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

Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Summary

In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/187, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Najat Maalla M'jid, reviews the actions she took in 2024 at the global, regional and national levels and the results achieved in fulfilling her mandate. She emphasizes the wide multi-stakeholder mobilization undertaken throughout 2024, which marked the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of her Office. The report is focused, in particular, on the alarming increase in trafficking in children and the urgent need to scale up efforts to end that form of violence against children.



I. Introduction

1. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, guided by General Assembly resolution 62/141, is an independent global advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. In its resolutions 76/147 and 78/187, the Assembly reaffirmed its support for the work of the Special Representative, recognizing the progress achieved and the role of her mandate in promoting further implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children¹ and in supporting States Members of the United Nations in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Assembly has also expressed appreciation for the leadership of the Special Representative in the follow-up to the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty² and has encouraged her to continue her work in that area.

2. In the present report, the Special Representative reviews actions she took in 2024 at the global, regional and national levels to fulfil her mandate and provides an overview of the results achieved since her previous report. She emphasizes the wide multi-stakeholder mobilization throughout 2024, which marked the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of her Office.

3. The Special Representative continues to identify global challenges that are increasing children's exposure and vulnerability to violence. The present report is focused on the alarming increase in the rates of trafficking in children for various purposes. Despite current responses, that complex and rapidly evolving crime continues to be driven by multiple risks and overlapping factors. The increased vulnerability of children worldwide due to ongoing crises, the increased use of technology by traffickers and an unprecedented rise in demand for the exploitation of children add to the challenges posed by this low-risk and highly profitable crime. Prompt and strengthened action – coordinated and delivered at scale across and beyond borders – is now a global imperative.

4. The Special Representative invited Member States, civil society organizations and United Nations entities to contribute to the report by submitting information on their actions to protect children against trafficking. She is grateful for the more than 60 contributions received.³ The report has also benefited from input from other groups and partners, including the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight. The Special Representative is particularly grateful to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) for their dedicated support. The report was also informed by input from children and trafficking survivors.

II. A year of wide multi-stakeholder mobilization

5. The year 2024 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the appointment of the first Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. The Special Representative took the opportunity to take stock in her 2024 annual report to the General Assembly of the progress achieved and the remaining challenges to ending violence against children worldwide.⁴ In that report, she confirms that the world is not on track to end violence against children by 2030. She also highlights that, at this time of spiralling crises, violence against children has reached unprecedented levels. Ending violence against children is still possible and makes economic sense. Powerful examples of actions taken by various key

¹ [A/61/299](#).

² [A/74/136](#).

³ Submissions from Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Denmark, Ecuador, Germany, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Switzerland, Türkiye and Zambia, as well as from civil society organizations and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight.

⁴ [A/79/242](#).

stakeholders to prevent and respond to violence now need to be brought to scale. Above all, investing in child protection and well-being must be a political priority at the national, regional and global levels.

6. The Special Representative led a year-long campaign to generate the widest possible mobilization and to strengthen partnerships with and between Member States, the United Nations system, the private sector, civil society and faith-based organizations and academia, as well as children and survivors. That mobilization underpinned her contribution to two critical, related processes: (a) the first-ever Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, held on 7 and 8 November 2024 in Bogota and co-hosted by the Governments of Colombia and Sweden, along with the Special Representative, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and (b) the revitalization of the previous Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, with the launch of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence against Children.

7. The Global Ministerial Conference brought together high-level delegations from 119 countries, including 63 ministers, and led to the adoption of specific pledges to accelerate action to end violence against children by 2030. As of January 2025, 55 States had also adopted the Bogota Call to Action, launched at the Conference. In addition, over 40 Member States joined the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence against Children, launched at the conference. As outlined later in the report, the Special Representative will build on the momentum generated by those developments and continue her close collaboration with all key stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels to accelerate efforts to end violence against children by 2030.

Engaging more Member States

8. During the reporting period, the Special Representative strengthened her engagement with Member States, including through country visits and high-level bilateral engagements. As part of the 15-month preparation for the Global Ministerial Conference, the Special Representative engaged with more than 50 State-led national preparatory processes, with the support of UNICEF. Those processes were opportunities to define concrete, context-specific actions to tackle violence and its drivers at the national and local levels and explore ways to take them to scale and overcome remaining challenges. They also helped to reenergize national commitment across sectors to address violence against children.

9. Since 1 January 2024, the Special Representative has led the process of revitalizing the previous Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, through the establishment of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence against Children. That process is aimed at ensuring greater ownership by Member States, cultivating closer connections to local realities through a bottom-up approach and boosting peer learning between States. As part of that process, she convened the first-ever technical workshop in Geneva on 10 and 11 September 2024. More than 90 participants, including representatives of pathfinding countries, took part in the workshop, alongside country and regional representatives from UNICEF and WHO. The Special Representative is thankful for the high-level engagement and representation of pathfinding countries and for the support of UNICEF, WHO and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation. The Special Representative has begun to support States as they build road maps to deliver on their commitments as pathfinding countries and on the pledges made at the Global Ministerial Conference.

10. Mobilization for the Global Ministerial Conference and the Pathfinding Global Alliance was also an integral part of the Special Representative's country visits. Since her previous report to the Human Rights Council,⁵ she has engaged with national authorities on visits to Brazil, Costa Rica, Lesotho, Malta, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Zambia, in addition to ensuring follow-up on country visits undertaken in previous years.

11. The Special Representative was encouraged during her country visits by the political commitments made on children's protection and well-being and steps taken to increase investment in integrated and cross-sectoral services for children and families. More States

⁵ [A/HRC/55/58](#).

are integrating that approach into public finance and budgeting frameworks. Zambia, for example, has analysed the cost of violence, estimating that it amounts to 6.4 per cent of the gross domestic product, and has prioritized cross-cutting investment in social protection, including by increasing allocations for its social cash transfer programme, public welfare assistance, economic empowerment for women and vulnerable households, free education and school feeding programmes. The Special Representative welcomed a new process in Zambia to identify a minimum package of services for the protection and well-being of children to standardize service provision and enhance coordination. In Lesotho, she welcomed a commitment to strengthen access to integrated services for the most vulnerable children as well as the new National Prevention and Response Plan on Violence Against Children, which is backed by a five-year commitment to reduce violence against children by 75 per cent by 2028. In Brazil, she welcomed the inclusion of a cross-cutting agenda on children and adolescents in the Multi-Year Development Plan 2024–2027 and the subsequent commitment by the Government to track progress on the elements of the agenda aimed at tackling violence against children.

