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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## Violence against children\*

### Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

#### *Summary*

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Human Rights Council the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais.

In her report, the Special Representative provides an overview of major initiatives and developments to sustain and scale up efforts to safeguard children's freedom from violence and advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report highlights the strategic milestone that will be reached in 2019 – the 30-year anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – during which the high-level political forum on sustainable development will review progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, including its target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children, and the General Assembly will mobilize accelerated action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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\* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	3
II. 2019: A strategic milestone to strengthen children’s freedom from violence .....	4
III. Supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda and accelerating progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children .....	4
A. Sustaining and scaling up progress in protecting children from violence.....	4
B. Supporting national implementation of the 2030 Agenda: towards a world free from fear and from violence .....	8
IV. Reinforcing regional processes in support of the implementation of Agenda 2030.....	11
V. Children as agents of change.....	14
VI. Leaving no child behind – protecting children with disabilities from violence .....	16
VII. Looking ahead.....	20

## I. Introduction

1. The present report reviews key developments promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children at the global, regional and national levels and provides an overview of the results achieved in safeguarding children's freedom from violence.
2. Guided by General Assembly resolution 62/141, which established her mandate, the Special Representative is a global, independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.
3. At its seventy-third session,<sup>1</sup> the General Assembly reaffirmed its support for the work of the Special Representative, and recommended that the Secretary-General extend her mandate, as established in paragraphs 58 and 59 of its resolution 62/141 of 18 December 2007, for a further three years and maintain support for the effective and independent performance and sustainability of the mandate, funded from the regular budget.
4. The General Assembly recognized the progress achieved since the establishment of the mandate in promoting the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children in all regions, and in advancing the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children, including through partnerships with regional organizations, as well as through advocacy, field missions, expert consultations and thematic reports addressing emerging concerns, including on violence prevention in early childhood.
5. Realizing every child's right to freedom from violence is a fundamental dimension of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which in 2019 celebrates 30 years since its adoption. The Convention explicitly prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; bans the use of the death penalty and of life imprisonment for children; makes imperative the protection of children from harmful practices, as well as from sexual exploitation and abuse, sale, trafficking and any other form of exploitation; prohibits school violence and any form of school discipline contrary to the child's human dignity; and safeguards children from the hidden manifestations of violence within the home, or institutions for the protection of children.
6. The United Nations study on violence against children was framed by the global experience of implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It recognized that no violence is ever justifiable and all violence can be prevented. It highlighted the widespread prevalence of violence and its impact on children's lives, while making critical recommendations to ensure its prevention and elimination.
7. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its ambitious vision of a world free from fear and from violence, and its target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children, has provided new impetus to global efforts to reduce the risk of violence in children's lives and ensure the effective protection of victims.
8. The 2030 Agenda calls for "a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation". The inclusion of a specific target to end all forms of violence against children gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Several other targets in the Sustainable Development Goals promote an environment of safety and non-violence for children, including in education (target 4.a), and address specific forms of violence in childhood such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (target 5.3), and the eradication of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers (target 8.7).
9. Indeed, ending all forms of violence is crucial to safeguarding children's rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. As highlighted in the sections below, the

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<sup>1</sup> See General Assembly resolution 73/155.

protection of children from violence is receiving increased attention in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

10. The Special Representative remains strongly committed to seizing the opportunity presented by the 2030 Agenda to accelerate progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children.

## **II. 2019: A strategic milestone to strengthen children's freedom from violence**

11. 2019 is a year of opportunity. It marks a strategic milestone on the path towards ensuring children's freedom from violence, with the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified United Nations treaty; the review of progress by the high-level political forum on sustainable development on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including its violence-related Sustainable Development Goals targets; and a summit at the General Assembly devoted to reviewing implementation of the whole 2030 Agenda.

12. The July session of the high-level political forum on sustainable development will focus on four of the Goals that have special relevance to ending violence against children: Goal 4 on inclusive, safe and equitable quality education; Goal 8 on decent employment, including the elimination of child labour; Goal 10 on reducing inequalities; and Goal 16 on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, including target 16.2 on ending all forms of violence against children.

13. In September 2019, world leaders will gather in the General Assembly to review progress in the implementation of the whole of the 2030 Agenda, and to mobilize accelerated action for the second phase of implementation.

14. The Special Representative will actively engage in these processes to help ensure distinct attention is given to the violence-related Sustainable Development Goals targets and their role in achieving the vision of the 2030 Agenda. In cooperation with a wide range of partners, a global thematic report on ending violence against children will be produced. The report will build on national implementation efforts, as well as initiatives promoted by a wide range of stakeholders to mobilize support and influence progress, including United Nations entities, regional organizations, civil society, professional associations, academia, religious leaders and independent children's rights institutions.

15. The thematic report will take stock of progress made during the first four years of the 2030 Agenda, documenting lessons learned, acknowledging challenges and anticipating strategic actions needed to realize its vision of a world free from fear and from violence. A significant component of the report will reflect the views, experiences and recommendations of young people, who are crucial agents of change.

## **III. Supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda and accelerating progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children**

### **A. Sustaining and scaling up progress in protecting children from violence**

16. Significant progress has been made in protecting children from violence, on which future action can build. New international standards have been adopted, strategic partnerships and alliances have been formed, information campaigns have raised awareness of the value of investing in prevention and the negative impact of violence on child development, and global initiatives have been undertaken to tackle specific forms of violence, including bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence, online violence and harmful practices.

17. Close to 100 countries have adopted a comprehensive national policy agenda on violence against children; many have enacted legislation to prohibit physical, psychological and sexual violence, and to protect child victims and fight impunity. National research and data systems on the scale and nature of violence in childhood, effective prevention strategies, and the monitoring of progress have also been consolidated.

18. Violence has far-reaching financial costs, diverting billions of dollars from social spending, slowing economic development and eroding States' human and social capital. But steady investment in the protection of children can avoid these high costs. In an era of big data and real-time information, better tracking of spending on prevention and response to violence is possible. The Special Representative remains committed to advocate for increased budget allocations by Governments, donors and other partners for this relatively neglected sector, including through collaboration with a major international study in 2019 to estimate the return on investment from the prevention of violence against children.

