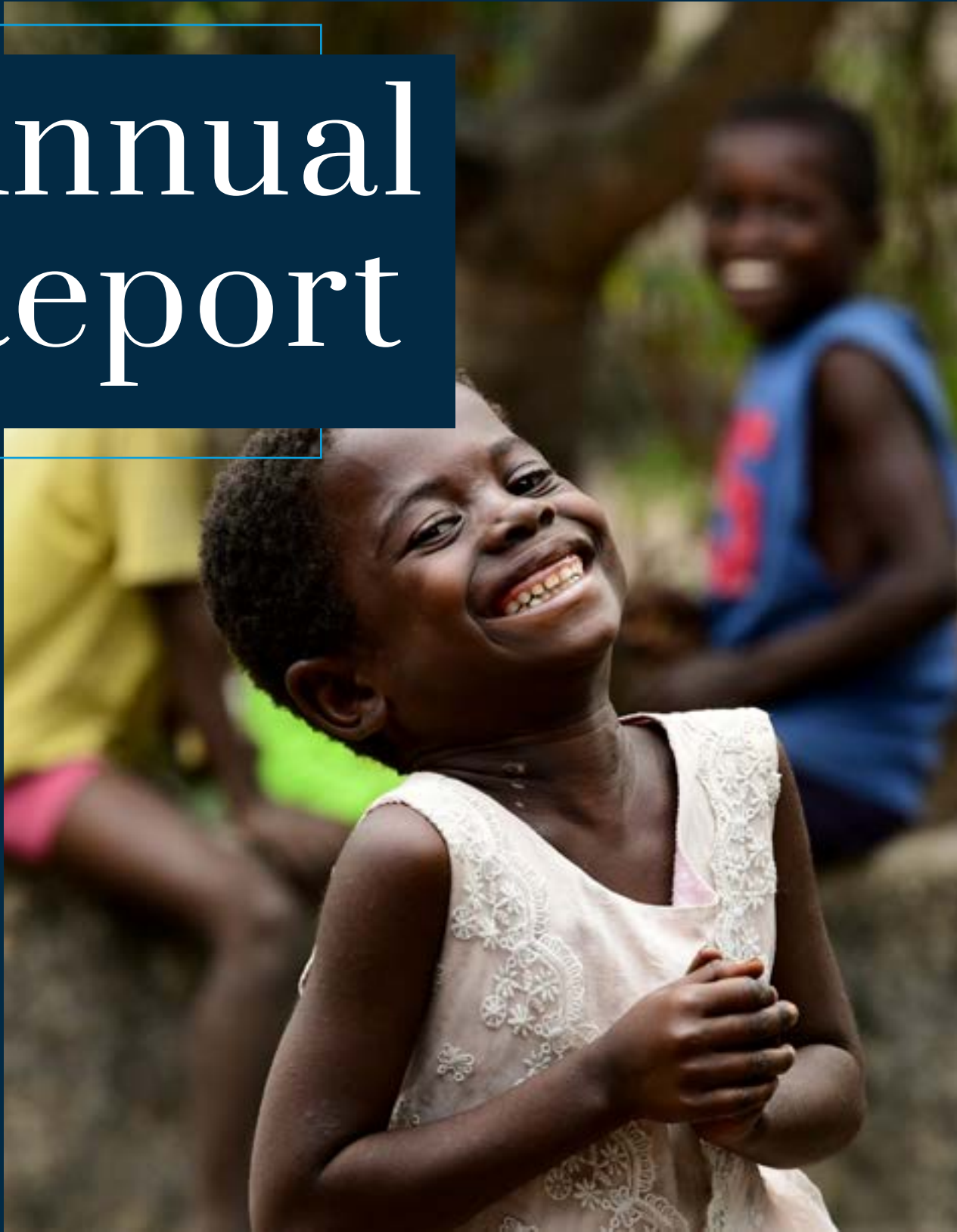


Annual Report

2021

Promotion and protection of the rights of children



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

We must recognize children as agents of change & ensure that inclusive participation is an integral part of the SDG implementation.



Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children

About the mandate

Guided by General Assembly resolution 62/141, by which the Assembly established the mandate, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is a global, independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. In its resolution 73/155, the Assembly reaffirmed its support for the work of the Special Representative, recognizing the progress achieved and the role of the mandate in promoting the further implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children, as well as in supporting the Member States in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, justice while ensuring that robust and inclusive social protection systems are in place to support children and their families.

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY.

All public and private institutions and organizations working for and with children must ensure that they keep all children safe from all forms of violence.

Exordium

The present report covers the immediate and long-term impact of the pandemic on violence against children, as well as the progress made and the challenges that remain in guaranteeing the protection of children and ensuring that no child is left behind.

It sets out the action taken and the results achieved by the Special Representative over the past year to respond to the pandemic and to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also highlights the action taken by children themselves to prevent and respond to violence and to support each other's well-being, highlighting the need to safeguard the empowerment of children in preventing and responding to the violence that they face.

With less than eight years until the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and with the impact of the pandemic posing such a severe threat to progress there is an urgent need to invest in an inclusive, resilient and safe recovery that works for and with children. In the context of the implementation of the Goals and building back better in the post-pandemic recovery, the Special Representative has emphasized the need to invest in integrated services for children including child protection, mental health, physical health, education and justice while ensuring that robust and inclusive social protection systems are in place to support children and their families.



Equally, progress toward SDGs related to poverty, hunger, health, education, justice, gender, social inclusion, decent work, equality, migration, climate change and building peaceful societies will be impeded if we do not end violence against children.

Impact of the pandemic on children: more severe than predicted



It was clear from the earliest days of the pandemic that it would have a far-reaching, long-term and profoundly damaging impact on children. In her previous report, the Special Representative noted that school closures, confinement, movement restrictions and additional family stress had heightened the risks of children being exposed to violence.

The pandemic has also disrupted the delivery of justice systems, increasing the backlog of cases resulting in increasingly lengthy judicial and administrative proceedings. The impact has been felt most acutely by children at risk and victims of violence, undocumented migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and children in detention, including pretrial detainees. In addition, a lack of functioning judicial oversight reduces

monitoring and the prevention of ill-treatment in detention facilities.

The effects of the pandemic have not been felt evenly across all groups. It has exacerbated existing inequalities, exposing children who were already more marginalized and vulnerable to violence before the pandemic to ever greater risks, including girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children, refugee, displaced and migrant children, children living or working on the streets, children in alternative care and children in detention.

Responses: progress & promising practices

The Special Representative joined forces with the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures and 16 other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to find out how the provision of services to children has been ensured. Respondents from 22 countries provided information using an online application and reported good collaboration across organizations, enhanced staff coordination, a sharper focus on support for parents and greater consultation with children.

Globally, 149 countries have integrated prevention of and response to violence against women and girls into their pandemic response plans, and 136 countries have adopted measures to strengthen services for survivors of gender-based violence. This builds on existing national policy frameworks to address violence against children, such as those highlighted by the World Health Organization in its Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020.

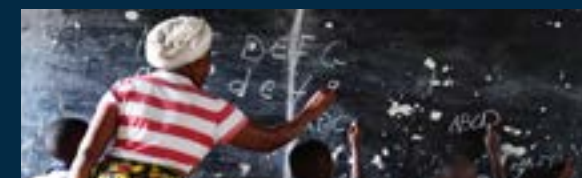


Building back better: investing in an inclusive, resilient & safe recovery for children

The wide-ranging social and economic costs of the pandemic are likely to have long-term repercussions for children's development and well-being around the world, in particular for marginalized and vulnerable groups. These losses will affect not only the prospects for children themselves but also the future for their families, communities and societies for decades to come.

