



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
12 August 2020

Original: English

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## Seventy-fifth session

Item 68 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Promotion and protection of the rights of children:  
promotion and protection of the rights of children**

## **Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

### **Report of the Secretary-General\*\***

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/133](#) and includes comprehensive information on the rights of the child, bearing in mind of the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also contains a review of progress made towards the achievement of universal child rights and information on a number of current challenges in that regard.

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\* [A/75/150](#).

\*\* The present document was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent information.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 74/133, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session a comprehensive report on the rights of the child, containing information on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which children are recognized as full rights holders, bearing in mind that 2019 marked the thirtieth anniversary of its adoption. The present report contains information on wide-ranging progress made over the past three decades, including progress made by almost all States parties to the Convention throughout the world, which have adopted some form of legislation, policies and/or practices with a view to achieving the realization of children's rights.<sup>1</sup>

2. The present report contains details on the current challenges for realizing children's rights, which often stem from insufficient effort invested towards applying the general principles of the Convention in legislation, policies and services that fulfil children's rights. The impact of such insufficient implementation is often felt most acutely by children living in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including those affected by armed conflict and disaster, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, children living in poverty, children in street situations, very young children, girls, pregnant adolescents, adolescent caregivers, refugee children, internally displaced, migrant and stateless children, indigenous children, children belonging to minority groups, children living in slums and informal settlements, children living in rural and hard-to-reach areas, children affected by HIV, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, child labourers, children affected by violence, children affected by economic upheaval and climate change, children deprived of their liberty, including in the justice system, and children in other disadvantaged situations, many of which have been further aggravated by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

## II. Status of and reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

3. As at 1 July 2020, all States Members of the United Nations, with the exception of the United States of America, had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child; 170 States had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict; 176 States had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and 46 States had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure.

4. During the reporting period, the Committee on the Rights of the Child held its eighty-second to eighty-fourth sessions. As at 1 July 2020, the Committee had received all initial reports from States parties and reviewed all but two, 570 reports pursuant to article 44 of the Convention, 119 initial reports and 2 periodic reports under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and 120 initial reports and 2 periodic reports under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *For Every Child, Every Right: The Convention on the Rights of the Child at a Crossroads* (New York, 2019).

### III. Thirty years of progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

#### A. General measures of implementation

5. Through its monitoring activities, the Committee has observed that the majority of States parties have reviewed their legislation to ensure that it is compatible with the Convention. Several States coordinated policies related to children within and between all levels of government, adopted policies, strategies and action plans and developed monitoring structures and training programmes to ensure the realization of all rights under the Convention for all children under their respective jurisdictions.

6. The Committee encourages States parties to implement the Convention in accordance with four general principles: non-discrimination (art. 2); having the best interests of the child as a primary consideration (art. 3); the right to life and maximum possible survival and development (art. 6); and respect for the views of the child (art. 12). States are taking more measures to identify children in vulnerable or marginalized situations. Some progress has been observed, in particular in the area of combating discrimination against girls.

7. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, marked a ramping up of gender equality efforts. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further reinforced those goals. Today, girls are expected to live eight years longer than they were in 1995.<sup>2</sup> Governments are developing national and subnational action plans and legislation to protect and promote the rights of adolescent girls. However, girls continue to face disproportionate threats to their well-being and the realization of their rights, due in part to persistent discriminatory gender norms, endemic gender-based violence, various forms of exploitation and high rates of child labour and unpaid work.<sup>3</sup>

8. More States parties are taking measures to include children's best interests in their actions concerning children. The Committee developed general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, to provide guidance to States in that regard.

9. Despite dramatic disparities in children's chances of survival, in particular for those in the most vulnerable situations, millions of children now have better chances of survival.<sup>4</sup> The total number of deaths among children and young adolescents under 15 years of age dropped by 56 per cent, from 14.2 million in 1990 to 6.2 million in 2018.<sup>5</sup> The mortality rate among children under 5 years of age has declined by more than half since 1989.<sup>6</sup> In addition, fewer countries are showing gender disparities in child mortality rates.<sup>7</sup>

10. Improvements for reducing multidimensional child poverty include increasing investment in social interventions for the poorest and most vulnerable children, strengthening social protection systems and enhancing reporting processes by Governments.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in almost every country, children are more likely to be

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, *A New Era for Girls: Taking Stock of 25 Years of Progress* (New York, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, "Gender equality: global annual results report: 2018" (New York, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2019: Special Edition* (New York, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, "Levels and trends in child mortality 2019: estimates developed by the Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation" (New York, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, *For Every Child, Every Right*.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, "Levels and trends in child mortality 2019".

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 5: every child has an equitable chance in life: global annual results report 2018" (New York, 2019).

living in poverty than adults and are more vulnerable to its negative effects.<sup>9</sup> Children are twice as likely as adults to live in poverty, and 663 million children live in multidimensionally poor households, deprived of basic nutrition and education.<sup>10</sup> Globally, two out of three children are not covered by social protection at all.<sup>11</sup>

11. Over 300 million children live in urban slums and informal settlements with limited access to high-quality essential services and experience heightened risks of exploitation, violence, crime and drug use. Analysis from more than 70 countries reveals that children in the poorest urban quintile are at least twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as their richest urban peers.<sup>12</sup>

## B. Civil rights and freedoms

12. Efforts to realize children's civil rights and freedoms have taken many forms over the past 30 years, including increasing birth registration, civic participation, child rights monitoring and consultations with children in decision-making processes.

