

How Civil Society can advance Ending Violence against Children in the Voluntary National Reviews

CSOs have a key role to play in the VNRs in defining progress and challenges to achieving the SDGs

Ending violence against children (SDG 16.2) is included in the general review of SDGs for the 2020 HLPF

Take action!
Engage in the VNRs to advocate for better reporting on ending violence against children

The annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main space for follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. Each year, governments can volunteer to present reports on national progress towards implementation of the SDGs as a whole, referred to as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). According to the DESA Handbook, countries are strongly encouraged to report on all 17 SDGs or on the ones that are their priorities.

The HLPF 2020 will take place from 7-16 July at the UN in New York. To begin the Decade of Action, the theme of the 2020 HLPF will be '*Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.*'

Call to Action!

National and local CSOs working together can actively engage with governments in the VNR process to promote reporting on SDG 16.2 and related Goals and Targets to end violence against children:

- **16.2 - End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.**
- 4.a - provide safe, inclusive, non-violent and effective **learning environments** for all.
- 5.2 - eliminate all forms of **violence against all women and girls** in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- 5.3 - eliminate all **harmful practices**, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 8.7 - secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of **child labor**, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.
- 16.9 - By 2030, provide **legal identity** for all, including birth registration.



Countries presenting VNRs in 2020

51 countries will present Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) including:

6 Pathfinding Countries of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (reporting for the 2nd time): **Armenia**, **Georgia**, **Honduras**, **Nigeria**, **Peru**, and **Uganda**.

8 Countries in discussion to become Pathfinding: **Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Kenya**, **Mozambique**, **Nepal**, **Ukraine**, **Zambia**, and **Zimbabwe**.

5 Actions CSOs can take together to accelerate progress to end violence against children

1. Participate in VNR consultations

Many of the countries presenting VNRs have a National SDGs platform. This can be your first space to connect to. If not, then assess which space to participate in the VNR consultation processes in your country. National consultations are key for engaging and seeking to influence. They will vary from country to country. VNR processes will vary from country to country. Some governments will create formal space or online platforms to include input from civil society and the voices of children, while others may consult very little and report more selectively on state data only. Some may focus purely on successes, or certain SDGs. Reach out to the government focal points and other stakeholders, such as UNICEF, to understand the process, timeline, and how you can engage. CSOs also have a role in regional consultations, which can offer more space and tailored conversations than the HLPF.

2. Meet with the government focal point and other key stakeholders

Each country submitting a VNR will have a focal point assigned. Information about the designated focal point can be found in the country listing in the [VNR database](#). Request a meeting with the focal point as soon as possible, as some governments have already begun work for drafting the VNR. It is advised to request the meeting as a collective of CSOs, rather than as individual organizations, to make it clear CSOs are united in their advocacy asks to end

violence against children. The focal point may also be working with the UNICEF office in country or other key agencies.

3. Promote SDG 16.2 and other related Targets to end violence against children to be referenced in VNR reports

Many governments may not prioritize, or may not have enough statistical data to report on, violence against children. The first step in ensuring that governments include SDG16.2 in their report is providing suggestions for content that governments can report on when asking them to prioritize 16.2 in their report. Suggested content may include any major progress governments have made enacting and implementing child protection legislation, increases in budget allocations, new commitments undertaken (such as becoming a Pathfinding country), and data or studies developed (such as the [VAC Study](#)).

Governments can note any challenges, such as gaps in data, capacity, constraints, or needs for professionals. Input from civil society can include non-governmental data, survey data, research, and the voices of children to add context or bridge data gaps. The objective of the advocacy should be that governments dedicate at least one paragraph of text to reporting on progress against SDG 16.2. Check out [World Vision's Guidance Note](#) for VNR countries, particularly regarding ending violence against children.

UN DESA Regional Forums for Sustainable Development - organized in preparation for the 2020 HLPF:

- [Sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#), 24 - 27 February 2020, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe
- [Third session of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development for the UNECE region](#), 19 - 20 March 2020, Geneva, Switzerland
- [Seventh session of the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development](#), 25 - 27 March 2020, Bangkok, Thailand
- [Fourth session of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development](#), 28 - 31 March 2020, Havana, Cuba
- [Seventh session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development](#), 7 - 9 April 2020, Beirut, Lebanon
- [Regional Commissions New York Office](#)

Learn more about the upcoming regional forums [here](#):
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020#preparation>

4. Support meaningful and inclusive participation of children

Member States should outline how children as agents of change are informed and included on SDGs process, including children from marginalized and vulnerable groups. Children should be involved in their implementation, including in ending violence against children, and engaged in the review of the SDGs, including the 2020 VNRs. To ensure meaningful participation of children, ask governments to establish adequate processes to include the voices of children, including from marginalized or excluded groups, in the VNR.

