

## United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### Input from a child rights perspective to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

*“Empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality”*

July 2019

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to securing a bright future for the world’s children, and are a crucial opportunity to realize their rights in all countries. As the future beneficiaries of the SDGs, reaching children, and particularly those children who are being left the furthest behind, is imperative to achieving the Goals overall.

This year marks the [30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) – the most widely ratified of all human rights treaties. In spite of near-universal ratification of the [Convention](#), millions of children around the world continue to be left behind and their rights denied, particularly those who are discriminated against or living in precarious situations of vulnerability – *inter alia*, children living in situations of conflict and humanitarian emergency, children living on the streets, those whose births were not registered or who lack legal identity, those most affected by environmental degradation, pollution and the impacts of climate change, children in the context of migration, and children deprived of their liberty and living in institutions. Children also suffer the impacts of poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion disproportionately, often with severe lifelong consequences, due to their sensitive phase of life and development.

Taking action on the SDGs in a way in which the most marginalized, at-risk children are the priority is both a human rights imperative and a pathway to multiply future development gains, by breaking down the transfer of poverty and exclusion across generations. The 2019 High Level Political Forum global review of the 2030 Agenda is a critical opportunity for accountability in this context, by casting light on progress and challenges to realizing children’s dignity and rights around the world.

Following a full-day meeting of the Human Rights Council to explore how the 2030 Agenda can help to advance children’s rights, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was requested to provide inputs on this matter to global reviews of progress taking place under the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, in broad consultation with stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the present report is provided as an input from the perspective of the rights of the child to the 2019 review process, which focuses on SDGs of central importance to children’s rights: – education, inequality and climate change, and specific targets on ending child labour and all forms of violence against children.

This report was prepared on the basis of consultation with member States, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict, the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN entities including UNICEF, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organizations, and children themselves. A total of 56 stakeholder contributions to the report were received.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, in partnership with the network organization Child Rights Connect, a consultation with children around the world was carried out in English, French and Spanish, in order to gather their inputs on the challenges and opportunities to realizing their rights through actions on SDGs. This

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<sup>1</sup> See HRC resolution 37/20

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children/ThematicReports/Pages/2030SDA.aspx>

consultation with children involved dissemination of a child-friendly written consultation online, followed by three virtual round table discussions held as WebEx videoconferences. A total of 153 children between the ages of 6 and 17 years from 11 countries participated by sharing their views, which are summarized below.

## **Children's views on risks, challenges and solutions**

### ***Risks and challenges***

In the consultations with children they highlighted that the signed international human rights conventions are not always respected.

Regarding education, some children identified an ongoing lack of access to education, especially for those living in isolated locations who have to walk to get to school. They also highlighted a lack of facilities, quality teachers and resources, and in certain contexts, that there are not enough schools. They noted that because of poverty many children do not have access to quality education, which affects their future job opportunities and quality of life. They said that corporal punishment is still being practiced in certain schools, and that some children do not access education because of poverty or because they suffer from violence in school.

Participants were concerned by ongoing, and in some contexts widespread, practices of child labour, domestic labour, and child trafficking. For example, one child flagged that many in their country were labouring in gold mines. Another noted that it is unhelpful that different positions exist on child labour, some seeking to regularize it and others to eliminate it.

Children highlighted that inequalities in health and education are problematic, and that those with less resources are "put aside", even though they are the ones who do not have a voice and who need to be most supported. Some pointed out the difficulties faced by children living on the streets, and that they often do not go to school. They also noted that access to drugs was "easy", leading to childhood drug addiction and related problems. Others pointed out that a lack of birth registration for children in street situations led to their lack of access to key services and to their rights.

Some noted with concern that children in the context of migration are not treated equally, and that many migrate because there are no jobs. One child pointed out the challenge of forced internal migration due to conflict and related issues in their country, and that children affected may suffer from bullying and mental health issues as they struggle to adapt in the new region and community.

Children raised great concern about climate change and related environmental challenges, including deforestation, which in one example was affecting the regularity of the rain and leading to drought and food insecurity. Air pollution was also a matter of serious concern to children consulted, and one noted that it had led to their classes at school being cancelled regularly, and to related health issues.

Children expressed their worry about those who are victims of violence, including sexual violence and child pornography. They also noted the harmful effects of the ongoing practice of child marriage, and of cultural barriers in which girls are seen as inferior.

Participants identified a lack of specific legislation or strategic documents concerning children, and the need to develop this so that national laws and strategies could work for them, with provisions to include them in the process. They also said that it is not always clear how children should be treated differently to adults in the justice system.

Children said that there is a lack of understanding and knowledge about human rights, particularly among children themselves, who are often not aware when their rights are being violated. They said that when their right to participate is denied they cannot contribute to decisions about their lives. Children felt that they lacked space to participate and have their voices heard in government institutions, and some pointed out that they had experienced difficulties when attempting to raise

awareness about children's rights, including that they risked being attacked, rejected, humiliated and disrespected when defending rights, which could lead to their loss of confidence. Some flagged that children's voices are not listened to as adults do not believe that they are capable because of their more limited experience.

### ***Solutions and good practices***

Children emphasized that States should more strictly enforce the rights listed in the conventions they have signed, and suggested that child rights could be set out in official documents, such as the constitution, which could also emphasize the responsibilities of adults towards fulfilling these rights. They said that governments need to take action on their promises, and that officials need to listen to people's opinions and care about people's wellbeing. Some pointed out the importance of global partnerships and alliances to achieve the SDGs.

Children proposed that financial support be given to make sure that all get a good education in spite of inequality, including in the form of free school meals, books, and free uniforms, as well as additional support to the children who are not in school. They said that the quality of education should be improved, and that parents must demand this from governments. Children identified the need for specific policies to enable pregnant girls to return to school and have opportunities.

Participants suggested that children be taught about solutions to climate change, natural disasters and pollution from a young age, including what actions to take to combat climate change and respond safely to natural disasters. Some proposed that all SDGs be taught in schools, particularly those relating to climate change, peace and justice, equality, including gender equality, and working together. They suggested that older children could help to teach younger ones through activities like games, so that children understand these challenges from a young age.

Children emphasized the need to respect nature and our resources, and to empower them so that they can take control of change, so that adults may follow good examples set by children and give them support to persevere and change small behaviours that improve the environment. Participants asked governments to take concrete steps to protect water and forests. Some students had formed groups with the aim of fighting pollution, including by cleaning up streets and rivers in their local area. They suggested that other child led groups could take similar types of action, with the help of social media to coordinate it. Some noted that their governments had already taken steps to protect nature and prevent deforestation, for example, by banning old cars to combat greenhouse gases. They recommended measures such as an international ban on the manufacture of plastic bags, using cars less and walking to school.

Participants identified the need for safe spaces for children to be protected from abuses such as child labour and trafficking. They highlighted the important role of education in combating child labor, and that families require financial support to help end this practice. Children suggested that sanctions be applied to teachers who use corporal punishment in schools despite its prohibition, and noted that governments needs to develop the labour market so that when children become adults they can get jobs. They highlighted good practices within their countries, such as national strategic plans against early marriage, and laws on bullying which make such acts punishable; while noting that there is still a need for more laws to ensure children's rights.

Children stressed that governments must involve them in key discussions and decisions, for example, by having child representatives in State institutions at different levels, and in non-governmental organizations. Some identified the need to raise awareness on children's rights and SDGs, including by supporting child human rights defenders, noting that non-governmental organizations could play a key role to support them. Others highlighted the role that children can play in raising awareness on the SDGs among children and young people, but also adults, who could be helped by children to embrace change and new concepts.

Children emphasized that they want to participate, and that their voices need to be listened to, as their imaginations can bring good ideas leading to real change, as they see things differently to adults.

They noted that adults and governments could work with them through children and youth advisory committees, and with the help of media and communications technologies. Some proposed establishing children's parliaments and authorized human rights and citizenship clubs in schools to provide spaces for their voices heard.

## **Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality**

A broad range of challenges at global, regional and national levels affect children and their rights, and the specific combination of issues is unique to each country context. A selection of pervasive global trends having a significant impact on children's rights across countries is outlined below. In addition to the challenges discussed here, the situation of children needs to be assessed in different national circumstances and within each context.

