



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
26 July 2019

Original: English

---

## Seventy-fourth session

Item 68 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Promotion and protection of the rights of children: follow-up  
to the outcome of the special session on children**

## **Follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children**

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

#### *Summary*

The present report assesses the steps taken in 2018 to achieve a world fit for children and highlights the gaps in achievement as well as the strategic shifts necessary to achieve unmet goals.

The report was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution [S-27/2](#), adopted at its twenty-seventh special session in 2002, and to resolutions [58/282](#) and [61/272](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report regularly on progress made in implementing the Plan of Action included in the annex to resolution [S-27/2](#).

---

\* [A/74/150](#).



---

## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	3
II. Follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children .....	4
A. Planning for children .....	4
B. Promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child .....	5
C. Collaborating with partners and leveraging resources for children .....	6
D. Monitoring progress .....	7
E. Participation and self-expression of children .....	8
III. Progress in the four major goal areas of “A world fit for children” .....	9
A. Promoting healthy lives .....	9
B. Providing quality education .....	12
C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence .....	14
D. Combating HIV and AIDS .....	16
IV. Ways forward .....	17

## I. Introduction

1. At the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in 2002, delegations from 190 countries adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled “A world fit for children” (resolution [S-27/2](#), annex), in which Governments made a commitment to a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals and targets for children and young people, with a particular focus on: (a) promoting healthy lives; (b) providing quality education; (c) protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and (d) combating HIV and AIDS. The present report provides the seventeenth update on progress made in follow-up to the special session.

2. At the global level, ongoing improvements in many aspects of child well-being were observed in 2018, including: the fall in the under-five mortality rate, from 93 deaths per 1,000 births in 1990 to 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017 – saving the lives of an estimated 132 million children under the age of 5 years; the reduction in child mortality over the same period, with the most remarkable progress recorded in low- and middle-income countries, indicating the potential for further progress by 2030; updated malnutrition estimates revealing that the number of children suffering from stunting declined by 25 per cent between 2000 and 2018; the enrolment of more children in school than ever before; and the achievement of gender parity in both primary and secondary school completion rates worldwide. Moreover, new data shows that 25 million child marriages have been prevented as a result of efforts made over the last decade, with global levels driven by the progress made in South Asia. In addition, the scaling-up of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV has averted a cumulative 1.8 million paediatric HIV infections since 2000.

3. Despite such good news, in many areas the scale of the challenges faced in realizing child rights remains daunting, and global progress masks uneven outcomes, with many children being left behind. Some 15,000 children still die every day, mostly from treatable diseases and other preventable causes – and 50 countries remain off-track to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3, targets 2.2 and 3.2, on child mortality. While the number of children suffering from stunting is falling, far too many still suffer from wasting, and the rate of anaemia among girls and women of reproductive age remained unchanged during the 2012–2016 period. More than 124 million children of primary and lower secondary school age are out of school. In Latin America and the Caribbean region, the prevalence of child marriage remains as high as it was 25 years ago. Globally, over 150 million girls are likely to be married in childhood between now and 2030 unless progress accelerates further. It is estimated that 1.2 million children under the age of 9 were still living with HIV in 2017.

4. Most alarming is the emergence of new threats to child rights and the unravelling of past progress in many areas of the world. In 2018, humanitarian needs continued to grow, with 101 million people targeted to receive United Nations-led humanitarian assistance in comparison with 77 million in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 420 million children, almost one fifth of children worldwide, are living in areas affected by conflict,<sup>2</sup> including in: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen. Many crises have

<sup>1</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Global Humanitarian Overview 2019”, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children International, *Stop the War on Children*, 2019.

resulted in mass population displacement, with nearly 69 million people on the move around the world in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

## **II. Follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on children**

### **A. Planning for children**

5. The year 2019 is significant, for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for the child rights agenda: the high-level political forum on sustainable development will meet for the first time under the auspices of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in September; and the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will take place in November 2019. All of the Sustainable Development Goals contribute directly or indirectly to the fulfilment of child rights, and are therefore in support of the broader global commitment expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6. Leaving no child behind in the context of the 2030 Agenda requires that the challenges facing millions of children are accurately assessed and addressed, and data and evidence are key prerequisites in this regard as they help to identify children with the greatest needs, the barriers that hold them back and the solutions that can overcome those barriers. However, the latest assessment carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with regard to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals shows that over half a billion children are effectively uncounted because they live in countries that have insufficient data to assess whether they are on track for at least two thirds of the global targets.<sup>4</sup>

7. In response to this challenge, UNICEF is leading efforts to close data gaps and increase the quality and availability of data on children relating to the Sustainable Development Goals. These include mobilizing new partnerships and coordinating efforts to pursue more systematic coverage across countries in order to fill remaining data gaps, including consultations with the statistical agencies of high-income countries on gaps in data for the Goal indicators related to children. Through their joint monitoring programme, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) have been able, for the first time, to generate data on several new Goal indicators, including the first global baseline estimates for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools and new measurements of early childhood development. These efforts contribute to placing children and children's issues at the heart of operationalizing, implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda and prioritizing them in development discussions.

