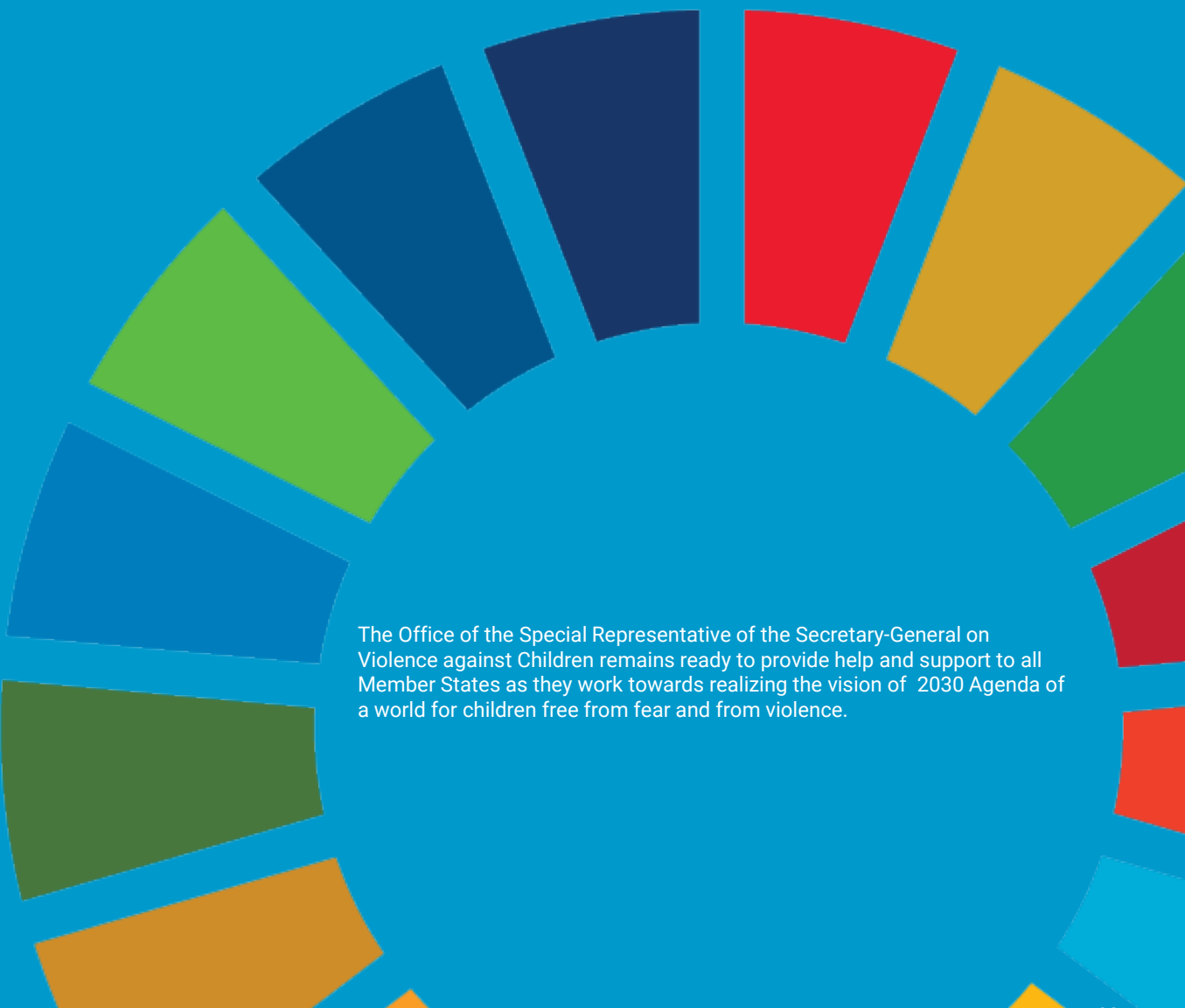
Whole of UN approach

The Office of the SRSG-VAC also noted the positive impact a system-wide approach to supporting preparation of the VNR at the national level can have. When the whole of the United Nations country team (where present) works together to support the host Government to ensure a focus on children, it makes an important difference in the VNR process and reporting.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Children are a distinct group with distinct rights

We must ensure that children as a distinct group are kept high on the global, regional, and national agendas. With emphasis on the importance of the life-cycle approach, children have distinct needs and are the subject of distinct legal rights. We must always keep in mind that children are young people below 18 years of age. The consistent attention and visibility given to youth should be mirrored by a consistent attention and visibility to children. We should be intentional when referring to “children” and when to “youth” as it helps to keep track of the different rates of progress, development, and challenges faced across the life cycle.