5. Utilize VNRs to elevate advocacy to end all forms of violence against children

Civil society can employ a wide variety of resources and avenues to best utilize the VNR process as a catalyst for accelerating actions to end violence against children.

This may include:

- tracking progress and monitoring implementation of SDG 16.2 and related goals
- dissemination of key findings on violence against children
- utilizing traditional and/or social media to increase public awareness
- lifting up children's perspectives
- producing an alternative report, or
- organizing a civil society response to the VNR presentation.

Leading up to the HLPF, a number of UN meetings will develop thematic discussions to contribute to the HLPF as part of the 2030 Agenda mandate. Some UN meetings such as the [ECOSOC Youth Forum](#), 1-2 April, will be guided by the theme of the 2020 High-level Political Forum. Check out the [ECOSOC calendar](#) of meetings that provide entry points for our advocacy.

Beyond the HLPF in July, there will be additional opportunities to utilize the data and information on progress assessed during voluntary national reviews. 2020 marks the [75th anniversary](#) of the United Nations. In addition, the Solutions Summit on SDG 16.2

“It is not only about Government policies or actions, but also about real and active involvement of every member of the society, businesses, and civil society organizations.”

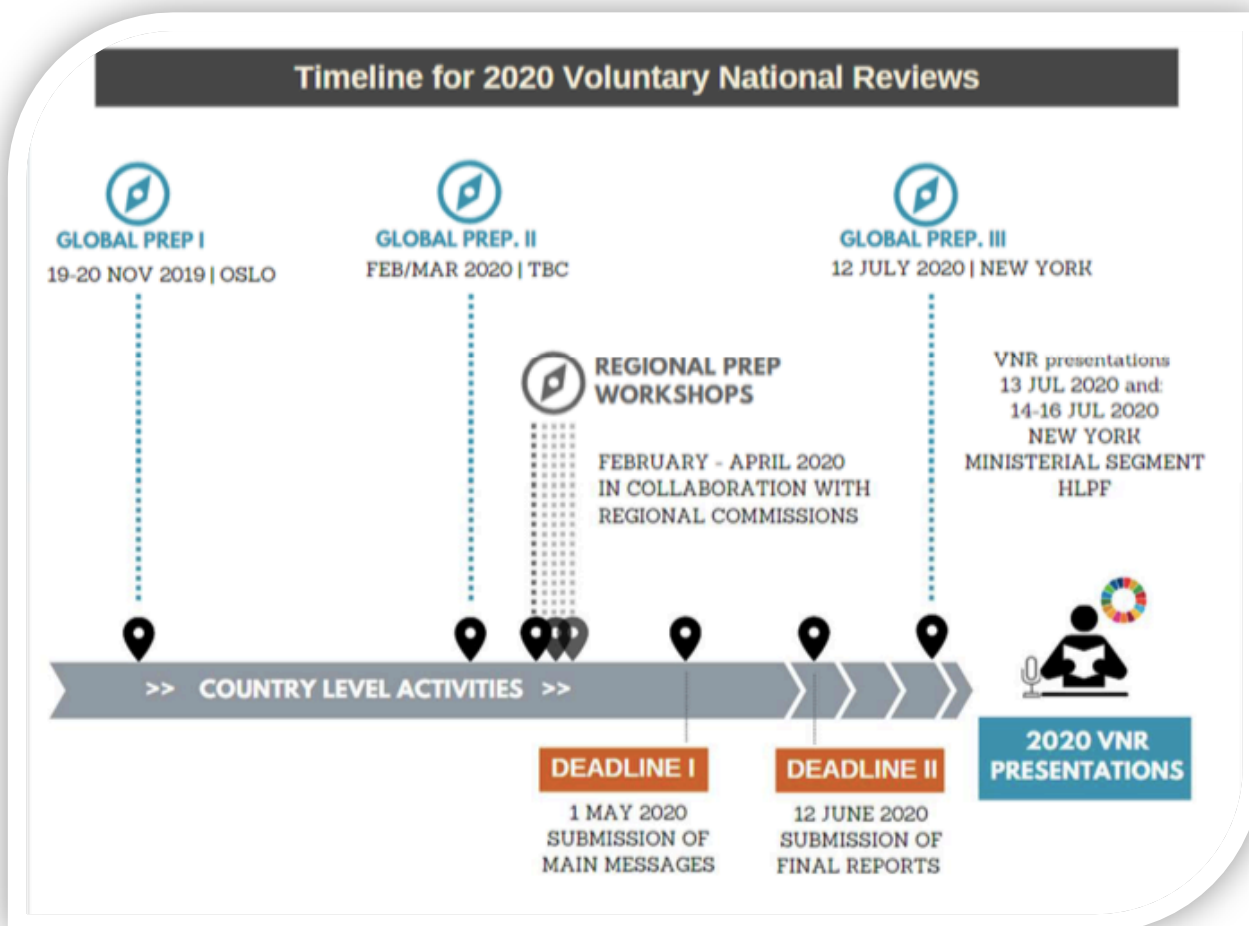
Armenia VNR 2018

held in November, around the 31st anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is significant moment to elevate national, regional and global actions to end violence against children.

Tips for CSOs:

In order to achieve the Decade for Action and Delivery, CSOs must call for accelerated actions to achieve the SDGs, including SDG 16.2 and related targets to end violence against children.

- ✓ Join or convene a national coalition of civil society organizations and partners committed to ending violence against children.
- ✓ Schedule a meeting between the coalition leadership and the VNR focal point (government) – the sooner the better!
- ✓ Develop joint key advocacy asks - these may include:
 - Request a commitment of a paragraph or more of text to SDG 16.2 be included in the VNR
 - Report progress on legislation and financing, as well as data
 - Include supporting Goals and Targets to end violence against children
 - Inclusion of voices of children in the VNR
- ✓ Identify CSO data, reports and research that add critical insights to violence prevention and response.
- ✓ Document and publicize collective work.
- ✓ Meeting minutes, flyers, media, publications and social media posts can all be used to document successes and challenges.
- ✓ Share updates with colleagues in other countries, regional networks, or global coalitions, such as the CSO Forum EVAC.



VNR Report Elements

The reports from Member States should include information on ending violence against children, such as:

- changes in **legislation** to prevent or respond to violence against children