8. Improving child, adolescent and youth participation, a core strategy for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, is gaining traction at the national and local levels. In the 2030 Agenda, the General Assembly formally recognized children and adolescents not only as beneficiaries, but also as key agents of change for sustainable development. Governments, civil society and United Nations entities have collaborated on various initiatives that engage children. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, 102 countries have presented voluntary national reviews as part of the follow-up and review process related to the Goals; in approximately 60 per cent of those reports explicit mention is made of consultations to gather information from

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 69 million people have been forcibly displaced, including 40 million who are internally displaced, 25.4 million who are refugees and 3.1 million who are asylum seekers: see *Figures at a Glance*, 2019 (as at 15 June 2019).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Progress for every child in the SDG era*, 2018.

children and youth. An additional 51 Member States were scheduled to submit reports at the 2019 high-level political forum in July 2019. Governments are establishing more channels for children and youth to learn about sustainable development, contribute to development plans and actions and hold decision makers and others responsible for the implementation of universal commitment to account. For example, in 2018 the Government of Chile created the position of Under-Secretary for Childhood within the Ministry of Social Development and Family as well as the Office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Children to promote and protect children's rights.

## **B. Promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

9. As at 1 April 2019, 196 States parties had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>5</sup> In 2018, South Sudan acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, bringing the total number of States parties to the Protocol to 168. South Sudan acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2018, as did the Marshall Islands in early 2019, bringing the total number of States parties to that Protocol to 176. Ecuador ratified, and San Marino and Tunisia acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure in 2018, bringing the number of States parties to that Protocol to 43.

10. UNICEF continued to provide alternative reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, identifying child rights violations and suggesting recommendations for countries under review. In some countries, UNICEF also supported broad national consultations during the preparation of the report of the State party and supported representatives of civil society and children themselves in conveying their views to the government. In addition, UNICEF supported the implementation of key recommendations of the Committee and the development of guidelines on the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

11. There has been considerable progress in advancing gender equality in the realization of the rights of all children over the past two decades. Efforts to address gender-related barriers in education, health, access to resources and protection from violence have contributed to a more level playing field for women and girls and have led to improved outcomes for children. The number of girls attending and completing primary and lower secondary school is increasing steadily. In the past 10 years, the proportion of women married as children decreased globally by 15 per cent, from one in four to approximately one in five, while the proportion of girls from 15 to 19 years of age who have undergone female genital mutilation and cutting fell from 43 per cent to 35 per cent in the 30 countries with representative data on prevalence.<sup>6</sup> Even so, gender inequalities that inhibit girls' chances of surviving and thriving remain alarming, robbing the poorest and most excluded girls, in particular, from the rights and protections they are owed.

---

<sup>5</sup> United Nations *Treaty Collection* (<https://treaties.un.org/>), accessed on 1 April 2019.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation/>.

## C. Collaborating with partners and leveraging resources for children

12. Official development assistance (ODA) from the 30 members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) totalled \$149.3 billion in 2018, a reduction of 2.7 per cent in real terms from 2017. Between 2017 and 2018, bilateral ODA to the least developed countries fell by 3 per cent in real terms, aid to Africa fell by 4 per cent and humanitarian aid fell by 8 per cent. Five members of the Committee, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, met or exceeded the 0.7 per cent target. Two donor countries that are not members of the Committee, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, whose ODA is not counted in the total amount of ODA provided to the Committee, provided 1.1 per cent and 0.95 per cent, respectively, of their gross national income (GNI) in development aid. ODA makes up over two thirds of external financing for the least-developed countries. The Committee is advocating the strategic use of ODA as a lever to generate private investment and domestic tax revenue in poor countries to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>7</sup>

13. Every year, the European Union allocates some €10 billion euros to development and humanitarian aid. In 2018, the European Union and UNICEF, in partnership, contributed to protecting and promoting the rights of children in over 80 low- and middle-income countries, with a special focus on education, child protection, nutrition and health. During the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, both the European Union and UNICEF advocated the raising of awareness regarding gender-based violence during emergencies. The European Union also adopted a new policy on education in emergencies, with a strong focus on children and adolescents, to guide the work of its institutions and its Member States in this regard. The European Union is the only donor in the world that allocates 10 per cent of its humanitarian aid to education in emergencies. In 2018, the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative, launched in 2017, resulted in the first funding allocations to eliminate violence against women and girls in 2018.

14. Global Programme Partnership initiatives continue to advance the promotion and protection of children's rights, including the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse. For example, UNICEF continues to provide technical guidance and support to the 23 pathfinding countries of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children,<sup>8</sup> whose membership since 2016 has expanded to include 328 organizations.

15. UNICEF and the World Bank have been leveraging their strategic partnerships through initiatives such as the Global Financing Facility in support of Every Woman, Every Child and the Identification for Development, which advocate for increased domestic resources for investments in civil registration systems. UNICEF continues its leading and convening role in its capacity as Co-Chair of the United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group to strengthen the coordination of a coherent and integrated United Nations response to, and programming on, the issue of legal identity.