13. Many regions have reached universal or near universal birth registration, reaching children in some of the world's poorest areas. Globally, the birth registration average is 73 per cent.<sup>13</sup> Challenges remain, however, including discriminatory laws and practices, such as the exclusion of children born to asylum-seeking, refugee, migrant or stateless parents, prohibitive fees and costs, cumbersome processes for late registration, lack of linkages with the national identity management systems and other barriers, such as non-functional civil registration systems during and after conflict situations.<sup>14</sup>

14. Progress in ensuring the rights of children to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and the effective participation of children and adolescents in matters that affect them is evident across the world. Examples include national campaigns, legislation, children's parliaments, child and adolescent mobilizations, data collection and community engagement designed to engender family support for civic engagement. In 2018, the Committee's day of general discussion was focused on children human rights defenders. At its seventy-eighth session, the Committee adopted working methods for the participation of children in the Committee's days of general discussion (CRC/C/155).

15. However, participation can be tokenistic and, even when children do participate and contribute to decision-making processes in matters that affect them, their views and opinions are not duly taken into consideration. Children and adolescents continue to endure restricted access to information, discrimination, threats and violence during peaceful assembly and threats made by adults who disapprove of their civic engagement and human rights activism.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, "Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019: illuminating inequalities". Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-MPI>.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF's global social protection programme framework" (New York, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, *Advantage or Paradox? The Challenge for Children and Young People of Growing Up Urban* (New York, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *SDG Progress 2019*.

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, "Birth registration for every child by 2030: are we on track" (New York, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Save the Children and Queen's University Belfast, "Enabling the exercise of civil and political rights: the views of children" (Belfast, 2016).

## C. Violence against children

16. The landmark United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299) drove progress towards ending violence against children, including through the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The 2030 Agenda has also been a catalyst. Around 60 countries have adopted comprehensive legal bans on all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, which have helped to shift overall attitudes away from harsh discipline.<sup>16</sup> However, progress towards ending violence against children remains uneven and insufficient. Data remains fragmented and critical funding gaps persist.

17. Globally, there is a continuing decline in the harmful practices of female genital mutilation and child marriage. Between 2016 and 2019, over 3.2 million girls and women received services for victims of female genital mutilation, and 5.7 million received services for victims of child marriage through the joint programmes of the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to eliminate female genital mutilation and child marriage. As of 2019, 42 countries had developed national action plans to end child marriage, indicating significant progress.<sup>17</sup> While progress is being made to meet the global target of the elimination of such harmful practices by 2030, the rate of reduction of female genital mutilation must be at least 10 times faster,<sup>18</sup> and the rate of reduction of child marriage 17 times faster, than the progress made in the past decade.<sup>19</sup>

18. In 2016, an inter-agency working group released terminology guidelines for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Today, more than 8.9 million children and adults have access to a channel for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse committed in humanitarian settings, marking a 27 per cent increase in such access from 2018.<sup>20</sup> In 2019, the Committee issued guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/156), including information regarding the digital environment.

19. However, every year, at least 1 billion children – half of the world's children – experience violence (see A/HRC/40/50). Sixty per cent of children between 2 and 14 years of age are regularly physically punished by caregivers, and approximately 25 per cent of girls between 15 and 19 years of age report having been victims of violence since they were 15 years of age.<sup>21</sup> Children now account for 30 per cent of those who are trafficked, with the sexual exploitation of victims being the main driver of trafficking in persons.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence against Children by 2030* (New York, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 3: every child is protected from violence and exploitation: global annual results report 2018" (New York, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF, "Female genital mutilation: a new generation calls for ending an old practice" (New York, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 3 report".

<sup>21</sup> Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, "Transformative change for children and youth in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", Innocenti working paper No. 2, UNICEF Office of Research and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Florence, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> UN News, "Rising human trafficking takes on 'horrific dimensions': almost a third of victims are children", 7 January 2019.

## D. Family environment and alternative care

20. The child should grow up in a family environment for the full and harmonious development of her or his personality. The Committee continues to note, however, the insufficient efforts by States to provide parents and caregivers with childcare and family-centred child services and to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities and positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline.

21. Widespread recognition of the adverse impacts of institutionalization on children's well-being and development has grown over the past 30 years. The General Assembly, in its resolution 64/142, welcomed the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and, in its resolution 74/133, set out unparalleled commitments for children without parental care.

22. Some countries have strengthened national laws and strategies to protect children without parental care and have adopted care reform strategies that are focused on prevention, deinstitutionalization and the diversification of family-based care options. Today, many national efforts are focused on reducing the number of children living in large-scale institutions and adopting standards for the provision of alternative care, including minimum standards and guidelines for residential, foster and kinship care (A/74/231, paras. 20–21).

23. Programmatic advances include the prevention of unnecessary family separation, a strengthened social service workforce and the establishment of review and monitoring mechanisms (see A/74/231). However, millions of children worldwide remain in residential care.<sup>23</sup> Ongoing challenges include the scarcity of accurate data on the number of children living in alternative care, limited family-based care options and insufficient resources to support care reform (see A/74/231).