- **financing** – including information on how public spending, budgeting and investment in areas that directly benefit children – such as social protection and child protection – has increased or changed
- **data** on violence against children at national and sub-national levels, and **disaggregated** by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

Disaggregated data is essential to ensure that children, especially marginalized or vulnerable groups of children, are not left behind. CSOs can help generate and share non-official data, in particular by children themselves, to address data gaps and enrich the official report.

How CSOs can advance SDG 16.2 to end violence against children

Regional and national review mechanisms feed into the High-Level Political Forum. Civil society should be consulted in the development of the VNR processes, and governments should create space at all levels for such dialogue to occur. Civil society organizations bring experience in implementation, data, and insights from working directly with children and communities.

Barriers to CSO engagement can include a lack of transparency for local CSO engagement, lack of political will to prioritize ending violence against children in SDG implementation, and a lack of readily available disaggregated data. In such climates, CSOs can:

- Highlight national reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, including Concluding Observations
- Reference the Universal Periodic Review reports
- Elevate National Plans of Action to end violence against children



Getting Started!

Here is a sample letter to request a meeting with the VNR focal point in your country, which you can adapt to your needs.

Consider sending the letter as a coalition of CSOs working together to end violence against children.

For more tips and examples, check out [Together 2030's quick guide for civil society](#).

Sample joint letter from CSOs to the VNR focal point

[Download letter in Word](#)

Dear [insert name and title],

On behalf of the [name of group], a collaboration of civil society organizations working locally on the prevention and intervention to end violence against children, I am writing to formally congratulate your Excellency and the Government of [Name] for presenting a Voluntary National Review at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum. We respectfully request to meet to discuss civil society engagement in the 2020 Voluntary National Review consultation process, and to encourage the inclusive participation of children.

As a [Pathfinding country/country in discussion to become Pathfinding], we appreciate the leadership opportunity for our government to prioritize SDG 16.2 and highlight our progress to end violence against children. The VNR report should include the following elements [insert joint advocacy asks on legislation, financing, and/or data specific to SDG.16.2, or related goals and targets, to prevent or respond to violence against children].

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We look forward to working together to end all forms of violence against children.