16. United Nations entities continued to support the scaling-up of high-impact health interventions in 2018, including the global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all (Sustainable Development Goal 3 and Global Action Plan), a new

<sup>7</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Development aid drops in 2018, especially to neediest countries", available at: [www.oecd.org/newsroom/development-aid-drops-in-2018-especially-to-neediest-countries.htm](http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/development-aid-drops-in-2018-especially-to-neediest-countries.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Pathfinding countries commit to public commitments to accelerate action towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, including with a three- to five-year action plan (see <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/summit-commits-to-ending-violence-against-children-achieving-sdg-16-2/>).

inter-agency coordination framework launched in 2018. The framework is a commitment made by 12 global health and development organizations<sup>9</sup> to accelerate progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goal targets through more-effective collaboration between signatories. It complements existing and approved agency-specific strategies and is intended to support implementation through collective action and to catalyse new collaborative efforts, including in areas such as primary health care, digital innovation and systems strengthening.

17. The Declaration of Astana on Primary Health Care, adopted at the Global Conference on Primary Health Care, held in Astana in October 2018, cemented a renewed commitment to the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination. UNICEF and WHO are at the forefront of implementing a vision of primary health care centred on meeting people's health needs, addressing the broader determinants of health through evidence-informed policies and actions across all sectors and empowering families and communities to act as catalysts of change, both as self-carers and caregivers. These ambitious transformations will require the partnership and engagement of young people so that they can be fully engaged as future leaders within health services as well as providers and users of those services.

18. The year 2018 was critical for the Global Partnership for Education. In February, the Global Partnership held its third financing conference, co-hosted by the Presidents of France and Senegal. In addition to significant development partner contributions to the Global Partnership fund, 50 developing countries committed to increase public expenditure on education to a total of \$110 billion.

#### **D. Monitoring progress**

19. To harness the power of evidence to drive positive change for children and to continue to strengthen monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals through a child-centred lens, UNICEF has supported partner Governments in launching the largest round of the programme of multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) yet to be carried out. As the leading survey-based household data source on children, adolescents and women, the programme has continuously evolved since its inception in 1995, innovating and aligning itself with changing priorities and emerging areas of concern. The sixth round is generating data on 33 Sustainable Development Goal indicators, representing more than half of the indicators that can be generated through household surveys. More than 67 MICS are expected to be completed between 2018 and 2020, producing, for the first time, comparable data on key areas, including foundational learning skills, quality of drinking water, impact of emergencies and child functioning.

20. During the sixth round of MICS several methodological innovations were introduced, including (a) "MICS Plus", a subsample of survey respondents who will be followed via mobile phones after the completion of the surveys to generate longitudinal results; (b) "MICS Tabulator", an open-access online tool that will enable visitors without coding skills to extract survey results, conduct cross-tabulations and create visual representation of all MICS microdata; and (c) "MICS Link", a suite of methods to help the integration of data collected with other data sources.

<sup>9</sup> The 12 agencies participating in the global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all are: Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization; the Global Financing Facility in support of Every Woman, Every Child; the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Population Fund; UNICEF; the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID); the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); the World Bank Group; the World Food Programme; and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Nevertheless, major monitoring challenges remain, such as significant gaps in data coverage, especially in conflict-affected States in which existing methods of collecting data are challenging to carry out, as well as additional constraints involving coordination among agencies, financing and capacity. Strengthening administrative data overall and in specific sectors is also part of the strategy to generate actionable data.

21. Systems for real-time information collection and engagement continue to be scaled up. The RapidPro mobile platform, which operates in 32 countries at scale as a real-time monitoring solution, continues to be a useful tool in helping to reduce maternal and childhood mortality. In Pakistan, RapidPro was employed to support the vaccination of more than 37 million children against measles and to reach the most vulnerable children with life-saving vaccination services. The importance of developing the child protection data ecosystem is epitomized by the success of the Primero information management system, which has improved efficiency and lowered transaction costs. Since going live in 2015, the Primero software has been used in 21 cases in 16 countries, including in complex emergencies such as the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, the Syrian refugee response in Jordan and the earthquake and tsunami response in Indonesia. By 2018, the software platform was supporting over 1,100 users from more than 80 organizations to safely and confidentially manage data on approximately 40,000 vulnerable children.

## **E. Participation and self-expression of children**

22. Supporting the participation of children in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies is an essential component of the 2030 Agenda. Children's right to be heard and respected in matters that concern them is reflected in several provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines that children should be active participants in their own development, rather than mere recipients of adult protective care.

23. UNICEF is the United Nations agency mandated to support the meaningful and systematic participation of children and adolescents. This includes consulting them on policies and services and supporting them in efforts to influence decisions and matters that affect them and their communities. This requires investments in addressing social norms, implementing laws and policies that create an enabling environment, building the skills and capacities of both adolescents and adults and creating sustainable mechanisms and opportunities for participation. Member States and other United Nations agencies also support efforts that encourage adolescents to participate in civic engagement – activities aimed at improving their communities, schools, environment, villages, states and countries. Peru, for example, has set up a consultative council for children and adolescents to provide a space for engaging them in policies that affect them.

24. In 2018, around 6 million adolescents across 108 countries participated in or led civic engagement initiatives through UNICEF-supported programmes, in collaboration with governmental partners, compared with just 2.3 million across 99 countries in 2017. Of those participating, around 500,000 were adolescents in conflict-affected or humanitarian contexts in 23 countries. The India alone, a UNICEF initiative engaged 4.2 million adolescents in 2018, a huge increase prompted by a joint strategy with the Government to scale up efforts. In addition, UNICEF, together with civil society organizations, organized a European Union-wide consultation on priorities for youth, involving over 20,000 adolescents and young people; the outcomes of the consultation was presented at a special session at the European Parliament on the occasion of World Children's Day.