## E. Children with disabilities

24. The world made notable advances in realizing the rights of children with disabilities and moving from a medical to a human rights based-approach to disability,<sup>24</sup> such as by adopting inclusive educational laws or policies, developing disability-inclusive programming, including disability in disaster preparedness, response and recovery planning, enhancing attention to disability in humanitarian action, strengthening data collection efforts, engaging children with disabilities in critical decisions that affect their lives, expanding access to formal and non-formal education and working to end institutionalization and reduce prejudice, negative attitudes and violence against children with disabilities.<sup>25</sup>

25. Children with disabilities nevertheless continue to face tremendous obstacles to the full enjoyment and exercise of their rights, such as family separation, educational and social exclusion and high levels of physical and sexual violence, often as a result of discrimination and negative stereotypes.<sup>26</sup> Children with disabilities are at increased risk of abandonment and institutionalization and are often overrepresented in residential care, where they face a heightened risk of violence, abuse and neglect

<sup>23</sup> See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/children-alternative-care/> (accessed on 4 May 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, general comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination, paras. 8–11.

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 2: every child learns: global annual results report 2018" (New York, 2019); and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities 2018* (New York, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report 2018*.

(see [A/74/231](#)). Children with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities are five times more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than their peers without disabilities.<sup>27</sup> Processes aimed at facilitating the participation of children often do not include children with disabilities; persistent data gaps have impeded continued progress; and investments to address obstacles for children with disabilities remain inadequate.<sup>28</sup>

## F. Health and welfare

26. Improved access to high-quality health services that target the main causes of death among children and the most vulnerable populations have resulted in increased survival rates among children. Such access includes the rapid roll-out of vaccines, better nutrition, improved care-seeking behaviour and treatment and improvements in drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. Despite those advances, progress in reducing neonatal mortality rates, in particular in the first month of life, has been slower.<sup>29</sup>

27. Between 2000 and 2017, 1.8 billion people gained access to basic services for drinking water; 696 million people benefitted from improved facilities to reduce open defecation; and 60 per cent of the global population had access to basic handwashing facilities at home.<sup>30</sup> Much work remains to be done, however, to improve drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, including menstrual hygiene management, in particular for children living in rural and impoverished areas.<sup>31</sup>

28. Progress in addressing the global HIV epidemic includes the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, increased access to treatment for pregnant women and the decline of new infections among younger children.<sup>32</sup> However, declines in HIV infection rates among adolescents are too slow to substantially reduce their overall risk. Major regional disparities continue, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth threatens to compound negative health trends for children.<sup>33</sup>

29. Evidence-based interventions to improve nutritional status among children have also contributed to improved health and well-being. Between 2012 and 2018, the number of children under 5 years of age affected by stunting decreased by 10 per cent.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, one third of children under 5 years of age are not growing well due to malnutrition in its more visible forms, namely, stunting, wasting and being overweight, and at least one in two children under 5 years of age suffers from hidden hunger due to deficiencies in vitamins and other essential nutrients.<sup>35</sup>

30. Exposure to prolonged and severe adversity can leave young children at risk of toxic stress, a biological response that disrupts a child's brain development and which

<sup>27</sup> Lisa Jones et al., "Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies", *The Lancet*, vol. 380, No. 9845.

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 5 report".

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, "Levels and trends in child mortality 2019".

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF and World Health Organization (WHO), *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, 2000–2017: Special Focus on Inequalities* (New York, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 4: every child lives in a safe and clean environment: global annual results report 2018" (New York, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF Data and Analytics, "Children, HIV and AIDS: global and regional snapshots" (New York, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, World Food Programme and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019: Safeguarding against Economic Slowdowns and Downturns* (Rome, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2019: Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing Well in a Changing World* (New York, 2019).

can continue into adulthood. The cost of inaction in early childhood can contribute to detrimental consequences for a child's health and well-being and to transgenerational poverty.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of neuroscientific evidence, some 80 countries have adopted and begun to scale up multisectoral packages to foster early stimulation and care in order to boost brain development in early childhood.<sup>37</sup>

## G. Education

31. In recent decades, key education policy initiatives have included a focus on the right to universal primary education, gender equality and development and the implementation of national education sector plans. The 2030 Agenda sharpened the focus on cross-sectoral educational goals, such as expanding access to high-quality education, engaging children in vulnerable situations in social inclusion programmes, supporting curriculum reform, focusing on gender equality, increasing access to early childhood education, increasing pre-primary and post-primary enrolment and improving education-related monitoring systems.<sup>38</sup> Since 1998, the gender gap for school enrolment has been closed at the secondary school level and has narrowed from 6 to 2 percentage points at the primary school level.<sup>39</sup>

32. The number of primary school-age children out of school has declined over the past 30 years.<sup>40</sup> By 2015, almost all countries had passed laws requiring school attendance at the primary level and fee-free public primary schooling was enshrined in law in 135 countries.<sup>41</sup> Many countries demonstrate progress on rates of enrolment and completion of primary education.<sup>42</sup> However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reported that, globally, 262 million (18 per cent) children between 6 and 17 years of age were out of school in 2017.<sup>43</sup> Children in vulnerable and marginalized situations remain most at risk of missing out on educational opportunities.

