



Child Rights Input

United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

March 2021

Summary

Beyond a health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be a child rights crisis with devastating consequences. Its fallout and the measures to contain it have deeply affected children, especially those who are the most marginalized and discriminated against. Children are being exposed to or experiencing violence, pushed into labour, child marriage, exploitation and trafficking. Yet their access to the services they urgently need – health care, social protection, education, and child protection – has been disrupted due to COVID-19, at the time that they are needed the most. Combined with the overlapping crises of inequality, environmental degradation and climate change, the situation poses an immediate threat to all of children's rights, including to survival and development, and to the rights of future generations. Responding to children's rights and needs, especially in their early years when it counts the most, is a guaranteed way to achieve transformative, sustainable development and prevent cycles of inequality and deprivation from repeating across generations. Children in all countries should feel secure in the knowledge that they have a future on a planet that is protected. They have the right to participate and have demonstrated that they can play a leading role in defining a better world. The task ahead requires urgently identifying and reaching the children being left behind, and placing their rights and best interests at the heart of all decisions, investments and actions to build back.

Introduction

In its [resolution 37/20](#),¹ the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to contribute to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, in particular by providing comprehensive inputs from a child rights perspective to the yearly thematic reviews of progress at the forum. The present report provides child rights input to the HLPF in relation to the 2021 review theme: "*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*".

This report was prepared on the basis of broad consultation with member States, UN entities including UNICEF, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, National Human Rights Institutions and civil society. Through this process a total of 59 submissions² were received. In addition, an extensive process was undertaken to gather children's own inputs, through a partnership with the network organization Child Rights Connect and its members. Focus groups were held with 449 children between the ages of 6 and 17 years old from 25 countries across all regions of the world, and direct virtual dialogues were held with 30 children from 15 different countries. The children who participated shared their views on how their rights should be protected and fulfilled through the SDGs, their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ideas on how governments can build back better.

Overview: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children

As highlighted by the United Nations Secretary-General, beyond a health crisis, the pandemic has proved to be a [child rights crisis](#) with devastating consequences.³ Its fallout and the measures to contain it have deeply affected children, and those who are the most marginalized and discriminated against have been affected the worst – children with disabilities, from the poorest households, girls, migrants and displaced children, and those living in conflict-affected settings, to name a few. Children are being exposed to or experiencing physical and psychological violence, pushed into labour, child marriage, exploitation and trafficking. For many girls and young women, the threat of violence and abuse looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes.

Yet violence prevention and response services have been disrupted due to COVID-19 at the time that they are needed the most. A sharp increase in poverty in many countries is depriving children of shelter, adequate nutrition and care. Untold numbers of children are going hungry, and experiencing or at risk of homelessness. School closures continue to affect millions, with as many as a third among them missing out further as they cannot access remote education. Those with access to technology are experiencing more screen time than ever before, facing heightened exposure to inappropriate content, online predators and screen addiction. Moreover, reductions in health service coverage due to the COVID-19 response are leading to increased child and infant mortality, and causing children to miss out on life-saving vaccines. Children are facing increased stress and posttraumatic distress, affecting their mental health with potentially lifelong consequences.⁴

Beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic, the world continues to be rocked by the overlapping crises of inequality, environmental degradation and climate change. The global situation poses an immediate threat to the rights of all children and of future generations, including their most basic rights to survival and development. Children suffer the impacts disproportionately, often with irreversible lifelong consequences due to their sensitive phase of physical and psychological development.

Children in all countries have equal rights, and should feel secure in the knowledge that they have a future on a planet that is protected. Six years ago the world committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a promise to make it a just and sustainable place in which all children are healthy, educated and free from fear and want. At the core of this global agenda lies the promise to leave no child behind. Mirroring the spectrum of children's rights, the Sustainable Development Goals reflect how realizing them is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Yet the steps taken towards reaching the SDGs so far have been slow, and too often children's rights remain far from a reality because of lacking political will, investment and other barriers. While there has been some very significant overall progress in recent decades, for example in child survival, nutrition and education, it has been extremely uneven, with global averages masking the way in which the most marginalized continue to miss out.

Millions of children around the world are continuing to be left behind, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic we are seeing a wholesale reversal of the gains made, placing the world far off-track from achieving the SDGs. Every child has the right to develop to the maximum extent possible and to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Protecting and investing in children, including in their early years when it counts the most, is the single most guaranteed way to accelerate development and secure a future for the present and next generations. A child's early years lay the foundation for their potential to develop throughout their lives, and in turn contribute to making their own communities and societies thrive. The benefits extend to that of their children and the whole of society.

The Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs calls for accelerated solutions involving global, local and people's action, and children have demonstrated that they can and will play a leading role in defining a better future. They are stepping up to demand real change in which people and the planet truly come first, and demanding action where previous generations have failed. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved how much the world can change when truly put to the test. Governments, in partnership with civil society, business and children themselves must build back better by prioritizing children's rights and best interests in every decision and action. With less than ten years left until the SDG deadline, the task ahead requires urgently identifying and reaching the children at greatest risk whose rights are being denied.

Children's views on the situation

In focus groups and discussions with children they were asked about the challenges they face today that are preventing progress towards the SDGs. Some expressed their mistrust in their governments, highlighting issues of corruption, which they saw to be a cause of poverty due to undermining the resources invested in children's rights, such as to health and education. They identified violence against children as a crisis affecting many, who often cannot escape violent situations or get access to justice. Children are deeply concerned about the poverty, hunger and inequality that they experience or observe around them. They said that the SDGs cannot be fulfilled while children are affected by the pervasive effects of poverty, such as child labor, malnutrition and homelessness. They said that malnutrition and hunger are causing many other challenges for children, like depression and other mental health issues, as well as poor physical health.

Children spoke about the marginalization and isolation that the most vulnerable children are experiencing (such as children with disabilities or children living in slums). They highlighted that those who are stuck in cycles of poverty cannot overcome anything, and that inequalities have become worse because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Children highlighted how, due to the pandemic, a lot of those who were already vulnerable have become extremely disconnected from everything, due to lack of access to the internet and technical resources to do things virtually, worsening their isolation and marginalization from society. Children said that the Covid-19 pandemic has made all major global issues worse, and has made it harder to fight against them.