12. During her visit to Costa Rica, the Special Representative welcomed the Government's commitment to violence prevention, community empowerment and building a culture of peace. In Malta, she highlighted strong measures to strengthen child protection systems and to ensure the participation of children in decision-making processes, including by lowering the voting age to 16 years for national and local elections and European parliamentary elections. Following her engagement with the national authorities in Qatar, she welcomed the Government's commitment to develop a framework for child protection professionals to enhance their skills and standards by 2030. The Special Representative also welcomed strong action by the United Arab Emirates to coordinate and standardize services for the protection and well-being of children and to ensure the participation of children and young people. In addition, she welcomed the leadership role of law enforcement agencies in the United Arab Emirates in protecting children both online and offline and their support to other States in that regard.

13. The Special Representative ensured systematic follow-up on recommendations relating to her visits to States in previous years and continuing support to them. On 9 July, she welcomed the announcement by the Government of Thailand of the withdrawal of its reservation to article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, extending rights protection to refugee children. Following her visit to Fiji, the Special Representative recommended that the country continue to examine the economic costs of violence against children and the return on investments in violence prevention. She welcomed the subsequent inclusion of a key performance indicator on reducing the economic costs of violence against children in the country's national development plan for 2025–2029, launched in September 2024. During a follow-up visit to Romania in 2024, the Special Representative welcomed the ongoing efforts to accelerate the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Child Guarantee, including an analysis of the costs of violence against children and the scale-up of integrated community-based services. She welcomed the commitment to increase State funding for local social services and the establishment of a budget allocation and expenditure tracking mechanism. She also expressed full support for the adoption of legislative amendments that enable the meaningful participation of children in decision-making at all levels of public administration and welcomed the establishment of 2025 as the Year of the Child in Romania as an opportunity to accelerate those efforts.

14. The Special Representative has continued to use the voluntary national review process as a key entry point for mobilizing and supporting States in their efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. She met with 31 States presenting voluntary national reviews in 2024, as well as United Nations regional commissions and country teams, to support the identification of promising practices and the involvement of children in those efforts. Her active engagement with States continued during the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Summit of the Future and the General Assembly. Her Office prepared an advocacy brief on the voluntary national review and its processes, which was shared with all Member States, stressing the importance of investing in child protection and well-being as a key accelerator for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

15. On 14 November 2024, the Special Representative co-hosted a high-level event with Sweden and the World Childhood Foundation in New York, with the participation of Princess Madeleine of Sweden and the Deputy Secretary-General. Building on the momentum of the Global Ministerial Conference, the participants identified the ways in which its outcomes and the pledges made by Member States and partners could connect with and support the implementation of other global commitments, such as the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact.

16. In every engagement with Member States, the Special Representative reinforced the urgent need to strengthen integrated approaches to violence against children, emphasizing the high returns on investment in proven, cost-effective and cross-sectoral services. She continued to document good practices and facilitate the sharing of experiences, expertise and peer learning. That included convening ministerial-level dialogues in March 2024 on the margins of the fifty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council and as part of the Global Ministerial Conference. She also facilitated peer support between countries, including Brazil, Fiji, Iceland and Zambia. On the margins of the High-level Conference on Children, Youth and Families in Romania, the Special Representative participated in a high-level exchange on processes that affect children, young people and families and on building new partnerships. Representatives from Austria, Benin, Bulgaria, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia participated in the key peer-learning exercise. To further support States in building the investment case for ending violence against children, the Special Representative issued an advocacy brief on that theme and a toolkit for assessing the economic costs of violence against children and returns on investment in violence prevention, which will be published in early 2025.

Strengthening engagement with regional organizations

17. The Special Representative expanded and consolidated her engagement and collaboration with regional and subregional organizations through participation in high-level advocacy opportunities, the provision of technical support and the creation of connections across regional organizations. She supported regional preparatory processes for the Global Ministerial Conference and convened a dedicated session at the conference for regional organizations, in which they highlighted the need to tailor action to regional specificities and facilitate an exchange of experiences among intergovernmental regional organizations.

18. Throughout 2024, the Special Representative continued to engage with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on monitoring the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016–2025 and on developing the next regional plan. Within the European Union, the Special Representative continued her engagement with European institutions regarding the adoption of the European Commission recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems, the European Union child participation platform, legislation on protection from sexual violence online and the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. The Special Representative continued to engage with the Council of Europe on the implementation of its Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027), as well as on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

19. The Special Representative has also informed and supported the work of regional organizations on specific aspects of combating violence against children. She provided input for and took part in the validation workshop for the African Union model law on child online safety, welcoming the inclusion of children and young people in the consultation process. She participated in a hearing organized by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in July 2024 on the impact of corporal punishment on the rights of children in the Caribbean. The Special Representative continued her active engagement with the League of Arab States and the Arab Council for Childhood and Development, addressing priority issues for children in the Middle East and North Africa. For example, at the sixth Arab Civil Society Forum for Children, held in February 2024, she spoke on the theme of empowering and protecting the Arab child in the era of the fourth industrial revolution. At a conference convened under the auspices of the King of Jordan in November 2024, she spoke on the role of the international community and civil society organizations in promoting and respecting the rights of Palestinian children.

Sensitizing parliaments, national human rights institutions and ombudspersons

20. The Special Representative engages systematically with parliamentarians during her country visits, highlighting their role in overseeing spending and the implementation of policies and legislation on social services for children and families, as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In March 2024, the Special Representative met with the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to identify ways to support the strengthened engagement of parliamentarians in increasing investment in child protection and well-being. The Special Representative is invited to intervene in the general debate of the up-coming 150th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, focused on the theme of parliamentary action for social development and justice, where she will further highlight the need to mainstream children's rights in the work of the Union and parliamentarians worldwide.

21. Human rights institutions and children's rights ombudspersons are also crucial for effective oversight and monitoring. During her country visits, the Special Representative emphasized the need to ensure that their work aligned with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and the general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁶ In all country visits, she pushed for the establishment or strengthening of the mandate and independence of national human rights institutions. She systematically provided technical support, shared good practices and connected national human rights institutions with their equivalents in other States to ensure that complaints and investigatory mechanisms were child-sensitive and fully accessible to all children.