33. Student learning outcomes and related policy issues, including language of instruction, competency-based curriculum reform and non-discrimination, are growing areas of focus.<sup>44</sup> Quality of learning and education is of increased focus, given that, according to the latest estimates, 56 per cent primary school-age children and 61 per cent of lower secondary school-age adolescents had not reached the minimum proficiency level in reading.<sup>45</sup>

## H. Special protection measures

34. Various global initiatives are focused on children affected by armed conflict, children who are victims of trafficking, child labourers, children in street situations,

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, *Early Moments Matter: for Every Child* (New York, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 1: every child survives and thrives: global annual results report 2018" (New York, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Beyond Commitments: How Countries Implement SDG 4* (Paris, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, *A New Era for Girls*.

<sup>40</sup> UNICEF, *For Every Child, Every Right*.

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO, *Education for All, 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges: Global Monitoring Report* (Paris, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> See <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 5 June 2020).

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Meeting commitments: are countries on track to achieve SDG 4?", *Global Education Monitoring Report* (Paris, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> UNICEF, "Goal area 2 report".

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO, "Migration, displacement and education: building bridges, not walls", *Global Education Monitoring Report* (Paris, 2019).

children deprived of their liberty, refugee, internally displaced, migrant and stateless children and children in other vulnerable contexts. In 2019, several organizations joined the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to launch a call for action on justice for children to accelerate action and bring about sustained change for child justice.

35. In 2019, the United Nations launched the global study on children deprived of liberty (A/74/136), detailing the impacts of institutionalization and deprivation of liberty on children, including severe developmental delays, impairments, irreversible psychological damage and increased rates of suicide and recidivism. The study also detailed policy options for States related to restorative justice, diversion, alternatives to migration-related detention and the deinstitutionalization of children. In 2019, the Committee adopted its general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system.

36. In 2017, the joint general comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and return was adopted. In 2018, Member States adopted the global compact on refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, reinforcing their commitment to the human rights of all refugee and migrant children. In 2020, the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement addressed the specific needs of internally displaced persons.

37. Myriad risks still remain, including those for child labourers in the agriculture sector, in which a vast majority of child labour occurs, and in which children face exposure to harmful agrochemicals and other hazards, for migrant and internally displaced children, who face high incidences of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking, and for the increasing number of children being detained for their migration status and in the name of national security or countering terrorism.<sup>46</sup>

## IV. Current challenges in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

### A. Climate change and environmental degradation

38. Climate change threatens children's lives, destroys critical infrastructure, affects children's chances of survival and constitutes an obstacle to the enjoyment and realization of their rights. The increasing incidences of cancer, diabetes, neurodevelopmental disorders and asthma globally have accompanied the rapid rise in air pollution, e-waste and harmful chemicals, among other things, in everyday products.<sup>47</sup> Three hundred million children live in areas with toxic air, which can damage their developing brains.<sup>48</sup> Childhood lead poisoning also remains a grave concern. Children in marginalized and disadvantaged communities are most at risk,

<sup>46</sup> See A/73/272; and FAO, "FAO work to promote decent rural employment", brochure. Available at [www.fao.org/3/a-i7322e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7322e.pdf); and UNICEF and International Organization for Migration, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea, at Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation* (New York, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF, *Clear the Air for Children: The Impact of Air Pollution on Children* (New York, 2016), pp. 29, 32, 42 and 52; and WHO, "Air pollution and child health: prescribing clean air" (2018), p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> UNICEF, *Clear the Air for Children*, p. 6.

in particular when environmental factors mix with poor nutrition, lack of access to health care and education and social inequalities (see [A/HRC/43/30](#)).

39. Due to their close, dependent relationship with the environment and its resources, the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation pose an existential threat to indigenous children.<sup>49</sup> Despite having contributed little to greenhouse gas emissions, the estimated 370 million indigenous adults and children in some 90 countries around the world are at particular risk of facing the direct consequences of climate change.<sup>50</sup>

40. Every year an estimated 1.7 million children under 5 years of age die prematurely from environmental factors, especially air and water pollution and poor sanitation (see [A/HRC/43/30](#)). Globally, approximately 160 million children inhabit areas at risk of drought, 530 million live in flood zones and 115 million are highly exposed to cyclones.<sup>51</sup> Outdoor air pollution, especially in growing urban centres, is an increasing health risk for children.<sup>52</sup> The adverse effects of climate change and disaster have also led to the displacement of communities and exacerbated protection risks.<sup>53</sup>

41. The world is also facing a growing water crisis, due to increasing demand for water as food production grows, populations grow and move, industries develop, consumption increases, temperatures rise and droughts and resulting famines and water-borne diseases become more frequent.<sup>54</sup>

42. The effects of climate change, including weather-related disasters, and environmental degradation are increasing the risk of school dropout among girls and the risks of their being forced into marriages and being victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. In its resolution [41/21](#), the Human Rights Council called upon States to adopt a comprehensive, integrated, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation policies.

43. The Committee has identified climate change as one of the biggest threats to children's health.<sup>55</sup> In 2019, the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment established a global initiative for advancing children's right to a healthy environment,<sup>56</sup> and a number of Governments signed the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action, committing to accelerating child-friendly and youth-friendly climate policies. The growing youth climate movement and number of children environmental human rights defenders have prompted millions of children to join in environmental and climate change-related protests.

44. Although some States have begun to transition towards low emission and climate-resilient economies and societies have begun to recognize the risks for

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF, *Unless We Act Now: The Impact of Climate Change on Children* (New York, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (New York, 2009); and Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, "Climate change and indigenous peoples", background paper, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, *Unless We Act Now*.

