2025 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Investing in child protection and wellbeing:
A key accelerator of the SDGs

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

Advocacy Brief

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VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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Investing in child protection and wellbeing:
A key accelerator of the SDGs - VNRs 2025
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"With less than five years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the urgency to act has never been greater. We are already falling behind to end all forms of violence against children by 2030, including on Target 8.7 to eradicate all forms of child labor by 2025. Today more than ever, investment in children's wellbeing and protection must be recognized as a cornerstone of national and sub-national development planning—because it makes economic sense and ensures people-centred development across the lifecycle."

Najat Maalla M'jid
Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.

THIS BRIEF

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC) reached out to all **35 Member States** that presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the **2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)** to offer guidance and support to their reporting processes. This was followed by briefings, where appropriate, to the United Nations Resident Coordinators, United Nations Country Teams, and United Nations Regional Offices. Following these engagements, **her Office conducted a thorough study of the 2025 VNR processes and reports, as well as the live presentations that had been made during the 2025 HLPF.**

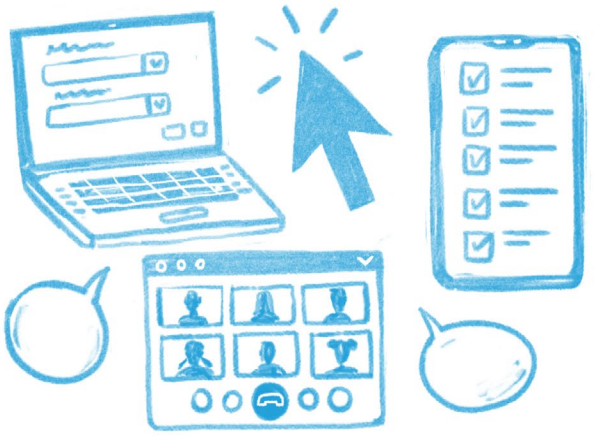
This brief highlights insights from the SRSG's engagements with Member States—through country visits, VNR preparations, and high-level UN meetings—on efforts to invest in cross-sectoral strategies that advance the SDGs and help end violence against children. In view of the **2025 deadline for the SDG Target 8.7**, the brief also reflects on the **urgent need to end all forms of child labour.**

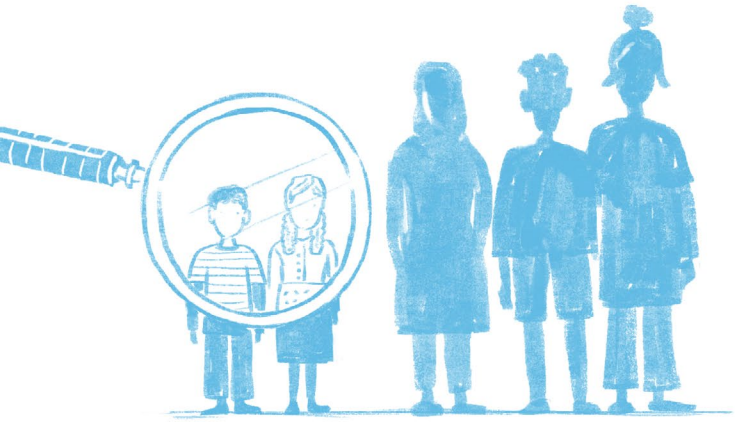
Through the sharing of this advocacy brief, Member States are encouraged to use the VNR process as an opportunity to highlight examples of promising practices that address its root causes and responses as part of national and territorial integrated development plans.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2025 VNR

In **2025**, over 20 VNR mentioned children and young people's participation in the VNR process in various formats. **A sign that children's participation in the VNR process is increasingly being recognized as essential to inclusive and people centred sustainable development.**

Their involvement takes various forms, including direct consultations, surveys, and online polls that allow them to express views on issues such as education, mental health, climate, and child protection. Online panels discussions, child and youth councils, and essay competitions are among the modalities used to engage children. **Child and youth groups also serve as important spaces for children to contribute to national discussions on the SDGs.**





Beyond direct engagement in the VNR process, civic education and inclusion initiatives help children participate in community life. However, **references to youth participation often overlook children—defined as those under 18—risking their voices being absorbed into broader youth categories.** Clear, age-specific language is needed to ensure children are distinctly recognized and meaningfully included.

