

16 PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS

# KEY ASKS

## 2023 • SDG National Reviews

## SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance, based on the rule of law are central to the realization of child rights, and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 includes several explicit targets for children (16.2 on violence against children; and 16.9 on legal identity for all, including birth registration); as well as many others where child rights are implicit, such as 16.3 on the rule of law and equal access to justice, 16.6 on strong institutions; and 16.7 on inclusive societies.



### KEY ASKS

Advances in ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to justice are uneven and continue to deprive millions of their security, rights and opportunities as well as undermine the delivery of public services and broader economic development. Renewed efforts are essential to move towards the achievement of SDG 16.

- 1. Peaceful Societies:** High levels of violence, conflict, insecurity, crime, and exploitation have a profound impact on sustainable development. Millions of children around the globe experience emotional, physical, and sexual violence in homes, communities, schools, workplaces, detention centres, and institutions and online. Today, there are 31 million children who have been uprooted from their homes, including over 17 million internally displaced, 12.7 million refugees and 1.1 million asylum seekers<sup>1</sup>. As children are particularly vulnerable to long-term effects of violence, exploitation, and abuse — they require special protection and attention.<sup>2</sup>

To accelerate achievement of SDG target 16.2 - ending all forms of violence against children, UNICEF urges Governments to:

- Establish or strengthen a national coordinating framework on violence against children, which dovetails with mutually supportive efforts to end violence against women.
- Enact legal reform to ensure comprehensive prohibition of all forms of violence against children and provide sufficient resources for implementation and enforcement.
- Scale up evidence-based violence and prevention and response services to through sectoral delivery mechanisms, notably health, education, social welfare, and justice.
- Mobilize constituencies - communities, families, children, and adolescents - to tackle the social and behavioural drivers of violence.
- Track progress through strengthening data systems on VAC (administrative and household survey data) and monitoring the outcomes of interventions.

- 2. Just Societies:** Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights is key to establishing peaceful and inclusive societies. While the right to access justice applies equally to children and adults, it is often overlooked in relation to children whether as alleged offenders, victims, or witnesses or as an interested party, or because an intervention is needed for their care, protection, health, or well-being. Access to justice requires the legal empowerment of every child and must consider their age, maturity, and evolving capacities. For children to exercise their rights in a meaningful way, effective representation and remedies must be available to enforce their rights and seek reparation<sup>3</sup>. The human rights

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-could-devastate-refugee-migrant-and-internally-displaced>, 1 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in particular in the case of migrant, refugee and internally displaced children: United Nations Children's Fund, Quick Tips on COVID-19 and Migrant, Refugee and Internally Displaced Children (Children on the Move). Retrieved from [https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276\\_d2d8c301892e470797308c97de15b41a.pdf](https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276_d2d8c301892e470797308c97de15b41a.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [#Reimagine Justice for Children](#) Agenda, UNICEF, 2021

of every child, especially those who are deprived of their liberty, must be fully respected, protected and fulfilled.<sup>4</sup> To be able to claim their rights, a person's very existence needs to be recognized by the state. The right to be recognized as a person before the law through a legal identity is a prerequisite for being able to exercise all other rights. A birth certificate – as proof of legal identity – is critical to ensuring that children can enjoy their rights from birth. An effective civil registration system, including universal birth registration, is essential to ensuring that all citizens and especially children are recognized before the law, have a nationality; and can access basic social services and be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation including child labour, sexual violence and exploitation, recruitment into armed groups, trafficking, child marriage and prosecution as an adult in criminal proceedings. Birth registration, as an essential component of a country's civil registry, also strengthens the quality of statistics, aiding planning and government efficiency and investment. Significant progress has been made to achieve SDG Target 16.9 on legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. However, substantial investments are needed to achieve this Target, as an estimated 237 million children are without a birth certificate<sup>5</sup>, out of which 166 million children are not registered. UNICEF urges all Governments to:

- Ensure all children have access to justice to seek and obtain a just, equitable and timely remedy for violations of rights, including through independent, child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice systems.
- End the detention of children in all its forms through legal reforms, prevention and early intervention, the provision of child protection services, diversion, non-custodial measures and therapeutic approaches, post-release support and restorative justice. Promote children's legal empowerment, including children's access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms involving informal/traditional and transitional justice mechanisms.
- Establish child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice processes and procedures at all points where children are in contact with the law, including for child victims/survivors and witnesses of violence, abuse, and exploitation.
- Strengthen civil registration systems that register every child immediately after birth; designate civil registration as an essential service, revise laws and policies to remove all discriminatory provisions, including gender-discrimination, make registration and certification free.
- Adopt a 'one-stop approach' to registration and certification which is entirely interoperable with health, immunization, and other systems, including in humanitarian contexts.