### III. Progress in the four major goal areas of “A world fit for children”

#### A. Promoting healthy lives

25. Globally, substantial progress has been made in reducing child mortality over the past several decades. The total number of deaths of children under five years of age dropped to 5.4 million in 2017 from 12.6 million in 1990. Globally, the mortality rate for children under five years of age dropped to 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017, from 93 in 1990, which represents a 58 per cent decline.<sup>10</sup> Children face the highest risk of dying in their first month of life – at a rate of 18 deaths per 1,000 live births – which resulted in 2.5 million newborn deaths worldwide in 2017. Some 2.6 million babies are stillborn each year. Inequities in accessing care and the poor quality of health services are substantial obstacles in improving maternal and newborn survival and in reducing stillbirths. Regional disparities continue to exist: in sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 1 out of every 13 children dies before his or her fifth birthday, while in the world’s high-income countries the ratio is 1 in 185. Among newborns in sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 1 in every 37 children dies within the first month, while in the world’s high-income countries the ratio is 1 in 333.

26. Access to skilled health personnel at birth is critical in curbing maternal and newborn mortality and intrapartum stillbirths. In 2018, 27 million live births were delivered in health facilities in 52 high-burden countries implementing the UNICEF-WHO Every Newborn Action Plan in support of maternal and newborn health. The percentage of live births attended by skilled health personnel in those countries reached 76 per cent among countries with available data (2010–2018). This represents a considerable achievement and strong commitment to mothers and newborns.

27. To boost neonatal survival, postnatal care is an essential, evidence-based intervention that includes the immediate assessment of the baby, breastfeeding within one hour of birth, umbilical cord care and the reinforcement of postnatal care messaging among families and caregivers. However, only 57 per cent of mothers and 33 per cent of newborns worldwide received postnatal care (among countries with available survey data, 2010 to 2018).

28. Adolescent girls in developing regions face specific challenges: every year, an estimated 21 million girls between the ages of 15 to 19 become pregnant, and an estimated 16 million give birth. It is estimated that 2 million girls under 15 years of age become pregnant and 2.5 million girls under 16 years of age give birth each year. Only around 70 per cent of live births among adolescent mothers aged 15 to 19 years (countries with available data, 2010–2018) were attended by skilled health personnel. Globally, maternal mortality remains the leading cause of death among girls in this age group.

29. Disparities in maternal mortality exist across regions and countries. Developing regions account for approximately 99 per cent of global maternal deaths, with sub-Saharan Africa alone accounting for roughly 66 per cent. Women and adolescent girls face additional risks in humanitarian contexts due to the deterioration of health services and weakened social protection systems.

30. If current trends continue, with more than 50 countries falling short of the Sustainable Development Goal target on child survival, some 56 million children under five years of age will die between 2018 and 2030, half of them newborns.

<sup>10</sup> Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, *Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2018*.

Worldwide, infectious diseases and neonatal complications are responsible for the vast majority of deaths of children under five years of age. The statistics are all the more appalling because the diseases that kill the greatest number of children are largely preventable and treatable with proven, cost-effective interventions.

31. Increasingly, global emergencies are stretching health systems and exacerbating inequities in health outcomes. Globally, UNICEF and its partners delivered results for millions of children affected by emergencies in 2018: more than 43 million people gained access to safe water; 3.4 million children received treatment for severe acute malnutrition; and 19.6 million children aged 6 months to 15 years received measles vaccinations. Working with WHO and other partners, UNICEF focused on five areas in its response to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: risk communication and community engagement; infection prevention and control; case management and psychosocial care; education; and nutrition. Despite the complexity of the country context and insecurity within the country, UNICEF reached 9.6 million people with Ebola prevention messages, and more than 700 health facilities and 700 schools received water, sanitation and hygiene services. Over 1,000 children admitted to Ebola treatment centres received psychosocial and nutritional support, and all 908 orphans and separated children identified received psychosocial support and appropriate care, including non-food item kits and food assistance.

32. Immunization remains one of the most successful and cost-effective public-health interventions. To prevent premature deaths and disabilities, UNICEF and its partners have supported the vaccination of 65.5 million children with three doses of the combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine (which contains pentavalent vaccine) in 64 priority countries. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF has ensured the measles vaccination of 19.6 million children – 96 per cent of the targeted 20 million.

33. In 2017, the global number of children vaccinated, 116.2 million, was the highest ever reported. The number of under-vaccinated children fell by over 1.8 million between 2010 and 2017. In 2018, South Africa boosted its immunization coverage for children under the age of one to 90 per cent nationwide. Globally, however, 19.9 million children remained under-vaccinated in 2017, exposing them to vaccine-preventable mortality, illness and disability. Under-vaccination is concentrated in 64 UNICEF priority countries, with a total of 16.7 million under-vaccinated children, including middle-income countries in which under-vaccination is becoming a serious public health issue. In 2018, the world witnessed an alarming global surge of measles outbreaks, including in high- and middle-income countries.