Working closely with the United Nations system and international organizations

22. In her role as Chair of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Children, the Special Representative enhanced the role of the working group of the Pathfinder Global Alliance and contributed to preparations for the Global Ministerial Conference.

23. As Chair of the United Nations task force on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative continues to cooperate with Member States, the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty, academia and other relevant stakeholders to prioritize the prevention of deprivation of children's liberty and promote investment in alternatives. To mark the fifth anniversary of the global study on children deprived of liberty, the task force members participated in the Global Conference on Justice for Children Deprived of Liberty, convened by the NGO Panel in Geneva from 17 to 19 December 2024.⁷ The task force continued to support a United Nations approach to ending all forms of children's deprivation of liberty by compiling promising practices in three advocacy briefs: (a) on ending the immigration detention of children; (b) on the deprivation of liberty of children and the administration of justice; and (c) on children's deprivation of liberty in the context of armed conflict and national security.

24. The Special Representative coordinates closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions to ensure that child protection and well-being are key dimensions of Sustainable Development Goal implementation, including in the voluntary national review process and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. She has continued her close cooperation with United Nations resident coordinators and regional and country teams on the preparation of and follow-up to country visits, the voluntary national review process and the development of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

25. The Special Representative has further strengthened collaboration with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. She has also continued her close cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, including through a memorandum of understanding. The Special Representative continues her close

⁶ See www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/general-comments.

⁷ See <https://defenceforchildren.org/global-conference>.

cooperation with the Human Rights Council and the special procedures of the Council as well as her engagement in the universal periodic review process. In particular, she has supported the consideration of the relevant outcomes of the review, especially linkages with the recommendations accepted by States, in efforts to end violence against children and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. She has continued her engagement with the inter-agency task team on child rights mainstreaming to support the implementation of the guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming.

26. The Special Representative has deepened her collaboration with the World Bank, both at the global level and in the context of her country visits, around the promotion of child protection and well-being as crucial for building human capital. The World Bank contributed to the development of the toolkit for assessing the economic costs of violence against children and returns on investment in violence prevention.

27. The Special Representative continued to engage with key partners on the digital environment and the need for greater protection for children online, working closely with the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology and participating in high-level events organized during the preparation of the Global Digital Compact.

28. The Special Representative and the International Telecommunication Union continued to lead an intersectoral, collaborative initiative on protection through online participation with more than 30 partner organizations. In 2024, after the collection of evidence from child helplines in 83 countries and insights from the largest social media and online gaming companies, guiding principles were developed under the protection through online participation initiative to facilitate children's access to protection and support via digital means and to ensure the safe and meaningful participation of children. The multi-stakeholder cooperation also enabled the building of partnerships between online platforms and child protection services.

29. The Special Representative worked closely with the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs on joint actions to support child-rights mainstreaming focused on issues concerning young people, including protection challenges and opportunities presented by the digital environment, and bearing in mind the overlap between adolescent children (15–17 years of age) and youth (15–24 years of age).

Catalysing private sector action

30. The Special Representative engages regularly with the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, including through engagement with key industry alliances such as the Tech Coalition. Following her inputs for the consultations on the Global Digital Compact, she welcomed the inclusion in the adopted text of a range of recommendations for States and industry relating to children's rights and protection online. She also continued to use key global advocacy opportunities, including the Global Cybersecurity Forum, held in October 2024 in Riyadh, and the WeProtect 2024 Global Summit, held in December 2024 in Abu Dhabi, to push for child protection to be a key dimension of cybersecurity and for mandatory child safety by design in the development of online products and platforms.

31. Following her 2023 annual report to the General Assembly on the protection of children in travel and tourism,⁸ the Special Representative engaged with the World Travel and Tourism Council, the Bicester Collection, Carlson Wagonlit Travel and other private sector actors to put child protection at the core of the sector's sustainability agenda. She supported the creation of a working group made up of the World Travel and Tourism Council, industry and ECPAT International to identify and share good practices and develop a joint advocacy strategy. The Special Representative welcomed the Council's inclusion of child protection as an explicit priority in its social impact work at its annual meeting in October 2024.

⁸ [A/78/214](#).

Deepening collaboration with civil society

32. The Special Representative has continued her regular engagement with hundreds of civil society organizations at the global, regional and national levels. During the reporting period, her activities included monthly meetings and consultations for the Global Ministerial Conference, the Pathfinding Global Alliance and the preparation of her annual reports. She has also pursued joint advocacy and coordination in relation to her country visits. She has expanded her civil society networking to widen the geographical and thematic range of her engagement, with a particular focus on organizations that work at the national and community levels, including those led by children and young people. In addition to child protection, those organizations work in diverse thematic areas, including on issues relating to humanitarian settings, women and gender, and development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the organizations are focused on a particular group of people, such as Indigenous communities or persons with disabilities. The Special Representative also deepened her engagement with survivors' networks during the reporting period.

Working closely with religious and traditional leaders

33. The Special Representative engages systematically with religious and community leaders, given their key role in tackling violence against children, promoting and widening a culture of peace and ensuring child safeguarding. She was granted an audience with Pope Francis on 18 March 2024 to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as the urgent need to address the impact of the increased humanitarian crises on children and to protect children from violence in the circle of trust, including within the church, while they are on the move, as well as in the digital environment. She held follow-up discussions regarding children's safeguarding and victims' protection with high-level leaders of the Catholic Church, including the Secretary for Relations with States and the Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. She continued to stress the need to document and disseminate examples of action by religious leaders and faith-based organizations, particularly as a member of the organizing committee for the sixth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, held in Abu Dhabi in November 2024. Over 1,200 participants from 90 countries, including children, engaged in person or virtually at the forum and the pre-forum events. In the outcome document of the forum, the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Building a Hopeful World for Children, the forum participants identified key steps to ensure a sustainable, safe and secure world for and with children, included a strong commitment to end harmful practices that are often justified in the name of religion and called for shared accountability.

34. The Special Representative continued to highlight the role of traditional leaders in challenging social norms that condone or support violence, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, during her country visits and regional engagements. During her country visit to Zambia, for example, she visited Chief Mukuni and Queen Mukuni, prominent traditional leaders who seek a total ban on child marriage. Following her visit, she welcomed the documentation of examples of positive practices in Zambia and the adoption and implementation by its House of Chiefs of the 2023 call to action to end child marriage by 2030.