19. In 2018, children's exposure to violence continued to be given much attention by Member States; in United Nations reports, academic research and the work of civil society; as well as through children's own heartbreaking stories.

20. In February 2018, Sweden hosted the first End Violence Solutions Summit, gathering Governments, United Nations organizations, civil society, religious, academic and private sector leaders and children to promote prevention and response solutions. In her address to the Summit, the Special Representative welcomed the progress made in children's protection from violence, but also called for more and better investment and a greater sense of urgency for action. She called for a global mobilization around the opportunities presented by the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention, and by the review of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2019 by the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to place children's protection from violence centre stage and achieve lasting change.

21. Children's protection from bullying and cyberbullying gained special attention through the adoption of the second report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on this topic (A/73/265).<sup>2</sup> Drawing on submissions by governments, civil society and academia, and on three important expert consultations organized in collaboration with the Special Representative in China,<sup>3</sup> Mexico<sup>4</sup> and the Republic of Korea,<sup>5</sup> the report documented positive experiences, highlighted successful approaches to tackling bullying, and identified major areas where further research was needed: investment in prevention, starting in early childhood; the role of teachers in modelling positive behaviour; and breaking the silence around bullying in sports.

22. The report presented key recommendations, including the need to raise awareness of the severe negative impact of bullying on children's development, and effective prevention strategies; the importance of closely involving, empowering and consulting with children; the crucial support for, and the engagement of, schools, parents and the community in prevention and response programmes; and the need for a sound legal foundation to underpin public policies and the promotion of restorative approaches. The report reiterated the call of the Secretary-General to strengthen data and research on bullying and cyberbullying to break the shame and silence that often surrounds its victims, and to promote proven prevention initiatives, early detection and response interventions.

23. The launch of the report of the Secretary-General was marked by the presentation at the United Nations of an innovative multimedia initiative – Cyber Cocoon Kids – sponsored by the Special Representative and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The exhibit featured four sculptures of children, representing aspects of cyberbullying and other online risks facing children around the world. The Special

<sup>2</sup> See also General Assembly resolution 73/154.

<sup>3</sup> Fourth World Internet Conference, held in Wuzhen.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-American Consultation of Experts on the Protection of Children from Bullying and Cyberbullying, held in Mexico City.

<sup>5</sup> International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying, held in Seoul.

Representative and the Permanent Missions of Lithuania and Mexico also hosted a high-level panel discussion at the United Nations to share positive experiences and mobilize support for the further implementation of the report's recommendations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) participated in the panel and presented the findings from its monitoring report, "School violence and bullying: global status and trends, drivers and consequences".<sup>6</sup>

24. Bullying and other forms of violence in and around schools endanger the protection and academic performance of children; they also affect the health and well-being of children, and their capacity to develop open and trusting relations. The impact of violence in school goes beyond the children who are its direct victims, negatively affecting the lives of those who witness it and creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity that undermines effective learning. Ensuring that all schools are havens of non-violence is the goal of the Safe to Learn campaign launched in January 2019 with the support of the Special Representative. The campaign is aimed at preventing and addressing school violence, promoting evidence-based interventions, and mobilizing the resources needed to end all violence in schools by 2024.

25. The use of violent discipline is a particularly pervasive form of violence against children, and it often starts in early childhood, as highlighted in the Special Representative's recent report.<sup>7</sup> According to a UNICEF report, *A Familiar Face*, shouting, yelling and screaming are common forms of discipline for 1-year-olds, close to 300 million children between 2 and 4 years of age experience psychological aggression and/or physical punishment by their caregivers at home, and 176 million children under 5 years of age witness domestic violence.

26. There is increasing recognition of the need to end the use of violent discipline. More than 50 States have enacted comprehensive legislation banning the use of violence as a form of discipline, correction or punishment, most recently in Nepal, and many other countries are moving in the same direction. In December 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics published an important policy statement<sup>8</sup> providing guidance to paediatricians and other health-care providers on educating parents about positive and effective strategies to discipline children at different stages of development. The policy statement pointed to evidence that corporal punishment and yelling at or shaming children are minimally effective for discipline in the short term and not effective in the long term. It also linked corporal punishment to an increased risk of negative behavioural, cognitive, psychosocial and emotional outcomes for children. Evidence on the negative impact of corporal punishment was reinforced by recent research pointing to an association between the introduction of a legal ban on corporal punishment in all settings and lower levels of youth violence, an association that held even after differences between countries in factors such as wealth and violent crime were statistically controlled.<sup>9</sup>

27. In June 2018, the High-Level Global Conference on the Universal Prohibition of Corporal Punishment<sup>10</sup> was convened under the patronage of the President of Malta. It was preceded by a regional consultation in Latin America and the Caribbean, hosted by the Government of Mexico.<sup>11</sup> The Conference provided a strategic platform to share national experiences, reflect on lessons learned and consider how best to accelerate progress in ending the use of corporal punishment. Delivering the keynote address, the Special Representative recalled the significant progress achieved in recent years, as well as the urgent need to close the gap between international standards on the protection of children from all forms of violence and the reality on the ground.

<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002657/265781e.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/violence-prevention-must-start-early-childhood>.

<sup>8</sup> *Pediatrics*, vol. 142, issue 6 (December 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Frank Elgar et al., "Corporal punishment bans and physical fighting in adolescents: an ecological study of 88 countries", *BMJ Open*, vol. 8, issue 9.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/srsg-santos-pais-welcomes-states%E2%80%99-commitment-towards-elimination-corporal-punishment-children>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/node/2569>.

28. In November 2018, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Government of Sweden, in cooperation with the Special Representative, co-hosted an international conference in Stockholm on non-violent childhoods. The meeting provided a valuable platform to share national experiences and learn from significant developments in laws, policies, research and data, as well as from the experiences of young people. It recognized the critical value of legislation while placing special emphasis on implementation, including positive parenting and social protection measures. It also stressed the provision of high-quality services and awareness-raising campaigns to promote a nurturing and non-violent environment free from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment.

29. Religious and spiritual communities are uniquely placed to support and influence the prevention and response to violence against children. Two recent global meetings illustrated how engaging faith leaders can play a crucial role in mobilizing society, raising awareness and accelerating action. In November 2018, the Special Representative participated in the first Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities Forum on Child Dignity in a Digital World, held in Abu Dhabi. The high-level meeting gathered faith leaders from the world's major religions to discuss the risks children face in cyberspace, the actions needed to inform and empower children to protect themselves effectively, and the critical role of religious leaders in promoting action.