### ***Climate change and environmental hazards***

The global impacts of climate change and natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity, and climate change is having the greatest impact on the world's poorest people, with the potential to push over 100 million back into poverty by 2030.<sup>3</sup> Projections indicate that by 2050, climate change will have displaced at least 200 million people, leading to millions more children being compelled to migrate.<sup>4</sup> In parallel, environmental damage and childhood exposure to pollution, hazardous substances and toxic wastes present an urgent challenge affecting the spectrum of child rights. According to the World Health Organization as many as 93% of children worldwide live in environments where air pollution exceeds maximum guidelines, and over a quarter of the 5.9 million deaths of children under five each year are attributed to environmental factors – particularly air pollution, water pollution and exposure to toxic substances.<sup>5</sup>

Children bear a disproportionate share of the burden as they suffer the consequences of climate change, environmental degradation and exposure to hazardous substances more than any other group, due to their sensitive phase of physiological and mental development. They are subject to both immediate and long-term impacts causing disease, disability and mortality.<sup>6</sup>

As the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation heighten existing social and economic inequalities, the most marginalized and disempowered children are at greatest risk of suffering the worst consequences for their rights, wellbeing and development. The central impacts affecting children include extreme weather events and natural disasters, water scarcity, food insecurity, air pollution, vector-borne and infectious diseases, and impacts on mental health. For example, globally, approximately 160 million children inhabit areas at risk of drought, 500 million children live in flood zones, and 115 million children are highly exposed to cyclone risk. Beyond the implications of increased mortality and morbidity of the children affected, is their consequent increased vulnerability to abuse, child labour, trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Moreover, it is estimated that climate change will increasingly compromise drinking water and food supplies, disproportionately affecting the world's poorest children.<sup>7</sup>

The most marginalized children are also at heightened risk of exposure to pollution, hazardous substances and toxic wastes, pointing to the importance of non-discrimination, equality and justice in

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank Group. (2018). Climate Change Solutions for the Poorest Countries. Retrieved from: <https://ida.worldbank.org/content/climate-change-solutions-poorest-countries>.

<sup>4</sup> Relief Web. (2017, August 21). Climate Migrants Might Reach One Billion by 2050. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-migrants-might-reach-one-billion-2050>

<sup>5</sup> A/HRC/37/58; WHO, "Don't pollute my future! The impact of the environment on children's health" (Geneva, 2017), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> A/HRC/33/41

<sup>7</sup> WHO, Quantitative Risk Assessment of the Effects of Climate Change on Selected Causes of Death, 2030s and 2050s (Geneva, 2014), p. 80.

addressing environmental issues. The Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes has documented a “silent pandemic” of disabilities and development problems associated with early childhood exposures to toxic chemicals that interfere with children’s normal gene expression, brain development and hormonal functioning.<sup>8</sup> The Special Rapporteur notes further that tens of millions of children are engaged in hazardous work, including in artisanal and small-scale mines, where they are exposed to toxic chemicals.<sup>9</sup> States have an obligation and businesses a responsibility to identify, prevent and mitigate the exposure of children to environmental risks and climate change impacts.

### ***Conflict and insecurity***

Conflict, insecurity and fragility within States undermine all of children’s rights, and spur associated challenges such as the global refugee crisis. Children living in countries affected by conflict and insecurity live in the fear of violence, and face increased, extreme violations of their rights. Today the number of countries in conflict is at its highest rate in 30 years. According to UNICEF one in four children live in countries affected by conflict or disaster, and since early 2018 close to 31 million children have been forcibly displaced by violence and conflict.<sup>10</sup> According to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the recruitment and use of children by armed groups or groups designated as terrorist has been increasing rapidly, reportedly doubling or even quadrupling in some countries.<sup>11</sup>

The nature of conflict has also changed, placing children at grave risk of violations of their rights. Their duration has increased, and wars are more likely to be fought in urban areas and to involve civilian populations. The denial of humanitarian aid continues to be used as a weapon of war and there is frequently a failure to respect and uphold international law and standards of conduct to protect civilians including children. These trends are resulting in the killing and maiming of children and augment a scourge of preventable childhood disease, trauma and malnutrition. Among the most concerning trends is the use with impunity of public infrastructure and services, including schools and hospitals, as military targets or for military purposes, resulting in access to food, water, education and health services being disrupted and severely compromised, often for long periods of time. The children who survive through conflict suffer a legacy of consequences, such as a lifetime of physical or psychological disability, debilitating post-traumatic disorders linked to their exposure to extreme violence, and lost opportunities to attain their education and rebuild their lives and societies.

### ***Migration and displacement***

There is a growing number of children on the move worldwide, alone or accompanied by their parents. Children are driven from their homes for a range of reasons, such as conflict, climate change, natural disasters, poverty, or a lack of access to food, health, education, among other human rights violations. Yet many encounter danger, detention, deprivation and discrimination in transit and upon arrival. In the context of international migration, children may be in a situation of double vulnerability as children and as children affected by migration who (a) are migrants themselves, either alone or with their families, (b) were born to migrant parents in countries of destination or (c) remain in their country of origin while one or both parents have migrated to another country.<sup>12</sup>

According to UNICEF, in 2017 there were 30 million children worldwide living outside their country of birth, among whom approximately 10 million child refugees forcibly displaced from their countries. Further to this, in the same year there were an additional estimated 17 million children internally displaced within the borders of their country due to conflict and violence.<sup>13</sup> Other children are in

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<sup>8</sup> A/HRC/33/41

<sup>9</sup> A/HRC/37/58

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, 2019 “*Children under attack*”. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/children-under-attack>

<sup>11</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

<sup>12</sup> CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22, para. 3.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, 2019 “*Children uprooted*”. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/children-uprooted>

vulnerable situations as a result of the experiences faced in their countries of origin, during transit, and upon arrival, and are in need of protections provided for under international human rights law.<sup>14</sup>

Vulnerability and exposure to risks of multiple rights violations are intensified for children in the context of migration. For some, difficulties result from restrictive migration policies and a lack of regular migration channels, compelling them to move through irregular channels, turn to smugglers, and risk exposure to dangerous interceptions, perilous border crossings at sea or across deserts, and in particular the risk of falling prey to criminal actors.<sup>15</sup> Some never arrive at their destinations, and others are at risk of sickness, injury, violence, including sexual violence, detention, kidnapping, extortion, family separation, abuse and neglect, and exploitation, including forced labour and trafficking, and lack of access to services and to justice. These risks are particularly high for unaccompanied children on the move. Children in the context of migration may be held in detention, in deplorable conditions, either alone or with their families – a practice that is never in the best interest of the child and can amount to torture and degrading treatment. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Migrant Workers Committee specify that the detention of any child because of their or their parents' migration status constitutes a child rights violation and contravenes the principle of the best interests of the child.<sup>16</sup> Any kind of child immigration detention must be forbidden by law and such prohibition fully implemented in practice.

Some children are returned without due process guarantees due to their migration status or that of their parents, and likely face the same conditions and risks of human rights violations that compelled them to leave, resulting in unsustainable returns. Others have been separated from their parents with limited or no opportunity for family reunification.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Unchecked inequalities***

The unchecked rise of inequalities within and between countries is among the most defining human rights challenges of our time. Extreme concentrations of wealth and income continue to accumulate, with the richest 1 per cent of the global population now holding as much wealth as the other 99 per cent of the population combined. According to Oxfam, 82 per cent of all growth in global wealth in 2017 went to this 1 per cent of the population, and the bottom 50 per cent saw no increase.<sup>18</sup> Extreme inequalities within and among countries limit economic growth and contribute to an increase of instability, violence and conflict, including due to associated violations of economic, social and cultural rights, such as sharp rises in food prices, unemployment, inadequate standards of living and unequal access to social services.

Inequality and discrimination are associated with policy decisions driven by economic and political incentives which fail to prioritize children's rights, even for those in situations of the most extreme poverty, marginalization and vulnerability. Violations of children's economic, social and cultural rights resulting from inequalities take the form of, for example: - failures to realize children's right to social protection and right to housing leading to the growth of slums and inadequate living conditions, homelessness and related challenges. Unequal access for children to nutritious food, clean water, a quality education, and adequate health care, vaccines and essential medicines, may amount to violations of children's rights to life, survival, health, education and development, among others. Economic and social inequalities are often perpetuated on the basis of intersecting forms of discrimination, including, *inter alia*, race, gender, religion, disability and migration status or country

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<sup>14</sup> OHCHR/GMG, 2018 "Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations. Available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/PrinciplesAndGuidelines.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> OHCHR, A/HRC/31/35.

<sup>16</sup> See CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22 on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration; and CMW/C/GC/4-CRC/C/GC/23.

<sup>17</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, as well as the other core international human rights treaties address the rights violations discussed above.

<sup>18</sup> Oxfam, "Reward work, not wealth", Oxfam briefing paper – January 2018, p. 8.

of origin.<sup>19</sup> Children living in especially disadvantaged or vulnerable situations are acutely affected by high levels of inequality, including children living in institutions or without parental support; children living in street situations; children affected by conflict or emergencies; migrant, asylum seeking and refugee children; children living in rural or marginalized urban areas; children from minority groups; child victims of economic exploitation; children living with or affected by HIV/AIDS; children in conflict with the law; and children whose births have not been registered.

While many dimensions of children's economic, social and cultural rights are to be realized progressively, States have an immediate obligation to ensure equality and non-discrimination in law and in practice. Moreover, States should not take retrogressive measures or allow the existing level of enjoyment of children's rights to deteriorate in times of economic crisis or slow-down – in accordance with the principle of non-retrogression, obligations under article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and general comment No. 19 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights.