"We need to participate in decision making everywhere to voice out the issues that we have in our communities, in our homes and everywhere!"

Girl

ENDING ALL FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR BY 2025

The world did not meet its goal to eliminate child labour by 2025 (SDG Target 8.7)

TARGET 8.7

CHILD LABOUR

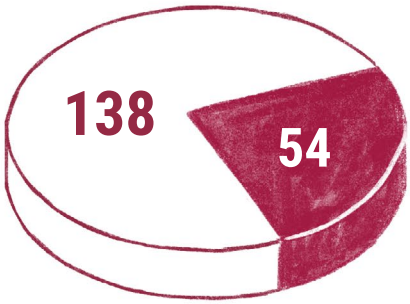
is a form **of violence against children.** It is intergenerational.

138

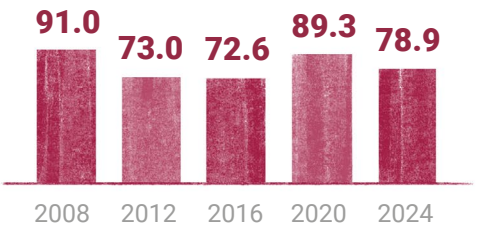
Million Children were engaged in child labour in 2024[1]

SOME OF THEM ARE **TRAFFICKED** FOR FORCED LABOUR.

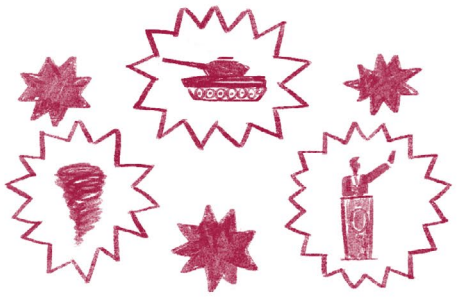
38% of identified victims of trafficking are children[2]. Many cases are not reported and the actual number of victims are much higher.



Out of the **138 million children, 54 million** were involved in **hazardous work[3]** that threatens their health, safety, or development.



Children aged 5–11 years still represent a large share of child labour, with little change since 2012[4].



The rate of child labour in crisis-affected countries is more than twice the global average.

Children in child labour struggle to access education, which compromises their future opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poverty and deprivation.

2025 VNRs:

CHILD LABOUR - FORMS AND TRENDS

Some countries reported **decrease in child labour.** Others mentioned that various forms of **child labour, such as unpaid domestic and care work, agricultural labour, mining, and commercial sexual exploitation of children continue in their countries.**

VNRs also highlight the **linkage between trafficking, exploitation and child labour.**

THESE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOUR WERE REPORTED:

- Legal reforms prohibiting hazardous child labour and alignment with international standards.
- Strengthened the supply chain due-diligence legislation.
- Establishment of a cross-sectoral national committee on addressing child labour and trafficking
- Implementation of national action plans on trafficking in persons that encompasses prevention, protection, strengthened law, survivor support, and awareness campaign.
- Reintegration of children into education.
- Vocational training and education-to-work linkages.
- Social protection expansion, including increased and more inclusive cash transfers and financial support to reduce economic vulnerability of families.

ALLIANCE 8.7

ALLIANCE 8.7 Provides a global platform where partners—including governments, UN agencies, civil society, and businesses—work together to accelerate progress toward SDG Target 8.7, which aims to eliminate child labour and trafficking[5].

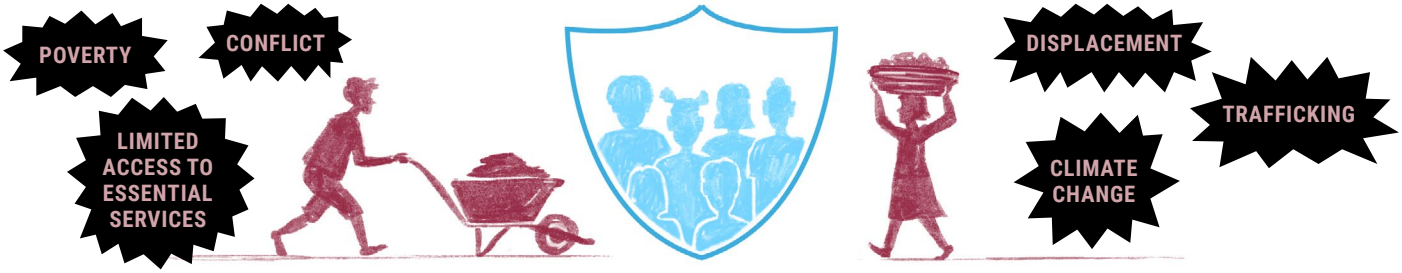
TACKLING ROOT CAUSES:

A holistic approach to End Violence against Children, including Child Labour

To end **CHILD LABOUR**, we must build environments where no child is pushed into work, where no parents have to send their children to work in the first place.