They spoke about their lack of access to education and unequal access to education due to the pandemic, emphasizing that they cannot be empowered without education. Many children said that they or their peers experienced multiple forms of discrimination, including, for example on the basis of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or because of belonging to indigenous, minority or other groups. They expressed urgent concern about climate change and environmental harm, and said that the consumption of contaminated foods and water was leading to health issues for children. Children emphasized the plight and risks faced by many migrant and displaced children. They said that one of the biggest challenges they face is not being involved in any of the decision-making processes and solutions affecting them, and that their voices are not heard by adults and their institutions.

Building back from crisis

No poverty (Goal 1) & Reduced inequalities (Goal 10)

The covid-19 pandemic has exposed and deepened existing poverty, inequality and injustice, profoundly affecting children and the environment in which they grow and develop. Within just one year the crisis precipitated by the pandemic has dealt a devastating blow to the world economy, triggering the deepest recession in decades: an estimated 150 million more people have been pushed into extreme poverty, disproportionately affecting women and children⁵. Within the past year, the number of children living in poverty has increased by an estimated 142 million.⁶ The crisis has exacerbated all forms of inequality, hitting children in vulnerable situations the hardest. The situation is having life-altering consequences for children, and is harming them disproportionately due to their age-based vulnerabilities. While millions of families have been pushed into poverty by loss of income, already poor households were far more likely to suffer the losses, especially those working in the informal economy for whom lockdowns crippled livelihoods. A survey carried out by Save the Children revealed that in the first six months the most vulnerable children were the ones who missed out the most on education, healthcare, food, and protection. Yet despite families' urgent need for extra support to provide for their children in the wake of the pandemic, at least 68 low-and-middle income countries did not provide them with social protection, affecting more than 594 million children.⁷

As poverty is a main driver, the risk of child marriage, child labour, child sexual exploitation, and child trafficking has increased exponentially, as well as child enrolment in criminal, armed and violent extremist groups.⁸ The situation risks irreversible damage, and wiping out decades of gains made towards the SDGs and children's rights. Moreover, the impacts of poverty deeply affect children, and even short periods of deprivation can have life-changing impacts on their health, development and future chances, and expose them to greater risk of violence.⁹

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Child labour (Target 8.7)

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, millions more children are now at risk of being pushed into labour, and are at risk of being pushed into more hazardous and exploitative forms of work.¹⁰ ILO reports that a one-percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 per cent increase in child labour in certain countries, reversing modest gains against made against it for the first time in twenty years.¹¹ Child labour harms children's physical, mental, social and moral development, depriving them of their education, right to play, and future chances. In its worst forms, it is associated with violence, slavery, sexual and economic exploitation and death.¹² Target 8.7 commits States to end child labour by 2030, and explicitly addresses the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

Migrant children

COVID-19 related impacts on migrants, such as border closures, loss of jobs or work visas, economic hardship due to containment measures, or lack of social protection, have had a heavy socioeconomic impact on migrants and their families, particularly undocumented migrants and even more so on children.¹³ Many migrants and their families are low-wage, temporary and informal sector workers, and many continue ensuring essential services for people during the pandemic and as a consequence may be at heightened risk of infection. Others are at risk of losing their jobs or work visas, and economic hardship as a result of containment measures, such as business closure, yet lack access to social protection.¹⁴ Immigration detention centers, camps and other places where migrants are deprived of their liberty are high-risk locations for the spread of communicable infections, as they are often overcrowded and lack adequate healthcare, food and water, sanitation and hygiene.¹⁵ Despite the prohibition of immigration detention of children, the practice continues in many countries, with children being held in unhealthy and unsafe conditions, without access to an education and at heightened risk of violence and abuse.¹⁶ Migrant children may face additional barriers in accessing education as schools or the organisations providing special educational programmes have been forced to close. This may include situations where migrant children have no access to the technological means or other support structures to continue their education from home.

Children may not speak the language of the country they are in and are often not provided information in a language and format they understand.¹⁷

Inclusive access to essential services and expanded child-sensitive social protection

States have an obligation to ensure equality and non-discrimination for children in law and in practice, and the interrelated causes of child poverty, including violence against women and children, need to be addressed holistically.¹⁸ Comprehensive responses prioritizing children's rights are needed, including to tackle discrimination against those from marginalized groups and those living in situations of vulnerability. The basis to building back better for children is their inclusive access to quality essential services, and expanding child-sensitive social protection. The SDG commitment in target 1.3 to provide social protection, including 'social protection floors' (minimum guarantees for those in the greatest need), will be crucial, by strengthening investment in human rights-based universal social protection which places children's rights and needs at the center. Existing programmes should be made child sensitive, gender-responsive, and include specific help to the most marginalized children, including by focusing on children under five and reaching those with disabilities. Social protection for children needs to be combined with services and help for families, including universal access to health, education, water, sanitation, and child protection services.¹⁹ Moreover, all children in migration situations should be treated as children first and foremost, regardless of their nationality or migration status, and included in aforementioned efforts. Children must further be at the heart of migration governance efforts, taking a rights-based approach that prioritizes their needs.²⁰

Strengthening monitoring and data on child poverty

Child poverty needs to be monitored more effectively, and recognized as a top priority in national strategies and action plans. This will require collecting more reliable, disaggregated data on the multidimensional facets of child poverty, including through real-time monitoring of the situation for children in situations of vulnerability, and consulting children on the challenges affecting them. It is especially important to monitor poverty among children not captured by household surveys who are often among those most at risk, such as those living in institutional care or on the street, and more reliable, regular data is needed on the incidence of child labour.²¹

Respecting and upholding children's civil and political rights

Understanding that poverty and exclusion are the manifestation of social and political disempowerment, efforts to build back must involve strengthening civil and political rights, including the right of the child to participate and be heard in matters affecting them. Children have the right to be heard and for their views to be taken seriously, and the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the participation of rights-holders.²² States also have a positive obligation to foster a safe and enabling environment for children to exercise these rights, including by removing age-based discriminatory practices that restrict child participation, and by providing resources for Child Human Rights Defenders and child-led organisations. Further, as the pandemic is having far-reaching consequences for children's lives, it is critical that children participate in decision-making and contribute towards shaping the post-COVID-19 world they will inherit. Yet engagement with and participation of children has been lacking during lockdowns and ongoing responses. Children's civil and political rights should be upheld in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and they should be provided with accessible, age-appropriate information at all stages of decision-making processes affecting them. National legal and policy frameworks for children to exercise their civil and political rights should be strengthened. At the same time, if justifiable restrictions are imposed on a children's civil and political rights, the process, outcome and reasons must be transparently communicated to them.²³

Examples of promising practices provided in member State submissions²⁴

In Austria a range of social protection and complementary measures were implemented to support families, and in order to support children from specific groups in situations of vulnerability the family hardship fund was increased and extended.