The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children remains ready to provide help and support to all Member States as they work towards realizing the vision of 2030 Agenda of a world for children free from fear and from violence.

Annex



Children as agents of change:
Their active involvement **in the VNR**

Introduction



VNR process is an opportunity to engage not only youth, but also children as the current and future generations of agents of change to build a healthy, safe, just, inclusive, and resilient world, while keeping children safe from harm and leaving no one behind.



The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development envisages “a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation”.¹ It also affirms that “children and young women and men are critical agents of change” and that they will find the SDGs “a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.”²

The VNR process is an opportunity to engage not only youth, but also children as the current and future generations of agents of change to build a healthy, safe, just, inclusive, and resilient world, while keeping children safe from harm and leaving no one behind.

Reflections on Reporting in the 2021 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) by the SRSG-VAC Office focused on how Member States reported on issues related to violence against children in their VNRs.

In this annex document, we highlight some examples from the 2021 VNRs that illustrate how Member States are involving children in their VNR process, as well as in the implementation of the SDGs, and provide some practical tips on this topic to inform Member States who are preparing their VNR in 2022 and beyond.

I hope that sharing these examples and tools will encourage Member States to promote a more systematic involvement of children in building a more child-sensitive VNR process and child-centered implementation of the 2030 Agenda. I believe children, as agents of change for a better world, must take an active role in this process.

Najat Maalla M'jid

Special Representative of the
Secretary-General on Violence against Children

¹ <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1> Preamble para 8

² <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1> para 51

Children's involvement in the VNR process

Each year, increasing number of VNRs mention children's participation in the process of developing the report. In 2021, about a half of the VNRs reported that children took part in developing their VNRs in different ways.

The following sections include examples from the 2021 VNRs on how Member States reported on children's participation in their VNR process: sharing of opinions in modalities such as surveys and polls; online or in-person meetings, including focus groups, and interactions with decision makers, such as national legislative bodies; and participation in UN meetings.

It is important to note that examples included in this brief are not exhaustive and only encompass instances where we could find some details on how children (under age 18) actively took part in these processes. We also noted in our reading of VNRs that there are other examples that referred only to 'youth' or 'young people' without specifying the age range.

Modality of participation: Surveys and polls

Surveys and opinion polls are a recognized way to gather views of a wide range and large number of children. Several Member States reported about their experience in their VNRs.



In Sierra Leone, a poll using the U-Report³ platform took place in May 2021 addressing the perceptions of children and young people (age 15-35) on the impact of SDG implementation in the country. The survey focused on Goals 3, 4, 8, 13 and 16. The results of this survey complemented testimonies collected from other instruments on the same Goals.



Taking note of sharing experiences from previous years, in 2020, Uganda reported that their U-report poll collected 23,324 responses from children and young people about their views on SDG implementation. The result showed that 60% of children and young people who responded experienced some form of violence in the past two years.



In Sweden, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish UN Association, and The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU) administered a survey to gather the voices of children young people on how the world should achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The survey was disseminated on social media in a campaign under the hashtag #Iraisedmyvoice. In addition, Sweden also reported about a workshop organized for upper secondary school students and young people to discuss solutions to health, gender equality, equality and climate and biodiversity issues.

³ U-Report is a platform created by UNICEF, available via SMS, Facebook and Twitter where young people express their opinion and act as a positive agent of change in their communities.

Children's involvement in the VNR process



In Zimbabwe, written submissions to illustrate the engagement of civil society organizations was an important part of the VNR process. The CSO Reference Group adopted the People's Scorecard tool to collect information from more than 80 organizations, including organizations working with children.

Modality of participation: Meetings and Focus Groups with children

Member States reported about how they met and had dialogues with children, often using online platforms during the pandemic, to hear their views and opinions on matters related to their well-being and the SDGs. Examples included an ad-hoc meeting for the development of the VNR and other more systematized approaches involving ongoing engagement with children, such as child parliaments. These are a few examples where some details around children's involvement were mentioned.