Building back better is an opportunity for a new social contract: one that is not only adult-centered but also child-centered and paves the way for more sustainable resilient economies and human capital development.

Accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Violence undermines every aspect of national development, and bringing it to an end is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Special Representative uses her global mandate

to encourage the Member States to share promising practices, innovations and lessons learned in the prevention of and response to violence against children.

Support to Member States

In 2021, the Special Representative met with 38 Member States that were presenting voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum, at an early stage of their process, encouraging them to use the forum to raise awareness of how violence hinders progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the steps needed for effective prevention. She also stressed that children themselves are key actors in national development and suggested ways to support their active engagement in the voluntary national review process.

In the lead-up to the high-level political forum, the Office of the Special Representative collaborated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to organize an expert group meeting on Sustainable Development Goal 16 to assess progress and challenges, including the impact of the pandemic. The Special Representative also participated in the integration dialogues organized by the Vice President of the Economic and Social Council in preparation for the integration segment of the forum.



The Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF co-organized a voluntary national review laboratory at the high-level political forum for representatives of Governments, the United Nations, children, young people and international financial institutions to explore promising practices and approaches to ensuring that voluntary national reviews are child-sensitive and inclusive. A strong message was conveyed about the need to prioritize investment in integrated systems of social services for children on the basis of a solid foundation of inclusive social protection.





Strengthening collaboration within the UN system



The Special Representative continues to promote and strengthen collaboration on ending violence against children within the United Nations system.

The Special Representative is particularly concerned about the increase in trafficking in children and, in June 2020, joined the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons to reinforce efforts to combat this crime through an integrated and coordinated approach.

The Office of the Special Representative has reactivated its collaboration with the children and youth major group and organized a networking session at the Economic and Social Council youth forum to raise awareness on ending violence against children in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

The Special Representative strengthened her support to the United Nations system by liaising closely with country teams and resident coordinators to support voluntary national review processes, prepare high-level policy dialogues and virtual country visits and exchange information on promising practices and measures to address the challenges and sensitive issues that children face in different contexts.

Strengthening partnerships & alliances

The collaboration of many different actors is critical in efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children, given that the complexity of issues affecting their lives cannot be divided along with the mandates and themes of the organizations working on their behalf.



Working with regional organizations

The Special Representative strengthened partnerships with regional intergovernmental mechanisms to promote an integrated and child-sensitive approach, collect information and disaggregated data, identify challenges and share promising practices.



The Special Representative continued to strengthen collaboration with the African Union, Economic Community of West African States, Economic Community of Central African States, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, European Union, Council of Europe, Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, League of Arab States.

The Special Representative, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the League of Arab States co-organized an event on protecting children in the Arab region that highlighted the continuum of violence against children in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict contexts, showing the impact of conflict on the rights of children and their well-being and on children in refugee settlements or undergoing reintegration programs, as well as the efforts undertaken to better protect and strengthen the resilience of conflict-affected children.

The Special Representative continued to identify areas of collaboration and advocacy with regional organizations in Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Some planned activities and visits had to be postponed owing to the pandemic, but the Special Representative continued engagement with those two regions to ensure that support would be provided during the post-pandemic recovery phase.

Working with civil society & faith-based organizations

The Special Representative continued her engagement with civil society organizations and faith-based organizations through quarterly meetings that provided opportunities to exchange information on global civil society initiatives and explore opportunities for collaboration on violence against children among civil society actors located in Geneva and New York.

To raise awareness about children's actions in this context, expand collaboration with civil society organizations and connect with children driving change in their communities, the Special Representative invited more than 140 national organizations to share their experiences of working with children as actors in the solutions to combating violence against children.

The Special Representative and the Secretary-General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement signed a letter of agreement on cooperation to strengthen the safety and protection of children from violence and increase community knowledge around the violence-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goal.

