

# DECADE OF ACTION

Ending Violence against Children

Reflections on reporting in the  
**2020**

Voluntary National Reviews

[violenceagainstchildren.un.org](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org)



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

No violence is justifiable  
All violence against children is preventable

# Introduction



## Najat Maalla M'jid

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

*"The Voluntary National Reviews prepared by Member States are an important resource for us to identify and share initiatives being taken to end violence against children."*

The right of all children to live free from fear and from violence is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights treaty. The international community also recognized that violence undermines human, economic and social development when it adopted targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end all forms of violence against children.

Through the work of my mandate, I am strongly committed to collaborating with Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda and reach the SDG targets on ending violence against children. A key component of this support is to promote the sharing of good practices, innovative approaches, and effective policies and programmes.

In 2019, my office developed a briefing note "How to highlight promising practices to End Violence against Children in VNRs"<sup>1</sup> to encourage Member States preparing Voluntary National Reviews to use the reports to share their achievements and challenges in preventing and responding to violence against children.

We followed up by reading all the Voluntary National Review reports and listening to the presentations at the High-level Political Forum in July 2020. The present document is an overview of our reflections on the reports; it also includes examples illustrating how Member States are incorporating ending violence against children into their national development process.

I hope all Member States will find this document helpful. It will be especially relevant to Member States preparing Voluntary National Reviews in 2021 who want to share the progress they are making towards ending all forms of violence against children.

1. [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2020/vnr\\_doc\\_final.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2020/vnr_doc_final.pdf)

# Reflections on Violence against Children in the 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)

The 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) theme was "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

The HLPF took place in the context of the emerging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* noted that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress remained uneven and we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030. This highlights the urgent need for accelerated action across the SDGs.

All 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals touch children's lives in one way or another while the drivers of violence against children span the political, economic, social and cultural policy environments.

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

Our reading of the sections of the 2020 VNR reports devoted to SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and providing access to justice, and the specific target (16.2) calling for an end to all forms of violence against children by 2030, led to the following reflections:

## 1. Progress on child protection in the VNRs

While readers may not immediately find information on violence against children (VAC) in the section of the report on SDG 16, this does not mean that progress on child protection has not been made.

In fact, a great deal of relevant information is included in other sections of the VNR reports, such as those relating to SDGs 4, 8, and 10, and in the introductory section on "leaving no one behind".

Among these other sections, progress on children's protection from domestic and other forms of violence, including gender-based violence, is quite often clustered with SDG 5 on gender equality. This shows the importance of adopting a holistic approach and reporting on how VAC and violence against women are often interconnected.

### THE GLOBAL GOALS



# Reflections on Violence against Children in the 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)

## 2. Line Ministries on children's issues

The most effective approaches to ending VAC adopt an intersectoral approach across government agencies. The broad range of VAC issues means they usually fall under different Ministries and this may be one of the reasons they are not clustered together under SDG 16 in VNR reports. For example, bullying issues could be under the Ministry of Education while the impact on children's mental health due to violence could be under the Ministry of Health.

## 3. Focusing on the child

Adopting a sectoral approach to reporting on progress can mean that achievements being made on the ground in addressing violence against children are overlooked. Children should be placed at the center if we are to have a complete picture of how actions taken by government and other stakeholders are strengthening the child protection system. A more child-centered approach to reporting in the VNRs, including their right to protection, would give a better depiction of the reality of children's lives.

## 4. Data, data, data

It is clear from the VNR reports that there are many gaps in the data on VAC. The different dimensions of VAC often lack baselines against which to measure and report progress. Some VNR reports contain a section for data grouped by SDGs but there is seldom data on SDG target 16.2 in comparison with other targets related to children.

## 5. Age matters

"Youth" is often mentioned in the VNR reports without specifying the different age groups covered so it is possible that children (i.e. under 18 years of age) are also included in this category, especially children who are 15 years of age and older.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child places specific legal obligations on States regarding those under the age of 18 and it is important that VNRs recognize that the situation of children, especially in relation to VAC, is qualitatively different from youth.

### THE GLOBAL GOALS



# Reflections on Violence against Children in the 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)

## 6. Violence and its drivers

VAC can take different forms, many of which are overlooked in VNR reports. Information on forms of violence, and the drivers of violence, that undermine progress but are not explicitly spelled out in the SDG targets could be strengthened (e.g. peer to peer violence, bullying, mental health and wellbeing, gang violence and violence against vulnerable children).