The Czech Republic's Council of Children and Youth consists of over 100 child and youth organisations. In April 2021, a focus group of the Council met as a part of the VNR process. The outcome of the focus group discussion, including quotes from the participants, were part of the report. The Council also contributed to the VNR by providing information based on its data, surveys, and activities.



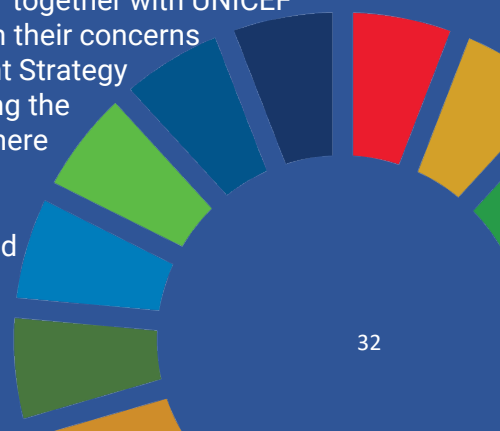
In Indonesia, a series of focus group discussions were conducted with representatives from vulnerable groups, including children and youth. Consultations and informational meetings on the importance of the human rights perspective were also held with the support of the Office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights.



In Paraguay, a discussion with multiple stakeholders was organized in a virtual format in April 2021 with 110 attendees, including children and adolescents and national experts from different sectors. This meeting was organized in partnership with UNDP, UNICEF and the Ministry of Children and Adolescents.



In Spain, the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda, together with UNICEF Spain, organized a consultation with children to learn their concerns and integrate them into the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030. In October 2020, consultations were held during the 6th State Meeting of Local Participation Councils, where 192 children between 8 and 17 years old from 16 autonomous communities participated. As a result of the consultations the 2020 Children and Adolescents' Manifesto, reflecting their voices and proposals addressing the SDGs, was presented to the Government.



Children's involvement in the VNR process



In Tunisia, a special session of the Children's Parliament was convened in April 2021 by the Ministry of Women, Family, and the Elderly, the Observatory for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, and other partners. The 25 child parliamentarians from the five governorates and the leadership of the organizing partners participated in the meeting. Each child parliamentarian was asked to present their ideas on the Tunisia they dream of. In the meeting, children learned about the 2030 Agenda and also shared their views, which were captured in the VNR. Also, child parliamentarians conduct projects to address the SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 16 in their communities during their mandate.



Similarly, in Namibia, child parliamentarians from all the regions were consulted on the SDGs in July 2021. The consultation was organized with the support of UNICEF and with the SRSG-VAC in attendance. The presentation by the Director-General of the National Planning Commission at the HLPF was accompanied by a child parliamentarian.

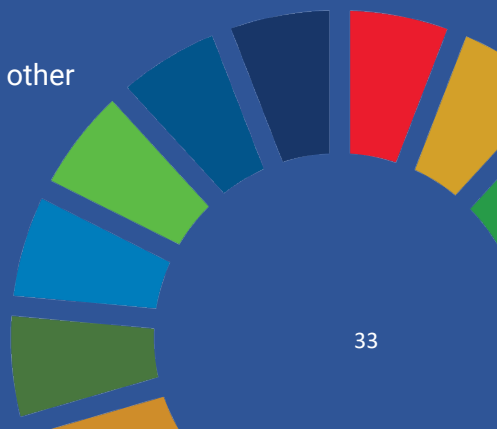
Other countries mentioned consultations and engagements with young people or youth as part of the VNR process or wider decision-making processes, though in some instances it was not clear whether this included those under the age of 18.

Modality of participation: at the UN and the HLPF

During the 2021 HLPF, children and young people were a part of the delegation of several Member States. A young representative was a part of Czech Republic and Namibia's presentation of their VNR.

We also noted other examples where children participate in UN and other international conferences as a part of the national delegation.

Inviting representatives of children who were consulted during the VNR process as a part of the official delegation to the HLPF could be one of the follow up actions.