Addressing child labour requires tackling the underlying drivers—poverty, lack of opportunities, limited access to essential services, climate change, conflict, trafficking, and forced displacement—that compound children's vulnerabilities not only toward child labour, but to other forms of violence against children. **If we fail to address social disparities—particularly by supporting families and ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, and protection services—children will continue to be exposed to exploitation and harm.** On the other hand, addressing these challenges will **contribute to achieving the SDGs.**

To effectively respond to these interconnected risks, **government must prioritize integrated child protection system that place children's wellbeing at the center of national agendas**.



SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION INCLUDING, PROMOTING DECENT WORK FOR ADULTS

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, INCLUDING DIGITAL LITERACY AND ONLINE SAFETY

CHILD PROTECTION CASE MANAGEMENT WITH EARLY WARNING MECHANISMS

COMPREHENSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTH SERVICES

INTEGRATED CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

STRENGTHENING PROTECTIVE SOCIAL NORMS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS

PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT, INCLUDING POSITIVE AND NON-VIOLENT DISCIPLINE

BIRTH REGISTRATION AND DOCUMENTATION

CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE SYSTEM

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Strengthening child-sensitive social protection is essential to building such systems and ensuring that every child is safeguarded from exploitation and harm.

2025 VNRS:

Actions to Strengthen **Child-sensitive social protection.**

Governments reported how they are strengthening social protection systems through a range of integrated measures

Strengthened legal and policy framework to ensure sustainable and inclusive cash transfer programmes.

Digitalization of social registry for improved efficiency and reach.

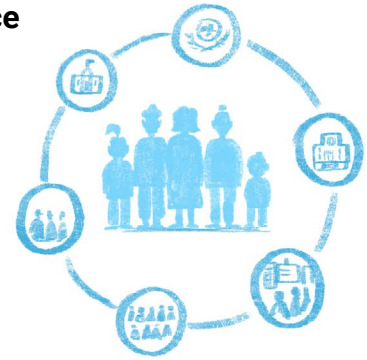
Expanded access to healthcare for children, women, and vulnerable populations.

Education support, such as free education and school feeding programmes, to strengthen inclusive education and reducing barriers to learning.

Promoting gender equality in policies that address unpaid care work and support caregivers

While these measures mark important progress, they must be part of a broader, more integrated strategy. **Ending violence against children, including child labour, requires a wholistic approach—one that connects social protection with education, health, climate resilience, justice, and child protection systems.**

Only by addressing the full spectrum of risks and vulnerabilities can we create environments where every child is safe and thriving.



Today, almost **1 billion children** live in multidimensional poverty. Yet, only **23.9%** of children are covered by social protection[6].

"Child Poverty is the violation of children rights. No child should suffer child marriage, sexual abuse, or street begging."

Boy

"The children do not get the opportunities to have good grades because they need to work, and they don't have the time to learn."

Girl

INVESTING IN CHILDREN CANNOT WAIT!

Less than 5 years remain to eliminate all forms of violence against children by 2030 and to achieve the SDGs!

INVESTMENT CASE TOOLKIT

Launched in May 2025, provides a roadmap: countries can systematically analyze, cost, and advocate for effective interventions[7].

ENDNOTES

1. See *Despite progress, child labour still affects 138 million children globall*y – ILO, UNICEF
2. See https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/19
3. See *Despite progress, child labour still affects 138 million children globally* – ILO, UNICEF
4. *International Labour Organization* (ILO) and *UNICEF, Child Labour: Global Estimates 2024, Trends and the Road Forward.* (Geneva and New York, 2024)
5. For more information, see Alliance 8.7
6. See https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/258
7. For more information see https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/en/our-work/investment-case

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