30. In October 2018, Faith Action for Children on the Move: Global Partners Forum was held in Rome, bringing together faith leaders to discuss the role of their congregations in preventing and responding to violence inflicted on children on the move. Through their long-term presence and local expertise, faith communities convey the trust and authority needed to promote positive change in countries of migration origin, transit and destination. By speaking out for children on the move and raising awareness of their plight, faith leaders can help prevent violence and promote the protection of children's rights, and ensure that the best interests of the child are kept at the heart of all decisions. The Forum developed a plan of action for its members and the wider community of faith-based organizations committed to protecting children on the move from violence.

31. The Special Representative supported the development of the Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in December 2018. The Global Compacts reiterated States' commitments to protect the rights of migrant and refugee children. These children are as much running with violence as running from violence – including abuse and exploitation, community violence, harassment by gangs, recruitment by criminal networks, or political persecution. They embark on perilous and uncertain journeys, often at the mercy of unscrupulous smuggling and trafficking networks. Their travelling companions are fear, anxiety, the threat of violence and, at times, even death. These children often do not receive the protection to which they are entitled: they may be separated from their family, and placed in crowded facilities with unrelated adults where they suffer risks of harassment, abuse and trafficking, and, in some cases, they endure deprivation of liberty in poorly-resourced detention centres. In these settings, impunity prevails for perpetrators of violence against children.

32. Guided by the best interests of the child, the implementation of the Global Compacts provides a crucial opportunity to transform this vicious cycle of neglect, abuse and exploitation into a virtuous cycle of protection of children's rights. The Special Representative is preparing a thematic report on this topic with Governments, United Nations partners, civil society organizations and independent children's rights institutions.

33. The critical role of the private sector in advancing progress in the elimination of violence against children was highlighted in a joint report by the Special Representative and UNICEF, entitled "The private sector and the prevention of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean".<sup>12</sup> The report presents private sector practices that protect children from violence and increase business investment in prevention strategies. It was launched in June 2018 in Colombia at the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism. The Summit called for stronger evidence to inform a global awareness

<sup>12</sup> Available at <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/private-sector-and-prevention-violence-against-children-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

campaign, enhanced online reporting hotlines, and child-sensitive approaches to assist and ensure the reintegration of victims and to bring an end to impunity.

34. To share knowledge and mobilize expertise and financial resources for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Special Representative actively engages in strategic partnerships, including the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, the Global Alliance to Eradicate Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Child Labour (Alliance 8.7), the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the Task Force on Justice, and the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals.

35. The developments outlined above are significant. But the urgent need to ensure children's protection from violence has not diminished. Every five minutes, a child dies because of violence. Every year, at least 1 billion children – half the world's children – suffer violence. They are intentionally targeted in politically driven processes, manipulated by organized crime, forced to flee armed and gang violence, sold and exploited for economic gain, groomed online, disciplined by violent means, sexually assaulted in the privacy of their homes, neglected in institutions, abused in detention centres, bullied in schools and in sports facilities, and stigmatized and tortured due to superstitious beliefs or harmful practices, including as a result of witchcraft accusations.

36. This is, however, not a fate. With the implementation of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda, children's freedom from violence can be placed at the heart of the policy agenda of every nation, helping to prevent the risk of violence in children's lives and providing effective support to child victims.

## **B. Supporting national implementation of the 2030 Agenda: towards a world free from fear and from violence**

37. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires States to adopt and implement a comprehensive, integrated, multidisciplinary and time-bound strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence. National strategies should be informed by solid evidence and robust, reliable and disaggregated data, supported by predictable resources, and monitored and evaluated in a periodic and transparent way. The recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children provide a sound reference for national implementation efforts, and they helped inform the development of INSPIRE,<sup>13</sup> a technical support package that uses the best available evidence on effective strategies to end violence against children.

38. Member States are encouraged to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals targets within national development strategies and related sectoral frameworks and to assess progress through participatory, transparent and integrated processes of follow-up and review. They are urged to conduct regular and inclusive voluntary national reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels. The voluntary national reviews facilitate the sharing of experiences in implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a view to accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

39. The high-level political forum on sustainable development provides a strategic platform to advance progress in children's protection from violence, and this topic has increasingly gained attention. The Ministerial Declaration from the 2018 forum with the theme of "transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies"<sup>14</sup> expressed strong commitment to placing children at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It recognized that developing human capital for sustainable and resilient societies begins by investing in children, adolescents and youth and ensuring they grew up free from all forms of violence. It also emphasized the importance of children as critical agents of change and their meaningful participation in implementation – particularly the most vulnerable.

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/inspire/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/).

<sup>14</sup> E/HLS/2018/1.



40. The preparation of a voluntary national review is an opportunity for States to showcase synergies between national and global commitments. And indeed, several of the 46 States that submitted voluntary national reviews to the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development paid special attention to the protection of children, reaffirming their commitment to the prevention and elimination of violence and showing the links between children's rights and sustainable development. The voluntary national reviews documented measures taken towards target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals – which included the adoption of national plans and policies, enactment of legislation, strengthening institutions and partnerships, training of professionals, and consolidation of data and research.

41. For example, Albania adopted significant policy and legislative measures to address physical and sexual abuse, bullying, and increases in the number of reported crimes against children. These included the Children's Agenda 2020, the Law for the Protection of Children's Rights, and the Criminal Justice for Children Code.

42. Armenia enacted a new law in 2018 to address domestic violence against children, including physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers. A Child Rights Unit was established in the Office of the Human Rights Defender and an inter-agency multisectoral Council on Access to Justice for Children was established by the Ministry of Justice.

43. In Australia, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 addresses violence against women, and domestic and family violence. The national "Stop it at the Start" campaign targets influencers of young people, and was launched to challenge attitudes supporting violence and generate long-term cultural change.

44. In Bhutan, a study on violence against children conducted in 2016 shed light on violence, exploitation and abuse against children, including children with disabilities, from broken homes or living with extended families, and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The establishment of "law clubs" in schools and the promotion of legal knowledge as part of the "Know the Law to Protect Your Rights" series helped address these concerns and increase awareness of children's rights.