Involving more children and young people

35. The meaningful and inclusive participation of children is a cross-cutting priority for the Special Representative. She engages systematically with children through various channels, facilitating spaces in which children can inform her work. During the reporting period, the Special Representative engaged directly with 2,730 children from every region of the world.

36. Her engagements with children and young people included direct interactions during country visits, consultations during the preparation of her reports and collaboration with child- and youth-led organizations around key events and processes, such as the Global Ministerial Conference, the sixth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children and the Africa Children's Summit. In advance of the Global Ministerial Conference, the Special Representative hosted three online dialogues and consulted with approximately 1,000 children from over 110 countries, aiming to identify children's messages to their

Governments on what was needed to end all forms of violence against children in the next six years. The Special Representative also supported children's participation before, during and after the conference. At the sixth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children, she facilitated inter-generational dialogues on how to work together to build a safer and more peaceful world for and with children through achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16. The dialogues built on the 2023 "Call for help to world leaders on behalf of children of the world", co-written by children who came together to commemorate the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children in 2023 in Mumbai, India.

37. Through an online interactive map, the Special Representative amplifies child-led actions to end violence against children, with an additional 48 examples added to the map during the reporting period. Her Office continued to develop child-friendly resources to empower children with information on how to tackle violence and support their own well-being, including child-friendly versions of her reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly and infographics on specific forms of violence. In 2024, her Office developed child-friendly fact sheets on children on the move, trafficking in children and children's participation.

38. The Special Representative is encouraged by the greater efforts being made by States to support children's participation in governmental decision-making. Her Office gathered examples during her country visits and the voluntary national review process and in a review of publicly available information from more than 100 Member States. Overall trends reveal efforts by national and local governments to increasingly include children in decision-making through children's and youth councils, national policies on children and young people and children's parliaments.

III. Trafficking in children on the rise: immediate action required

39. Trafficking in children⁹ – a severe violation of human rights, a form of violence against children and a serious crime – continues to increase and evolve within and across borders. This complex crime is also one of the fastest growing, driven by three interrelated factors that must be addressed simultaneously: (a) the growing vulnerabilities of children worldwide, which are exacerbated by multiple global crises; (b) a rise in lucrative and organized criminal activities that are increasingly facilitated by technology; and (c) growing global and local demand for the exploitation of children.

40. Within the United Nations, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons,¹⁰ co-chaired by the Special Representative for the past two years together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), has integrated child protection as a cross-cutting priority in its work. On the basis of the collective experience and expertise of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group and its members, the Special Representative argues that trafficking in children demands urgent attention and a redoubling of efforts at the global, regional and national levels for the proactive prevention of and protection of children from the crime of trafficking in children. Without immediate action, the number of children at risk and child victims of trafficking will continue to climb beyond today's already frightening levels and will continue to undermine the achievement of the commitments under the 2030 Agenda, notably Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2.¹¹

⁹ See Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, art. 3.

¹⁰ A policy forum consisting of 31 United Nations and international entities working on trafficking in persons.

¹¹ End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

A. Alarming trends

41. According to the latest *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*,¹² children account for 38 per cent of victims detected globally. That is a significant rise in the share of children detected among victims of trafficking since 2019, with a significant increase among girls, specifically. It is also likely that the actual number of child victims is far higher than reported. Children often remain invisible among victims of trafficking, leading to underreporting.

42. The vulnerability of millions of children to trafficking is exacerbated by many underlying risk factors, including poverty, hunger and food insecurity, economic, social and gender inequality, a lack of access to basic resources, such as high-quality and inclusive education and health and social protection, forced displacement due to armed conflict and climate change, discrimination and harmful cultural practices. Conflicts, displacement, famine, poverty, natural disasters and climate change often overlap and multiply the risks.

43. While trafficking affects every region, there are some key regional specificities. Children are more frequently detected among victims of trafficking than adults in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 61 per cent of all detected victims.¹³ Trafficking in children is also on the rise across all regions as well as in high-income countries, often involving girls trafficked for sexual exploitation. More boy victims have been detected in areas where more unaccompanied and separated children have been recorded, such as Europe and North America.¹⁴

44. Children are exploited for various reasons. Girls are increasingly trafficked for sexual exploitation and, to a lesser extent, for forced labour and other forms of exploitation, such as forced marriage. Boys are primarily trafficked for forced labour and criminality, with children reportedly recruited and exploited for drug trafficking and other crimes.¹⁵

45. Children in crisis- and conflict-affected areas are trafficked by armed and criminal groups for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, drug trafficking, forced marriage, armed combat and various forms of forced labour as well as for labour in extractive industries.¹⁶ There have been recent reports of widespread trafficking in persons, particularly young girls trafficked for child marriage, sexual slavery and exploitation – a situation triggered by conflict and displacement in a number of conflict- and crisis-affected countries.¹⁷

46. Children of all ages, genders, nationalities and backgrounds are affected by this crime.¹⁸ While no child is immune, those who are already vulnerable or disadvantaged are more severely affected. They include children who are poor, stateless, those belonging to minorities, Indigenous children, unaccompanied or separated children on the move, those in residential institutional care, children in street situations and children with disabilities.

47. Trafficking in children intersects with other forms of violence, and children often experience multiple forms of abuse and exploitation before, during or after being trafficked.¹⁹ Some child victims are subjected to multiple forms of exploitation, including forced labour

¹² *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024), available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121 and 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 25 and 43–45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 44 and 45.

¹⁶ See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018* (United Nations publication, 2018), available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2018/GLOTIP_2018_BOOK_web_small.pdf.

¹⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/drc-alarming-increase-trafficking-sexual-exploitation-say-experts>. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/haiti-soaring-number-displaced-desperately-need-protection-and-aid-priority>.

¹⁸ Vasileia Digidiki and others, *From Evidence to Action: Twenty Years of IOM Child Trafficking Data to Inform Policy and Programming* (Geneva, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, Boston, and IOM, 2023), p. 13.

¹⁹ See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (United Nations Publication, 2023), available at https://www.unodc.org/lpomex/uploads/documents/Publicaciones/Crimen/GLOTIP_2022_web.pdf.

and sexual exploitation, within the same trafficking situation.²⁰ In addition, children who have been trafficked are subjected to physical or extreme violence at a rate almost two times higher than that for adults.²¹ Trafficking in children is also linked to other forms of organized crime, such as trafficking in drugs and weapons and migrant smuggling, and is increasingly facilitated by rapidly evolving technologies.