In Guyana the government implemented a COVID-19 relief grant providing a stipend to households in need, which was primarily distributed in the interior regions where the majority of the indigenous peoples live. The government also implemented and extended an ongoing nationwide food-distribution programme for families living in poverty.

In Slovenia the European Child Guarantee is being launched to ensure that all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have access to essential services. In addition, measures were adopted to help families, including child benefits and a solidarity benefit for families without adequate income in need of social protection.

In South Africa a broad range of social assistance programmes are in place to help the many families living in poverty. The government augmented these through a socioeconomic relief package, including a monthly COVID-19 Relief Grant and temporary top-ups to the Foster Child Grant, Care Dependency Grant, and Child Support Grant.

In Italy the government is empowering children and young people by funding projects to develop their potential as active and responsible citizens. The funds target projects to accelerate recovery from the pandemic in collaboration with civil society, facilitating dialogue, non-discrimination and equality, and the inclusion of disadvantaged children.

In Ukraine the Ministry of Youth and Sports financially supports and cooperates with children's organizations, consulting with their leaders and members, including online. For example, to facilitate ties between children's organizations through joint open discussion of priorities, the Ministry and Regional State Administration held a conference involving 22 children's public organizations in 2020.

Children's health, education and wellbeing

Zero hunger (Goal 2)

Every child has the right to develop to the maximum extent possible and to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Protecting and investing in children, especially in their early years when it counts the most, is the single most guaranteed way to accelerate development and secure a future for the present and next generations. A child's early years lay the foundation for their potential to develop throughout their lives, and in turn contribute to making their own communities and societies thrive. The benefits multiply, extending to that of their children and the whole of society. There is strong evidence that early investments in children's health, education, and development pay off economically, and the most successful countries and societies around the world are those that invest in their children and protect their rights. It is urgent to take action towards building back and reaching SDGs through targeted investments to protect and provide for the needs of the most marginalized children in their early years.²⁵

A child's early years lay the foundation for their potential to develop throughout their lives, and in turn contribute to making their own communities and societies thrive

Good health & wellbeing (Goal 3)

Economic downturn, food supply disruptions and disruptions to essential health and nutrition services caused by the COVID-19 crisis are augmenting the incidence of hunger and malnutrition among children in both rich and poor countries, and causing dangerous levels of disruption to children's health services. Overloads of covid-19 cases have unmasked existing weaknesses in health systems and caused disruption to essential health services, with children's access to health and life-saving vaccines being directly affected, with nearly 100 million children under one year old missing out on life-saving vaccines due to COVID-19 measures.²⁶ Routine immunization is one of the worst affected services for children. It has been substantially reduced in at least 68 countries, a situation estimated to affect around 80 million children under one year old,²⁷ and placing millions of children at risk of infectious diseases such as diphtheria, measles and polio.²⁸

Nearly 100 million children under one year old are missing out on life-saving vaccines due to COVID-19 measures

Reductions in health service coverage are also leading to increased rates of child and infant mortality. Children already faced huge health challenges – in 2019, 5.2 million children under five died,²⁹ and half of the world's people did not have access to basic health services³⁰. A study published in the Lancet estimated that an additional 2 million under-five deaths may occur within a year as a result of the health crisis.³¹

Zero hunger

Malnutrition is the single biggest cause of child deaths, and is associated with poor cognitive development and physical health, as well as lifelong impacts on a child's health, education and future potential.³² During their earliest years children are extremely vulnerable to irreversible damage from chronic malnutrition. Even before the pandemic there was great cause for concern: as many as one in five children under-five were stunted, and 47 million children experienced wasting.³³ Prior to the pandemic, soup kitchens and school meal programmes were able to provide minimum daily meals to vulnerable children in many countries, but due to lockdowns and school closures malnutrition is now also affecting many among the millions of children confined at home. Early assessments indicate that an additional 6.7 million children under five suffered from wasting and became dangerously undernourished last year due to the impacts of COVID-19.³⁴ Overall, the health and nutrition crisis affecting children is causing rapid backsliding in progress towards SDGs 2 and 3, and infringes the rights of the child, including the right to life, to development and to food, enshrined in Articles 6 and 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³⁵ UNICEF, FAO, WFP and WHO have called for a \$2.4 billion investment to protect children from malnutrition, as well as concerted action to safeguard and promote their access to nutritious, safe, and affordable food, through expanded social protection, services for early detection of child wasting, and the maintenance of school meals for children in need.³⁶

Girls' health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (Goals 3 & 5)

Access to healthcare, already limited for girls and women due to lacking gender friendly approaches and intersecting forms of socio-economic discrimination, have worsened due to the crisis, with disruptions to health services disproportionately affecting girls and young women. Girls are also facing time poverty to access health information and services due to the greatly increased burden of domestic and care work they are carrying out in the home as a consequence of lockdowns and confinement. The situation is robbing millions of girls around the world of their health and their future, placing them at heightened risk of becoming ill and of missing out on their education, in many cases with no possibility to return.³⁷ Inadequate and disrupted access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services is further undermining girls' bodily autonomy and their agency over decisions about their bodies, and placing them at heightened risk of adolescent pregnancy, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

Children's mental health

The COVID-19 pandemic has further had a detrimental impact on children's mental health, with potentially lifelong consequences, as they face increased isolation, anxiety, stress and posttraumatic distress.³⁸ It is known that stress and anxiety can have negative and long-lasting effects on children's mental health causing, for example, sleep and eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression – yet approximately 70 per cent of mental health services

Children are facing increased stress and posttraumatic distress, affecting their mental health with lifelong consequences

for children have been disrupted by the pandemic.³⁹ In addition to the isolation and loss of peer support caused by lockdowns, school closures and physical distancing, measures to curb the spread have hindered children's right to play, with children lacking a private space for play being particularly disadvantaged. A lack of outdoor access and the closure of sports and recreational facilities further reduced children's opportunities for healthy levels of exercise.⁴⁰ In various consultations of children undertaken during the COVID-19 crisis, they expressed feeling unsafe, insecure, scared, lonely and isolated.⁴¹

Ensuring scaled up investment and access for all children to health and nutrition