<sup>52</sup> UNICEF, *Clear the Air for Children*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, *Unless We Act Now*, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> UNICEF, *Thirsting for a Future: Water and Children in a Changing Climate* (New York, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> See the Committee's general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

<sup>56</sup> Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment et al., "Global initiative: advancing children's rights to a healthy environment", 2019. Available at [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/ConceptNoteChildRights\\_EN.PDF](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/ConceptNoteChildRights_EN.PDF).

children, the pace falls far short of the transformation needed to limit the impacts on current and future generations.<sup>57</sup>

## B. Armed conflict

45. Armed conflict remains one of the greatest threats to the realization of children's rights. In 2016, 59 per cent of the world's children (1.35 billion) were living in a conflict-affected country.<sup>58</sup> In 2019, both boys and girls continued to suffer from the brutality of war, facing over 25,000 grave violations and abuses of international human rights law, primarily killing and maiming (see [A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)).

46. Children are recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups, including through online recruitment, and face deliberate and targeted attacks, including through the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Children suffer acutely from the breakdown of protection systems, including family and societal structures and social and child welfare systems and services, health services, the drinking water, sanitation and hygiene systems and the educational and legal systems.<sup>59</sup> Denial of humanitarian access and direct attacks perpetrated on schools, hospitals, water and sanitation infrastructure and civilian personnel, including in urban areas, also result in devastating harm to children.

47. Girls are disproportionately at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage, with boys also experiencing sexual violence.<sup>60</sup> The increased household work burden for girls in situations of emergency reduces their access to education and other opportunities, further exacerbating risks. Impunity for grave violations perpetrated by all parties to conflicts remains endemic.

48. Children recruited, used and exploited by parties to conflicts are victims of violence and rights violations on multiple fronts. They suffer violence during their association with armed forces or armed groups and may be forced to participate directly in hostilities. They may also be detained because of their former or alleged association with armed forces or armed groups, including those designated as "terrorist" groups, and are vulnerable while in detention. Many are stranded in crowded camps or detained in places where they suffer from limited access to basic humanitarian services, such as health care and protection, and from lack of respect for their right to a fair trial and other fundamental rights.

49. Children born to parents who are part of armed groups or brought by their families to a conflict zone may be perceived or treated as a member of the group based on their family ties. Of increasing concern is the refusal of States to accept the return of children and families who are their nationals or who are born to their nationals and who are stranded in conflict zones.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> UNDP and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, "The heat is on: taking stock of global climate ambition: nationally determined contribution global outlook report 2019" (New York, 2019).

<sup>58</sup> Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter, "Transformative change for children and youth".

<sup>59</sup> Save the Children, "Stop the war on children, protecting children in the 21st century" (Germany, 2019); and UNICEF, *Water under Fire: For Every Child, Water and Sanitation in Complex Emergencies* (New York, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> Save the Children, "Stop the war on children: 2020: gender matters" (2020).

<sup>61</sup> Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, "Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism: The Erosion of Children's Rights in Armed Conflict", policy note (New York, January 2020). Available at [https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/watchlist-policy-note\\_jan2020\\_lr.pdf](https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/watchlist-policy-note_jan2020_lr.pdf).

50. Children with disabilities face greater vulnerability in situations of armed conflict and emergency, including increased isolation and discrimination.<sup>62</sup> They are often overlooked during evacuations, suffer higher death rates, struggle with access to education and are often underidentified in humanitarian and post-disaster contexts.<sup>63</sup>

51. A disproportionate number of children continue to fall victim to explosive ordnance, which includes landmines, explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and explosive weapons with wide-area effects. The trend has been increasing in recent years, in particular for children in urban areas. According to Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, children accounted for 40 per cent of all casualties in 2018.<sup>64</sup>

52. The United Nations, other international organizations and national and local agencies continue to implement protection programmes for children affected by armed conflict, such as those for the release and reintegration of children, the monitoring and reporting of grave violations committed against children, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, prevention and services, explosive ordnance clearance, risk education and victim assistance, family reunification and tracing and mental health and psychosocial services.

### C. Asylum-seeking, migrant and internally displaced children

53. Armed conflicts, persistent violence, discrimination, extreme poverty and disasters, including climate-related crises, continue to drive millions of children from their homes each year. As at the end of 2018, nearly 31 million children had been forcibly displaced worldwide.<sup>65</sup> As at the end of 2019, at least 19 million children had been internally displaced within their own countries by conflict, violence and disasters.<sup>66</sup>

54. The number of stateless children is rising, due to persistent gender-based and other forms of discrimination in national laws and lack of birth registration. Approximately one third of the estimated 10 million stateless persons are children, and over 200 million children worldwide do not have birth certificates.<sup>67</sup>

55. Such children's journeys are often harrowing. Refugee, internally displaced, migrant and stateless children are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence while on the move and to being preyed upon by smugglers and traffickers. Those children are also often victims of discrimination, racism and xenophobia during their journeys and at their final destinations.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup> UNICEF, "Children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict", discussion paper (New York, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report*.

<sup>64</sup> Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, *Landmine Monitor 2019* (Norway, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global trends: forced displacement in 2018" (Geneva, 2018); and UNICEF Data and Analytics, "Child migration" Available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/> (accessed on 1 May 2020).

<sup>66</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council, "Global report on internal displacement, 2020" (Geneva, 2020); and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Number of IDPs by age at the end of 2019", briefing paper (Geneva, 2020).