48. As a gendered crime, trafficking affects girls and boys differently. According to UNODC, women and girls are three times more likely to suffer explicit or extreme violence during trafficking than men and boys. The links between trafficking in women and trafficking in children are now being increasingly documented, with some children born into situations in which they are highly vulnerable to trafficking.²² It has been reported, for example, that the children of women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation, particularly girls, are highly likely to be trafficked themselves.²³ While there is a growing body of data and evidence on the trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation, especially in humanitarian crises, there is less understanding of the trafficking of boys for sexual exploitation, with boys often being overlooked as potential victims.²⁴

49. The consequences of trafficking for children, families and entire communities are devastating and long-lasting, resulting in immense human suffering. While the global economic costs of trafficking in children have yet to be assessed, the total cost of all forms of trafficking, including trafficking in children, in the European Union in a single year is estimated at 2.7 billion euros.²⁵

B. Growing vulnerabilities

50. The vulnerabilities faced by children have expanded worldwide in recent years, exacerbated by multiple and ongoing crises. Those vulnerabilities are often interlinked, exposing the same child to multiple and compounding risks of trafficking simultaneously, further amplifying the impact.

51. As a result of such multifaceted and overlapping crises, children are on the move at an unprecedented scale. According to *World Migration Report 2022*, the United Nations estimate of the number of international migrants globally in 2020 was 281 million, of whom an estimated 14.6 per cent were children.²⁶ According to UNICEF, over 473 million children worldwide are living in areas affected by conflict – about 1 child in every 6 globally.²⁷ An estimated 47.2 million children had been displaced due to conflict and violence as of the end of 2023.²⁸ An additional 3.1 million children were living in internal displacement as a consequence of natural disasters.²⁹ According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 2 million children were born as refugees between 2018 and 2023.

52. An estimated 333 million children globally live in extreme poverty.³⁰ In addition, a staggering 774 million children are facing the compounding impacts of poverty and the climate emergency.³¹ UNICEF estimates that 213 million children in 146 countries and

²⁰ See

https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/WG_TIP_2024/3/CTOC_COP_WG.4_2024_3_E.PDF.

²¹ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*, p.18.

²² *From Evidence to Action*, p. 13.

²³ [A/79/322](#), p. 13.

²⁴ See <https://ecpat.org/global-boys-initiative>.

²⁵ See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/373138c5-0ea4-11eb-bc07-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>, p. 26.

²⁶ See <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022.pdf>, pp. xii and 40.

²⁷ See <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/not-new-normal-2024-one-worst-years-unicefs-history-children-conflict>.

²⁸ See <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-poverty-trends>.

³¹ See <https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/2024-tough-year-ahead-children-living-increasingly-hostile-world>.

territories will need humanitarian assistance in 2025.³² Around 733 million people faced hunger in 2023 (1 in 11 globally), while over 864 million experienced severe food insecurity.³³ Family and friends can play a significant role in the recruitment of children in countries where either widespread or localized extreme poverty is common. According to an IOM analysis of its victim database, children aged 14–17 years were the most likely to report being recruited by a family member (35.8 per cent).³⁴

53. The erosion of protective factors in humanitarian crises, such as family ties, safety nets, protective and safe schools and cohesive communities, combined with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and lack of access to such services as education and healthcare, result in family separation, displacement, the loss of livelihoods and a reduced capacity of families to meet their own basic needs. Such vulnerabilities, along with weak rule of law, justice and law enforcement,³⁵ create the conditions for trafficking in children to thrive and expand and increase the likelihood of high-risk behaviours by children and their families.

54. According to *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024*, the risks of negative coping mechanisms in every crisis-affected country have been amplified for vulnerable populations, contributing to the cycle of exploitation and abuse.³⁶ Children are coerced into devastating situations, including child marriage, child labour and transactional sex for basic survival.

55. As a result of the often chronic and protracted nature of humanitarian crises, many displaced children continue to live in camps or informal settlements, some of them for generations. They lack access to child protection authorities and services, a rights-based age- and gender-sensitive determination process, legal representation, accessible information about their rights and child-sensitive reporting mechanisms – leaving them even more vulnerable to trafficking.³⁷

C. A low-risk, high-profit crime

56. Trafficking in vulnerable children remains a low-cost and low-risk, yet high-profit, illicit trade. More and more organized criminal groups are trafficking more victims and making more profits.³⁸ At the same time, traffickers are making increasing use of online methods to scale up their operations and reduce their risks. They employ ever-more sophisticated strategies and ways to recruit and exploit victims and use financial services to move and launder their illicit profits. Many of the assets that they acquire during trafficking are difficult to trace. In addition, the private sector struggles to identify transactions linked to trafficking, which hinders financial investigations into the trafficking of children.³⁹ The role of cryptocurrencies in the commercial sale of child sexual exploitation and abuse material has been expanding significantly⁴⁰ and poses further challenges to the effective detection, investigation and prosecution of cases of trafficking in children.

57. As a financially motivated crime, trafficking in children generates billions of dollars each year. In 2024, ILO estimated that forced labour generated \$236 billion in illegal profits per year, which represented a dramatic increase of \$64 billion (37 per cent) since 2014.⁴¹

³² See <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-appeals-us99-billion-humanitarian-funding-support-children-affected-conflict>.

³³ See <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d5be2ffc-f191-411c-9fee-bb737411576d/content>, pp. xvi, 3 and 12.

³⁴ *From Evidence to Action*, p. 19.

³⁵ UNHCR, *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, pp. 216 and 217.

³⁶ See <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfiles>.

³⁷ See <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/protecting-rights-children-move-times-crisis>.

³⁸ See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*.

³⁹ See https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2023/New_publications/GLOACT_Study_on_Illicit_Financial_Flows_-_Final.pdf. See also <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Human-Trafficking-2018.pdf>.

⁴⁰ See https://cdn.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Cryptocurrency-and-the-Trade-of-Online-Child-Sexual-Abuse-Material_03.17.21-publish-1.pdf.

⁴¹ See https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/Profits%20and%20poverty%20-%20The%20economics%20of%20forced%20labour_WEB_20241017.pdf, p. 13.

That increase has been fueled by both a growth in the number of people forced into labour and higher profits generated from the exploitation of victims. While not all forced labour involves trafficking in children, those figures illustrate the huge financial gains flowing to trafficking networks as a result of their exploitation of vulnerable victims, including children.