Providing health access to all children in the present circumstances requires both maintaining and strengthening health and nutrition services with a focus on ensuring equitable coverage for all children, by removing the financial and non-financial barriers that they face. Governments should scale up investment in national budgets, with children's nutrition and primary health care being fully funded and implemented as a priority.⁴² In many countries much stronger investment is needed to uphold children's right to health, and health services must be made available for free at the point of use, especially for the most marginalized children and their families. While many countries have national nutrition policies and targets, financing remains a central challenge to implementation. Special measures are needed to guarantee children's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including

comprehensive sexuality education and the continuity of age-responsive sexual and reproductive health services to ensure children can make informed choices about their bodies, free from discrimination, coercion or violence.⁴³

Education (Goal 4)

Although the SDG on education (Goal 4) is not being assessed this year through the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, it has central relevance due to its far-reaching implications for children's rights and all SDGs. At their peak, school closures due to COVID-19 affected almost 90 per cent of students around the world, including 743 million girls,⁴⁴ and the total number of children out of school due to the pandemic is projected to increase by nearly 25 million.⁴⁵ While widespread use of online platforms has helped mitigate gaps in many children's education, more than a third of all schoolchildren worldwide have not been able to access remote learning during school shutdowns. The poorest have largely been the ones excluded, causing them to be left further behind. For example, due to not living in a suitable home-learning environment, or because of lacking access to a computer or an adequate internet connection for remote learning.⁴⁶ Many among them, particularly girls, will never be able to return to formal education, leaving them unprepared to develop their full potential.⁴⁷ In many contexts school closures also limit children's usual daily access to school meals, exposing them to malnutrition.

School closures due to COVID-19 affected almost 90 per cent of students, yet more than a third of schoolchildren have not been able to access remote learning

While widespread use of online platforms has helped mitigate gaps in many children's education, more than a third of all schoolchildren worldwide have not been able to access remote learning during school shutdowns. The poorest have largely been the ones excluded, causing them to be left further behind. For example, due to not living in a suitable home-learning environment, or because of lacking access to a computer or an adequate internet connection for remote learning.⁴⁶ Many among them, particularly girls, will never be able to return to formal education, leaving them unprepared to develop their full potential.⁴⁷ In many contexts school closures also limit children's usual daily access to school meals, exposing them to malnutrition.

The impacts of disrupted education are extensive, and are compounded by the psychological effects of isolation on children, as they miss out on peer interaction and support, as well as a crucial first line warning system for potential situations of violence, exploitation or abuse in the home. Among the children who do have access to computers and technology, many are engaging in more screen time than ever before, elevating their risk of exposure to inappropriate content, online predators and screen addiction. In many cases, parents and caregivers do not have the awareness and skills needed to support children's responsible use of the internet and safety in the digital environment. As has been highlighted in the recent General comment (No. 25, 2021) by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, "the use of digital devices should not be harmful, nor should it be a substitute for in-person interactions among children or between children and parents or caregivers." Further, the Committee recommends providing training and advice on the appropriate use of digital devices to parents, caregivers, educators and other relevant actors, taking into account the research on the effects of digital technologies on children's development, especially during the critical neurological growth spurts of early childhood and adolescence.⁴⁸

Examples of promising practices provided in member State submissions⁴⁹

In Denmark the government has maintained early childhood education and care services during lockdown in recognition of their crucial role in children's development, and reopened primary schools as soon as possible, recognizing the protection and support that these structures provide to children, especially those most vulnerable.

In Malta paid parental leave and monthly benefits were rolled out, reducing the pressure on parents looking after their children at home during lockdown. The government also introduced free childcare for healthcare workers, supporting care for children in their early years.

In Bahrain the government provided remote counselling services to mothers and their children during the period of confinement, as well as home visits when needed, transferring cases in which children were deemed at risk to specialized bodies for follow-up.

In the United Arab Emirates the government developed and broadly disseminated a child-friendly educational story ("Macronia") to help reduce children's fear and anxiety over the pandemic. The story provides children with age appropriate information about COVID-19, its implications, and how they can help to mitigate its spread.

In El Salvador the government implemented a project to support psychological care services for children and their family members suffering mental health difficulties due to the pandemic. It provided participants with psychological care services online, designed to help them face the challenges with holistic solutions.

The government of Ukraine is helping children to cope with the pandemic through sports. Its new strategy includes programmes to ensure the continuation of sporting activities for children, e.g. through summer swimming schools

in open waters; teaching children about sports and healthy lifestyles in schools, promoting sports in the media, and engaging with civil society including children's organizations.

Singapore aims to leave no child behind during the pandemic by implementing additional learning and financial support for students, paying special attention to disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs, to help ensure that they continue their education.

In Cuba, following the suspension of the school year two educational national television channels were established. The MiClaseTV mobile application was launched to download teleclasses for free, alongside the CubaEduca Portal and the implementation of a national 24-hour online tutoring service. Measures were also adopted to support children's home schooling, particularly through a wage guarantee for working family members caring for children.

In Ireland the government has kept schools, early learning and childcare services open, supported by a funding package and "roadmap" of programmes to ensure schools could operate safely in line with public health advice on mitigating the spread of COVID-19. To support every child's education it is also allocating over 20% of its annual education budget on provisions for children with special educational needs.

In the Maldives the government ensured that children, including children with disabilities, had continued access to medical supplies and services. The relevant Ministry contacted parents and carers of children with disabilities to assess and respond to unmet needs, such as access to medication, essential care items and health care services.

To overcome the challenges posed by distance education and ensure access for all children, Cyprus has accelerated its efforts to develop digital education systems and appropriate assessment tools, focusing on pupils' and teachers' digital skills, with a pedagogical approach focused on inclusion and tackling inequalities.

Poland is supporting students and teachers to access computer equipment, including by lending them computers and equipment, and through programmes enabling businesses to donate equipment to educational institutions.

Violence against children

Peace, justice, & strong institutions (Goal 16)

Violence against children affects more than 1 billion children each year – in every community, city and country – with devastating impacts on children's health, education and lifelong potential. It erodes societies, jeopardizes sustainable development and compromises children's rights to survival, development and protection, among others. The risk that a child will be subject to violence is compounded by existing forms of discrimination and inequality, for example, associated with their gender, disability status or care setting.⁵⁰ Violence against children often takes place in their own homes under the care of parents or other family members, and children may also be at risk outside of the home, in particular children living in institutions, children living on the street, and those living in situations of conflict, migration or displacement.