## **Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of ensuring that no child is left behind**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has contributed to driving significant progress for children worldwide. Almost every State Party has passed laws to protect the rights of children, and has set up programs to promote and fulfil those rights – benefiting not only the individual children involved, but all of society. However there are risks of regression and major gaps in implementation due to global trends and inadequate prioritization of children's rights in laws, policies, investment decisions and development programmes.

Across diverse socio-political economic contexts, the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has led to advances in child-focused law, policies and regulations, and influenced policy language and academic research promoting the respect for children as right holders. There have been important global advances in reducing overall rates of poverty and improving rates of child survival; in reducing hunger and malnutrition, and in expanding access to primary health care and to education. For example, since 2000, the global under-five mortality rate has been nearly halved – from 78 deaths per 1,000 in 2000 to 41 deaths per 1,000 in 2016, meaning that in this period 50 million children's lives were saved.<sup>20</sup> Today almost 100 countries have comprehensive policies in place to prevent and respond to violence against children, and over 50 States have enacted legislation banning the use of violence as a form of discipline, correction or punishment. There has also been important progress towards ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, with a growing number of countries adopting legal and policy frameworks outlawing these practices.<sup>21</sup>

However, in spite of an overall picture of progress the world is far from on track to achieve essential aspects of the 2030 Agenda for children. They are still amongst those left the furthest behind at all levels. Millions of children are traumatised, harmed and deprived of their rights to life, health and education by armed conflict, including those who are forcibly recruited or used by armed groups. Moreover, the available data reflect that wide disparities in development outcomes persist for children in different regions and circumstances, and the most marginalized children, including those who are most disempowered and subject to discrimination, continue to be the ones most likely to miss out on development gains. Further, in almost every context, children's voices are dismissed or

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<sup>19</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2019) *The pledge to leave no one behind: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, E/C.12/2019/1

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF (2018) *Progress for every child in the SDG era*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/progress-for-every-child-2018/>

<sup>21</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children

ignored in key decisions and programmes affecting them, denying their right to be heard.

Economic and development policies too often fail to prioritize the best interests of the child, leading directly to failures in ensuring the survival and development of children.<sup>22</sup> In spite of global improvements on child mortality, based on current trends more than 60 countries will miss the SDG neonatal mortality target, and UNICEF estimates that 60 million children under 5 will die between 2017 and 2030 from preventable causes. Stunting or chronic malnutrition was estimated to affect 155 million children in 2016, with only 13% of countries on track to meet their target.<sup>23</sup> In spite of overall global gains in expanding access to education, this is not the case for all, especially in the many countries experiencing conflict and insecurity. Moreover, the burgeoning crisis of weak learning outcomes affects far too many children across different contexts who do go to school.<sup>24</sup>

Gender inequality is a root cause of many barriers to the realization of children's rights. Girls continue to be among those most excluded across countries, facing double discrimination and abuse simply for being young and female.<sup>25</sup> While there is improved gender equality in education and better health outcomes for women and girls as compared to 30 years ago, such advances are not the case in all countries and regions. Because of harmful social norms millions of girls around the world also become mothers while they are still children, damaging their health and causing cycles of poverty to be repeated from one generation to the next.

There has been comparatively less global progress in child protection than in aspects of economic and social rights, though there have been significant improvements in legislation to protect and care for children, and crucial efforts to protect children from violence, and to support non-institutional forms of alternative care. However, the ongoing global prevalence of violence against children, including in particular gender-based violence, compromises children's rights to survival, development and protection. Violence against children has devastating impacts which endure throughout their lives, and is a core obstacle to realizing children's fundamental rights. Exposure to violence is compounded by existing patterns of discrimination and inequality, influenced, for example, by a child's age, gender, disability status, care setting, ethnicity or geographic location.

Disproportionately represented among the millions of children worldwide who continue to be left behind are those most discriminated against because of who they are or where they were born – for example, children in situations of conflict or humanitarian emergency, children on the streets, children in institutions or children in refugee or migration situations. In particular, the numbers of children who are in migration situations or internally displaced in every region are growing, placing increasing numbers of children worldwide at heightened risk of trafficking and slavery, including the worst forms of forced labour, sexual slavery and forced marriage.

Despite increased data collection on children in the past 30 years, weaknesses in data collection remain a core constraint. An over-reliance on averages and lack of disaggregated data concerning gender, age, disability, migration status and other grounds of discrimination seriously compromises effective policy planning and equitable implementation of the SDGs and children's rights. This is exacerbated by wide regional discrepancies towards achieving universal birth registration, with unregistered, uncounted children left without a national and legal identity, and much more likely to experience further rights violations throughout their lives.

To safeguard the future of our planet, and to better secure the rights of people of all ages, children must be placed front and center of development and peace efforts. All children have the right to survive and to thrive, and to live their lives free from the fear of deprivation, violence and abuse. An

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<sup>22</sup> Submission of the committee on the Rights of the Child

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF (2018) *Progress for every child in the SDG era*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/progress-for-every-child-2018/>

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO (2013) *The Global learning crisis: why every child deserves a quality education*. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223826>

<sup>25</sup> Submission from Plan International

approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which children's rights and wellbeing are the priority is not only a human rights imperative, but can catalyse development, changing the course for future generations.

## The identification of progress, gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges in achieving the SDGs

### Quality education

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Goal	Key target elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4.1 access to quality education and effective learning for all</li><li>4.2 access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education</li><li>4.5 eliminate gender disparities in education</li><li>4.7 ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and human rights</li></ul>

Education is both a fundamental human right in itself, and an essential means by which children are empowered to claim their rights and become agents of change for sustainable development throughout their lives. It serves as a powerful tool to break down cycles of exclusion, and is central to the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda defines a holistic vision for education under SDG 4, emphasizing the need to ensure lifelong learning, to reach those being left behind, and to activate the key role of education in realizing sustainability and human rights.

All children must have a fair chance in life and have the right to equal access to a quality education. Yet today millions are being excluded from education and the transformative opportunities that it generates: - according to UNESCO data, there is a learning crisis in which more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum literacy and numeracy standards (target 4.1). Within this, young women accounted for 59 per cent of the total illiterate youth population in recent years for which data are available.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, deep disparities persist in terms of access to education and level of attainment according to gender (target 4.5), location and other circumstances into which a child is born.<sup>27</sup>

For example, children who are disproportionately deprived of their right to education include, *inter alia*, children living in situations of conflict or humanitarian emergency, girls, children born into the poorest homes and communities, children living on the streets, indigenous children, children whose births were not registered, migrant children, especially those in an irregular situation and refugee children, children with disabilities and children with incarcerated parents. In spite of overall progress in girls' access to education, for example, disproportionate numbers of girls are still out of school due to gender discriminatory social norms and practices. These include girls affected by heavy domestic workloads, child marriage and early pregnancy, or simply because of negative societal attitudes about educating girls. Girls are also subject to higher levels of violence and abuse in schools.

For children from the poorest families, poverty is a barrier to attaining their education in many respects. Hidden costs, including that of schools uniforms, text books, stationary, etc., can prevent

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<sup>26</sup> UNICEF Data (2018) *Literacy*. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/literacy/>

<sup>27</sup> See UNESCO data, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs46-more-than-half-children-not-learning-en-2017.pdf>

them from attending school. This is compounded by shortfalls in the quality and facilities of schools in the poorest areas, such as inadequate sanitation, and by intersecting rights violations such as child labour. Children with disabilities are among those who face the greatest barriers, and are often placed in institutions or segregated education settings instead of inclusive education together with all children, due to discrimination and to a lack of necessary accommodations in terms of the available facilities and teaching methods.

Moreover, global trends of increased conflict, climate change and migration have profound implications for realizing the right to education for all children. Although the number of out-of-school children of primary school age declined globally from 100 million to 61 million between 2000 and 2015, progress has stalled since 2007 and regional rates vary widely. For example, there was only a 79 per cent net enrolment rate of primary-school-age children in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2015, compared with an average of 91 per cent of primary-school-age children enrolled globally the same year.<sup>28</sup>

For children living in conflict zones access to safe schools can be lifesaving, by restoring a sense of normalcy and stability, whereby schools serve as secure physical environments, including to access other critical services such as food, water, sanitation and health. International human rights law is clear that the right to education applies to all children at all times, including in situations of conflict.<sup>29</sup> Yet according to UNICEF attacks on education are high and increasing, and up to 27 million children are out of school in conflict zones<sup>30</sup> where schools are being damaged or destroyed, particularly when they are used or targeted by military actors. Students and teachers may be directly targeted, and girls are disproportionately affected by violence in or on the way to schools. In 2018, there were over 1,000 attacks on schools and hospitals in the 20 country situations covered by the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict. For example, in 2017 UN Country teams verified an eight fold increase in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 515 recorded attacks on schools and hospitals. In Mali, 657 schools were closed as of December 2017.

