

Joint Intergenerational Statement to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum

15 July 2022

This statement was co-authored by children, young people and adults involved in the #CovidUnder19 initiative, and endorsed by: ChildFund Alliance; Defence for Children International; Eurochild; the Institute for Inspiring Children's Future's, University of Strathclyde; the International Institute for Child Rights and Development; International Young Catholic Students; Save the Children; Terre des hommes International Federation.

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2022 opens a new avenue as we look forward to reaching the halfway point of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

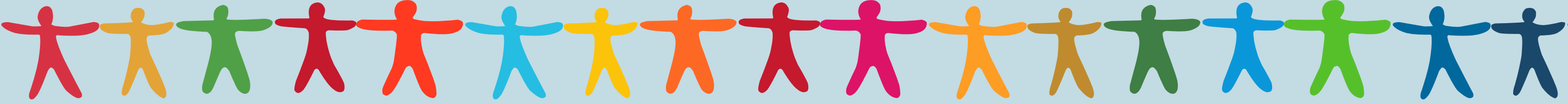
As a community of children, young people and civil society organisations, we believe that meaningful child and youth participation must be a cornerstone of pandemic recovery and response. While some notable progress has been made, more concerted efforts need to be taken collectively to ensure children and young people's voices are heard as we look ahead towards building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Last year, members of the child rights community convened on the sidelines of the HLPF to highlight how children's rights and the SDGs had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. We advocated for the need for countries to invest in children and young people and to view them as key partners in shaping the post-pandemic world. However, we were disheartened by the failure of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration to recognize the importance of meaningful involvement of children and young people in the project to build back better.

This year at the HLPF, we are encouraged to see that the Draft of the Ministerial Declaration (7 July 2022), recognizes the full, effective, meaningful and inclusive participation of children for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda (Para 115). It is also encouraging to see that the governments have resolved to take steps towards addressing children's urgent educational needs in the wake of the pandemic, especially for children from marginalised communities. We earnestly hope that this spirit will continue to drive Government representatives at this and successive HLPFs, and that these words will be brought to action when the Ministerial Declaration is adopted on July 18, 2022.

During last year's HLPF, young people were given opportunities to be a part of formal and informal spaces where they could share their views around SDGs and the HLPF with decision-makers. These spaces should become more systematic and inclusive to engage with a wider range of children and youth from a variety of backgrounds. Moving forward, we envision intergenerational spaces in the main channels of the HLPF every year with a wider focus on meaningful involvement of children.

For the children and youth among us, we often feel that our words are not taken seriously. So many ideas, but often nowhere to put them. Our ideas uplift countries' SDG progress and reinforce iterative reporting against SDG targets. We have seen many examples of how child & youth participation psychologically contributes to their well-being and empowers them to create social change and lead others to do the same. Their involvement is crucial to getting the right information to the right people.



For many years, UN bodies, such as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children (UNOSRSG-VAC), and civil society organisations have been advocating for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to include representatives from all age groups, including children. We believe that all viewpoints must be included in VNRs.

Has it been done? Yes! In 2019, children and young people were supported by a child rights agency to represent their peers at the HLPF in New York after taking part in processes to monitor SDG target 16.2 on ending violence against children using a child-friendly accountability methodology. In 2021, it was estimated that around half of all completed VNRs included children in some way. Some countries have made positive changes in that direction: Bulgaria, Finland, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Sweden and Uganda. Serbia and Uganda have created their child-friendly VNRs that include children from all backgrounds. Another success story comes from Zambia, where in 2020, children supported by another child-rights agency developed their own child-led complementary VNR and a member of the child research team was invited to join the official Zambian delegation to present on their findings at the HLPF in New York.

Many other countries have made good plans for this goal, but have not been successful. Different ways of engaging children in VNRs have been documented and this wide range of approaches should be applied in even more countries, with the support of civil society. We believe that these methods should always be child-friendly and underpinned by children's rights, such as in the example of the Rainbow Healer's Campaign Toolkit, which was co-created with children and young people alongside civil organisations.

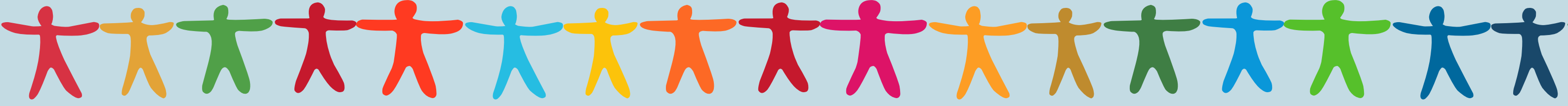
Finally, it is important to remember that these direct processes around SDGs should take place against the backdrop of favourable environments for children and young people, including child human rights defenders, to hold duty bearers to account. We need more responsive governance towards children who are expressing their views; and more transparent, child-friendly access to justice for children and young people to claim their rights.

In the face of the compounding crises that threaten our world, from covid to conflict to climate change, we believe that the right to be heard, the right to freedom of expression and the right to access information are key parts of building a more equal, peaceful, sustainable and just world. Next year, world leaders will be gathering for the SDG Summit in September 2023 to mark the half-way point to 2030. Today, we start our countdown to that moment!

Between now and then, we, children, young people and civil society organizations, are calling for the following actions to put meaningful child & youth participation into practice:

1.Regarding VNRs:

- At least 75% of VNRs submitted in 2023 should be drafted with meaningful participation of children. Countries should include children's comments and create a special section where these are highlighted alongside the views of young people over the age of 18. Youth and children's comments should be edited by the council preparing children and youth's inputs only. Specific attention should be taken to involve children and young people from marginalised communities and those with special needs.
- Countries should provide feedback to children and young people about the final VNRs, in accessible formats and local languages.
- Governments & civil society organisations should work together to support the development of child-led complementary reports to VNRs and act on their recommendations.



2. Regarding the 2023 HLPF and SDG Summit:

- At least 50% of Ministerial Delegations to the 2023 HLPF and SDG Summit events should include at least one designated child delegate (aged under 18 years old) and one youth delegate (18–35).
- A child and youth advisory group for the 2023 SDG Summit should be established, that is tasked with ensuring child-friendly modalities of the event including designing a dedicated, inclusive & hybrid space for children & young people to exchange & organize.

3. Empowering children:

- Children and young people should be equipped with the skills and information that they need, in accessible formats, to participate meaningfully in holding governments accountable against SDG targets and international human rights obligations.
- Children and young people should be supported to build the skills that duty bearers need to engage in meaningful intergenerational work.
- National governments should make efforts to integrate pedagogical materials about the SDGs, such as The World's Largest Lesson, into curricula for primary and secondary schools in the 2022–2023 academic year.
- UN agencies and civil society should amplify child-led and youth-led advocacy around the SDGs and human rights, for example through the "Let's tell the world!" campaign.

4. Investing in children:

- Public budgeting for children's rights must be prioritised as a cornerstone of building back better.
- Meaningful child and youth participation should be included all stages of budgetary planning and decision-making, not just on topics related to children & youth.
- Governments must invest in establishing and reinforcing mechanisms for meaningful civic participation of children and young people linked to monitoring progress towards the SDG and international human rights obligations. This can include, for example, national structures, such as child and youth parliaments, that promote the highest standards of participation and meaningful opportunities to hold duty-bearers to account.