A woman wearing a pink and green striped sari and a blue face mask is sitting in front of a wall with Hindi text. The text on the wall includes "प्राचार्य - श्री रामेश्वर शर्मा", "परामर्शदाता - श्री कमलेश्वर शर्मा", and "CHD - शिक्षा".

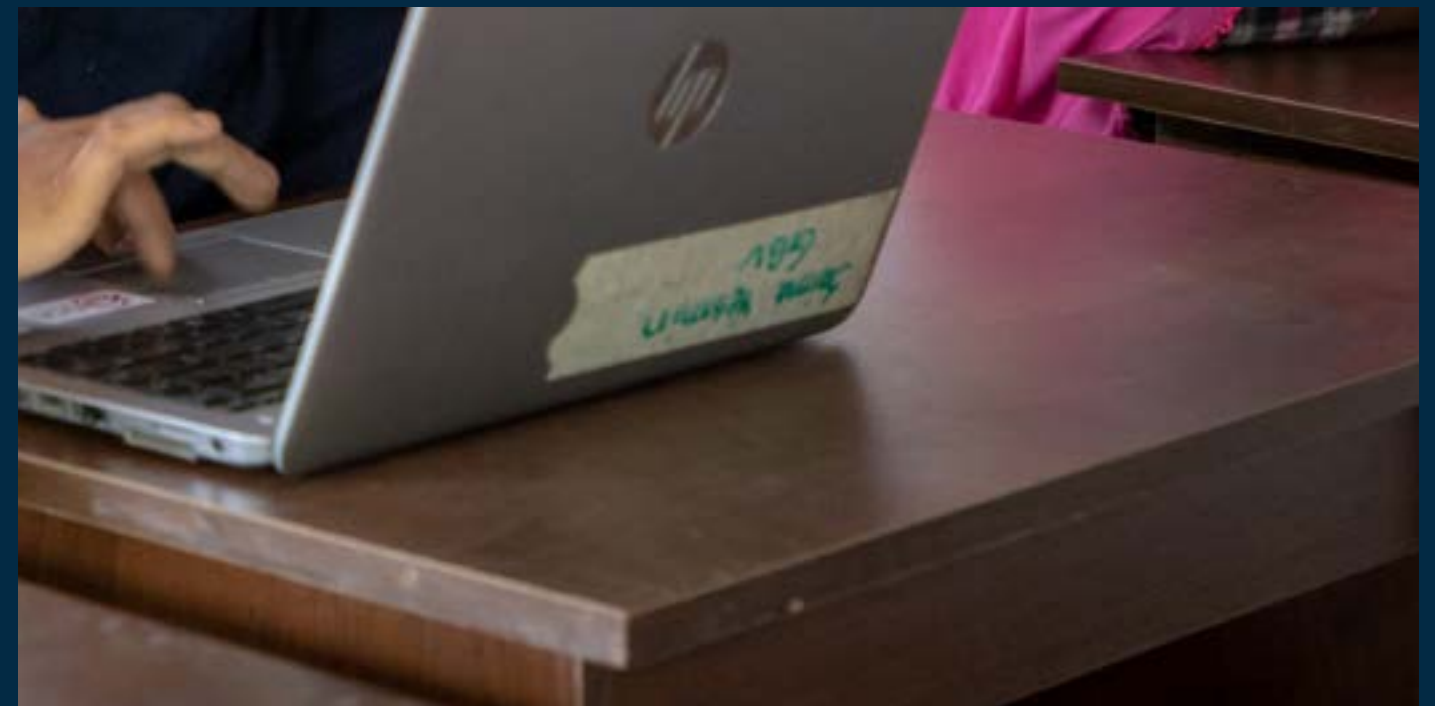
“ Partnership is the only path to success.



Working with the information & communications technology sector

The Office of the Special Representative has been working with the International Telecommunication Union to explore how children can use the online world to enhance their own protection, recognizing that it is an entry point for their safety and support.