45. In 2017, Canada launched "It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence" – founded on prevention, support for survivors, and promotion of responsive legal and justice systems. The Criminal Code was amended to enhance the protection of children from sexual exploitation and cyberbullying, and funding was allocated to strengthen capacity to respond to public reporting and support the removal of online sexual abuse materials.

46. Ireland highlighted its ambitious vision for a country where the rights of all children and young people are respected and protected, their voices are heard, and they are supported to realize their potential. The National Policy Framework for Young People 2014–2020 addresses domestic violence, violence against women and girls, and human trafficking.

47. In Jamaica, the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence was revised to guide implementation up to 2023. The "Break the Silence" campaign, implemented in 2015 to increase the reporting by adults of child abuse, had resulted in an 18.7 per cent increase in cases reported.

48. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF, developed a child protection policy that included a comprehensive methodology for early identification and referral of cases of school violence.

49. Lithuania has a National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Provision of Assistance to Victims 2014–2020. In 2017, the Guidelines for the Implementation of Violence Prevention in Schools came into force to promote a safe school environment free from violence and bullying.

50. 2018 also saw significant progress in the development and implementation of comprehensive national plans and policies, as well as in the strengthening of national legislation to protect children from violence.

51. Chile adopted a National Policy on Children and Adolescents 2015–2025.<sup>15</sup> The protection of children from violence within families, schools and other settings is a key priority. The Office of the Defender of Children’s Rights<sup>16</sup> was established in January 2018.

52. Panama launched its National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents 2018–2019. The Plan was developed through a participatory process and identifies strategic and well-coordinated actions by the national child protection system, and promotes mechanisms for the protection and empowerment of children and adolescents in municipalities.<sup>17</sup>

53. In the Philippines, the Plan of Action to End Violence against Children was launched, which addresses diverse dimensions of violence. It stresses the need to strengthen the child protection system, ensure children’s access to protective services, and identify key implementation roles and responsibilities within the Government.

54. The Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic launched a multisectoral plan of action on violence against children based on the findings of its 2014 national violence against children survey. As noted by the Special Representative at its launch, the plan provides a critical contribution to accelerate progress towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

55. Spain is developing its third National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents (2018–2022) to address child vulnerability, including trafficking. Legislation is being finalized to protect children from all forms of violence, including very young children abused at home.<sup>18</sup>

56. Support for the enactment of legislative measures on children’s protection from violence remained a high priority for the Special Representative in her global advocacy, policy dialogue and country missions, which in 2018 included visits to Andorra, Belarus, Chile, China, Iceland, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico and Spain.

57. Since 2006, the number of countries with a comprehensive legal ban has more than tripled, reaching over 50 by 2018; most recently Benin, Ireland, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lithuania, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, Paraguay, Peru, Slovenia and Viet Nam.

58. In 1979, Sweden was the first country in the world to prohibit all forms of violence against children. In 2018, the Swedish Parliament incorporated the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish law to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child guides policymaking.

59. Peru adopted new legislation<sup>19</sup> to support its legal ban on corporal punishment. It requires mandatory reporting by teachers and other professionals, and recognizes the crucial role played by municipalities in violence prevention and elimination, including support for families and positive parenting initiatives. New safeguards will ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in child rights-related public and private proceedings.<sup>20</sup>

60. The consolidation of data and research is a key concern for the Special Representative. In cooperation with a wide range of partners, significant progress has been made in this area: over the last decade, data on violence against children has been produced

<sup>15</sup> See [http://observatorioninez.consejoinfancia.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Plan-Accion\\_Ni%C3%B1ez\\_VF\\_.pdf](http://observatorioninez.consejoinfancia.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Plan-Accion_Ni%C3%B1ez_VF_.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Law 21067.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.unicef.org/panama/spanish/EstrategiaPVNNA\\_infografica.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/panama/spanish/EstrategiaPVNNA_infografica.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> See [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/203295182018\\_VNR\\_Report\\_Spain\\_EN\\_ddghpbrgsp.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/203295182018_VNR_Report_Spain_EN_ddghpbrgsp.pdf), p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Decree No. 003-2018-MIMP, in *El Peruano*, Índice de Normas Legales (June 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Decree No. 002-2018-MIMP, in *El Peruano*, Índice de Normas Legales (June 2018).

on 10 per cent of the world's children and young people under 24 years of age. In 2018, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia launched the findings of their comprehensive surveys on violence against children.

#### **IV. Reinforcing regional processes in support of the implementation of Agenda 2030**

61. Cooperation with regional organizations and institutions is a major thrust of the Special Representative's strategy to accelerate progress in children's protection from violence. These strong partnerships have helped to place this concern at the centre of the regional policy agenda, while enhancing the accountability of States and supporting national implementation efforts.

62. As part of this strategy, the Special Representative has hosted high-level regional consultations in the South and Central American, Caribbean, South Asian, Pacific, European and Arab regions. Six regional monitoring reports have been issued, with periodic review meetings conducted to sustain and accelerate progress.

63. Significant regional political commitments and implementation road maps have continued to be developed. A new generation of regional plans on ending violence against children is being developed, aligned with the 2030 Agenda. These plans have strengthened national legislation and public policies, consolidated data and research, and promoted awareness-raising campaigns.

64. The Special Representative organizes an annual high-level round table with regional organizations. The forum is a unique, strategic mechanism within the United Nations system to enhance cross-regional and South-South cooperation on ending violence against children through policy dialogue, sharing knowledge and good practices, and identifying trends and pressing challenges.

65. The eighth cross-regional round table took place in May 2018 in Thimphu, co-organized with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children and hosted by the Government of Bhutan.

66. The round table paid special attention to accelerating progress towards reaching the targets in the 2030 Agenda addressing violence, including the protection of children from harmful practices and child marriage, and the role of religious leaders in tackling violence against children.<sup>21</sup>

67. Participating regional organizations recognized the strategic opportunities provided in 2019 by the review of progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. To leverage these opportunities, they committed to contributing to the global thematic report on ending violence against children, referenced above.

68. The Special Representative will co-host the ninth cross-regional round table with the African Child Policy Forum, at the headquarters of the African Union, in Addis Ababa in February 2019.