<sup>67</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/en-us/statelessness-around-the-world.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statelessness-around-the-world.html) (accessed on 10 June 2020); and UNICEF, "Birth registration for every child by 2030".

<sup>68</sup> Joint general comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, para. 5.

56. Some children become separated from their parents or caregivers before, during or after their journeys and often face legal, administrative and practical barriers to reuniting with them. No global data on family reunification following migration or displacement-based separation exist. Furthermore, unaccompanied and separated girls and boys are vulnerable to gender-based violence. Girls are at particular risk, including in camps for displaced populations, which are often not built with the protection of girls in mind.

57. Many refugee, migrant and displaced children miss out on education, due to rigid documentation requirements, persistent insecurity, social tensions, discrimination, lack of adequate funding, lack of inclusion in national education systems and the language of instruction not being their first language.<sup>69</sup> Only 50 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school, and less than 25 per cent of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary school.<sup>70</sup> When displaced children do attend school, in many cases, it is through parallel systems.<sup>71</sup>

58. Migration-related detention constitutes a child rights violation and contravenes the principle of the best interests of the child. Furthermore, the possibility of detaining children as a measure of last resort is not applicable in immigration proceedings, because it would conflict with the principle of the best interests of the child and the right to development.<sup>72</sup> However, at least 77 States are known to detain children for immigration purposes, although the exact number of children detained and the length of detention is unknown (see [A/74/136](#)).

#### D. Situations of violence

59. Gang-related violence has disproportionately affected children and adolescents, over the past two decades in the Americas, and is increasing in Europe and other regions. Although it affects boys in particular, in a climate of gang-related violence, girls suffer from sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and child marriage. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, participation in organized crime and gang activities, or involuntary exposure to the violence associated therewith, often drives homicide rates among adolescents and young people.<sup>73</sup>

60. Recent data from 96 countries and territories have revealed that some children experience relentless bullying.<sup>74</sup> Almost one third of children in school are bullied by their peers at least once per month.<sup>75</sup> According to international surveys, physical appearance is the most common reason for being bullied, with race, nationality or skin colour ranking second.<sup>76</sup> Children from poorer families, migrant children and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex are also at greater risk.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO, "Migration, displacement and education".

<sup>70</sup> Cited in UNICEF, *Education Uprooted* (New York, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> UNESCO, "Migration, displacement and education".

<sup>72</sup> Joint general comment No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, paras. 5 and 10.

<sup>73</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Killing of children and young adults", *Global Study on Homicide* (Vienna, 2019).

<sup>74</sup> UNESCO, *Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying* (Paris, 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Keeping the Promise*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

## E. Child rights in the digital age

61. The digital environment offers a range of risks and opportunities for States, businesses, civil society, parents, caregivers and children, including regarding the enjoyment and realization of child rights. Children have increased access to information, education and opportunities for participating in matters that affect them. However, children, who account for an estimated one third of Internet users around the world, face growing risk to their rights online due to violence and susceptibility to harm in the digital context.<sup>78</sup> The evidence has made it increasingly clear that children face online violence from the live streaming of sexual abuse, sexting, cyberbullying and harmful information that incites the hatred of others or of oneself. The latter includes online networks of children and adolescents focused on self-harm and suicide.<sup>79</sup> Predators may also easily make contact with children and groom them online through anonymous and unprotected social media profiles and game forums. As risks rapidly shift and expand, it is difficult for experts to track and address what is happening.

62. Many parents, caregivers and teachers worry that immersion in screens is making children depressed, creating a dependency on the Internet and contributing to obesity. Worries are also growing, given that personal devices promote a culture in which online access for many children is becoming more personal, more private and less supervised.<sup>80</sup>

63. Children are increasingly using digital tools that utilize artificial intelligence systems, from face filters and content-based recommendation systems on social media to language translation applications and personalized curriculum platforms. Use of artificial intelligence systems to inform the allocation of social protection services for children, manage traffic flows for safer cities or improve crop management also has an impact on children's lives. Children interfacing with artificial intelligence raises child rights issues related to privacy, data protection, consent, accountability, recourse and exclusion. National artificial intelligence strategies and guidelines tend to neglect or only superficially address children's rights.

64. The fluidity of children's attitudes, preferences and identities, along with the evolving capacity of children to make informed decisions and have full agency, presents unique challenges to children's data security and privacy.<sup>81</sup> The international community has made some progress to protect children's rights online by developing policies and approaches to address harmful online risks, working to improve digital equity, providing support for victims and promoting digital literacy among children, parents and caregivers.<sup>82</sup> In 2020, the International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF launched the new Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection to assist in the development of a safe and empowering online environment for children and young people.

65. Information and communications technology can increase opportunities and access to knowledge and skills development training for vulnerable and marginalized children, such as those living in remote areas and in places suffering from humanitarian crises.<sup>83</sup> Connectivity can help such children to fulfil their potential and break intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, digital access is becoming the

<sup>78</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World* (New York, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> ECPAT International, "Global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism" (Bangkok, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> See [www.unicef.org/globalinsight/data-governance-children](http://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/data-governance-children) (accessed on 4 June 2020).

<sup>82</sup> UNICEF, "Policy guide on children and digital connectivity" (New York, 2018).

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2017*.

new dividing line, and millions of the children who could most benefit from digital technology are missing out.<sup>84</sup> That divide reflects pre-existent economic gaps and discrimination and amplifies the disadvantages of children from poorer backgrounds and other marginalized situations.