There is also evidence that violence in schools contributes to school drop-outs in many countries including and beyond those experiencing active conflict. For example, in Central America thousands of children have left school to get away from gang threats and harassment, particularly as they travel to and from school through gang-controlled areas.<sup>31</sup> Bullying and other forms of violence in and around schools are pervasive across different national contexts, endangering children's health and wellbeing, and compromising learning by creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.<sup>32</sup>

In many countries the expansion of private actors in education, particularly through the rapid growth in numbers of low-fee private schools, is undermining access by replacing public education and introducing fees which are unaffordable to the poorest families. In February 2019 the "Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education" were adopted, and are a key global initiative to address the phenomenon. In a recent report to the Human Rights Council on this matter the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has called for accountability from States to guarantee the right to education for all.<sup>33</sup> Although States are under obligation to ensure adequate investment in education in order to fulfil the right to education for all children, in accordance with their maximum available resources, the reality reflects that investment in education continues to fall short in many countries. This hits the most marginalized children the hardest, and strong budgetary prioritization of education in all countries is fundamental to achieving SDG 4.

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<sup>28</sup> UNICEF data (2018)

<sup>29</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/27-million-children-out-school-conflict-zones>

<sup>31</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

<sup>32</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children

<sup>33</sup> A/HRC/41/37

### ***Lessons and experiences highlighted by stakeholders***

The Consortium for Street Children et al. have highlighted that for the many children in street situations who either have no formal schooling or have dropped out of school, education systems and interventions need to be tailored to their needs. Different options should be available, including informal 'second-chance' education and vocational training, as well as pathways back to formal education.<sup>34</sup>

In order to overcome the multiple barriers and discrimination faced by children from indigenous communities in the Philippines, in Northern Mindanao 64 schools reaching 7,326 children were established introducing culturally relevant curricula and teaching methods.<sup>35</sup> In the Republic of Bulgaria education is being expanded for children from ethnic minority groups and geographically remote areas through efforts to engage with parents on the value of education, and language training for those who do not speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue.<sup>36</sup>

To support the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, in accordance with CRPD article 25(b), early identification and intervention should be an integral part of existing health systems, as well as education and social system actions for all children. For example, Chance for Childhood in Kisumu, Kenya, has found a significant improvement in education retention of children in street situations by deploying initial screening for developmental delays and communication disabilities, some of which are trauma induced.<sup>37</sup> In Ukraine there has been progress in developing new laws and regulations regarding inclusive education for children with disabilities in the general education system, which have led to an increase in the number of classes providing inclusive education.<sup>38</sup>

To support girls' equal access to education in all countries States must ensure that education is safe and accessible by every girl; take proactive measures to ensure that pregnant girls and young mothers continue to attend and complete school; and implement progressive laws and policies to ensure consistency between the minimum school leaving age and the minimum age of marriage.<sup>39</sup> In Togo, in order to address gender discrimination the government has introduced a policy that girls only pay 70 per cent of the fees paid for boys, has eliminated sexist stereotypes in textbooks, and in partnership with UNFPA, has introduced programs to address childhood pregnancy.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to target 4.7, Italy is undertaking measures to integrate sustainability and human rights educations into school curricula. In 2017 the Strategy for Education on Sustainable Development (ESD) was adopted, including teacher training on integrating human rights and sustainability topics. Similarly, Switzerland has developed the "Education 21" initiative, a national center of competence for education on sustainable development, in order to advance the implementation of education on human rights and sustainability in Swiss schools.<sup>41</sup> For human rights education to achieve its purpose it should enable children, particularly those at greatest risk, to identify and challenge breaches of their rights based on a knowledge of domestic and international law.<sup>42</sup>

In situations of insecurity and armed conflict, States must abstain from and safeguard against acts that disrupt education, including military occupation of schools, and to date the international community has undertaken important initiatives towards protecting education in conflict. The Global Coalition to protect Education from Attack is an inter-agency coalition formed in 2010 to address targeted attacks on education. Subsequently, the Safe Schools Declaration was adopted in May 2015,

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<sup>34</sup> Submission from Consortium for Street Children et al.

<sup>35</sup> Submission from Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

<sup>36</sup> Submission from the Republic of Bulgaria

<sup>37</sup> Submission from Consortium for Street Children et al.

<sup>38</sup> Submission from Ukraine

<sup>39</sup> See Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/DGPIntroduction.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> Submission from Commission Nationale des droits de l'homme, Togo

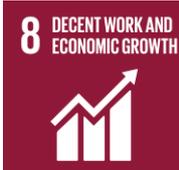
<sup>41</sup> Submission from Switzerland

<sup>42</sup> Submission from Child Rights Connect

and has now been endorsed by 91 States. It serves to gather support for the protection and continuation of education in armed conflict, particularly through implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Education Cannot Wait, established in 2016, is a global fund with the objective to deliver education more rapidly and through concerted action in emergencies as a joint initiative between governments, humanitarian and development actors, which so far has reached over 1.3 million children.<sup>43</sup>

In order to promote freedom from violence in educational settings the “Safe to Learn” campaign was launched in January 2019 with the support of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children.<sup>44</sup> As a national level example, to promote nonviolence and coexistence in schools in Spain, especially for children from groups at risk, the Strategic School Coexistence Plan (2016-2020) is being implemented in collaboration with relevant government agencies, institutes and stakeholder representatives.<sup>45</sup> In Estonia, over two thirds of kindergartens and 143 schools have joined the programme “free from bullying!” led by the non-governmental organization, Estonian Union for Child Welfare, implemented in conjunction with other anti-bullying programmes.<sup>46</sup>

## Decent work and economic growth

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Key target elements</i>
	8.7 end child labour

SDG target 8.7 commits States to ending child labor by 2030. Child labor is a major global phenomenon and rights violation involving nearly one in ten children worldwide, and as many as one in five children in the Africa region.<sup>47</sup> While much child labor remains hidden, uncounted and undocumented, the available data suggest that progress towards reducing it has been slow or stagnant. For example, UNICEF reports only a one per cent reduction globally between 2008 and 2012, with significantly less progress for girls than for boys.<sup>48</sup> According to the available data, almost 73 million children worldwide work in hazardous child labour, and 4.3 million in forced labour.<sup>49</sup>

Child labor is deeply harmful to children’s physical, mental, social and moral development, deprives them of their education, their right to play, holding children back from claiming their futures. It is closely interlinked with economic inequalities, poverty and the vulnerabilities induced by economic or environmental shocks. In some low- and middle-income countries disproportionately high numbers of children are involved in child labor due to dominant industries specific to each context, including mining, agriculture, fishing, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.<sup>50</sup> In its worst forms, child labour is associated with violence, slavery, sexual and economic exploitation, and even death.

<sup>43</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict

<sup>44</sup> Submission from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children

<sup>45</sup> Submission from Spain

<sup>46</sup> Submission from Estonia

<sup>47</sup> Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016 International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, 2017

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) *Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in response to a call for inputs by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)*

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

The Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes has highlighted that tens of millions of child laborers are also being exposed to harmful toxic chemicals.<sup>51</sup> The role of labor in the lives of children in street situations is complex, and children often experience multiple forms of work while on the streets, though simply banning them from working or begging can force them into the worst forms of labor and the associated risks to the survival, rights and development.<sup>52</sup>

SDG target 8.7 explicitly addresses the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Every year several tens of thousands of children are recruited by State and non-state actors and used in armed conflicts around the world.<sup>53</sup> In many conflicts, children take direct part in hostilities. They are also used as lockouts, porters, cooks or for sexual purposes. The use of children for acts of terror, including as suicide bombers, has emerged as a phenomenon of modern warfare. Children who are recruited and used are exposed to acute levels of violence – as direct victims, witnesses, and forced participants. Some are injured and have to live with disabilities for the rest of their lives. Girls have vulnerabilities unique to their gender and place in society and suffer specific consequences including, but not limited to, rape and sexual violence, pregnancy and pregnancy-related complications, stigma and rejection by their families and communities. All child soldiers should be seen as victims whose participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being.<sup>54</sup>

In 2018, 13,600 children benefitted from release and reintegration worldwide. However, according to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict the phenomenon continues, with the highest numbers of children affected in 2018 being in Somalia and Nigeria, where over 4000 children were verified as recruited and used.<sup>55</sup> Other recent examples where thousands of children have been recruited and used include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan, among others.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Lessons and experiences highlighted by stakeholders***

States should introduce and enforce legal standards to end child labour and child recruitment, and implement integrated programmes addressing parenting, harmful social norms, access to quality education or vocational training as an alternative, and strategies to reduce poverty including social protection, which has been demonstrably effective at reducing child labour. Preventing violence and abuse by providing social services helps to address child labour within families. Awareness raising programmes conducted within communities and among probable employers of child labour can also be effective. In addition, providing universal birth registration helps to ensure that a child who is too young to work can be identified as such. All countries should continue to ensure routine collection of quality data on the incidence of child labour.<sup>57</sup>

The EU seeks to address the root causes of child labor, including poverty and shortfalls in education and social protection, working through an integrated approach across its development cooperation, political dialogue and trade programmes. In particular, it seeks to address child labor throughout value chains, for example in the cotton, textile and garment value chains, and in cocoa production.<sup>58</sup>

In Armenia, with the support of the International Labour Organization and within the framework of the “Project on Assistance to Reduce Child Labour”, the government carried out a *National Child Labour Survey*, which led to new monitoring mechanisms and targeted actions to reach children

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Submission from Consortium for Street Children International et al.