34. In 2017, an estimated 219 million cases of malaria and 435,000 malaria-related deaths were recorded in 87 countries. Children under the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa account for nearly two thirds of global deaths from malaria.<sup>11</sup> Since 2012, seasonal malaria chemoprevention has been recommended by WHO for children between 3 to 59 months of age living in areas of highly seasonal malaria transmission in the Sahel subregion of Africa. However, about 13 million eligible children did not benefit from this intervention, mainly due to a lack of funding. Community-based health programmes can significantly reduce malaria-related child mortality in rural communities. Through the Rapid Access Expansion Programme, for example, WHO and its partners have trained and deployed more than 8,400 community health workers in hard-to-reach areas. More than 8 million cases of malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea among young children were diagnosed and treated in the areas in which the Rapid Access Expansion Programme was implemented.

---

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Director-General of the World Health Organization on consolidating gains and accelerating efforts to control and eliminate malaria in developing countries, particularly in Africa, by 2030 (A/73/853).

35. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative continued its critical work, including on vaccine procurement and management, social mobilization and communication, with a strategic focus on the three polio-endemic countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan – as well as eight countries with circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus outbreaks in 2018 – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. Well-nourished children are healthier, more resistant to disease and more likely to survive. As they grow, they are more able to learn, becoming more productive and better equipped to participate in and contribute to their communities. The estimated number of children suffering from stunting globally has declined, from 171 million in 2010 to 149 million in 2018: more than one third of those children live in Africa, where their number has increased, and more than half live in Asia. Furthermore, malnutrition in all its forms remains a persistent challenge.

37. Globally, millions of children continue to suffer from vitamin and mineral deficiencies, which can lead to poor growth, delayed cognitive development, weakened immunity, disability, disease and even death. Forty-three per cent of preschool-age children and 28 per cent of women of reproductive age suffer from anaemia, which is often due to iron deficiency.

38. In 2018, 49.5 million children under five years of age suffered from wasting and nearly 17 million suffered from severe wasting, most of them in Africa and Asia. While wasting is often associated with emergencies, its burden remains high in many stable contexts. At the other end of the spectrum, 40 million children under five years of age were overweight in 2018, up from 30 million in 2000.

39. Breastfeeding is not only an investment in improving the health of children and mothers, it is also an investment in human capital development that can benefit a country's economy. On average, every dollar invested in breastfeeding programmes generates \$35 in economic returns. Globally, only 41 per cent of infants under six months of age were exclusively breastfed in 2018.

40. In low- and middle-income countries, approximately half of children between 6 and 23 months of age receive food with adequate frequency and only 29 per cent are meeting the minimum requirement for dietary diversity. Only 18 per cent of children receive a minimum acceptable diet, which refers to meeting the minimum for both meals and diet diversity.

41. For women of childbearing age, fortifying such commonly consumed cereal grains as wheat flour, maize flour and rice is an important means of preventing birth defects and anaemia. According to most recent estimates, 82 countries had legislation to mandate the fortification of at least one industrially milled cereal grain.<sup>12</sup> For young children, home fortification using micronutrient powders is a more targeted approach that is currently reaching more than 16.6 million children in 59 countries worldwide.

42. The targets associated with Sustainable Development Goal 6 for universal access to drinking water and for sanitation and hygiene place emphasis on accessibility, sustainability and quality, and are therefore ambitious, given the challenges to resource mobilization and the conditions prevailing in many countries. Over 18 million people gained access to safe water services in 2018 through UNICEF-supported programmes alone, with 62 per cent gaining access to long-term water service.<sup>13</sup> The sustainable provision of water and sanitation services will require

<sup>12</sup> Food Fortification Initiative, "Global Progress of Industrially Milled Cereal Grain Fortification [legislation]", global map available at: [www.ffinetwork.org/global\\_progress](http://www.ffinetwork.org/global_progress).

<sup>13</sup> WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines*, 2017.

transformational change in structural and institutional factors and the strengthening of sector governance functions at the national and subnational levels.

43. Increasingly, Government-sponsored campaigns to eliminate open defecation are reaching beyond individual communities to declare entire districts, municipalities and even provinces or states free of open defecation. In 2018, nearly 11 million people gained access to basic sanitation services through UNICEF-supported programmes. The monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals has revealed that one third of primary schools worldwide lack basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, with especially deleterious consequences for girls. While hygienic behaviours have improved, the percentage of people with hand-washing facilities at home, consisting of soap and water, must be increased. According to WHO and UNICEF data, one in four health-care facilities lacks basic water services and one in five has no sanitation services.<sup>14</sup> Globally, one in six has no hygiene service, meaning there are no hand-washing facilities where patients receive care, nor soap and water in bathroom facilities. In March 2018 the Secretary-General made a global call to action for water, sanitation and hygiene at all health-care facilities. Since that time, WHO and UNICEF have established a set of global targets aimed at achieving universal water, sanitation and hygiene services in health-care facilities by 2030, and for the first time, made global estimates available. With support from over 35 partners, WHO and UNICEF are leading global efforts to provide technical support, generating and sharing evidence and knowledge and galvanizing partners to make commitments and to act.

44. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF provided safe water to more than 43 million people in 69 countries and sanitation facilities to over 13 million people in 46 countries in 2018. Close to 4.4 million children benefited from gender-appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and hygiene promotion in schools or temporary learning spaces in humanitarian situations.