**3. Inclusive Societies:** Inclusive societies ought to engage people as equal participants in decision-making, policy-making and law-making processes, implementation, and scrutiny. Like adults, children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them. This requires that those views be heard and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Their effective participation can enrich decision-making processes. Children should not be excluded from processes and decisions that affect them and society more broadly based on their age, gender, disability, or other status. UNICEF calls on all Governments to:

- Promote the meaningful participation of children in society and provide an environment that enables the child to exercise their right to be heard.
- Guarantee the rights of all children in their territory, without discrimination.
- Take urgent action to combat xenophobia and discrimination against disadvantaged groups of children.
- Ensure the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups are heard, including children in low-resource and/or humanitarian settings who do not have access to internet-enabled technology, including through increased innovations and adaptations to deliver information and services to people.<sup>6</sup>



## MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

Addressing all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation of children requires increased investment in data collection and analysis to improve the evidence base for policy making, planning, and programming and in working towards filling information gaps. Disaggregated data (e.g., by age, sex, education, wealth quintile, migration or displacement status, ethnicity, disability status) are critical to identify and track the most excluded and vulnerable groups of children. Of the 20 indicators agreed for measurement of progress towards SDG 16, eight target children, or explicitly require age disaggregation. UNICEF urges all governments to collect and analyse disaggregated data, especially on groups of children particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation. Additionally, UNICEF encourages countries to strengthen civil registration systems and the collection of vital statistics, build or improve national data collection and monitoring systems on violence against children and justice for children to generate reliable evidence to guide policy and budgeting and for designing, monitoring, and evaluating prevention and response programmes and services. That said, the need for evidence

<sup>4</sup> iv For more detail, see: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and United Nations Children's Fund, Technical Note: COVID-19 and children deprived of their liberty, 8 April 2020. Retrieved from <https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/technical-note-covid-19-and-children-deprived-their-liberty>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?, UNICEF, New York, December 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/62981/file/Birth-registration-for-every-child-by-2030.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Background paper for the 2020 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 31 September 2020.

For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>

must be balanced against the substantial risks to children, families and researchers participating in violence-related research and data collection.



## **INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH**

Opening budgets and promoting participatory budget processes is a key component in achieving effective, accountable, and transparent institutions. When citizens have a say in policy formulation and resource allocation, it contributes to the allocative efficiency of national public financial management and enables better tracking of expenditure that is responsive to children's concerns and good value for money. This is especially important for child protection related services, most of which are provided locally, making it harder to track use of public funds without feedback from concerned families and communities. UNICEF calls on all Governments to ensure an open and transparent budgeting process, prioritize resource allocation for programmes that further the realization of children's rights; and establish measures to track and monitor public expenditures for children. Countries are encouraged to follow the guidance from the General Comment No. 19 on the best possible use of public budgets for realizing child rights. UNICEF stands ready to aid through its Public Finance for Children work.



## **ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH**

UNICEF urges all Governments to promote the meaningful participation of children in society and to provide an environment that enables the child to exercise their rights (including to be heard) without discrimination.

- **The process for preparing the 2021 national review should directly involve children and adolescent girls and boys, especially the most marginalized or excluded.** For example, through consultations (on and/or offline), surveys or polls, focus group discussions. UNICEF together with civil society, child-focused organizations and other partners could support in the process. The results of these efforts as well as the methods employed should be described in the Voluntary National Review, including the number of young people involved in the process.
- **Actively involve children, adolescents, and youth, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in local and national planning processes in development and humanitarian contexts** through consultation and other participatory means, and as part of ongoing efforts to make children, adolescents and youth aware of these issues, inspire their positive action and expand the space for their participation in accountability mechanisms and activities. This should be part of a continuum to engage children, adolescents, and youth regularly, meaningfully and consistently as agents of change to influence behaviours and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities. It goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather systematizing the engagement of young people in a variety of ways and across media and communications channels, including for example: digital platforms (including U-Report), participatory theatre, intergenerational community dialogues, community and children's radio, participatory video, school clubs, TV Edu-tainment and child-participatory research.
- **Provide spaces for children, adolescents, and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.** UNICEF can support this effort through our existing work in this space and by creating child-friendly education and entertainment materials through UNICEF's foundational partnerships on the World's Largest Lesson. In addition, UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology is a platform for children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.