The Office also engaged directly with information and communications technology (ICT) companies to understand how children use online means to prevent, respond to and report violence (including accessing resources, helplines and services and creating peer-support systems) to identify safeguarding challenges related to their online engagement and to provide technical guidance.





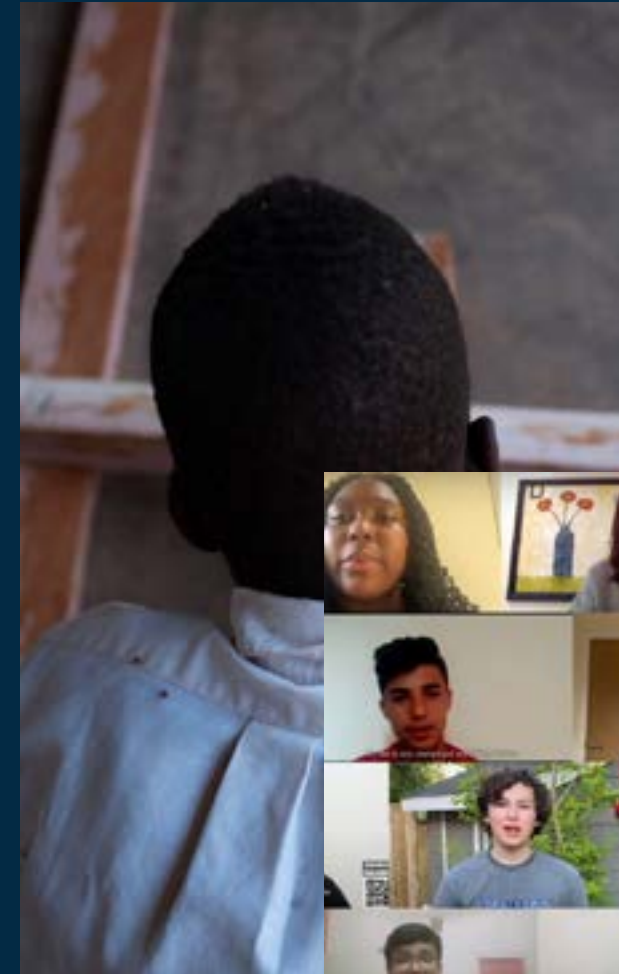
Ending the immigration detention of children

The past few years have witnessed growing numbers of children on the move, including migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children traveling alone or with their families across countries and borders. Children, particularly those who are traveling unaccompanied or without documents, or who have been separated from their families or caregivers, are at high risk of various forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and trafficking.

Migrant children are detained in more than 100 countries every day, whether traveling alone or with their families. At the same time, the Special Representative acknowledges that progress has been made in phasing out the immigration detention of children, with many examples of successful rights-based alternative solutions in over 60 countries across all regions.

All actions to address child trafficking must be informed and shaped by children's experiences

Children as part of the solution and actors of positive change



In order to promote the actions of children as agents of change, the Special Representative invited children from all regions who were working on mental health issues to share videos of their recommendations on improving mental health and well-being. The videos were shared with States and world leaders at a high-level event on mental health during the high-level political forum and through the Special Representative's digital channels are dedicated to raising awareness of children's actions in these areas.

Promoting a culture of children's meaningful participation is a priority for the Special Representative. In March 2021, her office issued a report entitled *Children as Agents of Positive Change: A Mapping of Children's Initiatives across Regions, towards an Inclusive and Healthy World Free from Violence*, in which participation initiatives of 246 organizations across 83 countries are highlighted.