## 7. From acknowledgement to action

When VAC issues are mentioned in a VNR report, it is often to acknowledge their existence without outlining a clear plan of action to respond. We need to find ways to ensure that identification of the challenges of VAC are accompanied by indications of how they can be addressed and what support may be needed.

## 8. Working together

When a multi-stakeholder approach to preparation of the VNR is adopted by including the United Nations Country Team (where present), civil society, the private sector and others (including, most importantly, children!) it makes a significant difference to the VNR report.

### THE GLOBAL GOALS



# Ending violence against children in the 2020 VNRs

In our briefing note “[How to highlight promising practices to End Violence against Children in VNRs](#)”, we highlighted the domains of action to address VAC that Member States could share in their VNR. These domains included: Political Commitments, Policy and Legal Frameworks, Prevention and Response, Data, Budgets, Participation, and Partnerships.

Here we share examples from the 2020 VNRs to illustrate how Member States have reported on their progress and experience in these areas.

## Political commitments, national legal and policy frameworks on Violence against Children



Armenia reported on the National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and the Action Plan for 2020-2022 was approved. The plan addresses protection of children's rights and protective environment, including prevention of GBV and rights of victims; protection of rights of people with disabilities, beneficiaries of closed and semi-closed institutions, as well as children without parental care; and strengthening juvenile justice systems.



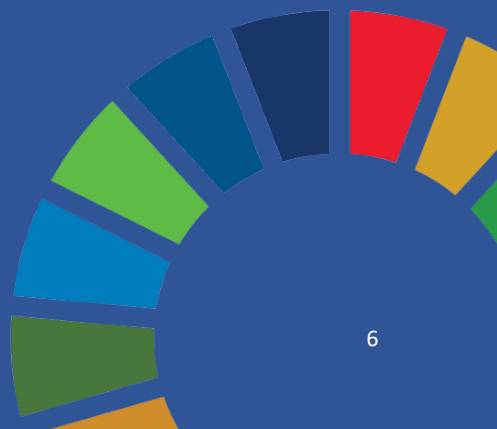
Bangladesh noted that its National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children (2013-2025) is implemented as an initiative to prevent violence against women and children. The Plan addresses legal arrangements and facilities, social awareness, socio-economic advancement, protective services, and preventive and rehabilitation measures.



Costa Rica noted the National Plan of Action for prevention and eradication of violence strategies: *Política Publica de Personas Jovenes 2020-2024* was developed.



Ecuador reported on its *Plan Nacional para la Erradicación de la Violencia de Género hacia la Niñez, Adolescentes y Mujeres* (National Plan for the Eradication of Gender Violence against Childhood, Adolescents and Women) and its three priorities: prevention, service provision and compensation.



# Ending violence against children in the 2020 VNRs



Georgia described the Inter-Agency Commission on gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence, a specialized unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs established in 2018 to oversee investigations into and administrative proceedings on domestic violence, violence against women, crimes committed on the grounds of discrimination, hate crimes, human trafficking and crimes committed by and/or towards minors, and provide support services, including shelters and legal aid to the survivors of violence.



Morocco reported that its 2025 Health Plan, the country's overall strategic framework for the sector, includes a National Strategy on the Promotion of Mental Health of Children and Adolescents.



North Macedonia reported on adoption of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2020-2025 and Action Plan to Reduce Any Forms of Violence against Children 2020- 2022 to uphold its commitment to protecting children.

4

QUALITY  
EDUCATION



## SDG 4

### Violence in schools and peer violence, including bullying

Many VNRs placed emphasis on access to education, as well as the importance of a safe and improved learning environment, including investment in ICTs. Providing a safe environment for children by addressing the issues of bullying, inclusive education, and the physical settings of schools is integral to protection of children from violence. Several reports mentioned the issue of bullying (not necessarily confined to in school) and what they are doing to address it.



Brunei reported that the Ministry of Health through various departments and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, has gradually increased its mental health promotion activities, including anti-bully programme, 'Bully - Free Brunei' ('Brunei Bebas Buli').

The programme focuses on children, particularly in the school setting. So far, more than 40 out of 152 schools have participated in the workshopssince 2018. This campaign is a collaboration between the Ministries of Health and Education.



Bulgaria noted that the Ministry of Education and Science developed a project for safe school environment and the prevention of violence and bullying. The programme involves all participants in the education process – students, teachers and parents, representatives of the local community and other stakeholders.