<sup>53</sup> Data sources and methodologies are largely inadequate or absent so that the true number cannot be known.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Submission from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Submission from UNICEF

<sup>58</sup> Submission from the European External Action Service and the European Commission Services

involved in the worst forms of labour.<sup>59</sup>In Ecuador within the framework of the *National Agenda for Intergenerational Equality 2017-2021* a report was prepared on the compliance of policies to eradicate child labor, which made possible new joint recommendations to improve national protection mechanisms, services and programmes. <sup>60</sup> In the Philippines, the government initiated the *Philippine Program against Child Labor*, which aims to expand the creation and accreditation of Child Labor-Free areas and establishments across the country.<sup>61</sup> In addition, *Project Angel Tree* provides social services made available by sponsors or ‘angels’ to child laborers and their families, to improve their living conditions and increase the number of advocates against child labor.<sup>62</sup>

Children who have been recruited by armed groups or used in conflict should be treated primarily as survivors of grievous violations of their rights, and related legislation should clearly refer to them as children in need of protection. Child detention in such circumstances should be eliminated, as detention can have a profound negative impact on their long-term physical, emotional and cognitive development and can amount to torture and degrading treatment. The priority should be their unification with their families and communities, in accordance with the Paris Principles and Commitments to promote reintegration programmes.<sup>63</sup>

The international community has instituted important legal and normative measures in relation to children in armed conflict. Following the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), in 2000 the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities. The Protocol has now been ratified by the majority of States. Recruiting and using children under the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited under international humanitarian law and is defined as a war crime by the Rome Statute.<sup>64</sup> In 2007, the international community adopted the Paris Principles, which lay out detailed guidelines for protecting children from recruitment and for providing assistance to those already involved with armed groups or forces. They were followed in 2017 by the Vancouver Principles, which aim to prioritize and further operationalize child protection within UN peacekeeping.<sup>65</sup> The Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers is a key initiative that was launched in 2018 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, to explore the scope for a new comprehensive mechanism to ensure all children released from armed groups and forces have access to services to rebuild their lives.<sup>66</sup>

Further, the CRC has been strengthened by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children, established through Security Council Resolution 1612 in 2005. The MRM informs an annual listing by the UN Secretary-General of countries and armed groups responsible for grave violations. Offending parties are asked to draw up action plans to comply with international law: to date, 28 listed parties have signed action plans, including 11 Government forces and 17 non State armed groups. Examples of progress against the recruitment and use of children in 2017 have included the development or finalization of Action Plans in a number of countries, while others have been delisted when children have been released as part of peace agreements.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Submission from Armenia

<sup>60</sup> Submission from Ecuador

<sup>61</sup> Department of Labor and Employment, Philippine Program Against Child Labor (PPACL), available at <https://bwsc.dole.gov.ph/programs-and-projects-submenu1/clpep/philippine-program-against-child-labor.html> (last accessed 3 June 2019); Submission from Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

<sup>62</sup> Department of Labor and Employment, Project Angel Tree, available at <https://www.bwsc.dole.gov.ph/programs-and-projects-submenu1/clpep/project-angel-tree.html> (last accessed 3 June 2019); Submission from Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines

<sup>63</sup> Submission from the the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

## Reduced inequalities

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### Goal



### Key target elements

- 10.2 empowerment, social, economic and political inclusion
- 10.3 equal opportunities and outcomes; non-discrimination
- 10.4 fiscal/wage and social protection policies
- 10.7 child rights in situations of migration

***\* Please refer to above “Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality” – “Unchecked inequalities”; “Migration and displacement”***

### ***Lessons and experiences highlighted by stakeholders***

Empowering people and ensuring equality and inclusiveness are at the core of a human rights-based approach to sustainable development. In order to address inequality from a human rights perspective, while many dimensions of economic, social and cultural rights are to be realized progressively, States have an immediate obligation to ensure equality and non-discrimination in law and practice. The concept of minimum core obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights offers an understanding that everyone is entitled, without discrimination, to enjoy minimum essential levels of economic, social and cultural rights, to immediate effect.<sup>68</sup>

Social protection is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool to combat poverty and inequalities, and human rights based universal social protection serves to effectively tackle inequalities and entrenched patterns of discrimination, delivering on the promise of the 2030 Agenda of “leaving no one behind”. Building a protection system that puts children at the centre is essential, in particular for the most marginalized and disadvantaged, in recognition of the heightened vulnerabilities that they face because of their early stage of physical, intellectual and emotional development. As such, the commitment in target 1.3 to social protection including “social protection floors” (minimum guarantees for those families and individuals in situations of the greatest need) provides a crucial foundation for addressing child poverty for those in the greatest need.

Inequality affects children most directly in the form of unequal access to essential goods and services, which are the foundation of their rights, including to food, water, health, education, and the right to an adequate standard of living. Equal access to services and opportunities for children is also a crucial building block for fulfilling the SDGs overall. Early interventions and investment in children are a particularly powerful tool to reduce inequalities by breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty.

Achieving greater equality also requires tackling the root causes of exclusion and the many types of inequalities affecting societies, such as political, social and environmental inequalities. To achieve substantive equality, special measures must be prioritized to improve the situation of those who have been previously disadvantaged due to discrimination. In many contexts, this requires a review of policies and legislation to ensure that they do not allow for discrimination on any grounds.

Discriminatory norms and practices tend to be strongly entrenched in societies. For example “son bias”, whereby boys are advantaged with respect to educational and other opportunities over and above girls, reinforcing the gender discrimination that girls face. In order to combat discriminatory

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

norms and practices it is necessary to adopt proactive policies and integrated approaches to empower girls and overturn harmful social norms.

Children with disabilities are subject to heightened discrimination on multiple grounds, and are more likely to be poor throughout their lives due to lack of education and exclusion from vocational training. In both developed and developing countries, households with members with disabilities are likely to be poorer than those without, because of increased expenses and the likelihood of a member of the family having to give up work to provide care.<sup>69</sup> Coverage of children and adults with disabilities through social protection programmes is therefore crucial, in line with CRPD article 28. In addition, measures must be taken to empower children with disabilities with the skills to move out of poverty, including through inclusive quality education.<sup>70</sup>

Strengthening disaggregated data collection and analysis is also crucial, so that the situation of the most marginalized groups and children can be monitored effectively. Human rights indicators and a human rights approach should be integrated throughout the 2030 Agenda monitoring and review process. Moreover, ensuring free, active and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in implementation, monitoring and review is a key step towards building accountability.<sup>71</sup>

Several national level examples submitted reflect policies and practices to address inequality within countries. In Slovenia, by January 2019 all economic austerity measures had been abolished, and there are comprehensive measures to improve the quality of life for families, including in particular through social protection programmes.<sup>72</sup> In Turkey support is provided to families with children, and mobile teams have been formed to identify those living or working on the streets in order to link them with social services, education and vocational training.<sup>73</sup> To reduce inequality in Belarus a broad system of social protection and benefits targeting children and families with children exists, covering approximately a third of all children in the country. The government is also augmenting the system of benefits to children at heightened risk of being left behind, particularly children with disabilities.<sup>74</sup>

In Kenya, as a result of institutional collaboration on SDG indicators and data collection between the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, a list of population groups left behind was drawn up, and related indicators were identified to monitor their situation. This resulted for the first time in a set of indicators on albinism, and in self-identified indigenous persons being included in the population census.<sup>75</sup>

A new child well-being index has been developed and implemented in 25 EU countries to strengthen the monitoring of child well-being, comprising domains such as children's material well-being, health and safety, education, behaviours and risks, housing, family and peer relations, and subjective well-being factors. The index is disaggregated by age and gender dimensions, and contributes to better understanding of child well-being including by comparing outcomes across participating countries.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Children in the context of migration***

Migration can be one of the most meaningful ways to redress inequalities, to contribute to sustainable development and to realize human rights. But in a context of inequalities and increased intolerance and xenophobia, too many migrants – among them millions of children - are being left behind and unable to enjoy their human rights. States must adopt a human rights-based approach to addressing the rights and needs of children in the context of migration. Children around the world, regardless of where they are from and why they have left their homes, should be safe from violence, exploitation

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<sup>69</sup> UNICEF, Fact Sheet - Children with Disabilities, 2013, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Submission from UNICEF

<sup>71</sup> A/HRC/40/29

<sup>72</sup> Submission from the Republic of Slovenia

<sup>73</sup> Submission from Turkey

<sup>74</sup> Submission from the Republic of Belarus

<sup>75</sup> A/HRC/40/29

<sup>76</sup> Submission from Slovenia

and abuse, able to remain or be reunited with their families, and able to access education and health care services.