Children taking action in advancing the SDGs

Our reading of VNRs identified only a few examples where children's actions are acknowledged as contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. We found limited examples of actions that are contributing to SDG targets related to specific forms of violence against children and its drivers.

We know that more children are taking action around the world, but they are not always included in the VNRs. We hope that children's actions addressing the SDGs will be further recognized as part of the implementation process and recorded in the national review process.

Supporting Mental wellbeing



In Uruguay, a peer support system was launched through the digital challenge #MiFórmula, which encouraged adolescents to share with their peers their strategies to combat isolation during the pandemic.

Climate change



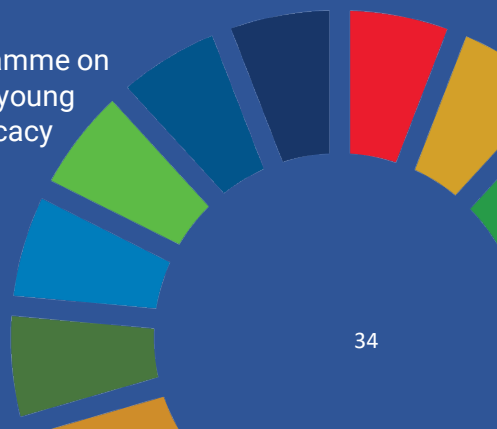
In Norway, the Children's Panel on Climate Change was established by the Eco-Agents in 2015, with the purpose of providing a space for children to communicate their opinions to decision-makers and influence their ability to define their own future.

The panel has met with representatives of parliament and the Government to express children's views on environmental issues. Each year, a report on their work is handed to decision-makers at home and abroad. Representatives of the panel participate in UN climate change conferences. In the long term, the ambition is "to create an international climate change panel for children, consisting of children from all UN Member States".

Learning about the SDGs



Mexico reported about 'Yo por los 17,' a training programme on the SDGs and leadership skills for school children and young people, organized by the Youth Mobilization. The advocacy work of the programme contributed to an initiative to reform the General Law on Climate Change presented in the Senate.



Children taking action in advancing the SDGs

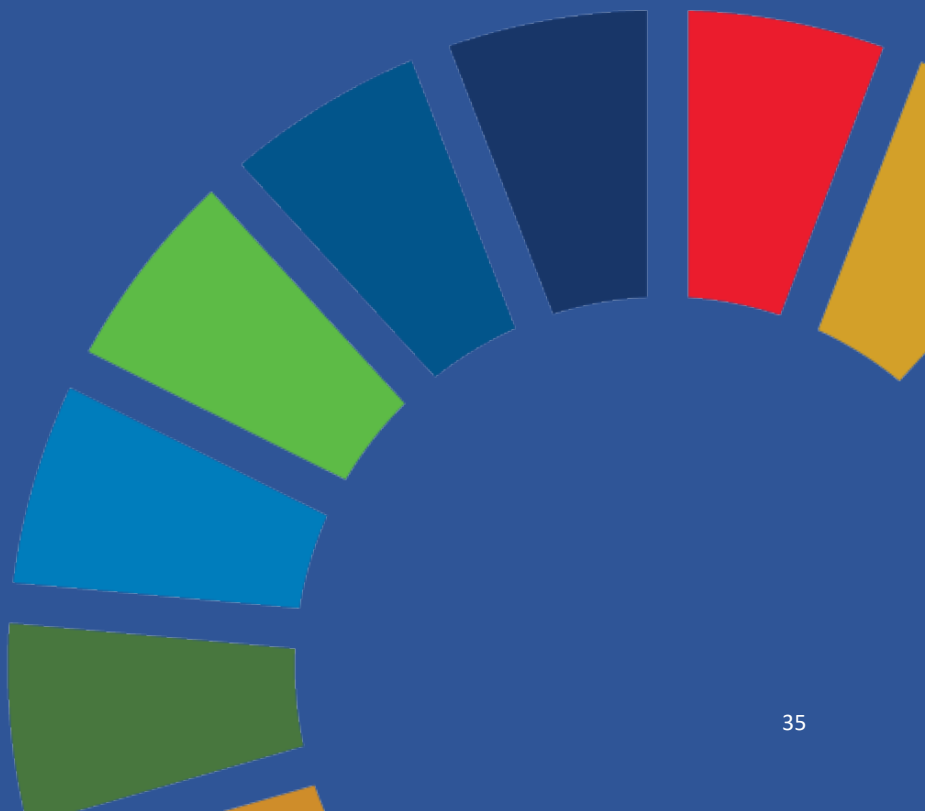
More children taking action

Information collected for the mapping exercise conducted by the office of the SRSG-VAC pointed out that children are taking action to address issues around them that are also addressing one or more of the SDGs.