45. In 2018, at its sixty-first session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in its resolution 61/9 on protecting children from the illicit drug challenge, called on Member States to take effective measures to prevent the abuse of illicit drugs by children. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has supported Member States with initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles among children, including through a partnership with Lions Clubs International Foundation to prevent substance use and disruptive behaviours in the educational sector, reaching over 15,000 young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

## **B. Providing quality education**

46. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. It embodies a commitment to reach the most vulnerable children, places learning at the centre of success and is aimed at meeting the ambitious targets of universal primary education and increased access to pre-primary and secondary education. The global education community acknowledges the progress made since 2015, but has taken note that the world is off-track to achieve Goal 4 by 2030, especially with respect to learning and the acquisition of at least basic skills by all, while facing a financing gap.

47. There are more children in school than ever before, over 1.5 billion across pre-primary, primary and secondary education.<sup>15</sup> By 2018, most countries in the world (73 per cent) had passed laws making nine years of primary and secondary-level

---

<sup>14</sup> WHO-UNICEF: [www.washinhc.org/about/](http://www.washinhc.org/about/).

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, online database, accessed in April 2019.

education compulsory. However, at least one year of pre-primary education is compulsory in only 22 per cent of countries, meaning that in many countries children start formal schooling without adequate preparation.<sup>16</sup>

48. The world, as a whole, has achieved the target of gender parity at all levels of education except tertiary education. However, this is not true for all regions, country income groups or individual countries. Only 66 per cent of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, 45 per cent in lower secondary and 25 per cent in upper secondary.

49. Despite progress, much remains to be done. Globally, 6 out of 10 children and adolescents are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. The total, 617 million, includes more than 387 million children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years old) and 230 million adolescents of lower-secondary school age (about 12 to 14 years old). This means that more than one half, 56 per cent, of all children will not be able to read or handle mathematics with proficiency by the time they are of age to complete primary education.<sup>17</sup>

50. More than 124 million children of primary and lower-secondary-school age worldwide are out of school. That number is increased to an estimated 262 million when upper-secondary-school-aged children are included.<sup>18</sup>

51. Skills development begins from early childhood, yet half of the world's pre-primary-aged children, at least 175 million, are already missing out on a critical opportunity to develop the skills they will need to support a lifetime of learning.<sup>19</sup> At current rates, by 2030, more than half of the world's 2 billion children will not be on track to complete secondary education to obtain the skills they will need to succeed in life, school and work.<sup>20</sup> The global rate of 15- to-24-year-olds not in employment, education or training is 22 per cent. The rate is 34 per cent for females and 10 per cent for males, reflecting the lower labour market participation of women as a result of gendered roles in childcare and domestic work.<sup>21</sup>

52. Basic literacy should also include online safety training and educational campaigns to make children aware of online risks and the possibility of becoming victims of online violence and sexual exploitation. To maximize the opportunities and minimize the risks of children in an increasingly digitized world, UNODC has continued producing and disseminating educational tools for children and educators on online safety and cybercrime, reaching over 35,000 children in a number of countries, including China, El Salvador, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Tunisia and Uzbekistan.

53. Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in terms of access to education. There are no internationally comparable data due, in part, to a lack of both data collection and common definitions on disaggregation. However, the MICS on child functioning are a significant step forward in capturing comprehensive information on children experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, limited participation

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2019. Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls*, Paris, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Fact Sheet No. 46, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs46-more-than-half-children-not-learning-en-2017.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "New Education Data for SDG 4 and More", 26 September 2018 (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/new-education-data-sdg-4-and-more>).

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn; Prioritizing quality and early childhood education*, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (Education Commission), *The Learning Generation*, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future*, Geneva, 2017.

in education.<sup>22</sup> The implementation of inclusive education policies, which include provisions for the use of accessible information communication technologies in education, will help to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to learning opportunities.

54. Access to digital technologies will help to prepare children for the jobs of the future and provide them with the skills young people need. Project Connect, a partnership involving UNICEF, Governments, mobile network operators and technology companies, has collected data for more than 500,000 schools around the world, displaying their Internet connectivity in real time. Educational content should also be developed with an understanding of the skills that children need to thrive in the fast-moving information society of the twenty-first century.

55. Sustainable Development Goal 4 will not be reached worldwide without increased investment in education and action in humanitarian contexts. In 2018, UNICEF reached 6.9 million children in humanitarian situations with formal or non-formal education, including 560,000 children in South Sudan and 1.2 million Syrian refugee children living in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

### **C. Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence**

56. The ministerial-level proclamation on violence against children adopted at the groundbreaking 2018 Global Solutions Summit, accelerated attention to the violence-prevention agenda. In 2018, UNICEF supported the efforts of 134 countries to reach children affected by violence with prevention and response services, including through national action plans and policies to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation. Parenting programmes reached over 2 million mothers, fathers and caregivers in 75 countries. An alliance was established between End Violence, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative to end violence in every school by 2024. Important gains were made to better integrate multisectoral approaches to address violence against children, with around 2.3 million boys and girls who had experienced violence in 112 countries reached by health, social work, justice and law enforcement services.