58. Trafficking in children is also facilitated by the high levels of impunity enjoyed by traffickers. Corruption, weak reporting because of fear and threats and a lack of protection and access to justice for victims create good conditions for a low-risk and illicit trade in vulnerable children.⁴² As a result, convictions for trafficking in children remain low and perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity.

59. Trafficking is increasingly facilitated by evolving digital technologies. Traffickers misuse that technology during every stage of trafficking in persons and for all forms of exploitation.⁴³ They use ICT to facilitate the recruitment of victims, to execute the financial transactions that make trafficking so profitable and to expand the means by which victims are exploited and controlled. ICT also enhances the anonymity of traffickers. One of the most alarming consequences has been the way in which ICT helps traffickers to engage in transactions with users, enter new marketplaces and expand their criminal operations on an immense scale. The dark web, for example, is being used to facilitate the exchange of child sexual exploitation and abuse material, and buyers also exchange information on how to commit those crimes without being caught by the authorities. The worldwide increase in access to the Internet also means a heightened risk of Internet platforms being used for trafficking purposes by perpetrators.⁴⁴ The Internet creates new channels for both the trafficking of children and for connecting abusers with their victims. By eliminating the need for physical movement, digital exploitation enables simultaneous abuse across multiple locations, making it difficult to detect, investigate and prosecute technology-facilitated trafficking in persons.⁴⁵

60. The evolution of artificial intelligence has also led to its increasing use in trafficking in persons. Artificial intelligence is used by traffickers to enhance existing transnational criminal activity by reducing costs, increasing revenue and reducing the likelihood of detection.⁴⁶ Artificial intelligence can also be exploited for the recruitment and manipulation of potential victims. By analyzing social media platforms, artificial intelligence can identify individuals who may be vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking and can craft convincing messages to assist in their recruitment. The technology can also generate non-consensual explicit images to coerce and control victims and even clone voices to impersonate trusted individuals. In addition, artificial intelligence can be used to create fake identities and travel documents, facilitating the transportation of trafficking victims, including children. Furthermore, according to UNODC, artificial intelligence-generated child sexual exploitation and abuse material complicates efforts to identify and protect victims. As generative artificial intelligence improves, it is likely to be used increasingly by traffickers who want to target new communities, increase the scale of their crimes through automation and avoid detection.⁴⁷

D. Growing demand online and offline

61. Another key driver of the rise in cases of trafficking in children worldwide is a growing local and global demand for child labour and child sexual exploitation. According to ILO, a total of 1.7 million children are in situations of forced commercial sexual exploitation, constituting over half of all children in forced labour. A further 1.3 million,

⁴² See <https://www.undp.org/publications/corruption-and-contemporary-forms-slavery-examining-relationships-and-addressing-policy-gaps>, p. 8.

⁴³ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.osce.org/cthb/technology>.

⁴⁵ See https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_statement_wdat_2022.pdf.

⁴⁶ See <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/579715.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

accounting for 39 per cent of the total, are in forced labour exploitation. While not all of these cases involve trafficking, many of these children are being trafficked.⁴⁸

62. There is significant demand for trafficked children's labour and services across various sectors, including agriculture, domestic work, construction, manufacturing, tourism, mining, street vending and small-scale informal retail work. The children affected include girls in rural and remote parts of Africa who are trafficked to urban areas for forced labour in domestic work, scheduled caste and tribal children in South Asia who are trafficked to distant cities to work in manufacturing and Indigenous and migrant children in Latin America who are trafficked to work as domestic servants, for organized criminal groups or as soldiers in armed conflicts.⁴⁹ While consumers may be unaware that the labour or services that they use involve trafficked children, the widespread demand for cheap goods and services fuels such exploitation.

63. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) has found that the commercialization of online child sexual exploitation continues to spread, driven by both a sexual interest in children and financial gain.⁵⁰

64. The proliferation of criminal and armed groups also contributes to increased risks of trafficking in children, creating demand for the recruitment and exploitation of children for forced criminality and other forms of exploitation. In addition to boys, who are recruited and exploited for criminal ends, criminal target girls for forced labour, including domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. Criminal networks often operate with impunity, while children who are recruited and forced into illegal activities are often arrested, prosecuted and punished, even though they are victims of trafficking.⁵¹

65. In recent years, the issue of so-called orphanage trafficking has also gained global attention. The rise of volunteerism and the growing number of donors who wish to support orphaned children overseas have reportedly created a demand for children to be placed in institutions or orphanages. To meet that demand, children are sometimes recruited or transferred from their families into those institutions, where they are exploited or used for profit.⁵² Similarly, the demand for illegal adoptions is also contributing to the trafficking of children, with traffickers exploiting that demand for financial gain.⁵³

66. There are reports that the trafficking of children in sports is an emerging problem that is increasingly prevalent across the global sports industry.⁵⁴ Transnational organized criminal networks often exploit legal loopholes, unregulated sports academies and fake recruitment agents to profit from the trafficking of child athletes. As highlighted in Mission 89's *Global Thematic Report on Sport Trafficking 2024*,⁵⁵ children are particularly vulnerable to that form of trafficking. According to the organization, in football alone, an estimated 15,000 children are trafficked from West Africa to Europe every year by false promises of professional careers. Many cases go unreported, however, and the issue remains poorly understood within both the sports and anti-trafficking communities.

⁴⁸ See https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁰ See Europol, *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2024* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024).

⁵¹ See <https://familiesontherun.org>; <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/violence-drives-haitis-children-armed-groups-half-all-members-are-now-children>; and A/HRC/57/41, para. 22.

⁵² Kathryn E. Van Doore and Rebecca Nhep, "Orphanage trafficking and the Sustainable Development Goals", *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond*, vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2023) pp. 76–84.

⁵³ See joint statement of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and human rights special procedures on illegal intercountry adoptions, 28 September 2022, available from https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/ced/2022-09-29/JointstatementICA_HR_28September2022.pdf.

⁵⁴ See <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/august/the-problem-of-sports-trafficking.pdf>.

⁵⁵ See <https://mission89.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/GLOBAL-THEMATIC-REPORT-ON-SPORT-TRAFFICKING..pdf>.