Children's organizations and children themselves shared with us that they are taking action to address various forms of violence against children and its drivers, in various settings, on and offline, including corporal punishment, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and violence, emotional and psychological violence, child marriage, FGM, child labour and child trafficking to name just a few. Children around the world are also raising their voices and taking action for social justice and addressing climate change.

In these actions, children are offering support to their peers, educating and training one another, raising awareness of the wider public and collaborating with their government to build a better, safer and more just world for all.

We invite you to find out more about children taking actions in our publications: [Children as agents of positive change](#) and [When children take the lead](#).



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Some final reflections on children's involvement in the VNR process

Children are experts on children and their wellbeing. Children's resilience, strength, and leadership to support one another, their families, and community in times of crisis are remarkable. Children are full of creativity and activism that they are channeling for the creation of a better world. It is an important part of the work of my Office to continue highlighting children's role as actors of positive change.

Our reading of the 2021 VNRs pertaining to children's participation leads to the following reflections, focusing on how to strengthen and systematize participation of children to make the VNR process more child-sensitive. It is important to note that during our interactions with Member States, we learned about instances of children's active engagement in preventing and ending violence against children that were not highlighted in the VNRs.

Involving children from all age groups

Some Member States specifically mentioned children's active involvement in the VNR process, while others mentioned youth or young people without specifying the age range. As recipients of protection and subjects of rights, children are key stakeholders on all issues and action pertaining to their well-being. It is encouraged to involve not only adolescent children but starting from earlier ages, reflecting children's critical periods of growth and development, taking the life cycle approach. Children and youth do not exist in isolation; it is a continuum.

Representativity and voices of the most vulnerable

When planning children's involvement in the development of the VNR representativity of children participating in the process should be considered. The vulnerable or marginalized groups of children will vary depending on the country context, but all Member States should consider addressing and including children living in fragile contexts in their VNR processes. Vulnerability to violence is increased for: children living in areas adversely affected by climate change, children on the move, children in street situations, children with disabilities, children belonging to ethnic, linguistic, and indigenous minority groups, and children belonging to sexual minority groups.

Also, several Member States reported about using online means such as polls and surveys and organizing online meetings to consult with children. At the same time, they also reported on the need to close the "digital divide". Children who are in vulnerable situations may not have regular access to means of participation such as children's organizations facilitating the process (including schools), information, or the internet. Extra efforts need to be made to ensure more inclusive participation of children.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Ongoing involvement of children

The VNR process is an important platform to ensure ethical, inclusive, and meaningful engagement of children in the 2030 Agenda. This is an opportunity to engage children and young people as key providers of information and input and agents of change to build a healthier, safer, more just, more inclusive, and more resilient world. For this, children's involvement in the VNR process must be an ongoing process, not a one-off event.

Children need to be included in the follow-up and implementation of the SDGs, before, after, and in-between the VNRs as a part of the wide partnerships, along with child-focused and child-led organizations. When the VNR process takes a multi-stakeholder approach, benefitting from the wealth of experience and knowledge they bring, it makes an important difference in the reporting. We hope to see more examples where children are recognized as active partners in achieving the SDGs.

Documenting the process

Many reports mentioned children taking part in the VNR process without including much detail about how they participated in the process. We encourage Member States to include more information about how Governments worked with children to make sure their views and voices are included in their reporting. Documenting the process, sharing successes, and reflecting on lessons learned will help strengthen the culture of inclusive and meaningful participation of children, which will help children to be active and responsible citizens.

Recognizing children's activism in the VNR

During our interactions with Member States, civil society organizations, the UN system, and children and young people, we learned a lot about how children are taking actions in their communities around the world to address issues that are affecting their well-being.

At the same time, we noted that these actions are also contributing to the implementation of the SDGs, but they are often not acknowledged in the VNRs.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children remains ready to provide help and support to all Member States as they work towards realizing the vision of 2030 Agenda of a world for children free from fear and from violence.