Estonia reported that the NGO Bullying-Free School and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare co-organized anti-bullying programmes used in kindergartens and schools. The programme teaches social skills, prevention of bullying, and problem solving; and provides educational institutions with the knowledge and tools to make them free from bullying.



Finland described how prevention of bullying, harassment and hate speech has been addressed in education and training in various ways, such as inter-sectoral cooperation, including non-formal learning contexts.



## SDG 5 Violence against women and girls, domestic violence, child marriage and harmful practices



Benin reported on the commitments by religious leaders around the country to work towards the abolition of child marriage.



Bulgaria noted that Parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code in 2019 declaring all forms of domestic violence a crime.



Burundi has a plan of action to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) including enhanced awareness-raising efforts and strengthening the capacity of "integrated centres" for GBV victims.



Finland reported that the Act on Child Custody and Right of Access took effect in 2019, banning all underage marriages and adjusting the penal scale for sexual offenders violating children to make punishments more severe.



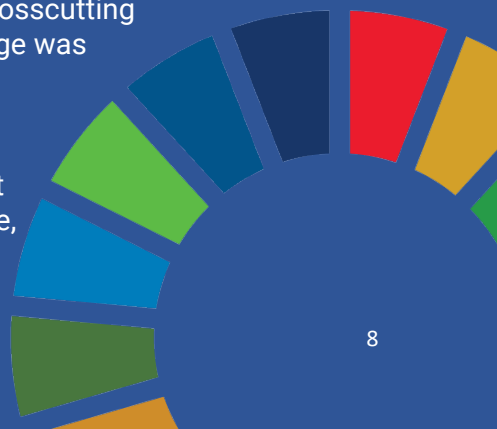
Liberia pledges that child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) would be the government's priority for public policy for the next 5 to 10 years.



Mozambique listed gender inequality as one of the crosscutting challenges and noted that a law banning child marriage was passed in 2019.



Niger noted its national action plan on tackling both child marriage and FGM. On child marriage, the report acknowledges that there is a strong urban/rural divide, with prevalence remaining significantly higher in rural areas. On FGM, the government has made efforts to translate legislation into many local languages to enhance dissemination.







## SDG 8 Child Labour



Morocco reported that the legal framework supporting realization of SDG target 8.7 was strengthened in recent years (through Law 1-00-312 on the worst forms of child labour).



Mozambique highlighted that its fight against child labour focuses on main causes: economic, socio-cultural, low level of schooling, legal-bureaucratic, political and natural disasters (drought and floods). To address the issue, Mozambique formulated the National Action Plan to Fight the Worst Forms of Child Labour 2018-2022 involving institutions and organizations dealing with issues related to children, employers' organizations, labour organizations and civil society.



Zambia noted that the Government has criminalised the employment of young children and young persons through the Employment Code No. 3 of 2019, and also that in 2019, the Government established a child labour data centre, which is used to monitor incidences of child labour and accordingly alert relevant authorities for action.



## SDG 16 Corporal punishment



Austria reported on its commitment to combating violence against children through organizing a High-Level Global Conference in Vienna in 2016 on the rights of the child entitled "Towards childhoods free from corporal punishment". A comparative study "Right to a non-violent upbringing: 1977-2014-2019", and the 2020-2021 project "Violence-free Zone Europe" aims to make a significant contribution to the non-violent upbringing of children and young people.



Gambia noted that in the VNR preparatory consultations children highlighted that corporal punishment as an area of concern for them.

9
INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

16
PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS

SDG 9

Violence against children  
online, including cyber bullying  
and hate speech

SDG 16

The expansion of children’s presence online may increase the risk of exposure to violence. While the online space provides many learning resources and other opportunities for children, some VNR reports noted the risks of cyberbullying and hate speech.

Finland reported that social polarisation has increased and there is an increase in hate speech particularly targeting asylum seekers and Muslims, bullying, hate speech and sexual grooming by strangers targeting children.

Slovenia noted that various projects for the prevention of online violence involving children and teachers have been running since 2017. The ‘Web Eye’ reporting system enables Slovenian internet users to anonymously report hate speech and recordings of sexual child abuse. The partners in the project include the Office of the State Prosecutor General, the Police and representatives of the mass media and other organizations actively involved in the protection of children’s rights. Slovenia also launched the Odklikni web application as part of the ODKLIKNI (CyberVAW) project to stop cyberbullying and harassment of women and girls, co-financed by the EU.