All children in the context of migration should be treated as children first and foremost, regardless of their nationality or migration status, or that of their parents. In December 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Migrant Workers Committee clearly stated that the detention of any child because of their or their parents' migration status constitutes a child rights violation in contravention of the principle of the best interests of the child.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in December 2018 and rooted in the 2030 Agenda, is a landmark agreement that recognizes for the first time that children must be at the heart of efforts to respond to the global migration situation. In cases of returns of migrant children, it is imperative that they take place in a child rights friendly and sustainable manner. The UN Human Rights Office, IOM, UNICEF and civil society organizations have developed the "*Guidance to respect children's rights in return policies and practices*" (forthcoming, 2019), which provides information for States to design and implement return procedures that are child rights compliant.<sup>77</sup>

In 2014, an Inter-Agency Working Group on Ending Child Detention was established, including multiple UN agencies, relevant UN Committees and Special Rapporteurs, as well as the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner. Under this framework UN entities and members have collaborated towards ensuring that the rights of children in the context of migration are upheld, and have advocated against migration related detention of children.

One national level example of efforts to protect the rights of children in the context of migration is UNICEF's work in Turkey, as part of its *Agenda for Action* to support children on the move. A Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme was extended to refugees reaching 53,561 children in 15 provinces, including 4,853 refugee children with medium or high protection risk who were referred to specialized services.<sup>78</sup> In South Africa, Save the Children has developed a best interests determination toolkit to improve the best interests determination process for unaccompanied children on the move. Developed within the South African legal and policy frameworks, the toolkit is aimed at field practitioners who manage the identification, documentation, tracing and reunification processes in the country. It is designed to ensure children's involvement and take into consideration the range of factors that have contributed to the migratory experience of the child.<sup>79</sup>

## Climate action

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### Goal



### Key target elements

- 13.1 resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards / disasters
- 13.2 integrate climate change measures in national policies /planning
- 13.3 improve education, awareness and capacity on climate change

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<sup>77</sup> Guidance to respect children's rights in return policies and practices, UNICEF/UN Human Rights Office/IOM/Save the Children/PICUM/ECRE and Child Circle, forthcoming

<sup>78</sup> Submission from UNICEF

<sup>79</sup> Save the Children UK South Africa Programme, Best Interest Determination for Children on the Move: a Toolkit for Decision Making, September 2010. Available at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/3829.pdf>

**\* Please refer to above “Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality” – “Climate change and environmental hazards”**

### **Lessons and experiences highlighted by stakeholders**

Climate change should be recognized as the most significant intergenerational injustice issue of our time. Children’s concerns around climate change, dependence on fossil fuels and environmental degradation and pollution must be heard, and unless urgent action is taken their future rights are jeopardized. Governments should respond to the message of the growing number of child and youth led movements against climate change worldwide, such as the global school strike for climate movement led by 15-year-old Greta Thunberg in 2018. Human rights commitments contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Paris Agreement make clear that States have obligations to take action to protect children’s rights and best interests from the adverse effects of climate change.

To fulfil children’s rights, governments, civil society, the private sector, international partners and individuals must collaborate to protect the environment, and achieve sustainable development that meets the needs of both present and future generations. Ambitious measures are urgently needed to minimize the future negative impacts of climate change on children by limiting global warming and mitigating climate change to the greatest extent possible, focusing adaptation measures on protecting those children most vulnerable to the impacts.

Climate mitigation and adaptation measures should ensure that children’s rights are an integral consideration in all respects. They should be undertaken on the basis of participatory, evidence-based decision-making processes that take into account the ideas and best interests of children as expressed by children themselves. Accountability is key, and children should be guaranteed access to effective remedies when they suffer related human rights harms, including those associated with business activities affecting the environment. Children and youth have a right to access justice and remedies for violations of their rights due to the impacts of climate change. The ongoing 2015 case of *Juliana v. U.S.* is an important example of efforts in this regard, in which young people have filed a constitutional climate lawsuit against the U.S. government, asserting that affirmative actions causing climate change have violated their rights to life, liberty and property.

States must do more to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children in relation to environmental harm and pollution. Broad measures are needed at all levels so that all children can enjoy a safer and healthier future, including access to adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water. Children human rights defenders around the globe are acting on environmental issues,<sup>80</sup> yet too often they face intimidation, harassment and violence from authorities. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that States 1) provide a safe and empowering context for environmental child human rights defenders, 2) support activities organized by them, and 3) ensure they are protected against intimidation, harassment and violence.<sup>81</sup>

One important regional example highlighted by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is the “Escazú Agreement” on access to information, public participation and justice on environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Adopted in March 2018, the Escazú Agreement aims to guarantee at regional level the rights of access to information and public participation in the environmental decision-making process, and access to justice in environmental matters. It is based on the express intention to support the rights of present and future generations to live in a healthy environment. To date it has been signed by 16 countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia and Uruguay) and ratified by 1 (Guyana). The Escazú Agreement is the world’s first treaty to include specific provisions on environmental human rights defenders.<sup>82</sup>

At the national level, States have reported important steps to recognize and protect children’s rights

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<sup>80</sup> A/HRC/40/60 (2019).

<sup>81</sup> Submission from Child Rights Connect

<sup>82</sup> Submission from UN ECLAC

to live in a healthy environment. For example, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay have introduced national legislation recognizing children’s right to a healthy, ecological and sustainable environment. Denmark, Saudi Arabia and Slovenia have adopted measures to protect children’s health from environmental degradation and chemicals. Serbia is using the media to raise children’s awareness about environmental issues, and Germany is promoting their participation in environmental initiatives. Many States, including Australia, Azerbaijan, El Salvador, France, Georgia, the State of Palestine, the Philippines and Switzerland, report that they have introduced measures to improve children’s environmental education. Oman and Qatar have each designated a “national day of the environment” to raise awareness on and promote children’s participation in addressing environmental issues.<sup>83</sup>

## Peace, justice and strong institutions

Goal	Key target elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16.2 abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children</li> <li>16.3 access to justice /rule of law</li> <li>16.6 accountable, transparent institutions</li> <li>16.7 inclusive, participatory decision-making</li> <li>16.9 legal identity / birth registration</li> <li>16.10 access to information and fundamental freedoms</li> <li>16.b promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws</li> </ul>

Violence against children takes place in every country and has devastating long-term impacts on children’s rights and wellbeing. No violence against children is justifiable and all violence against children is preventable.<sup>84</sup> SDG target 16.2 in which States commit to end all forms of violence against children, alongside the related targets within and beyond Goal 16, are a crucial opportunity to strengthen global efforts and ensure that all children may live free from fear, maltreatment, neglect, exploitation and abuse. Moreover, State parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have a legal obligation to protect children, without discrimination, from all forms of violence.

Children are the most vulnerable members of any society to violence, either at the hand of adults or of other children, and are particularly vulnerable to suffering from the associated long-term effects. The costs of violence on a society are extremely high in many ways, with negative implications for realizing rights and for States’ economic development and human capital. Protecting children from violence is both central to ensuring greater equality overall, and to supporting their access to other rights.

Today violence against children continues to occur worldwide, in both the private and public spheres. Every moment, millions of children are subject to emotional, physical and sexual violence, and one child dies because of violence every minute. According to the World Health Organization, as many as one billion children– representing half of all children – suffer violence every year.<sup>85</sup> According to UNICEF, nearly three quarters of children aged 2 to 4 experience violent discipline by their caregivers on a regular basis. Around 15 million adolescent girls worldwide aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime, and every 7 minutes an adolescent is killed by an act of violence.

<sup>83</sup> A/HRC/37/58

<sup>84</sup> As highlighted by the UN Study on Violence Against Children (2006), recommendations for the elimination of all forms of violence against children

<sup>85</sup> A/HRC/40/50

Approximately half of students around the world aged 13 to 15 report having experienced peer-to-peer violence in and around school.<sup>86</sup>

Violence against children takes place either at home within their families, or outside of the home, within their communities, schools, workplaces, detention centers or institutions and online. It can take many different forms, including armed violence in situations of conflict, trafficking and sale of children, sexual abuse and exploitation, gender-based violence, bullying, female genital mutilation or cutting, child marriage, violent child discipline practices including corporal punishment, and other harmful practices.

Children living in certain situations are at heightened risk. For example, those living in detention or in institutions, children with disabilities, children living or working on the streets, those in situations of conflict or displacement and children who are internally displaced, refugees, or in the context of migration, particularly those who are unaccompanied, and girls in any of the above circumstances. More than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation. Children continue to be victims of torture, trafficking, slavery and forced labour. Corporal punishment and violent discipline continue to be pervasive forms of violence against children in many countries, both at home and in schools or institutions, and corporal punishment is still not prohibited or sanctioned in certain countries' national legislation.<sup>87</sup>

In the context of migration, child immigration detention can amount to torture and degrading treatment, and the best interests of the child principle must prevail above all else. Evidence shows that detention of migrants in an irregular situation or asylum-seekers, including children, occurs more prevalently in the context of enforcing decisions of returns and during reception procedures of those seeking international protection, especially in border contexts.<sup>88</sup>

Goal 16 also contains the crucial target 16.3 to promote the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, which should include children's access to juvenile justice systems. While the right to access justice applies equally to children and adults, it is often overlooked in relation to children, including those in contact with the law, whether as alleged offenders, victims or witnesses. According to a report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the UN General Assembly, major obstacles impede children living in poverty from accessing justice, including the costs of legal advice, administrative fees and other costs. Children must be enabled to access justice, effective representation and remedies to enforce their rights and seek reparation in the case of violations.