57. In 2018, UNICEF released analysis revealing that 25 million child marriages had been prevented as a result of progress made over the past decade, driven largely by a sharp decline in child marriages South Asia: from nearly 50 per cent to 30 per cent of women between the ages of 20 to 24 who has been first married before the age of 18. In 2018, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage provided 3 million adolescent girls aged from 10 to 19 years of age with prevention and care interventions to address child marriage in 2018. Building on the African Union's Campaign to End Child Marriage, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) finalized its multi-country analytical study on legislation, policies, interventions and cultural practices on child marriage in Africa and convened a policy dialogue to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in this respect in 2018.

58. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation reached nearly 100,000 girls and women with prevention and protection services, and nearly 7 million people participated in education, communication and social

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls*, Paris, 2018.

mobilization platforms to promote the elimination of the practice. Successful programming by both organizations led to resource commitments from six new donors, including a first private sector donor.

59. The establishment of child protection committees to detect and report violence against children in a total of 96 localities in Côte d'Ivoire is an example of a national initiative to protect children. Mexico published its national programme for the protection of children and adolescents in August 2018, in collaboration with the private sector, academia and civil society and international organizations, outlining specific objectives and strategies to ensure the well-being of children and adolescents. In Sierra Leone, UN-Women championed advocacy campaigns, awareness-raising and sensitization training in partnership with civil society organizations, the Government and international organizations and other partners to raise awareness of sexual violence against girls. Yet, despite gains, in 2018, hundreds of millions of children suffered as a result of harmful practices, violence or exploitation. Indeed, each year around 12 million girls worldwide are married as children, and over 150 million more are likely to be married by 2030 unless progress accelerates dramatically.

60. Continuous monitoring for the publication of the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that children continue to be targeted by traffickers, with 30 per cent of all victims detected worldwide in the 2016–2017 period being children, mostly girls. In response, UNODC has delivered technical assistance specifically aimed at strengthening the capacity of Member States to protect children from all forms of trafficking in persons. In 2018, almost 1.7 million children on the move received protective services through UNICEF-supported programmes across 48 countries, almost double the number reached in 2017. In partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the League of Arab States has developed a strategy for the protection of refugee and displaced children in Arab countries, which tackles important issues, including basic principles for the protection of refugee children.

61. During the reporting period, focus was increased on the scaling-up of action and investment to strengthen child protection systems, and in particular the role of the social service workforce. The number of countries reporting action and progress jumped from 114 in 2017 to 132 in 2018, including a first-time engagement with an additional 17 countries to support social-service workforce strengthening, with the greatest progress made in the area of strengthening the normative framework.

62. In 2018, concerted efforts bolstered the reach, impact and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. During 2018, over 1 million women, girls and boys were provided with training on gender-based-violence risk mitigation, including measures on prevention and response, while 3.6 million children and adolescents received community-based mental health and psychosocial support, including access to child-friendly spaces. Mine-risk education to reduce injuries from landmines and explosive remnants of war reached more than 3.7 million children in 18 countries with life-saving messages. In 2018, UNICEF and its partners registered more than 113,000 unaccompanied and separated children in humanitarian situations in 43 countries across the world. Over 61 per cent of unaccompanied and separated children registered with family tracing and reunification services were reunified with their families or received family-based care or appropriate alternative services. With UNICEF support, 13,643 children in 16 countries across five regions were released from armed forces and armed groups during 2018, and 13,516 received care and services, of which 9,346 (68 per cent) were reintegrated with their families.

63. The United Nations stepped up efforts to galvanize collective action for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian situations. In



16 country offices, UNICEF worked with partners to deliver child-sensitive and survivor-centric programmes in high-risk environments, charting the course for accelerated protection from sexual exploitation and abuse programmes in all countries with humanitarian response plans and refugee response plans.

64. In 2018, 71 countries provided assistance to girls and boys in contact with justice and administrative bodies to improve their access to justice services. In at least 65 countries, UNICEF supported capacity-building for justice professionals, 44 per cent of whom were certified in dealing with child offenders and 59 per cent with child victims. In 2018, support by UNICEF to national civil registration authorities translated into over 16 million births registered in 49 countries and the issuance of birth certificated for over 13 million children in 41 countries.

65. Cyberbullying can cause profound harm and lead to mental health consequences as it can quickly reach a wide audience and can remain accessible online indefinitely, virtually following its victims online for life. Victims of cyberbullying are more likely to use alcohol and drugs and skip school than students who have not been victims. They also are more likely to receive poor grades and experience low self-esteem and health problems. In extreme situations, cyberbullying has led to suicide. According to data from UNESCO on the prevalence of cyberbullying in high-income countries, the proportion of children and adolescents affected by cyberbullying ranges from 5 per cent to 21 per cent, with girls appearing to be more likely to experience cyberbullying than boys.

#### **D. Combating HIV and AIDS**

66. The scaling-up of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is one of the greatest public health achievements of recent times, averting a cumulative 1.8 million new HIV infections among children under 15 years of age since 2000. In 2017 (latest available data year), 80 per cent of pregnant women living with HIV worldwide received antiretroviral therapy to keep them alive and well and to stop them from transmitting the virus to their babies. In 2018, Malaysia was certified by WHO as having eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV. At the time of this writing, a total of 11 countries and territories had been certified.<sup>23</sup> South Africa reduced-mother to-child transmission of HIV at six weeks postpartum from 8 per cent in 2008 to 1.4 per cent in 2017. Globally, there were 180,000 new infections in children from birth to 4 years of age in 2017, a 35 per cent reduction since 2010 and a 3 per cent reduction since 2016.