Violence prevention and response services have been disrupted due to COVID-19 at the time that they are needed the most

The world was already far from being on track to achieve SDG target 16.2 to eradicate violence against children by 2030 before the pandemic hit, and now what little progress had been made is being reversed.⁵¹ The same is true of efforts to end gender-based violence, including child marriage, female genital mutilation, and other harmful practices against women and girls (SDG targets 5.2 and 5.3).⁵² The measures in place to contain and respond to COVID-

19 have sharply increased levels of violence against children across countries. School closures, confinement and movement restrictions, the disruption of already limited child protection services, added family stress related to job loss, isolation, and anxieties over health and finances have significantly increased the risk of children experiencing or being exposed to violence at home.⁵³

Domestic violence

Countries are reporting increases in domestic violence, demand for emergency shelters and helplines, and online sexual exploitation of children. According to a global survey conducted by Save the Children nearly 32% of

households had a child, parent or caregiver reporting violence in the home since the start of the pandemic.⁵⁴ The multi-stakeholder #COVIDUnder19 survey, which captured over 30,000 children's experiences under COVID-19, highlights that and half of them reported experiencing or witnessing violence since the pandemic started. Children who participated said that they felt less safe where they live, and that they had less knowledge than before lockdown on how to get help and support. Children from specific groups, including from minority or migrant communities, children with disabilities, and LGBT children reported experiencing higher levels of violence.⁵⁵

Strengthening prevention and response measures

Despite the scale of the hidden crisis of violence against children, the capacity of essential services to effectively prevent and respond has significantly decreased, with an estimated 1.8 billion children living in countries where violence prevention and response services have been disrupted due to COVID-19.⁵⁶ Moreover, during confinement, school closures and other measures, children are less visible to the individuals and professionals normally engaged in their protection. School closures, in many cases over extended periods of time, mean that children miss out on a crucial line of protection and warning against violence that is provided by school staff and the community. Furthermore, increased unsupervised internet use has exacerbated sexual exploitation and cyber-bullying, and Europol's law enforcement partners are reporting "increased online activity by those seeking child abuse material".⁵⁷ The COVID-19 crisis has also led to increased hate speech and activities of violent extremist groups. Further the ongoing use of the death penalty has extremely adverse psychological, physical, social, and economic effects on children, whether it is they or their caregivers being sentenced, which are being compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the absolute prohibition on the application of the death penalty for child defendants under international law,⁵⁸ in some jurisdictions children are still being sentenced to death.⁵⁹

Responding effectively to increased violence against children due to the COVID-19 pandemic is essential to protect them from severe lifelong consequences. It requires strong, uninterrupted child protection systems, and mobilising effective, multi-sectoral responses backed by adequate investment to enable their application at scale. Despite the extremely high social and economic cost of violence against children, legal and policy measures to address it are falling short and investments remain too low.⁶⁰ States should prohibit and legally ban all forms of violence against children in all settings, and should recognise child protection interventions and services as essential services to be guaranteed throughout and beyond the pandemic.⁶¹ To combat child sexual abuse and exploitation taking place online, a comprehensive approach is required which empowers children and their caregivers through human rights, digital and sexual education, and providing the necessary skills to children to be safe online.⁶² Further, the absolute abolition of the death penalty for children, and the protection of children facing the death penalty, is crucial to ending violence against children.⁶³

Children affected by armed conflict

Children living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts face extreme levels of abuse, exploitation, deprivation and violence, often with high levels of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition— conditions and risks exacerbated by the pandemic and efforts to contain the virus. Globally, one in five children are living in areas affected by armed conflict,⁶⁴ and the COVID-19 pandemic has rendered the children living amidst hostilities even more vulnerable since its onset. Measures to contain it have limited the ability of child protection actors to carry out vital work to monitor, end and prevent grave violations against children. For example, the COVID-19 crisis has greatly reduced opportunities for engagement with parties to conflict, facilitating the release of children associated with parties to conflict and providing appropriate response to children affected by armed conflict.

Every year several tens of thousands of children are recruited by State and non-state actors and used in armed conflicts around the world,⁶⁵ and restrictions disrupting education, healthcare and social services have placed children at further increased risk of being recruited and used, or abducted by parties to conflict. Moreover, the surge in complex, protracted conflicts in recent decades, along with the associated violence and human rights violations, has led to forced displacement with a record 79.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2019, including an estimated 30–34 million children.⁶⁶ Children from refugee and internally displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to multiple human rights risks and to negative coping strategies.⁶⁷

Reaching and protecting children in fragile contexts

Providing humanitarian assistance, including to children, has become even more difficult in the COVID-19 context, as movement restrictions and a reduced field presence of humanitarian and protection actors exacerbate challenges in already adverse protection environments marked by continuing attacks against aid workers and the looting of supplies. This development comes after 2019 had already seen a rise of more than 400 per cent in incidents of denial of humanitarian access in country situations on the children and armed conflict agenda.⁶⁸ Continuing attacks on schools and hospitals, including healthcare personnel, are particularly egregious, especially considering the heavy burden the pandemic places on healthcare facilities and the fragile state of health systems in countries affected by conflict. Further, in some situations it has been reported that armed forces and groups take advantage of COVID-19 restrictions, particularly the closing of schools and other civilian infrastructure, by occupying and using such facilities for military purposes.⁶⁹

Achieving the SDGs for children everywhere will require reaching those most vulnerable who are being left behind, which means reaching children living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, which are furthest behind in achieving the SDGs and the least able to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Collective efforts will be critical for building a stronger nexus between principled humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions toward achieving the SDGs for these most vulnerable children.⁷⁰

Children deprived of liberty

As emphasized in the April 2020 Policy Brief of the UN Secretary-General, and the Technical Notes of the Interagency Working Group on Violence Against Children, WHO, and UNICEF, children deprived of their liberty have faced a disproportionately adverse impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are exposed to heightened risk of overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, insufficient access to water, malnutrition, and have been found to have generally poorer health than the rest of the population. Their psychosocial development is further stunted through forced isolation, stigma, violence, and neglect.⁷¹ Children in detention for actual or alleged association with armed groups, including groups designated as terrorist, or those detained on the grounds of national security reasons, have faced increased vulnerabilities, in particular risk of violence, including sexual violence, and exposure to the Covid-19 pandemic. While some countries have released children detained for offences as a response to the pandemic, children detained for alleged association or on national security have often not benefited from such measures. It is crucial to ensure the provision and continuity of well-resourced and inclusive child protection, gender-based violence and mental health services for all children, including those deprived of their liberty.