In efforts towards targets 16.6 and 16.7 on accountability and inclusive societies, children should be engaged as active participants in decisions, laws and policies concerning them, according to their age and developing capacities. Information should be made transparently available in ways and formats that children can easily access and understand. Children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and for their views be heard and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Their effective participation can enrich decision-making processes, and children should not be excluded from participation on any grounds, such as their age, gender, disability, or other status.

Under target 16.9, States have committed to providing legal identity for all, including birth registration, which is a right under article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite progress since 2000, over one-fifth of births globally are still not registered, with 146 million children affected,<sup>89</sup> and the unregistered children are those in situations of the greatest vulnerability and marginalization. The right to be recognized as a person before the law through a legal identity is a gateway for being able to access justice and all rights, and importantly, the right to a nationality. Birth

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<sup>86</sup> UNICEF, 'An Everyday Lesson: #Endviolence in schools', September 2018.

<sup>87</sup> A/HRC/40/50

<sup>88</sup> OHCHR et al. (March 2019), Child Immigration Detention in the EU, p.2, <https://europe.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Paper-ChildImmigrationDetentionintheEU-EN.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> *Child Rights Now! (2019) Global report on the status of children's rights*, 69

registration and the issuance of a birth certificate providing proof of age and legal identity is often required by States, for example, for children to be admitted to school, or to access basic social services – even though the rights to health, education and other essential services are applicable to all regardless of whether or not their births have been registered. Birth registration is also fundamental to children’s protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation and trafficking. Children in the context of migration are at heightened risk of statelessness, including due to their births not being registered, and under the Global Compact for Migration, member States commit to ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation (Objective 4), and to “*strengthen measures to reduce statelessness, including by registering migrants’ births, ensuring that women and men can equally confer their nationality to their children, and providing nationality to children born in another State’s territory, especially in situations where a child would otherwise be stateless, fully respecting the human right to a nationality and in accordance with national legislation*”.<sup>90</sup>

Birth registration as a component of national civil registration systems informs the vital statistics and data needed to improve rights-based policies and action planning on SDGs. Strengthened efforts are needed to ensure the universal registration of all children, especially in regions and countries where rates of registration still lag behind.

With respect to target 16.10, to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, the CRC recognises children’s right to access information (art. 17), yet in reality it is difficult for children to access information on their rights and policies and processes that affect them, particularly in ways and formats that children can easily understand. In addition, many countries have not put in place laws that ensures children’s rights to take civic action, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

### ***Lessons and experiences highlighted by stakeholders***

Poverty, social exclusion and violence against children are intertwined, and undermine children’s rights in all countries. There is a legal and moral obligation to take urgent action towards ending violence against children. In global terms significant progress has been made, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children has documented examples from around the world of programmes and approaches for doing so. International standards have been adopted, strategic partnerships and alliances have been formed, information campaigns have raised awareness of the value of investing in prevention and the negative impact of violence on child development, and global initiatives have been undertaken to tackle specific forms of violence, including bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence, online violence and harmful practices.<sup>91</sup>

Regional inter-governmental policy frameworks on violence against children now span Africa and the Middle East, the Americas and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe. At national level, almost 100 countries have comprehensive policies in place to prevent and respond to violence against children, and more than 50 States have enacted legislation banning the use of violence as a form of discipline, correction or punishment. There has been important progress on ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, with a growing number of countries adopting legal and policy frameworks to outlaw these practices. The work of the African Union (AU) is especially noteworthy for the widespread impact of its Campaign to End Child Marriage. Further, in 2017, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) launched *Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040*, including a specific objective to ensure that “*every child is protected against violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse*”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Global Compact For Migration (2018), see paragraph 20.

<sup>91</sup> A/HRC/40/50

<sup>92</sup> Submission from the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children

Regional good practice also includes the adoption of the *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (2016-2025)* which commits all member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to protect children from violence and support child victims. In the Council of Europe (CoE) a *Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)* has been developed, addressing violence against children as a central issue. An Ad Hoc Committee is overseeing implementation and assessing how the 47 CoE member States prevent and respond to violence, and since 2016 at least 21 member states have put in place a national programme, action plan or policies to improve integrated measures addressing violence against children.<sup>93</sup>

The Barnahus model (“*children’s house*”) promotes child-centred interventions by bringing together the services needed to safeguard the rights and protection of child victims and witnesses of violence under one roof. The Barnahus movement and similar initiatives have grown across Europe and worldwide, and since 2015 the PROMISE initiative, managed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States in collaboration with Child Circle, is promoting such approaches across Europe, with 20 countries expected to establish a comprehensive model by the end of 2019.<sup>94</sup>

In Latin America SDG target 16.2 to end violence against children is seen as a rallying point, and 10 States have explicitly prohibited all forms of violence against children through legislation: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. In addition, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have introduced laws prohibiting child marriage. A number of countries in the region have adopted national policy agendas on violence against children and are allocating resources for their implementation in line with the 2016 *Road Map of Strategic Actions for Investment in Children in Latin America and the Caribbean*.<sup>95</sup>

The SDGs have also contributed to the creation of important partnerships and networks: 1) the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children was established to bring actors together to promote the achievement of SDG target 16.2 and related targets; 2) Alliance 8.7 is a global partnership committed to achieving SDG target 8.7 to eliminate the worst forms of child labour and; 3) the Global Task Force on Justice brings policymakers, justice leaders and experts together to ensure access to justice for all, including children, and to foster societies that prevent and tackle violence. Further to these partnerships, UNICEF’s #ENDviolence campaign, launched in 2013, aims to make all forms of violence against children visible – a crucial step to tackling an issue too often hidden away. More than 100 countries have taken part in the campaign to date.<sup>96</sup>

The burgeoning crisis of online sexual exploitation of children needs to be addressed through coordinated global prevention efforts, involving digital technologies, effective reporting mechanisms, awareness raising and educational programs for children.<sup>97</sup> One example of good practice in which businesses are being engaged to this end is the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. This initiative was established to work with the travel and tourism industry to prevent the sexual exploitation of children, particularly by supporting industry professionals to report suspected cases within their facilities. In 2019, The Code counted 336 member companies, and it is being implemented in 161 countries.<sup>98</sup> Another good practice is the WePROTECT Global Alliance, which has developed a Model National Response (MNR) to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation and abuse. MNRs are now being rolled out in several countries including Jordan, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines and Tanzania. Through a combination of strategies, this joint project enables child helplines, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, educators and other professionals to inform and empower children, to prevent and respond to online child sexual abuse and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Ibid

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> UNICEF, *Annual Results Report 2017: Child protection*, New York, UNICEF, 2017, p. 37, <[https://www.unicef.org/publicpartnerships/files/Child\\_Protection\\_2017\\_Annual\\_Results\\_Report.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publicpartnerships/files/Child_Protection_2017_Annual_Results_Report.pdf)>

<sup>97</sup> Submission from Equality Now

<sup>98</sup> Submission from ECPAT International

exploitation, and to provide necessary support to child victims.<sup>99</sup>

Target 16.3 to promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all must be read to encompass equal access to justice for children. This requires that children, or their appropriate advocates where applicable, must be able to use and trust the legal system to protect their human rights. As such the legal system must provide them with the means to do so through a transparent and effective process in which mechanisms are available, affordable and accountable.<sup>100</sup> Justice systems need to be adapted to the needs of children to prevent harm, to seek redress and to ensure that they are enabled to complain about violations of their rights.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, children have a right to be empowered to contribute to and participate in justice systems. The Pathfinders are a group of States, international organizations, and other global partners working to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, by establishing a Task Force on justice and a shared vision on how SDG 16 can be implemented. Their *Justice for Children Call to Action* highlights critical challenges and the responses needed, where children's rights are not being met in the context of justice systems, and where justice systems can be used better to prevent injustices to children.<sup>102</sup>

With respect to target 16.6 to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions, target 16.7 to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, and target 16.10 to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms:- Children should be empowered to participate meaningfully in national and global accountability mechanisms, including those in place to review progress on the 2030 Agenda via Voluntary National Reviews and global reviews under the High Level Political Forum. All children should have access to information about their rights and how to seek redress in a child-friendly manner; including through support services, legal and paralegal aid; judicial and non-judicial mechanisms such as National Human Rights Institutions. It is important that States ratify the Optional Protocol to the CRC on a communications procedure, so that children may claim their rights before the Committee on the Rights of the Child.<sup>103</sup>