67. In the business sector, the lack of adequate oversight of supply chains often results in higher risks of trafficking. Important challenges remain in integrating a human rights-based approach in addressing the demand side of trafficking, ensuring respect and implementing children's rights while conducting business.

68. Despite some efforts, the role and the scale of demand in the financially motivated crime of trafficking in persons, coupled with factors that fuel demand for the exploitation of children, have not yet been sufficiently recognized or addressed in State efforts to eradicate it.

E. Action is under way, but far more must be done

69. Many actions at the global, regional and local levels are aimed at preventing and responding to the crime of trafficking in children, and there is growing awareness of its impact on them. Many efforts have been made to develop targeted interventions, despite the challenges to data collection. It is important to note, however, that a strong evidence base is crucial in order to address data gaps and to inform appropriate responses. That and other evidence-based actions are outlined in the Call for Accelerated Action by 2025 to Prevent and End Child Trafficking of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons.⁵⁶

At the national level

70. The submissions from many Member States and information gathered by the Special Representative through her engagements highlight the adoption or existence of legislation and national action plans to address trafficking, including trafficking in children. Some reported the integration and prioritization of measures to tackle trafficking in children in broader policy frameworks, such as child rights action plans. Several countries also highlighted preventive action to tackle such issues as poverty or the lack of birth registration and documentation of statelessness, which make children more vulnerable to trafficking.

71. The contributions received for the report confirm that many actions are under way. Most contributors highlighted actions to build the capacity of the social, law enforcement and justice and legal professions in the early detection of trafficking in children. Those efforts include public awareness-raising campaigns to reach vulnerable populations, such as children on the move. The establishment of coordination bodies was also noted as well as referral mechanisms and specialized investigative units within law enforcement and the provision of specialized support services for child victims.

72. Despite such actions, significant challenges remain. There is an urgent need to address the root causes of trafficking in children, as vulnerable populations continue to be at risk as a result of poverty and a lack of access to basic services. Child protection systems continue to be underresourced and the capacity of front-line professionals to identify victims and children at risk remains uneven. There are gaps in the provision of comprehensive support services tailored to the specific needs of child victims, including legal, psychosocial and mental health services, as well as reintegration support upon their identification. There is also a lack of services for victims and survivors who are making the transition from adolescence to adulthood, including services for their effective economic integration.

73. Early detection and care and protection for the most vulnerable children and their caregivers require well-resourced and fully integrated child protection systems. Such systems must be inclusive and responsive to the needs of all children, without discrimination on any grounds, particularly refugee, migrant and stateless children on the move in times of crisis. Centralized in-country information and case-management systems that keep track of children in vulnerable situations and ensure their access to such basic resources as high-quality and inclusive education, healthcare and social protection can reduce the risks of trafficking.

⁵⁶ See https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/call_to_action_on_child_trafficking.pdf.

Transnational cooperation

74. Transnational cases of trafficking in children require enhanced international, regional and bilateral cooperation, as traffickers often exploit gaps in legal frameworks and enforcement across borders. Efforts are being made, however, to enhance transnational and multi-stakeholder collaboration to combat trafficking in children.

75. Interpol has been supporting law enforcement agencies around the world to combat trafficking in persons through a variety of activities designed to increase their capacity to detect and investigate the crime of trafficking in persons, including dismantling criminal networks, sharing information and establishing specialized transnational networks. The Virtual Global Taskforce, an international alliance of 15 dedicated law enforcement agencies, works closely with non-governmental organizations and industry to protect children from online sexual exploitation and other forms of transnational child sexual exploitation often linked to trafficking in children. Europol assists law enforcement authorities in the member States of the European Union to protect children and to dismantle networks of traffickers and other criminals. The Global Coalition to Fight Financial Crime has also established a working group to identify, develop and research mechanisms to better detect and disrupt financial flows linked to child sexual exploitation online and trafficking in persons. The WeProtect Global Alliance, which has mobilized over 300 actors, including Governments, representatives of the private sector and civil society and international organizations, is a key facilitator in advocacy for the strengthened protection of children from the growing threat of online sexual exploitation and abuse.

76. The European Union has adopted a revised and updated version of its Anti-Trafficking Directive, which enhances the protection of children by supporting the establishment of referral mechanisms for early victim identification, cross-border cooperation and unified approaches among its member States. The adoption by the Council of the European Union of a regulation prohibiting products made using forced labour to be sold in the European Union is also an important step,⁵⁷ as is the adoption by the Council and the European Parliament of the Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence, under which companies are required to conduct due diligence to identify and address adverse impacts on child rights within their value chains and operations in their actions inside and outside of Europe.⁵⁸ Within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons provides OSCE participating States and partners with innovative and coordinated approaches to strengthening the prevention of and fight against trafficking in persons. In addition, the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings supports national and regional anti-trafficking responses, including through regular engagement with the European Union Network of Rapporteurs or Equivalent Mechanisms on Trafficking in Human Beings and the European Union Anti-Trafficking Coordinator.

77. The Organization of American States has adopted the Third Work Plan for a Comprehensive Response to Trafficking in Persons 2023–2028, in which it stresses the special vulnerabilities of children from minority groups, such as Indigenous children and children of African descent, as well child migrants and refugees. Similarly, the ASEAN Multi-Sectoral Work Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2023–2028 outlines measures to address the root causes of trafficking, reduce the risk factors that heighten children's vulnerability and challenge the enabling environment that allows exploitation to flourish.

78. At the African Union and regional economic communities levels, relevant frameworks have been put in place to facilitate cross-border collaboration. They include, for instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) 2023 Freetown Roadmap on Enhancing the Combat of Trafficking in Persons in the ECOWAS Region. Similarly, the Comprehensive Arab Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the League of Arab States in 2012. Those frameworks need to be further reinforced and updated in view of the rapid evolution of this crime.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/11/19/products-made-with-forced-labour-council-adopts-ban/pdf>.

⁵⁸ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1760/oj>.

79. Despite such efforts, cross-border cooperation and coordination among States and across regions remain weak. In many countries across all regions, immigration and border control authorities, which are the first point of contact for children on the move at risk or victims of trafficking, are not adequately linked to child protection services. They often fail to identify, refer or protect child victims and children at risk. Linking anti-trafficking, border and asylum procedures with national child protection and law enforcement and justice systems is critical to ensure the prompt identification and referral of children at risk of trafficking and those who are already victims. It is also crucial to improve capabilities for criminal investigations and mutual legal assistance, including joint law-enforcement operations, to increase convictions.