Tips for consulting with children

SDGs

STRATEGIC

1 2 3 4 5

EGYPTIAN CONTINGENT

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

13 CLIMATE ACTION

WORLD SCOUT MOOT 2021 IRELAND

WORLD NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FORUM

WORLD SCOUT MOOT 2021 IRELAND

WORLD SCOUT MOOT 2021 IRELAND

WORLD SCOUT MOOT 2021 IRELAND

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WORLD SCOUT MOOT 2021 IRELAND

Tips for organizing consultation with children

Consultation with children is a recognized way to include children's views and opinions in the VNR process.

Direct interactions with children allow for more in-depth conversations to enrich the report. At the same time, precautions such as good child safeguarding practice need to be in place.

1. Coordinating body



Governments often form an inter-agency coordination committee to facilitate the development of their VNRs. Make sure children are included as one of the stakeholder groups to be consulted. Other entities such as UNICEF can also be consulted.

2. Reaching out to children



Identify children's organizations to take part in the consultations. These can be local or national organizations, including schools, CSOs working with children, child-led organizations, institutions working with different groups of children (children with disabilities, refugee children, children in conflict with law, sports groups, membership organizations, etc.).

Make sure the process is inclusive and children in vulnerable settings are consulted. Consider having more than one occasion/ modality of consultation to include children from different age groups, backgrounds, and vulnerabilities to violence.

3. Method of consultation:



With participating parties, agree on a method for consultation, reporting and inclusion of results in the VNR. The consultation should identify issues that can be translated into legislation, policy, practice, etc. It is also recommended to involve children at as early a stage as possible in the preparations.

Some modalities of consultations include:

- Child representatives are invited to interact with Government
- Children organize consultation among themselves and report back on the results

Consultation with children provides a great opportunity for knowledge transfer and capacity-building for children. Organize the consultation to include expert speakers and group exercises so that children can be more familiar with the SDGs as well as the VNR process.

Also, consider organizing more than one form of consultation with children. In 2021, some Member States reported that multiple forms of consultation with children took place, for example, administering an online survey for children in addition to a focus group with a group of students and inviting a child as a part of the official delegation to the HLPF.

Tips for organizing consultation with children

Tips on conducting online or in-person surveys

Online surveys are typically focused on certain topics with a limited number of questions. Although they require access to information technology - and may need detailed data analysis - they also provide a practical way to receive a large volume of opinions from children.

- Develop a brief set of questions in age-appropriate and child-friendly language. Also, local languages, sign language and other modalities should be provided to ensure accessibility to all children.
- Test the survey instrument with children to receive feedback.
- It may be helpful to work with partners, such as civil society organizations that focus on children, an academic institution, or UN agencies
- Also, it is important to strike a balance between children's right to protection and expression. Do no harm must be the underlying principle.

4. Reporting of results in the VNR

Note children's participation in the 'policy and enabling environment' section, especially as a part of 'leaving no one behind'. Be sure to include information on the process of children's participation, such as the frequency of the consultation, age groups, child friendly materials being provided for the meeting, etc.

Incorporate children's concerns, views, and opinions throughout the report for each SDG. Dedicate a separate/special chapter compiling children's issues as related to the different SDGs.

5. After the consultation - following up with children

Make sure to share the results of the consultations, including the final report, with children who participated in the process. This could be sharing the VNR with them in a child-friendly language.

Child representatives could also be invited to be a part of the delegation to the HLPF and other SDG related consultations.



External Resources



Initiation Guide to planning children's participation

- [The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation](#) (Save the Children)
- [Applying the 9 basic requirements for meaningful and ethical child participation during COVID-19](#) (Save the Children)
- [Implementation Guide on the Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders](#) (Child Rights Connect)



Safeguarding children in events and consultations

- [Child Participation Guidelines for Online Discussions with Children](#) (Save the Children)
- [Guide to Keeping Children and Young People Safe at Events](#) (Plan International)
- [Child safeguarding policy for digital events](#) (End Violence)
- [Child Safeguarding and Communications](#) (End Violence)



For questionnaire and survey tools

- [The Global Kids Online research toolkit](#) (Global Kids Online)