## F. COVID-19 pandemic

66. The United Nations reports that 60 per cent of all children live in countries where a full or partial lockdown was in place in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the pandemic is exacerbating pre-existent structural inequalities and creating a child rights crisis. The broader impacts on children could be catastrophic and among the most lasting consequences for societies.

67. The United Nations warns that hundreds of thousands of children could die in 2020 due to economic hardships faced by their families, service disruptions in health care, including in relation to pneumonia, malaria and cholera, the suspension of immunization campaigns and infection with the virus itself.

68. Socioeconomic impacts of measures to contain the virus will likely push an estimated 42 to 66 million children into situations of extreme poverty, exacerbate the global learning crisis through school closures and digital exclusion, increase malnutrition among children who normally rely on school meals and jeopardize children's mental health.<sup>86</sup>

69. In the first half of 2020, 191 countries implemented unprecedented school closures, disrupting education for 1.58 billion children and adolescents.<sup>87</sup> Although more than two thirds of countries introduced national distance-learning platforms, among low-income countries, the introduction of such an initiative may have been as low as 30 per cent.<sup>88</sup> Children's reliance on online platforms for distance learning, leisure, recreation, cultural and artistic activities has also increased their risk of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators.<sup>89</sup>

70. Children have faced an increased threat of child labour, child marriage, trafficking in children, sexual exploitation and recruitment into criminal groups and armed forces and groups.<sup>90</sup> Emerging evidence shows that violence against children is increasing in all its forms, from domestic violence and sexual abuse at home to excessive use of force by law enforcement personnel while enforcing lockdown decisions against children in street situations.<sup>91</sup>

71. The impact of the pandemic on children's civil and political rights has also been felt, including in the restrictions on the freedoms of expression, thought, conscience and religion, association and peaceful assembly, privacy and information. Children have been victims of State harassment and intimidation and have faced increased levels of surveillance, censorship, disinformation, incitement and propaganda.

72. Such risks have a disproportionate impact on children in the most vulnerable and marginalized situations, including the poorest, those with disabilities, those living

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> United Nations, "The impact of COVID-19 on children", policy brief (New York, 2020).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> See <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> (accessed on 4 June 2020).

<sup>88</sup> United Nations, "The impact of COVID-19 on children".

<sup>89</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children, "Agenda for action" (New York, 2020). Available at <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/agenda-action-8-united-nations-entities-launch-roadmap-protect-children-violence-response-covid>.

<sup>90</sup> United Nations, "The impact of COVID-19 on children".

<sup>91</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2017*.

in marginalized communities and fragile environments, such as refugee camps, urban and informal settlements, those deprived of their liberty, those for whom the home is not a safe place and those who live in countries experiencing armed conflict.<sup>92</sup>

## V. Conclusion and recommendations

73. Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention, and in view of its near universal ratification, States have adopted legislation, policies and practices with a direct impact on the well-being of children. For children to fully enjoy all rights enshrined in the Convention without discrimination, however, States must recognize children as rights holders, enable their meaningful participation in matters that affect them and prioritize the allocation of resources in accordance with the best interests of the child.

74. States should fully implement their international legal obligations contained in the Convention, without discrimination of any kind, including by strengthening their national legislation, policies and practices to protect children's rights.

75. States should strengthen data collection and analysis systems related to the fulfilment of all rights under the Convention and should support such efforts by other relevant actors across all sectors. That includes support for improved and secure data collection, compilation and storage methods, strengthening indicators for monitoring progress and increasing the disaggregation of data by sex, age, disability and other factors relevant to the analysis of inequity.

76. States should progressively allocate adequate budgetary resources for ensuring the implementation of their international obligations regarding children's rights, keeping the best interests of the child at the centre of the budgeting process and ensuring that resources are used effectively. They should provide information on budgets and facilitate public dialogue and participation, in particular the participation of children, and include provisions in budgets for the most disadvantaged children.

77. States should invest in nationally appropriate and universal social protection systems, intensifying efforts to improve the standard of living of all children as a matter of priority, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable. In addition, States should promote inclusive and responsive family-oriented policies, including those designed to strengthen parents' and caregivers' ability to care for children.

78. States should improve and strengthen civil registration and vital statistics services to ensure timely birth registration for all children, including migrant and refugee children, the provision of a certificate upon birth and the provision of identification documents, including in times of humanitarian emergency.

79. States and other relevant actors should enable children to exercise their rights by increasing their opportunities to access reliable information and creating platforms for them to participate meaningfully in decision-making in matters that affect them, especially children facing exclusion and multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination.

80. States should prioritize establishing and strengthening national systems to protect children from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. That includes investing in multisectoral collaboration, the coordination of authorities at all levels and improved cross-border systems. States should also invest in strengthening social services for child protection and in making national child protection systems inclusive to respond to the needs of all children, including refugee, internally

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<sup>92</sup> United Nations, "The impact of COVID-19 on children".

displaced, migrant and stateless children. States and other relevant actors should provide global leadership by working to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children in all settings, in particular for the most vulnerable and marginalized children.

81. States should prioritize the prevention of family separation and family-based alternative care options for children without parental care. That involves a commitment to community-based services and support for families, implementing international standards for the protection of children at risk of family separation, following the guidelines for alternative care, implementing cross-border child protection frameworks and ending the institutionalization of children, in particular children with disabilities.