69. The 2019 cross-regional meeting is aimed at consolidating efforts to end violence against children across the African continent, building upon the 2018 Day of the African Child which was devoted to the 2030 Agenda under the theme "Leave No Child Behind for Africa's Development". As noted on that occasion, failing to invest in essential services and children's protection from violence runs the risk of leaving behind the vast majority of boys and girls, who constitute almost 50 per cent of the population of Africa.

70. The *African Report on Child Well-being 2018* by the African Child Policy Forum found that while several countries had legislation, policies and institutions on children's rights, many laws and practices were inconsistent with international standards. The high

<sup>21</sup> See [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/general/conclusions\\_recommendations\\_bhutan\\_2018.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/general/conclusions_recommendations_bhutan_2018.pdf).

incidence of child labour, child marriage and violence against children showed the gap between rhetoric and action and the lack of enforcement of legislation. For instance, while 36 out of 52 countries set the marriage age at 18 years or older for both sexes, according to the report 3 in 10 children in Africa were married before that age.

71. Both Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, including target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

72. Fourteen countries in Africa have undertaken comprehensive household surveys to document the magnitude, nature and impact of violence in childhood. Information from violence against children and youth surveys has supported multisectoral government policy, planning, programming and budgeting, as well as the enactment of legislation to prevent violence and protect child victims.

73. The Special Representative continued to collaborate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children on the implementation of the 2015 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children. The plan promotes national action within ASEAN towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals targets that address violence.

74. In 2018, during her annual dialogue with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the Special Representative urged the Commission to seize the opportunity provided in 2019 to accelerate action for the protection of children from violence. The Commission adopted her suggestion to undertake a midterm review of the Regional Plan of Action, building upon the significant baseline study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with ASEAN member States and ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children representatives. The midterm review of the Regional Plan of Action will be completed in 2019.

75. In the framework of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children, protection from violence was further strengthened by the implementation of the regional plan of action for the prevention and elimination of child labour for 2016–2021 in South Asia, and the development of a regional strategy and action plan to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, including online.

76. The regional action plan on child marriage was extended for a further five years (2018–2023) and its implementation pursued through the development of national plans in Afghanistan and Nepal and a multimedia campaign in Bangladesh.

77. A regional platform for religious leaders to promote children's rights was launched in September 2017 in Kathmandu, contributing to their increased involvement at the national level. In Bhutan, a 2017–2022 national strategy and plan of action for the protection of children in monastic institutions was developed.

78. The South Asia Parliamentary Platform for Children, which convened in Dhaka in May 2018, brought together legislators from across the region to safeguard children's rights, including their right to protection from violence.

79. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS). The resolution adopted by the OAS Inter-American Children's Institute, on violence against children,<sup>22</sup> reaffirmed member States' commitment to violence prevention and elimination in all settings, while calling for the sharing of good practices and experiences, especially on children's protection from sexual exploitation and on the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and for greater use of alternatives to children's deprivation of liberty.

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<sup>22</sup> See [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/regions/engcd\\_res\\_08\\_92-r17.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/regions/engcd_res_08_92-r17.pdf).

80. In the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the guidelines for the promotion of positive discipline and the prevention of violence against children are aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

81. In October 2018, the MERCOSUR Permanent Commission, Niñ@Sur, reaffirmed member States' commitment to ending violence against children, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda. Uruguay hosted the second Inter-American Forum on National Child Protection Systems which, through the Montevideo Declaration, recognized children's protection from all forms of violence as a programmatic principle of national child protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.

82. The Forum devoted special attention to the situation of children on the move. It identified the major drivers of migration in the region, including poverty, exclusion, and violence; reaffirmed the role of national child protection systems in safeguarding the rights of migrant children; and called for the best interests of the child to be upheld at all times, and for family separation and child detention to be avoided.

83. In November 2018, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and UNICEF convened a regional dialogue (entitled On the road to equality: 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) to review progress in realizing the rights of children. That forum brought together high-level representatives of Governments, experts and representatives of civil society organizations from across the region. It included four panels, on the progress and challenges in the provision of social protection, promoting child participation, ensuring access to high-quality early child development services, and addressing violence against children. The panel on violence drew attention to the high rates of child homicide in some countries in the region, the devastating impact of gang violence, and the "normalization" of violence in and around children's lives. It also identified some of the key drivers of violence against children, including high and sustained levels of poverty and inequality.

84. Over 140 children and young people from across the region working on innovative projects to promote children's rights also joined the forum to share their experience as agents of change.

85. The young people engaged in discussions on the key challenges they had identified in relation to the four key topic areas of the forum and the action they wanted to see to effect change. Children expressed particular concern at the different manifestations of violence in childhood, which make children feel insecure.

86. They identified education as one of the most potentially transformative processes to prevent violence and bring violence to an end. In their view, the education system in the Americas should empower and enable children to develop the skills needed to face the challenges of today's world.

87. The Special Representative continued engagement with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), including bilateral meetings with the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission. The Commission promotes the strengthening of children's protection from violence as a priority in national development plans and national reviews, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda. The OIC thematic debate on the rights of the child outcome document, adopted in April 2018, called on States to enact legislation guaranteeing the protection of children from exploitation, to establish specific mechanisms to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to take action to abolish harmful practices. It highlighted the need for States to exercise due diligence to prohibit, prevent and investigate acts of violence against children, end impunity and provide support to victims.

88. The Special Representative further strengthened her cooperation with the Council of Europe, including in the framework of the Council's Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021), which mainstreams children's freedom from violence. To give this topic distinct attention, a group of experts was established to document good practices and consolidate progress in violence prevention and response, including through the development of an online regional platform for sharing information. Results from this

process will feed into the midterm evaluation of the Strategy, to be hosted by the Government of France in November 2019.

89. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted new standards on violence-related concerns, including in April 2018 on safeguarding the rights of children of imprisoned parents, and in July 2018 on the rights of the child in the digital environment. The latter set of standards promotes children's empowerment and protection through the development of legislation and policies, the strengthening of national and international cooperation, and enhanced partnerships with key stakeholders.