67. Despite remarkable progress in preventing the vertical transmission of HIV, 1.2 million children from birth to 9 years of age were estimated to be living with the virus in 2017.<sup>24</sup> Timely diagnosis and the initiation of antiretroviral therapy can ensure that these children survive and thrive to reach their full potential as adolescents and adults. However, diagnosis continues to occur late and such therapy is currently provided to only half of those in need, with suboptimal regimens and formulations. Globally in 2017, 59 per cent of adults living with HIV received antiretroviral therapy, compared with only 52 per cent of children, a slight increase from 49 per cent coverage in children in 2016. Of the regions with available data for 2017, South Asia had the highest percentage of children on antiretroviral therapy (73 per cent), followed by the Middle East and North Africa (71 per cent) and East Asia and the

<sup>23</sup> The countries and territories are: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Belarus, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Malaysia, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Thailand.

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, "Children, HIV and AIDS: Global Snapshot", December 2018 (<https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-hiv-and-aids-global-and-regional-snapshots/>).



Pacific (68 per cent). Key bottlenecks included limited access to HIV testing for infants and the inadequate expansion of paediatric treatment access points.

68. Globally, progress in preventing new HIV infections has been slow among adolescents, specifically adolescent girls and young women. The number of new HIV infections among adolescents from 15 to 19 years of age in 2017 was only 17 per cent lower than in 2010, compared with a decline of 35 per cent in children younger than five years of age over the same time period. In adults over 15 years of age, 36 per cent of the 1.6 million new infections reported occurred among those from 15 to 24 years of age: 250,000 in those 15 to 19 years of age; and 330,000 in those 20 to 24 years of age. Adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for 340,000 of the new infections in adults, with adolescent girls accounting for 66 per cent of new infections among those 15 to 19 years of age.

69. In 2017, there were still more than 12 million children who had lost one or both parents to AIDS. However, remarkable gains have been made in mitigating the economic and social impact of HIV and AIDS on children and families over the past decade. Evaluations of national social protection programmes have documented that social protection, in particular cash transfers, can contribute to improving access to health, education and nutrition, strengthening social networks, increasing access to HIV and AIDS treatment and prevention and reducing adolescent vulnerability and risk-taking.

70. The current state of affairs with regard to the response to HIV calls for innovative solutions. For example, early adopters of point-of-care HIV diagnostic technologies in Eastern and Southern Africa have demonstrated that, compared with conventional laboratories, point-of-care platforms can reduce the turnaround time for results, substantially increase initiation rates for antiretroviral therapy for children, and reduce patient loss during follow-up. Infant same-day HIV results in pilot point-of-care studies have demonstrated improved and early linkages to treatment, thereby avoiding the early peak mortality associated with HIV at 2 to 3 months of age in HIV-infected infants. Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, early adopters of point-of-care HIV diagnostic technologies, are also piloting the integration of HIV and tuberculosis testing, using point-of-care platforms capable of multiplexing. In the Philippines, the HIV and AIDS Policy Act of 2018 will expand access to evidence-based HIV strategies and facilitate access to guided HIV testing, especially for children at risk of contracting HIV.

71. Increasing knowledge about HIV is a key strategy for preventing its transmission. UN-Women has supported awareness-raising campaigns, peer-to-peer counselling, competitions and vocational training for over 21,000 youth and adolescents in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jamaica, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique and Uganda. The organization has also provided safe spaces for open discussions of previously taboo topics such as HIV prevention for over 17,000 Rohingya women, including adolescent girls, in Bangladesh. UN-Women has supported capacity-building programmes for civil servants of national AIDS-coordinating bodies in China, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Malawi, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe to integrate gender equality into national HIV strategies and monitoring frameworks.

#### **IV. Ways forward**

72. From 2002 to 2018, millions of children born around the world started their lives with a better chance of living healthily and achieving their potential. Nevertheless, poverty, discrimination, disasters, violence and conflict robbed millions of others of the chance to enjoy those same rights. Despite improvements in child survival,

pockets of extreme poverty persist even in wealthy countries and children comprise a disproportionate number of the poor. Humanitarian emergencies, fragility, instability and displacement continue to threaten children's rights. Gender inequalities between women and men continue to hamper equitable access to services and resources for women and burden women with caregiving responsibilities, thereby perpetuating the intergenerational transfer of unequal gender norms and practices and gender-unequal outcomes for girls and boys. Addressing gender equality is a fundamental way to achieve all development outcomes for children.

73. Taking note of the synergies between the realization of child rights and the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is recommended, for the consideration of Member States, that the present annual report on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children be issued from now on as a biennial report, to both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, on children and the Sustainable Development Goals. A biennial report will allow sufficient time to record detectable changes in data on outcome levels, and will thereby providing a more comprehensive update on progress towards the Goals related to children. It is also recommended that the report be considered as an input into the Sustainable Development Goals follow-up and review process taking place during the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and in line with paragraph 17 of the Ministerial declaration of the 2018 high-level political forum. The report would be drafted by UNICEF, in collaboration with relevant United Nations bodies.

---