82. In its resolution 40/14, the Human Rights Council urged States to provide information, services and support to children with disabilities and their families with a view to preventing concealment, abandonment, neglect and segregation and to ensuring that they have equal rights with respect to family life, and encouraged States to replace institutionalization with appropriate measures to support family-based care and community-based services, bearing in mind the best interests of the child and taking into account the child's will and preferences. States and other relevant actors should also work to meaningfully involve children with disabilities in the protection of their rights, including throughout the humanitarian response.

83. States and other relevant actors should work to improve children's health, such as by strengthening public health-care systems, diminishing inequities, increasing accessibility, sufficiency, acceptability, universality and quality of health care, reaching underserved populations, improving access for children to safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, adequate nutritious food programmes and healthy food environments, HIV prevention and treatment programmes, sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education and building mechanisms for the meaningful participation of children in related policy decisions.

84. States should take steps to ensure that children enjoy a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and access to water and sanitation and that they have access to information, meaningful participation in environmental policy development and justice in environmental matters. States should put children at the centre of climate change strategies and response plans, and support climate change and environmental education.

85. States and other relevant actors should focus on accelerating progress in education, including with regard to the quality, availability, inclusion and accessibility of early childhood development and learning programmes and primary and secondary education, for all children, regardless of their status. That means ensuring that all children have equitable access to quality learning and education.

86. States should invest in developing national capacities to increase knowledge on and the practice of gender equality across programmes, policies and budgets in all sectors. States and other relevant actors should also work to scale up programming for girls, such as education and skills development training for adolescent girls, to end gender-based violence, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, to expand access for girls to gender-sensitive health information and services and to ensure that girls' opinions are heard and prioritized in their communities and relevant political processes.

87. States and other relevant actors should work to reach and empower children in disadvantaged situations and uphold their participation and contribution to decision-making processes in matters that affect them, including in fragile, conflict-affected

and emergency settings, and to acknowledge the capacity of children to foster peace and social cohesion, with a focus on the role of girls and boys.

88. States should accelerate action to develop justice systems that guarantee equal access, protection and support for children, including access to free legal aid. They should prevent unnecessary criminalization and contact with the justice system by making full use of diversion measures and restorative justice. They should work to prevent all forms of violence against children in contact with the justice system, including children who are detained due to their or their parents' alleged or actual association with armed forces or groups, including those designated as "terrorist" groups, eliminate arbitrary or unlawful detention and support the development and application of alternatives to detention.

89. States should ensure that the private sector carries out environmental and human rights impact assessments that examine the effects of proposed actions on children and fully respect children's rights, in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and incorporate into their operations the guidance contained in the Committee's general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights and the Children's Rights and Business Principles (A/HRC/43/30, paras. 69–71). States should hold the private sector accountable for violations of children's rights.

90. States and other relevant actors should take a wide range of actions to improve the protection of children during armed conflicts, such as the following:

(a) Ratify and implement the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and provide timely progress reports to the Committee;

(b) Endorse and implement the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Safe Schools Declaration;

(c) End impunity for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses against children committed by parties to conflicts, by strengthening national judicial processes, developing expertise for investigating and prosecuting crimes against children and increasing support for international judicial mechanisms;

(d) Strictly comply with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction and proportionality, and take all feasible precautions to avoid and, in any event, to minimize, the incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects, including water and sanitation infrastructure. States should also ban anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions and consider ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty;

(e) Treat all children, including those associated with groups designated as "terrorist" groups, primarily as children and develop protocols for the handover of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups to child protection actors;

(f) Facilitate access to birth and civil registration documentation and repatriate foreign children stranded in detention camps in third countries.

91. States and other relevant actors should protect the rights of asylum-seeking, refugee, migrant and stateless children without discrimination on any basis, including immigration status. Children, especially those who are at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children, girls, children with disabilities and survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, should receive appropriate

protection, assistance and access to services without discrimination. States should also eliminate migration-related detention for children, expedite family reunification and prevent unnecessary family separation in the context of migration.

92. States, the private sector and other relevant actors should collaborate on developing and implementing a safe, inclusive and empowering digital agenda for children.<sup>93</sup> Efforts should include putting children at the centre of digital policy, public and private investment in protecting children from online harm, including the safeguarding of children's privacy, and providing all children with affordable access to high-quality online resources, including digital skills and literacy. It is especially important to increase access to information and communications technology for children in vulnerable and marginalized situations, including girls, children in rural areas and children with disabilities.

93. In the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, States should take into account the statement of the Committee of 8 April 2020 on the physical, emotional and psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children,<sup>94</sup> in particular the call to safeguard the continuation, and where necessary the scaling up, of social protection, health, education and child protection services during the COVID-19 pandemic for all children, regardless of their status. States should prioritize the restoration of interrupted child services, including education, nutrition programmes, protection and social services, maternal and newborn care, immunization services, sexual and reproductive health and rights services, HIV treatment and mental health and psychosocial services, and should develop strategic plans to reduce inequalities. In addition, stimulus packages should be aimed at building back better, improving readiness for any future crisis and reinforcing the best interests of the child, environmental sustainability and resilience, including through the use of digital innovations.

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<sup>93</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, "Releasing children's potential and minimizing risks: ICTs, the Internet and violence against children" (New York, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CRC/STA/9095&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CRC/STA/9095&Lang=en).