90. Additional work was pursued on the rights of the child in migration, with special emphasis on age assessment and guardianship of unaccompanied and separated children. The Council of Europe prepared a handbook for professionals working with children affected by migration to help them communicate in a child-friendly way about children's rights and the procedures affecting them, in accordance with the age, maturity, language, gender and culture of the child.<sup>23</sup>

91. The European Union has continued to promote important initiatives to prevent and address violence against children in both its internal and external action, including with respect to strengthening national child protection systems, enhancing child safeguarding standards, building the capacity of professionals, and supporting the delivery of integrated, multidisciplinary services to child victims of violence.

92. In December 2018, the President of the European Parliament appointed a new coordinator for children's rights to ensure that the rights of the child were fully respected in European Union legislation and in other initiatives promoted by the Parliament. The coordinator will act as a focal point for engagement between the Parliament and other institutions and agencies involved with the development and implementation of European Union policy related to children's rights, as well as with the United Nations system and civil society organizations.

## V. Children as agents of change

93. Partnering with children is a crucial dimension of the Special Representative's mandate. Listening to children's voices and experiences is critical to realizing the vision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda of a world free from fear and violence.

94. As the Ministerial Declaration from the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development noted, children are important agents of change and their meaningful participation is vital for the effective implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. The 2019 forum theme of "empowering people" and the forum's review of Sustainable Development Goal 16, alongside the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with its crucial attention to children's agency and participation, will give children's engagement and support for violence prevention and response initiatives a special relevance.

95. Violence was a top concern for the more than 800,000 children who participated in consultations informing the development of the 2030 Agenda. This priority was reconfirmed by an online opinion poll on migrant and refugee children, conducted by the Special Representative and UNICEF. Of more than 170,000 young people surveyed, a large percentage saw violence as a serious issue associated with children's cross-border movements. Violence was identified as a key reason for children leaving their country, a major challenge faced during their journey and an ongoing problem when they arrived in destination countries.

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<sup>23</sup> See <https://rm.coe.int/how-to-convey-child-friendly-information-to-children-in-migration-aha/1680902f91>.

96. Violence, fear and insecurity were also key concerns expressed by children affected by detention.<sup>24</sup> These concerns were highlighted in consultations with adolescents deprived of liberty and with children whose parents were in detention, organized in Latin America by the Special Representative in cooperation with UNICEF and civil society partners. Their views are highly relevant to the global study on children deprived of liberty, requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/157. The Special Representative chairs the United Nations task force that provides system-wide support for the development of the global study.

97. The voices of children demanding an end to violence and marginalization is the most compelling and urgent reason for action. But even in the most desperate of situations, children reveal hope for a better world and determination to achieve lasting change. Across regions, young advocates join hands with national authorities, civil society and many other allies in raising awareness about the impact of violence, empowering young people to be the first line of protection from the risk of abuse and exploitation and inspiring many others to build a world where children can grow up respected and supported.

98. To better understand how child participation is evolving and how governments and other actors are helping to prevent, report and raise awareness of different forms of violence against children, the Office of the Special Representative undertook a review of case studies on child participation across different regions. The review included the U-Report conducted by the Special Representative in collaboration with UNICEF, where over 100,000 children from more than 20 countries shared their experiences and views on bullying, as a key contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on the topic.<sup>25</sup>

99. The case studies reviewed illustrate a shift in the paradigm around child participation: from “let’s hear what children have to say”, to one which enables children to identify problems, revisit approaches, inform decisions, and mobilize a range of partners – from decision makers to their own peers – to promote positive change.

100. As illustrated in the following examples, child participation is increasingly associated with the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). And the most successful processes gave children significant roles in identifying the greatest concerns and as leaders or designers of the initiatives.

101. In 2018, in Malaysia, the Government, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector launched a national campaign promoting kindness to tackle bullying in schools. #StandTogether Malaysia invited schools to suggest solutions developed through child-adult collaboration, and within one week students had submitted over 130 projects and 750 schools had taken action to promote kindness.

102. Manuals and toolkits were made available, both online and offline. ICTs were used to promote the campaign on social media, disseminate resources and collect real-time data. The online platforms were particularly useful in directly engaging with children and gathering evidence about how children related to bullying.

103. Through the UNICEF-supported U-Report initiative, thousands of young people had their say and more than two in three expressed concerns at violence in and around schools. Recognizing that “kindness is a responsibility that begins with each one of us”, children committed to being respectful and caring and to speaking up. They also committed to breaking the taboos and victimization around reporting violence, to seek out trusted authorities and to create child-led channels for reporting. Their recommendations included a call for accessible and reliable means of reporting cases of sexual harassment and assault.<sup>26</sup>

104. In Mexico, to ensure implementation of the 2014 law on children and adolescents, which includes child participation as a key dimension of its enforcement, the Government launched a nationwide online polling system to gather information from children 13 years

<sup>24</sup> A/73/276, pp. 17–18.

<sup>25</sup> See A/71/213.

<sup>26</sup> See [www.unicef.org/end-violence/youth-manifesto](http://www.unicef.org/end-violence/youth-manifesto).

of age and older. To reach out-of-school children, collaboration was promoted with the community network of the National Council for Educational Development. Children expressed concern at the use of corporal punishment in the home, as well as at discrimination in schools, including against children with disabilities and from indigenous communities.

105. In 2015, the National Council for Children in Chile launched the *Yo Opino* initiative.<sup>27</sup> This national consultation was conducted through the school system to collect the views of children between 4 and 18 years of age to inform policies and programmes. The results of the survey were presented to Congress, as well as to the 2017 high-level political forum on sustainable development. Children expressed strong concern at situations of poverty and violence and called for the promotion of respect for diversity and non-discrimination, for children to enjoy freedom from verbal and physical punishment, and for violent practices, such as bullying and cyberbullying, to be strongly addressed.

106. In India, the organization Restless Development has focused on children's empowerment to prevent child marriage. Youth-led advocacy and mobilization, and peer-to-peer education and learning, were critical dimensions of this initiative, alongside data collection through a smartphone-based technology. The #KnotSoYoung campaign involved thousands of children and adolescents, and mobilized a network of youth leaders in significant child-centred community action and campaigns. These efforts placed special emphasis on girls' education and awareness of their rights, providing them with the skills needed to stay in school; as a result, 10 villages declared themselves free of child marriage.