# Strengthening the protective shield around children and reducing vulnerability

1
NO  
POVERTY

5
GENDER  
EQUALITY

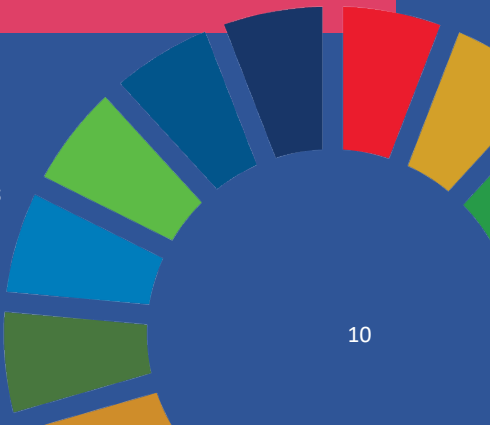
10
REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES

SDG 1

SDG 5
Social protection

SDG 10

Protection of children from all forms of violence requires progress across the whole the 2030 Agenda and all 17 SDGs. By reducing child poverty (SDG 1), increasing access to health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4), promoting gender equality and addressing harmful practices such as child and forced marriage (SDG 5), and ending the worst forms of child labour (SDG 8), the protective shield around children is strengthened and the risk of violence reduced. This section presents examples from the 2020 VNR reports of how Member States’ initiatives are addressing the drivers of violence against children.





Bangladesh noted that its national priority to the eradication of poverty has a special emphasis on the eradication of feminization of poverty by strengthening the Social SafetyNet programme.



The Kyrgyz Republic reported that in order to prevent violence against children, an early detection and social support system for children in vulnerable situations was introduced. The system includes personalized case management, psychological support and legal assistance. Furthermore, the Family Support and Child Protection Program for 2018-2028 strengthens and develops the institution of the family, increase the level of family wellbeing, and protects the rights and interests of children.



## SDG 4 Safe learning environments and getting back to school



Samoa reported on infrastructural development for schools that aims to be inclusive as it is important to provide a safe and resilient environment, including ICT infrastructure.



Uganda noted that through its free education programmes from primary to the end of secondary school, 'Go Back to School' and 'Accelerated Learning Programme,' the Government is working with development partners and local civil society organizations to support children who have dropped out to return to school. These measures have benefited refugee and internally displaced children; victims of child marriage; abducted children; orphans, child heads of household and children living with disabilities.



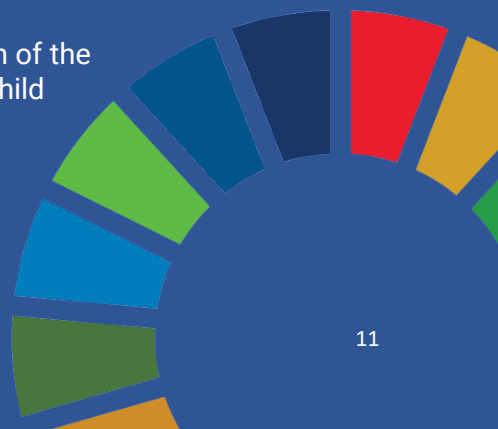
## SDG 16 Justice for children



Bangladesh reported that the justice system designed specifically for children has been strengthened with more appropriate placements made available for children in conflict with the law.



Bulgaria noted that its Strategy to Continue the Reform of the Judicial System adopted in 2015 gives priority to the child justice system.





## SDG 16 Children's right to an identity



Georgia noted that it has started issuing (temporary) ID cards for all children, including homeless children and children who have been victims of domestic violence.



Morocco reported on the launch of two birth registration campaigns in recent years. In 2018, the proportion of children under the age of 5 who had been registered reached 96.9 percent.



Zambia highlighted the passage of Statutory Instrument No. 44 of 2016, which made registration of births mandatory, and decentralization of the registration process.



## SDG 16

### Children's active engagement in SDG processes



## SDG 17

Children are not only beneficiaries of VAC services and protection but are becoming more active in being part of the solution. The VNR reports presented a variety of examples of children's engagement in processes to develop the VNR and in implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Consultations, meetings and surveys to receive inputs from children for the VNR were highlighted, as well as moves to establish more permanent systems of engaging them in national decision-making. Children's engagement is often facilitated by civil society actors and the VNR reports gave examples of how governments are seeking to strengthen this aspect of national cooperation.