80. One key area for cross-country and cross-regional cooperation and information-sharing is family tracing and reunification for victims of trafficking in children. At present, children may be denied opportunities for family tracing and reunification and for access to justice to safeguard their rights as victims of trafficking. Often trafficked children are wrongly identified as irregular migrants and detained or deported without having access to the necessary protection as victims and are victimized again. The United Nations task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty has stressed that detaining child victims of trafficking is incompatible with their victim status and the principle of non-punishment of victims of trafficking, which applies to child victims of trafficking.⁵⁹

81. In humanitarian settings, the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action provide standards for all actors in efforts to prevent and respond to trafficking in children. According to the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, pilots in a number of countries of its Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action have demonstrated the critical importance of holistic child protection, education and livelihood programming to prevent the risk of trafficking in crisis-affected communities. The humanitarian response is often siloed, short-term and uncoordinated, however, which hampers the effectiveness of interventions to protect children at risk. Accountability for trafficking in persons in conflict situations remains limited, which also limits access to justice and remedies for trafficked persons.⁶⁰ Stigma and deep-rooted cultural beliefs often shift blame to child victims, undermining efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.⁶¹ Multi-sectoral interventions are required, designed at the community level with affected communities and delivered with a child-protection lens.

The private sector, civil society organizations and children

82. The private sector plays a key role in preventing, identifying and reporting suspected cases of trafficking in children. Several public-private initiatives, from corporate partnerships to tackle child exploitation in supply chains to technological solutions to identify and prevent trafficking, are already having a positive impact.⁶² Technology, such as cutting-edge facial recognition and signal-detection, can be leveraged to identify suspects and potential victims. Data management technology can drive unprecedented levels of coordination between anti-trafficking actors, helping to dismantle trafficking networks that operate across borders and end impunity for trafficking in children. More can be done, however, to enhance the private sector's unique positioning to enable the disruption of traffickers' operations. To address the ever-evolving nature of technology-facilitated trafficking, stronger victim-centred and up-to-date legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are crucial. They must include stronger international and national norms and standards to ensure mandatory regulation and the accountability of the ICT sector, including in relation to artificial intelligence. More broadly, businesses should carry out effective child rights due diligence, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and better oversight of supply chains.

⁵⁹ See <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/end-immigration-detention-of-children>.

⁶⁰ See [A/78/172](#).

⁶¹ See <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Child-Sexual-Exploitation-in-Humanitarian-Contexts.pdf>.

⁶² See <https://www.unodc.org/documents/NGO/PPP/UNODC-PPP-Interactive.pdf>.

83. Civil society organizations are key allies in multi-stakeholder efforts to end trafficking in children, implementing community-based interventions and grass-roots programmes. Such initiatives have empowered vulnerable communities through education, awareness campaigns and skills development. In addition, civil society anti-trafficking networks and platforms have been established in various regions to support collaboration and joint action. The ability of civil society to scale up its action, however, is severely limited by a lack of funding and other resources, a situation that must be addressed.

84. The experiences of trafficked children differ from those of trafficked adults and trafficked children also have different needs as victims and survivors. While there have been efforts to consult children on the development of anti-trafficking laws, policies and programmes,⁶³ including through organizations of experts, the participation of children in anti-trafficking work, particularly those at risk and survivors, remains significantly lacking. In addition, prevailing practices often fail to address children's distinct vulnerabilities and needs, resulting in underreporting, low prosecution rates and a lack of victim-centred approaches and child-friendly services, hampering children's recovery and reintegration.

85. Involving children in policy discussions on trafficking is essential for highlighting the barriers to their support and protection and helping to address underreporting through child-friendly and easily accessible reporting mechanisms. Engaging with children, therefore, and securing strong collaboration with civil society and social movements, including organizations led by survivors, children and young people, is not an option, but an imperative.

IV. The way forward

86. While the world faces an unprecedented child rights crisis, new momentum has been created with the first Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children. The Bogota Call to Action is a commitment to address the root causes of violence against children, including trafficking, in an urgent and different manner. Through sustained investment in children's rights and well-being and integrated child protection systems accessible to all children, the acceleration of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2, is possible.

87. The growth of trafficking in children demands accelerated and collective action from every relevant actor to address, simultaneously, three interlinked factors: (a) the increased vulnerabilities of children; (b) the growing global demand for exploitative services; and (c) the impunity of perpetrators. Ending trafficking in children is possible if States protect them and reduce their vulnerabilities, deter traffickers and reduce demand for services that sell, enslave and exploit children.

88. Responses to trafficking in children are not evolving fast enough to keep pace with the evolution and scale of the crime. Traffickers are adapting rapidly, taking full advantage of technological advancements and of the vulnerabilities created by crises, while responses continue to lag behind. A rapid, multi-stakeholder, well-coordinated, child rights-based and adaptive approach is needed to tackle the crime and its underlying causes.

89. The past two years have seen a concerted effort within the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, under the leadership of the Special Representative and IOM, to prioritize and integrate the child protection agenda within its work and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The resulting mobilization has spurred a greater global focus on the alarming rise in trafficking in children, its root causes and its multiple and

⁶³ The European Commission conducted an open public consultation on the evaluation and possible revision of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (Anti-Trafficking Directive) to provide citizens and stakeholders with an opportunity to share their opinions on current problems and the future of combating trafficking in persons, including possible ways to reinforce, develop and modernize the existing framework. Feedback was received from, among others, organizations focusing on child protection and assistance. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13106-Fighting-human-trafficking-review-of-EU-rules/public-consultation_en.

devastating consequences, as well as on workable, durable solutions. It has generated stronger commitments from States to tackle trafficking in children with renewed and accelerated action.⁶⁴ The General Assembly's appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2025 is a key opportunity for States to step up their efforts in a more integrated manner. The implementation of evidence-based solutions, as proposed by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group in its Call for Accelerated Action by 2025, can serve as an important catalyst for intensified efforts to prevent and end trafficking in children.

90. Fewer than five years remain to end trafficking and all forms of violence against children by 2030. There is an urgent need to act now.

⁶⁴ See <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/working-group-on-trafficking-in-persons-2024.html>. See also <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/multi-stakeholder-pledge-protection-refugees-and-migrants-risk-or-affected-trafficking-persons>; and <https://endviolenceagainstchildrenconference.org/government-pledges>.