107. In Guatemala and Malawi, "Rise Up for Girls" was organized to tackle child marriage and gender-based violence. In both countries, the risks of early marriage, dropout from school by girls, and life-threatening health consequences of early pregnancy are high. Girls were involved in the identification of major concerns at every step of the process. In cooperation with traditional and local leaders, important results were achieved. In Malawi, over 10,000 girls supported the change of national legislation on child marriage, helping to ban this harmful practice in 184 communities. And in Guatemala, a group of girls led the process of creating a national violence observatory to report cases of violence against girls and women; over 700 girls have been referred. In both countries, the most used resources for participation were offline, due to the rural contexts within which the initiative was promoted, but social media were used to support communication and mobilization of girls.

108. These examples show a growing reliance on ICTs. In most cases, the use of digital tools was for data-collection purposes, while offline approaches were promoted to achieve change. Interestingly, children used these digital tools for continuous participation and to be active agents of change rather than only data providers.

109. Child participation models need to evolve according to the reality of children's lives. And technological tools and developments need to respond to children's growing experience and expectations as digital citizens. This is an area where further research is needed, both to seize the opportunities offered by ICTs and to prevent and address any associated risks, and to continue to strengthen the capacity and agency of children to genuinely access information and influence decision-making processes. This is an area that the Special Representative will continue to actively promote, including in the thematic report on violence against children, noted above.

## **VI. Leaving no child behind – protecting children with disabilities from violence**

110. Violence against children is widespread and pervasive. It affects children of all ages, takes place in all settings, and knows no geographic, social or cultural borders. It often starts early in life, and as children grow up, the risk of violence often becomes a continuum.

<sup>27</sup> See [www.creciendoconderechos.gob.cl/docs/Informe-nacional-Yo-Opino-es-mi-derecho-2017\\_Final.pdf](http://www.creciendoconderechos.gob.cl/docs/Informe-nacional-Yo-Opino-es-mi-derecho-2017_Final.pdf).



111. For children with disabilities the risk of violence is particularly high – indeed, they are almost four times more likely to experience violence than children without disabilities.<sup>28</sup> And for children with mental or intellectual disabilities the risk may be especially high, including the risk of sexual violence.<sup>29</sup>

112. Children with disabilities are also exposed to a high risk of placement in institutions, where poor conditions endanger their health, development and well-being, where they do not receive the individual attention they require, and where they may suffer abusive attitudes and behaviour, as well as harassment, beatings and isolation, by poorly trained staff.<sup>30</sup>

113. For too long, children with disabilities have been left behind. Addressing violence against children with disabilities has been a key concern for the mandate of the Special Representative. In September 2018 in Bangkok, the Special Representative joined the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility to launch the 10 principles for the protection, well-being and development of girls, boys and adolescents with disabilities. This campaign was developed with the participation of children with disabilities and is aimed at the elimination of violence.

114. The 10 principles express important messages from children with disabilities, including the following: “I exist as I am, and I am a person just like you. I deserve to be respected and have my diversity valued. I have the same dignity and human rights as you and everyone else”; “I want you to accept me as I am, help me develop my abilities and talents and give me a good-quality education”; and “I want you to respect me and protect me from all forms of violence ... Just as anyone else, my body, my soul and my mind deserve to be protected.”

115. Framed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,<sup>31</sup> the section below builds upon the decision of the Human Rights Council to devote special attention to the empowerment of children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights. It addresses social exclusion, institutionalization, the neglect and abuse that children with disabilities often encounter, how violence aggravates the risk of mental health disorders, and how to promote the protection of children with disabilities from all forms of violence.

116. Disability, social exclusion, poor health and violence often go hand in hand. The incidence of disability is higher among children belonging to poorer households, where they also lack access to basic social services of quality and in turn miss opportunities for early detection, treatment and recovery, and for meaningful participation in social life.

117. Families of children with disabilities face extra medical, housing and transport costs; they miss employment opportunities and face marginalization. Heavy care demands and high levels of stress, lack of support and services, and a deep sense of isolation aggravate the risk of violence within the household. Some families respond with neglect. Others shield the child from contact with the outside world, including in order to protect him or her from abuse and stigmatization.

118. Stigma and prejudice related to disability, as well as barriers in the environment, make it much more difficult for children with disabilities to attend school, to access health care, to participate in the community and to seek remedies and support when they are victims of violence.

119. Indeed, children with disabilities are less likely to attend school, limiting their opportunities to develop their talents and abilities and access employment opportunities later in life. Weak investment in national budgets for education, high costs for families, and

<sup>28</sup> See [www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2012/child\\_disabilities\\_violence\\_20120712/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2012/child_disabilities_violence_20120712/en/).

<sup>29</sup> See [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SOWC\\_2013\\_75.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SOWC_2013_75.pdf), p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> Available at [www.unviolencestudy.org/](http://www.unviolencestudy.org/), pp. 175–190.

<sup>31</sup> General Assembly resolution 64/142.

shortages of schools, inadequate facilities, insufficient qualified teachers and a lack of learning materials, are just some of the reasons for this situation.<sup>32</sup>

120. Although education facilities are required to be child-, disability- and gender-sensitive and to provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all,<sup>33</sup> school violence against students with disabilities – by teachers, other staff, and fellow students – is common. Students with disabilities often become the targets of physical and verbal threats, and abuse and social isolation. Their risk of being bullied can be high, and they may prefer to attend special schools because of the fear of stigma or bullying in regular schools. In this regard, the attitudes of teachers are critical in valuing diversity and providing a safe and supportive environment, and in ensuring the genuine participation of children with disabilities in school and classroom activities.

121. In some communities, disability is perceived as a curse, a source of shame for the family and a misfortune. At times, it is believed to be the result of possession by evil spirits, and the child's liberation is thought to be achieved through starvation, exposure to extreme heat or cold or to fire, or severe beatings. As a result, under pressure from influential actors in the community, "mercy killings" may take place to put an end to the child's perceived suffering.

122. When used as beggars, children with disabilities are subject to violence to keep them on the streets, and they may suffer physical abuse to attract attention and encourage charity.

123. Exposure to such situations of violence can have serious consequences on the mental health of children with disabilities, leading to an increased risk of low self-esteem and depression; post-traumatic stress disorder; anxiety; hallucinations and memory disturbances; sleep and eating disorders; health-risk behaviours, including substance abuse; and self-harm and suicidal ideation.