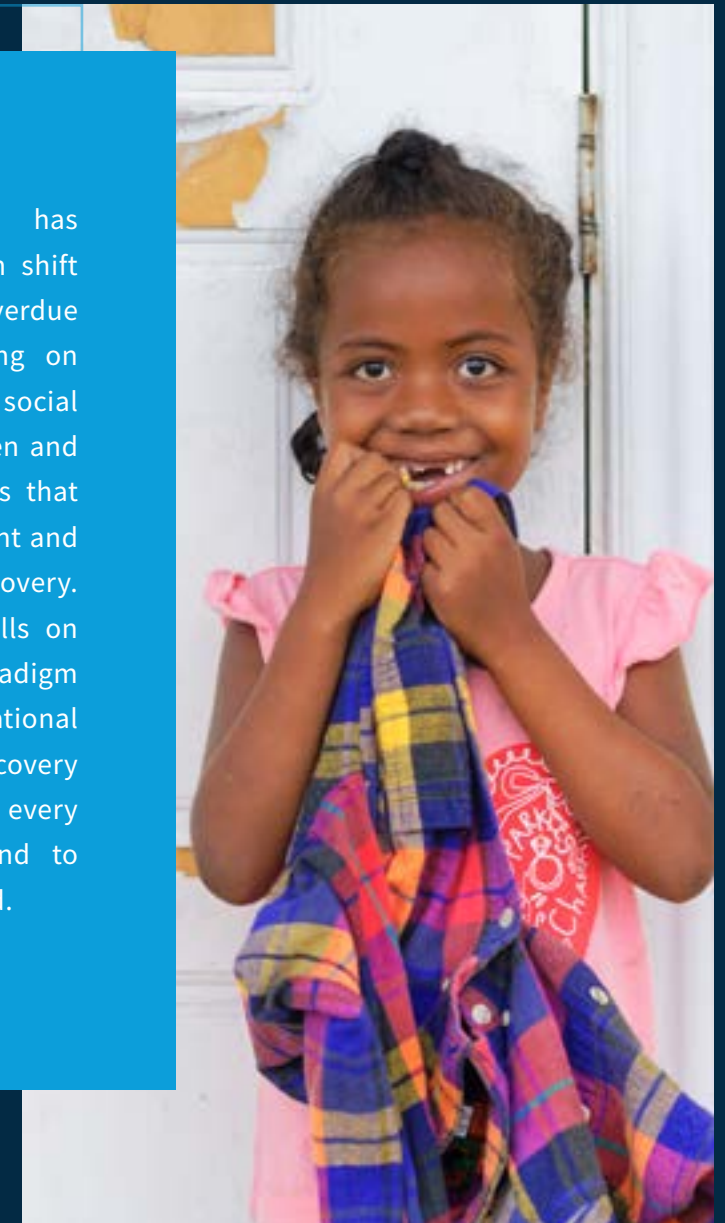
The Special Representative participated in many activities that involved children, including reaching out to over 48,000 children through different channels, venues and opportunities organized by or with civil society organizations and United Nations entities, including the Global Youth Summit convened by the Big 6 Youth Organizations, an alliance of the six largest youth-led organizations in the world. Participating children and young people prioritized educating their peers on violence and training youth on how and where to report violence while remaining committed to taking concrete action in their communities.

The way forward

In order to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals, efforts to end violence against children should be integrated into every national development agenda. Prevention is the most effective way to end such violence, and a growing pool of evidence is available to demonstrate successful approaches that are also relatively low cost. An integrated, multisectoral and coherent national development agenda will also address the drivers of violence, such as poverty, inequality, gender discrimination, migration, exclusion and humanitarian crises, among other challenges.



The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a paradigm shift in favor of children is long overdue – a shift that treats spending on integrated social services and social protection measures for children and their caregivers as investments that are vital for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable post-pandemic recovery. The Special Representative calls on all States to ensure that this paradigm shift is reflected in every national development and economic recovery plan to maximize its impact for every child and their caregivers and to ensure that no one is left behind.



Our efforts should be informed by the growing evidence on cost-effective interventions to support children's mental health and wellbeing, such as preventive interventions that focus on maternal mental health, mother-infant interaction and parenting support; community-based rehabilitation programmes; and socio-emotional learning interventions in schools that adopt a whole-school approach.



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