Sincerely,
[insert name, title, organization/coalition, contact information, and name(s) of member/co-signing organizations]

Recent VNR Examples

- [Indonesia 2019 VNR](#) built on the 2017 VNR to present one of most robust report sections on SDG 16.2: dedicating 5 pages of reporting on ending violence against children (pages 153-157), including disaggregated VAC survey data (page 153), establishing *Access to Justice for All* to provide birth certificates (page 150), ending early and forced marriage (Box 35, page 155), and working with CSOs, including Plan International, to promote children's participation in achieving SDG 16.2 (see Box 34 page 154).
- [South Africa 2019 VNR](#) reported a reduction in the percentage of school-attending children who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression at school in the past three months (from 11.4 per cent in 2015 to around 6.3 per cent in 2017), (page 102).
- [Armenia 2018 VNR](#) included policy on birth registration, access to justice for children, and VAC data (pages 78-79).
- [Mexico 2018 VNR](#) dedicated a full-page text box to addressing violence against children, including 2019-2030 priorities for EVAC (page 70). Mexico also offers detailed examples of consultation processes for civil society and young people (pages 37-40).
- [Brazil 2017 VNR](#) highlighted a new law to organize the system for safeguarding the rights of children and adolescent victims or witnesses of violence (page 43).
- [Philippines 2016 VNR](#) included how CSOs, government, and development partners to "build capacity of CSOs to advocate for child protection using the SDG framework." (pages 7-8).

Advocacy Asks:

The CSO Forum EVAC developed 6 key advocacy asks, and regional and national coalitions can adapt these for use. Download in word document [here](#):

- **Prohibit all forms of violence in all settings:** Governments should prohibit all forms of violence in all settings and against all children and ensure that their national legislation is aligned with the international human rights standards.
- **Invest in what works to prevent violence:** Scale up existing solutions such as INSPIRE strategies by **integrating them into government strategies and plans** which address violence against children and by providing clear policy guidance for scaling up interventions, including the selection of priorities and implementation modalities.
- **Increase funding to end violence against children:** Governments must ensure child-centred budgets and allocate adequate funding in legal and child protection systems, as well as infrastructure to collect and share data on violence against children.
- **Strengthen accountability mechanisms for commitments made to end violence against children, especially through the SDGs, and the international human rights instruments.**
- **Listen to and involve children:** Governments, international agencies and partners must formalize and fund processes to ensure meaningful and active inclusion of children in ending violence.
- **Leave no one behind:** Efforts to end violence against children need to be inclusive, age and gender-responsive approaches and must reflect the needs of the most vulnerable children who are living in extreme poverty, LGBTQI, especially those on the move or in humanitarian crises.



Civil Society Forum
**Ending violence
against children
against children**

Contact us

Share how CSOs in your country are working together to advance SDG 16.2 in the VNRs:

Contact us here

<https://forms.gle/4H3B6698pJDHGCHf7>

Email us at csoforumevac@gmail.com

Follow us on [Facebook](#)

Learn more!

- UN DESA Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews is available in the six official languages of the UN: [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Russian](#).
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25245Handbook_2020_EN.pdf
- Voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated_Voluntary_Guidelines.pdf
- Focal Points contact information is available for each Member State on the UN DESA Knowledge Platform: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates>
- Global Partnership to End Violence against Children VNR Webinar (conducted in partnership with the CSO Forum EVAC, November 2018). Recording available here: https://zoom.us/recording/share/An2R3ykiR615ld8WLQkw_gGSymqYsZxyJhEvJwQ8
- UN DESA webinar Voluntary National Reviews 101 is available online in English, French and Spanish (January 2019) Slide deck and recordings are available under the tab “Preparation” at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019>
- UN DESA *Knowledge and Exchange on Approaches and Tools for the Voluntary National Reviews (2020): Summary of Approaches and Tools*. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25361Knowledge_Exchange_Booklet_for_2020_VNR_Countries.pdf
- World Vision International, *Ensuring children are not left behind: Guidance for countries preparing for Voluntary National Reviews at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. (2019) here: shorturl.at/fgklZ
- Together 2030, *Voluntary National Reviews – a civil society quick guide* available online at: https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Voluntary-National-Reviews-quick-guide-for-civil-society_Oct2018.pdf
- UNICEF Briefing Note on Goal 16 (annex): https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDG-briefing-note-14_abuse-exploitation-and-violence.pdf