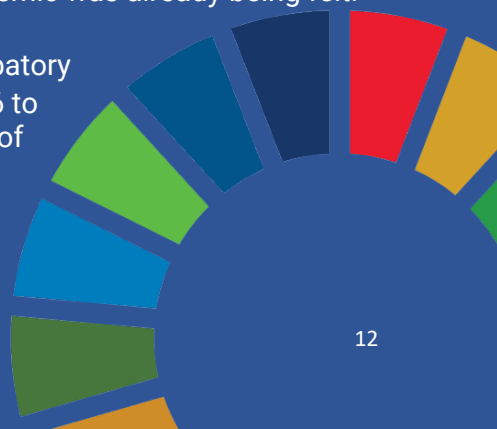
It is worth noting that some Member States reported that activities to engage children in their 2020 VNR had to be cancelled as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was already being felt.



Austria highlighted the importance attached to participatory democracy by noting the voting age was lowered to 16 to encourage the political participation and engagement of young people.



Kenya reported on primary schools organizing SDGs Clubs to create awareness among students. Mozambique noted that surveys and consultations with children were used as input to the VNR.





North Macedonia, Moldova and Russia reported on young people's networks that are actively promoting the SDGs.

Permanent national consultation structures were also created to consult children.

Some examples reported were:

- Gambia - National VNR Taskforce
- Finland - Agenda 2030 Youth Group
- Slovenia - the Youth Council
- Solomon Islands - the national Youth Council and Action Committee on Children.



Countries including Bulgaria, Slovenia and Uganda used online surveys to reach out to children and young people to hear their thoughts on national development.



## 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



# SDG 17 Multi-stakeholder partnerships



Austria reported on a mapping of SDGs related initiatives. The mapping highlights the numerous links between the SDGs and the rights of the child at a glance. It enables government, business and civil society initiatives to be reviewed and managed accordingly. Mapping the rights of the child in the SDGs is a particularly effective way to fulfil the commitment to "leave no one behind".



Gambia reported on a multi-stakeholder VNR Taskforce comprising Government, the National Assembly, private sector, Academia, civil society and NGOs, Development Partners, youth, and women.



India reported that civil society, NGOs, community organizations and the private sector play a major role in ensuring the success of the SDG agenda in the country and consultations with them are critical to the VNR preparation process.



The Kyrgyz Republic noted that 34 young activists contributed to the collaboration between youth, civil society, the private sector and government agencies in raising awareness on the SDGs and the contribution of youth to their achievement.



Samoa reported that the Samoa Victim Support Group plays a critical role in the promotion and implementation of national and targeted programmes to protect and support victims of violence and abuse. It works closely with the Ministry of Police and Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration and with funding and in-kind support from the government, development partners, the private sector and the community.



Uganda noted that the National SDG Taskforce, headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, established a multi-institutional Advisory Committee drawn from ministries, departments and agencies, Parliament, United Nations bodies, civil society and the private sector, to provide oversight to all processes leading to the VNR report.

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## Looking forward: the Decade for Action to deliver the SDGs and “Building Back Better”

The Decade of Action to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and deliver the SDGs by 2030 was launched before COVID-19 struck. As we assess the short, medium and long-term impact of COVID-19 and respond to the call of the Secretary-General to “build back better”, there is an even greater urgency to identify, share and promote solutions to overcome the barriers that hinder national development - and that includes ending violence against children!

Our overview of VNR reporting in 2020 shows that while progress towards ending violence against children is being made, more needs to be done. Children’s lives are not segmented into the mandates of sectoral Ministries, United Nations’ organizations or civil society agencies. We need to take a more holistic approach, across the child’s life cycle, to assessing progress towards realizing their rights and enhancing their wellbeing, and what action is needed to address shortfalls.

We need more and better-quality data to measure progress and identify priority areas, especially in relation to children who are left behind or entirely forgotten. And we need to ensure that children themselves are recognized as key agents of change in transforming their communities and society, and their views, experiences and suggested solutions are included.

In reading the VNRs and participating in the High-level Political Forum in 2020, it was encouraging to see that Member States increasingly recognize that ending violence against children is critical to making progress across the SDGs. We hope this trend will continue to grow. Accelerated action to end violence against children must be an essential part of the response to the impact of COVID-19 and the increased vulnerability of children.

The urgency of the cause demands it!

### November 2020

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