Gender-based violence

Sexual violence and abuse against children is a gross violation of their rights affecting boys and girls in all countries, with girls comprising the vast majority of known victims. Confinement measures, and the associated isolation, anxiety, job losses and financial insecurity, have greatly increased stress within families, causing crisis levels of intimate partner violence, child, early and forced marriage, and other forms of gender-based violence. For many girls and young women, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes. During lockdowns, women and girls who experience violence at home have been trapped with their abusers, leading to a spike in femicide in some countries.⁷² In the past 12 months, an estimated 243 million girls and women across the world have been subject to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner.⁷³ Yet measures to control the pandemic in many countries have led to the suspension of gender-based violence services, which have been largely unavailable or inaccessible to women and girls at the time when they need them the most.⁷⁴ Phone-based services have helped respond to an extent, but are not a solution for the many children living in marginalized situations who do not have access to phones and technology.

For many girls and young women, the threat of violence and abuse looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes

Projections indicate that over the next decade the secondary impacts of COVID-19 could result in 31 million new cases of gender-based violence, two million more cases of female genital mutilation and an estimated 13 million more child marriages,⁷⁵ hindering the achievement of all SDGs and leading to dire consequences for girls' sexual and reproductive health, mental health and wellbeing. As rates of child marriage soar, curbing the practice will be

an even greater challenge considering that poverty is a core driver, and continues to rise steeply.⁷⁶ Sexual violence frequently occurs in the context of child marriage, making married girls especially vulnerable to experiencing violence. Child marriage is also closely linked with female genital mutilation, which affects approximately 200 million girls across about 30 countries.⁷⁷ Commercial sexual exploitation of children has reportedly risen sharply during the pandemic, including the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse material, trafficking for sexual purposes, and child marriages involving monetary exchange. In all three forms girls comprise the majority of victims.⁷⁸

Protecting and supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, it is critical that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have uninterrupted access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and psychosocial support. Strengthened national laws and programmes are urgently needed to fight sexual violence against children, including in marriage. Given its complex causes and consequences, States should take a holistic approach which integrates the essential role of men and boys, and should set the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys at 18 in national law. Further, there is a need for more effective legislation banning the linked challenge of female genital mutilation, and forbidding the medicalization of the practice. Measures to curb the spread of commercial sexual exploitation of children are also urgently needed, with strengthened national laws and interventions to fight violence and abuse against children committed online.⁷⁹ Moreover, the root causes of violence against women and girls are gender inequality, patriarchal social norms and unbalanced power relations, which must be challenged and changed.⁸⁰ Comprehensive sexuality education is a key strategy to curb gender-based violence, both to empower women and girls, and to address underlying social norms. Governments should ensure that all adolescents and young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education, and age-responsive sexual and reproductive health services.

Examples of promising practices provided in member State submissions⁸¹

In Azerbaijan eliminating violence against women and children is a priority, and the government has strengthened domestic violence prevention activities by supporting the safety of victims of domestic violence, promptly investigating appeals, strengthening preventive measures of law enforcement agencies and local authorities, providing public information on domestic violence and providing urgent assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Measures are in place to help prevent and respond to domestic violence in Mexico, particularly during the pandemic. These include providing public information on parenting free from violence, and on how to recognize violence and abuse; publicizing and optimizing emergency telephone helplines; and strengthening the availability, accessibility and quality of care services for child victims of violence, including the ongoing and safe operation of shelters for women and child victims.

In Montenegro protecting children from violence is a top priority, and all child care institutions and state and non-state run shelters apply child safeguarding procedures. With the assistance of UNDP the government launched a mobile application for fast and confidential reporting of family violence by victims, and with UNICEF support, the state run child helpline provides psychosocial support to children in relation to COVID-19 and all forms of violence.

In Ecuador, a multi-stakeholder program is in place to help ensure a safe internet for children, which aims to protect children's dignity and their physical, psychological and sexual integrity. This public policy was a pioneer in Latin America, promoting a culture of prevention and protection for the safe use of the internet, as well as adequate monitoring and sanctions in case of rights violations.

In Switzerland measures have been put in place to ensure reporting by and support to victims of child sexual exploitation, abuse and domestic violence. They include public campaigns to raise awareness; increasing the capacity of counselling centres and the space in shelters; and financing of counselling services for children.

In Kenya programs in support of child rights and welfare were rolled out in 30 counties through the Area Advisory Councils for Children. They included key partners and stakeholders working with children, and have been key to support children's rights and needs, e.g. by taking the campaign on violence against children to the community level and enhancing prevention and timely response to violations of children's rights linked to confinement measures.

In Saudi Arabia the Family Affairs Council launched a package of initiatives and programs in support of children's rights, such as the "remote family counselling" program, an application providing counselling services to help

families identify solutions to the challenges resulting from the pandemic; and the Guidelines Initiative, to help working parents caring for their children at home balance the demands of work and child care.

In Sweden the Public Health Agency has increased funds to organizations working on promotion and prevention in the area of mental health, particularly the prevention of suicide linked to the COVID-19 situation, including for children in migration situations.

Sustainability

Climate action (Goal 13)

The UN Secretary-General has noted that the “climate crisis is the biggest threat to our survival as a species and is already threatening human rights around the world”.⁸² The environmental crisis in the form of climate change, pollution and environmental degradation including biodiversity loss presents an urgent challenge affecting all of children’s rights, with lifelong consequences for their health, well-being and development. Children are uniquely susceptible to health-related harm from environmental degradation due to their sensitive physical and psychological phase of development. Their exposure levels to hazardous substances and pollutants are much higher than adults as children have faster metabolic rates, proportionally consume more water and food and breathe more air. Every year an estimated 1.7 million children under the age of 5 die prematurely from modifiable environmental factors, especially air and water pollution and poor sanitation, representing a quarter of all infant deaths worldwide.⁸³ Twelve million children in developing countries experience permanent brain damage due to lead poisoning, and approximately 85 million children worldwide work in hazardous conditions and are regularly exposed to toxic substances causing brain damage and disease.⁸⁴ Children in the poorest countries and communities and those in marginalized or vulnerable situations are the most affected, highlighting the importance of non-discrimination, equality and accountability in addressing the issue.