124. For adolescents, these risks may be particularly high, as half of all lifetime mental health disorders appear by the age of 14, depression is the primary cause of illness and disability among adolescents, and suicide is the third leading cause of death.<sup>34</sup>

125. According to a UNICEF review<sup>35</sup> in industrialized countries, there is a close link between adolescents' mental health and the experience of bullying, and between mental health and health-risk behaviours. That study notes that the proportion of children and adolescents with mental health symptoms is on the rise, and on average, almost twice as many girls as boys reported symptoms related to their mental health at 13 and 15 years of age.

126. Despite their importance, mental health-related services for children often receive inadequate budgets and lack good-quality standards of care and staffing, thus creating an environment where abuse is common.<sup>36</sup> But for children with an intellectual disability, institutionalized approaches, including in psychiatric institutions, and excessively medicalized practices, may seriously compromise their development and well-being.<sup>37</sup>

127. Placing children with disabilities in institutional care can have devastating consequences. Children lack the caring support, stimulation and social engagement that are crucial to their health and development; they also often experience isolation and overmedication. In many cases, staff are ill-trained and ill-paid and are also undervalued and stigmatized by the community. At the same time, children are at increased risks of physical violence and of verbal and emotional abuse, and may be subjected to violence as part of their purported "treatment". In some cases, drugs may be used to control children's behaviour and make them more compliant.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See [www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/report.pdf](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Target 4.a of the Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>34</sup> A/HRC/32/32, paras. 67–73.

<sup>35</sup> See [www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB\\_2017\\_12.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2017_12.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> A/HRC/35/21, para. 74.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Available at [www.unviolencestudy.org](http://www.unviolencestudy.org), p. 188.

128. Promoting the social inclusion of children with disabilities and their genuine access to basic social services of quality, including education and health-care services, is key, alongside the provision of strong support for family-based and community-based care as well as of measures to prevent the risk of placement in institutions.

129. In all these efforts, attention must be given to children's right to be heard. Indeed, ensuring ethical and meaningful participation is a prerequisite for crafting an effective approach to promoting the rights of children with disabilities and addressing their mental health conditions.

130. But no less important is setting up counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms to address the violation of their rights, including to freedom from violence.

131. This is an area where much remains to be done. Still too often, children lack information about where to go to obtain advice and assistance, and they fear being disregarded rather than believed, and judged rather than being seriously listened to. For children with disabilities, these challenges often become overwhelming.

132. Not only may getting access to counselling, reporting and complaint services be physically difficult for these children, but they may also be less able than others to escape the threat of violence or to report abuse, especially when the abuser is someone they depend on, be it a family member, a neighbour or a professional care worker. In such cases, child victims may be unwilling to complain, fearing that if they do so they will lose the support of caregivers, and the attention and affection of those on whom they rely.

133. Furthermore, incidents of violence reported by children with disabilities run the risk of being easily dismissed, as there is a prevailing perception that these children become easily confused and unable to provide a convincing and accurate testimony.

134. In many cases, the justice system is not child-friendly or disability-sensitive. The challenges faced by a child with visual impairment in identifying a sexual offender illustrate this well. In several countries, additional barriers exist when the legal system fails to recognize the testimony of children with disabilities in court and prevents them from testifying under oath or signing legal documents. At the same time, there is often limited knowledge and exclusionary attitudes on the part of those involved with the administration of justice, including judges, lawyers, the police, social workers and psychologists.<sup>39</sup>

135. It is critical to be responsive to the needs of children with disabilities, with specially adapted accommodation and individualized support, including through sign language for hard-of-hearing persons, and alternative forms of communication for children with mental disabilities.

136. And it is essential that children with disabilities enjoy easy and safe access to child- and disability-sensitive institutions and proceedings to report incidents of violence, to seek advice and support, and to allow their views and voices to be heard. Mechanisms such as child helplines and independent human rights institutions for children play a critical role in this regard, as a report by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children<sup>40</sup> illustrates.

137. Children with disabilities have for too long been left behind. But building on experience and young people's recommendations, they can take their place at the forefront of global priorities and enjoy the respect, empowerment and support that are their human rights.

<sup>39</sup> See [www.mdac.org/en/resources/access-justice-children-mental-disabilities-standards-and-findings-english-0](http://www.mdac.org/en/resources/access-justice-children-mental-disabilities-standards-and-findings-english-0).

<sup>40</sup> See <http://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ENOC-Report-on-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-GA.pdf>.

## VII. Looking ahead

138. When the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted 30 years ago, the world was still in the grip of the cold war and its tensions. The Convention surmounted these challenges and brought the international community together around a shared vision for a future where every child develops and thrives, free from fear and from violence.

139. 2019 offers golden opportunities to further accelerate progress towards the realization of the noble vision of the Convention.

140. The 2030 Agenda has given new impetus to national efforts and international cooperation for the prevention and elimination of violence against children. The global review of progress in 2019 will allow us to take stock of how far we have come and where further work is needed.

141. The Special Representative remains deeply committed to advancing progress in children's protection and to using the strategic opportunities that lie ahead. With increased political commitment, resources and action, a quantum leap in preventing and responding to violence against children is possible.

142. With this in mind, the Special Representative will give particular priority to the following:

(a) Supporting national efforts to mainstream children's protection from violence into national policy agendas; furthering enactment and enforcement of legislation banning all forms of violence; consolidating data and research to inform strategic action; and promoting inclusion of assessments of progress in national efforts to protect children from violence, and of gaps where further action is needed, in voluntary national reviews;

(b) Supporting global, regional and national reviews of progress by preparing a global thematic report on ending violence against children, taking stock of positive developments and lessons learned since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and identifying persisting and emerging challenges and opportunities for positive change;

(c) Supporting implementation of the Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to safeguard the rights of children at all times, including through a thematic report on the violence these children encounter and on measures taken to ensure a continuum of protection in their lives;

(d) Consolidating evidence on violence prevention and response, including through research on the right of children to participate in recreation, play and sports free from the risk of all forms of violence.

143. In 2018, the renewal of the mandate of the Special Representative by the General Assembly was an expression by the international community of its continued support for the elimination of all forms of violence against children. The Special Representative remains strongly committed to further building on this foundation to mobilize people from all walks of life towards reaching this common goal. Working together, the vision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda of a world free from fear and from violence, with no child left behind, can be made a reality.

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