Many countries have not yet built effective child-friendly platforms and mechanisms to facilitate children's engagement with local and national level decision-makers. Children's Parliaments, Children's Councils and similar fora supporting their participation enable children to mobilize themselves and coordinate input with their peers. In its general comment no. 12 on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee welcomed the growing number of youth parliaments, children's councils and ad hoc consultations where children can voice their views on decisions affecting them. As these structures allow for the engagement of a relatively small number of children, they should go hand in hand with wider initiatives to engage with children at all levels within countries.<sup>104</sup> States must also empower children to participate by addressing the lack of relevant national legislation on children's right to take public action, and their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, peaceful assembly and access to information online and offline.<sup>105</sup>

In order to implement target 16.9 to provide universal birth registration and legal identity, based on a recent review of best practices conducted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, States should take all measures necessary to ensure that all children are immediately registered at birth and issued with birth certificates. The right to birth registration and legal identity stands

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<sup>99</sup> International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC), 'Implementing the Model National Response: A collaborative approach to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse in five countries', Alexandria, Va., n.d., <<https://www.icmec.org/joint-program/>>

<sup>100</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) Input from a child rights perspective to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development review of 'eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world'

<sup>101</sup> Liefwaard, T. (2019) Access to justice for children: towards a specific research and implementation agenda. *The International Journal of Child Rights* 27:2 [https://brill.com/view/journals/chil/27/2/article-p195\\_195.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/chil/27/2/article-p195_195.xml)

<sup>102</sup> The Pathfinders (2019) Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+

<sup>103</sup> Submission from Child Rights Connect

<sup>104</sup> General Comment No.12 (2009), The right of the child to be heard, paras. 127-129

<sup>105</sup> Submission from Child Rights Connect

irrespective of a child’s migration status or that of their parents. All legal and practical barriers to birth registration should be removed, including by eliminating registration fees and fines for late registration; ensuring procedures for late registration; removing documentation requirements that are difficult or impossible to fulfil; protection from deportation for those in irregular situations; and ensuring that registration documents are easily accessible and comprehensible by all. Targeted programmes are needed to reach children living in the most remote and excluded circumstances, and birth registration must be continued during and after situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis.<sup>106</sup>

## Partnerships for the goals

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Key target elements</i>
	Cross-cutting

There is an urgent need for improved reporting on expenditures and programs directed at children, and for increased, equitable investments in child-focused SDG priorities. Domestic resource mobilization is a key source of revenue for implementing the 2030 Agenda and, as set out in target 17.1, States should mobilize resources through progressive tax and non-tax revenues. In order to allocate the maximum available resources to children it is vital that States take effective national and global measures to combat corruption, illicit financial flows and tax avoidance. Public finance management systems should be transparent and accountable on the basis of internal and external monitoring and audit processes, and governments should enable public budget monitoring by civil society, including by children themselves. This requires, for example, making key budget documents public in a timely manner; designing financial systems in a way in which budget lines for spending on children, including the most marginalized, are clearly specified; and empowering children through safe, age appropriate mechanisms to track and provide their input on expenditures.

Considering the scope and impact of activities of the private sector on development, business is seen as a key actor on SDGs, and is expected to play a strong role in their financing and achievement. In this context, private companies must be held to account to ensure that they “do no harm” and that profit incentives do not compromise the aim of SDG partnerships to put people first and leave no one behind. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementing and monitoring SDGs (target 17.16) should be based upon and report on their alignment with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles and general comment No. 16 (2013) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights.

The prominent role that private sector has been given in the 2030 Agenda is likely to increase business participation in the provision of public goods and services. In its general comment no. 16, the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that: “States are not relieved of their obligations under the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto when their functions are delegated or outsources to a private business or non-profit organization. A State will thereby be in breach of its obligations under the Convention where it fails to respect, protect and fulfil children’s rights in relation to business activities and operations that impact on children.”<sup>107</sup> The Committee further recommends that States

<sup>106</sup> A/HRC/39/30

<sup>107</sup> CRC/C/GC/16, 17 April 2013, para. 25

should require businesses to adopt child rights due diligence measures to ensure that they identify, prevent and mitigate their impact on children's rights, including across their business relationships and within global operations. As the 2030 Agenda does not specify mechanisms to ensure the accountability of private sector it is essential that States create such mechanisms.

## **Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum is required**

The High Level Political Forum should play a central role in promoting the implementation, follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda in a way in which children's rights are protected and prioritized. As the 2019 review at Summit level coincides with the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is a key opportunity for States to reaffirm and reinvigorate their commitments made to children in both the CRC and the SDGs, linking with concrete national efforts and actions.

***Rely upon child rights principles to guide effective SDG actions:*** When children do not have equal opportunities to reach their potential, all of society suffers the consequences. When children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, dividends are returned in the form of global security, sustainability and human progress. Activating the four core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – of non discrimination; the child's best interests; the right to life, survival and development; and right to be heard – through policies and actions on the ground, is the foundation for securing a sustainable future and realizing all human rights. In order to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality in implementing SDGs, reaching the most marginalized, disempowered children who are at greatest risk of being left behind is key. This requires transforming inequality and entrenched discrimination to break intergenerational cycles of exclusion.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines State obligations to ensure the enjoyment of the rights of the child at all levels. It determines children's fundamental rights, which are reflected throughout the SDG framework, including the right to life, survival and development, food, health and education, social security, housing, non-discrimination, protection from violence and exploitation, participation, respect for the views of the child, and their right to freedom of expression and assembly. These rights and principles should inform all planning, policies and actions on the SDGs, in particular those that directly or indirectly affect children. Moreover, it is important that they be applied to safeguard against any unintended child rights harms that could result from SDG partnerships and programmes, including through built-in safeguards and child rights assessments.

***Identify and prioritize children being left behind:*** Delivering on the pledge that no one will be left behind requires identifying which children are in situations of greatest risk of exclusion in different national contexts. It requires prioritizing the elimination of violence, discrimination including gender discrimination, and the reduction of inequalities in all policies and actions on SDGs. In practice, respecting and realizing children's rights requires prioritizing children in development policies and actions relating to financing, programmes and the monitoring and review process, including through: a) adequate financing and investment in children up to the maximum available resources, prioritizing the best interests of children; b) creating supportive, meaningful opportunities for children to participate and be heard in decisions and processes affecting them; c) a human rights approach to data and monitoring for accountability, based on transparent, quality disaggregated data monitoring the situation of all children, particularly those who remain uncounted and invisible.

## **Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality**

### ***1. Reach children who are being left behind first***

**The children being left the furthest behind must be reached first, as leaving the hardest to reach until last means that they are not reached at all.** Those most urgent to reach are those at greatest risk of rights violations in different circumstances of vulnerability: - *inter alia*, children in the context of migration or displacement, those on the streets, living in rural or marginalized urban settlements, in refugee camps, those deprived of their liberty and living in institutions, and children subject to discrimination because of race, ethnicity, disability or other grounds.

### ***2. Invest in children***

**The 2030 Agenda commitments to children must translate into investment up to the maximum available resources in their health, education, social protection and other sectors crucial to their wellbeing and development.** Clear allocations should be made to children, backed up by indicators and systems to monitor that the resources spent are being allocated to children, and to those in the greatest need. In this respect, international cooperation to make SDGs achievable in resource constrained contexts is essential, alongside participatory budgeting national level involving public dialogue, including with children themselves.

### ***3. Include and listen to children***

**Children must be enabled to participate and be heard on decisions, plans and actions on the ground that affect them.** Children have the right to participate and be heard in all issues affecting them related to the implementation, monitoring and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Providing the space for children to participate in public discussions and in decision making, in line with their evolving capacities, helps to ensure effective responses to children's most important needs and concerns. Participation is also the backbone of accountability: by pointing out gaps, identifying issues and rights violations that may otherwise unnoticed, it helps to flag the priorities for course correction.

### ***4. Monitor children's situation and their rights***

**Effective monitoring in which every child is counted is fundamental to track the situation and rights of all children and leave none behind.** Adults cannot be accountable to children unless monitoring is in place which tracks the situation of every child through reliable, disaggregated data. An essential step towards generating more and better data on children is realizing the right of each and every child to birth registration and legal identity, regardless of their national origin, migration, disability or other status. National SDG monitoring frameworks should also include child-focused indicators, and capacities for data collection need to be strengthened. Respecting child rights in the monitoring and data-collection process of the 2030 Agenda requires a human rights-based approach whereby core principles and standards are prioritized throughout the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of data. This entails the participation of children and all population groups in data collection exercises, ensuring that data is disaggregated by age, sex, migration status and other factors to enable the assessment of disparities, and ensuing transparency and the right to information, while respecting the right to privacy.

As outlined in this report, children today face major challenges to their empowerment and to claiming their rights across national contexts, which are exacerbated by pervasive global trends such as climate change, conflict and migration. Yet, as reflected in the summary of children's views provided through the consultation process, these are the same children who are an invaluable resource of ideas, innovations and solutions for the future. Empowering them, respecting their dignity and upholding their rights benefits all, from the present generation through to those who will hold stewardship of our world in 2030 and beyond.