The climate crisis affects children first and worst, and is already here

The climate crisis is already resulting in major disruptions and worsening threats by the day and affects children first and worst.⁸⁵ Despite broad global agreement on what needs to be done, governments have lacked the political will and means to keep their promises to secure a sustainable future. Children are experiencing

what has been termed “eco-anxiety”, a form of anxiety and lack of hope for their own future and for their environment.⁸⁶ People on the move in the context of climate change and environmental degradation, and all displaced children are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and face significant barriers to accessing healthcare and other basic services. One-third of displaced persons are situated in the 10 countries most at risk of the pandemic, highlighting the challenge to ensure that displaced children are protected.⁸⁷

Children are both rights-holders and agents of change who should be meaningful, active participants in the development of environmental action and policies, as well as beneficiaries thereof. In recent years, children have organized marches and demonstrations on climate change, launched legal actions on climate change, environmental degradation and human rights, and called for climate action that respects, protects and fulfils their human rights, including the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), and the role of business

Despite increasing global knowledge of the health and development risks to children posed by climate change, environmental degradation and exposure to hazardous substances and pollution, there is an ongoing global failure to protect children through effective environmental laws, policies and actions, and ensure children’s rights to access information, participation and justice in environmental matters.⁸⁸ Businesses, and particularly certain industries, continue to cause serious environmental

Recognition of children’s environmental rights is urgently needed, with stronger policies and actions to protect the planet and secure their future

harm infringing children’s rights, including by producing hazardous products and toxic waste, contributing to air,

land and water pollution, and contributing to climate change and the destruction of natural ecosystems. Existing environmental protection policies and business action plans too often fail to prioritize children's best interests as expressed by them, and persistent gaps in legislation, or weak enforcement where relevant laws exist, render pathways for accountability and redress limited or non-existent.⁸⁹

Protecting the planet and realizing children's rights through a healthy environment is fundamental to recover better and building back in a way that moves the world forward. It means overcoming long-standing barriers and interests holding back a truly transformative development track.

Prioritizing a safe and sustainable environment for children

Around the world children are demanding real change, and demanding societies where people and the planet come first

Ensuring a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment requires prioritizing children's best interests as expressed by them in all relevant decisions and actions pertaining to the environment. States' obligations and businesses' responsibilities relating to environmental impacts on children need to be taken seriously.⁹⁰ The impacts of environmental degradation on children, including much of the environmental burden of disease on them, could be mitigated and

prevented through decisive, rights-based climate action, addressing environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and ensuring pollution mitigation and the safe disposal of hazardous substances and toxic waste.⁹¹ Children's specific vulnerability places a heightened duty on governments, business and all actors to protect them from environmental harm, provide them with accessible and age-, gender- and disability-responsive information, listen to their views and provide effective and timely remedies where their rights have been infringed by environmental factors.⁹² Moreover, children need to be educated and given the information they need to be part of the solution, including by making rights-enhancing choices as responsible consumers. Governments, schools and businesses should actively support children in this respect, by providing them with the information they need to make rights-based decisions as consumers.

Global recognition of children's right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is urgently needed to support the measures required to protect children and the planet. Around the world, children are calling for real change, and demanding action to protect people and the planet.⁹³ Their commitment in defending the environment and their human rights is a call to action to governments to ensure intergenerational equity and fulfil their responsibility towards present and future generations.⁹⁴

Children's views on building back better

In focus groups and discussions children were asked about what world leaders can do to change things for the better for them. These were some of their responses:

- *"First, that the rights of children and adolescents are respected and protected. We recommend serving low-income children and adolescents in rural communities and the city."* – **Marilen**
- *"I think leaders have to make the children their priorities when drafting laws, projects and allocating the state budgets they have to focus more on the children. We request of the leaders to provide better healthcare, quality education and provide equal opportunities for all children regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender or incomes"* – **Puhiza**
- *"I consider it important that the agencies and institutions endorse and rely on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that they take us into account in all kinds of queries."* – **Rodrigo**
- *"We as children want to live in an economically prosperous world and in a clean environment in which we can breathe freely and also have the opportunity to develop our abilities and our skills."* – **Drion**
- *"It is important that leaders put more transcendental issues such as education, hunger and the environment on their agendas, with real commitments, but more commitment is needed from everyone."* – **Cristian**
- *"World leaders can promote innovation and invest in research for better methods of farming, so as to boost the food supply chain and ultimately achieve SDG 2 on Zero Hunger."* – **Gift**
- *"If leaders improve our education now, it can allow us to be heroes for extraordinary situations. If one child with special needs can go to school today and become involved with society, he can be a hero too for his friends with special needs"* – **Priya**
- *"World leaders can provide better services; by partnering with local organizations to support the provision of clean water; and encourage education of the girl child, to avoid issues of teenage pregnancy and child marriage"* – **Sharon**
- *"As children we should be able to make choices for ourselves and be the big-thinkers. Children have to think beyond their limits. The limits imposed by parents and by society."* – **Grace**
- *"We ask that adults listen to children and adolescents, and that the problems be seen and that these instances be disseminated so that more children and adolescents participate."* – **Pia**
- *"Adults have to listen to us and know what children and adolescents are doing for their countries. Children must participate, but for this, spaces must be created where they can do so...Children have to work together with world leaders in creating laws that define our lives, because this is not just today and tomorrow this is a fight until all children grow up having a full childhood. Being happy and not seeing their dreams so far. As a job we ask you to empower children with their rights."* – **Claudia**

Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic is reversing decades of progress and has exposed long-term failings to protect and uphold children's rights, jeopardizing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has unmasked the shortcomings of our present economic and governance models, revealing deep social, political and economic inequalities which manifest as poverty, hunger, violence and unfair access to essential goods and services for children. As the world begins the enormous task of building back, there is an unprecedented opportunity to reset and rebuild from the foundations, towards sustainable recovery from the environmental degradation, inequality and discrimination causing human rights harm to millions of children worldwide.

Business as usual is not an option, and now is the moment transform our societies and economies, to make them sustainable, fair and inclusive, respecting the dignity and rights of all children everywhere, and of future generations. It requires responding to the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights,⁹⁵ by redefining and reinforcing the global commons of the climate and environment, public health, education and the digital environment. International solidarity and the role of multilateralism have never been more essential, to overcome the pursuit of narrow interests at all levels, which threaten children's rights and the achievement of the SDGs.

All children have the right to survival and development, and to live their lives free from deprivation, violence and abuse. Responding to children's rights and needs is the most guaranteed way to achieve transformative, sustainable development and to prevent cycles of inequality and deprivation from being repeated across generations. The task requires urgently identifying and reaching the children who are being left behind through decisions and actions guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, particularly non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, their rights to life, survival and development, and the right to participate.⁹⁶

1. Uphold children's rights and best interests in all decisions, investments and actions to build back from the pandemic

- Investing the maximum available resources in children's health, education, protection from violence and social protection is crucial to upholding children's rights. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has explicitly requested that States ensure their responses to the pandemic, including the allocation of resources, are made according to the best interests of the child.⁹⁷ This requires expanding fiscal space and massively scaling up investment in favour of children's rights and needs, taking a child rights perspective to budgeting processes. In line with the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no. 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights, budgets should be transparent and open to public participation including with children.⁹⁸
- Public goods and services should be redesigned in accordance with children's rights and best interests, in particular by scaling them up and ensuring equal access for all to essential services, including healthcare, mental health support and services, social protection and child protection services which meet the increased need. Services must target the most marginalized children and families in situations of vulnerability, to help prevent rising child labor, child marriage, exploitation and trafficking, and must be made more resilient to prevent interruptions in future crises.
- There is a crucial opportunity to seize the accelerated digital shift by bridging the digital divide for children, for example, through partnerships to increase the accessibility and affordability of internet access and technology to all children, especially those most marginalized or in vulnerable situations. At the same time as expanding access, children urgently need better guidance and stronger protection from the risks and harmful effects posed by increased engagement in the digital environment, which should also not be a substitute for in-person interactions among children or between children and their parents or caregivers.
- Legal and policy frameworks should be reassessed from a child rights perspective, and amended where necessary to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly discriminate against children due to their age, gender, status of belonging to a specific group or of living in situations of vulnerability. Harmful social norms and practices condoning violence against children, in particular all forms of gender-based

violence, must be tackled at all levels. International support and systems of protection for children affected by conflict and humanitarian disasters should be strengthened, ensuring their continued access to protection and essential services. The number of children deprived of their liberty worldwide must be reduced, strengthening the use of alternatives to detention, such as restorative justice.

2. Monitor children's situation and their rights to understand the impacts upon them and design appropriate responses

- Data from existing human rights frameworks and reporting mechanisms, particularly from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations, and from civil society consultations, including with children, should be used to help identify gaps and priorities for children. Child rights impact assessments should serve as a key tool to design response and recovery plans in a way that prioritizes children's rights and their best interests.
- States should strengthen the collection and availability of data which is reliable and disaggregated by age, sex, disability, migration status and other factors, to enable the assessment of disparities. All children, including those in vulnerable or precarious situations, should have access to birth registration and legal identity and should be included in national data and monitoring.
- Monitoring and data collection should be done in accordance with child rights principles, involving children themselves, ensuring transparency and the right to information while respecting their right to privacy.
- Measures of progress should also be based on the perceptions and self-assessment of children and families themselves. Technological innovations have the potential to support real-time monitoring and children's participation in the process.

3. Empower and listen to children, allowing and enabling them to participate in building back

- The pandemic has underscored the need to empower and listen to children, involving them directly as part of the solution to the crisis that has upended their world. Children have the right to participate meaningfully in all decisions and processes affecting them, yet face major barriers to their civil and political rights.
- States must protect and fulfil children's civil and political rights, and take proactive measures to support and enable their participation in decision making at all levels. Children should be provided with safe, age-appropriate information and spaces to participate both online and offline in global and national decision-making and actions. States should further support existing platforms for children's meaningful and safe participation by consulting with children via children's parliaments, children's councils and other child-led groups at national and sub-national levels.

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- ³ See: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_children_16_april_2020.pdf
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- ⁷ Submission from Save the Children; <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/save-children-%E2%80%93-almost-600-million-children-completely-missed-out-financial-support-during>
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- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ UNODC, 2020
- ¹⁶ Humanium submission
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- ¹⁸ Submission from World Vision International
- ¹⁹ OHCHR Child Rights Input to the HLPF, 2019:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24291OHCHR_ChildRightsReport_HLPF_July19.pdf. In line with the global agreement on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)
- ²⁰ Submission from World Vision International
- ²¹ Submission from Child Rights Connect
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- ³⁴ Submission from Save the Children
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- ⁴⁹ See member State submissions, available at: <https://ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children-OHCHR/Pages/Report-2030-Agenda-Sustainable-Development.aspx>
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- ⁷⁰ Submission from World Vision International
- ⁷¹ Submission from Reprieve
- ⁷² See: <https://www.unicef.org/media/76916/file/Gender-Based-Violence-in-Emergencies-CP-Learning-Brief-Aug-2020.pdf>
- ⁷³ "Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic: Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women." 6 April 2020. See more [here](#).
- ⁷⁴ See: <https://www.unicef.org/media/76916/file/Gender-Based-Violence-in-Emergencies-CP-Learning-Brief-Aug-2020.pdf>
- ⁷⁵ Goulds, S., Fergus, I., and Winslow, E. Halting Lives: The impact of COVID-19 on girls and young women. Plan International. September 2020. See more [here](#).
- ⁷⁶ UNFPA, (2020). [Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage](#)
- ⁷⁷ UNICEF 2020
- ⁷⁸ Submission from Plan International
- ⁷⁹ Submission from Plan International
- ⁸⁰ Submission from Plan International
- ⁸¹ See member State submissions, available at: <https://ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children-OHCHR/Pages/Report-2030-Agenda-Sustainable-Development.aspx>
- ⁸² UNSG speech at 43rd session of the Human Rights Council: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-02-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-un-human-rights-council-%E2%80%9Cthe-highest-aspiration-call-action-for-human-rights-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english>
- ⁸³ Ibid
- ⁸⁴ See A/HRC/43/30, para. 3.

⁸⁵ See:

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-02-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-un-human-rights-council-%E2%80%9Cthe-highest-aspiration-call-action-for-human-rights-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english>

⁸⁶ See UNICEF, 2020; The Washington Post, 2020

⁸⁷ UNHCR, 2020; <https://www.undocs.org/A/75/207>

⁸⁸ A/HRC/43/30: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/30>

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² See: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/45/30>

⁹³ See, for example, the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action launched at COP25:

<https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/cop25-join-declaration-children-youth-and-climate-action>

⁹⁴ Submission from Save the Children

⁹⁵ See:

https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Rights_English.pdf

⁹⁶ See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

⁹⁷ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'COVID-19 Statement' (8 April 2020)

⁹⁸ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment no. 19, 2016:

<https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhslkirKQZLK2M58RF%2F5F0vHXnExBBGbM8arvsXxbQtfQy5IM9wjdpzdQWNBmhRXy5GddCXwk43ltcbNBFLtyueX%2B6YpzPiHmwp3k68ATyNj>