



World Vision Review of the 2021 Voluntary National Review: **COUNTRIES' MAIN MESSAGES**

OVERVIEW

In 2021, 44 countries will present Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in order to assess progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper reviews and analyzes the main messages of 42 countries¹ preparing for a VNR from a children's rights perspective and identifies key references to children, youth and/or young people in relation to the following categories:

- Poverty;
- Food security and nutrition;
- Health;
- Education;²
- Violence against children including child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, sexual violence against children, child marriage and education to end violence;³
- Social spending, budgeting and/or investment in children;⁴
- Participation including consultations with children, youth and/or young people;
- Vulnerable or marginalized groups of children;⁵
- Children living in fragile contexts;
- Disaggregated data;⁶ and
- The COVID-19 pandemic.⁷

44 countries presenting VNRs in 2021

Africa: Angola, Cabo Verde, Chad, Egypt, Madagascar, Namibia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Zimbabwe

Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Thailand.

Eastern Europe: Azerbaijan, Czech Republic

Latin America and the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay

Western Europe and Other States: Denmark, Germany, Norway, San Marino, Spain, Sweden

¹ The main messages of Bolivia and Saudi Arabia were not reviewed, as they were not available at the time of assessment.

² References to education are included only where children are mentioned specifically or where it is implied that the reference to education involves children (for example, education in early childhood, basic education, education impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic etc.) Accordingly, general references to education have been excluded for the purposes of this analysis.

³ General references to violence, gender-based violence and domestic violence have been included for the purposes of this analysis.

⁴ General references to social spending or investments impacting children's lives – such as investment in or the provision of free healthcare and education – are included in this analysis.

⁵ Vulnerable or marginalized groups of children include a range of different groups such as girls, children with disabilities, Indigenous children, children living in rural or remote areas, children from certain ethnic or religious groups, refugee and migrant children, children living in poverty, etc.

⁶ General references to disaggregated data are included given the importance of such data in order to leave no child behind.

⁷ References to the COVID-19 pandemic include measures that seek to provide financial or other forms of support to families or dependents.

Among the 42 countries reviewed, 32 countries – or roughly 76 percent of countries – refer to one or more of the above categories. Regrettably, there are no references to the above categories by the following 10 countries: Afghanistan, Bahamas, Colombia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Qatar and San Marino.

Key references in the main messages of the VNR countries are outlined below.

SUMMARIES OF MAIN MESSAGES



Angola’s main messages highlight some of the results of the government’s past efforts to improve social and economic conditions, including reducing under-five child mortality from almost 300 per 100,000 live births at the beginning of 2000 to around 68 in 2015. The net attendance rate for secondary education is also situated at 39.9% (2019). Angola states that it is necessary to improve inclusive access to a series of services, including quality education. It also states that its gender inequality index in 2019 was 0.536, noting that women and girls generally have less access to education, are more affected by HIV-AIDS, suffer more from gender violence, are less represented in decision-making bodies, and have lower access to employment. Angola’s unemployment rates, especially among youth (54.4% in 2019), are also highlighted. Angola’s NDP 2018-2022 aims to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs, including through a greater engagement of the private sector in increasing investments in productive value chains, aiming at substantial employment, targeting especially youth and women. In response to COVID-19, Angola provided a package of measures to alleviate the economic impact for businesses, families and the informal economy.



Antigua and Barbuda’s main messages state that the VNR was informed by participatory stakeholder engagements with a number of different stakeholders including youth. It also notes that it will continue to invest in education and training.



Azerbaijan’s main messages state that the COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected the implementation of the SDGs in several areas, including education. Support programs were approved to provide direct financial assistance (overall 1.5 billion USD in 2020) to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, including for public works covering education and health expenses. Next steps include developing competitive human capital through increasing investment in education and improving data collection and analysis on sustainable development, including strengthening capacity for analysis and generating detailed disaggregated data on gender, ethnicity, age groups, habitats and regions/administrative districts.



Bhutan’s main messages state that national policies on mother and child health have been endorsed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth unemployment, a long-standing concern, has reached an all-time high of 22.6% as compared to 11.9% in 2019. Domestic violence and protection issues have also emerged as a ‘shadow pandemic’, exposing an area that is yet to have effective systems and essential services fully in place. Issues of online safety, cyber security and the digital divide are highlighted, due to education and public services going online.



Cabo Verde’s main messages state that it has made remarkable progress in the area of gender equality, including a significant and sustainable reduction of GBV crimes. It aspires to be a country without gender discrimination, including by promoting economic opportunities for women and girls, stimulating diversified educational and professional paths, and developing policies and measures to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence. Cabo Verde elected the development of human capital as the main accelerator of sustainable development, noting that young people are the most important segment. It has made remarkable progress in the last four years on education, becoming one of the few countries with free primary and secondary education. Reforms to promote technical and professional education from the ninth grade onwards will contribute to the massification of the professional qualification of young people.



Chad’s main messages state that the proportion of births attended by skilled health workers rose from 24.3% in 2015 to 34.5% in 2019. The retention rate for girls in school has also improved. By implementing the “Vision 2030, Chad We Want,” Chad intends to promote the empowerment of women and girls.



China’s main messages state that it has increased investment in public health infrastructure and woven the world’s largest social safety net with basic medical insurance covering more than 1.3 billion people.



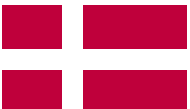
Cuba's main messages state that there is universal and free access to important social services including health and education.



Cyprus' main messages state that it falls behind in quality education. Next steps include a pioneering educational program for children with activities for each of the 17 SDGs.



Czech Republic's main messages note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerable groups have lost their primary earners, especially single parents who must remain at home to look after their children. In coping with the lockdown, inclusive education reform has continued.



Denmark's main messages state that it is committed to not only include, but also empower. An example of this approach is the initiative "Children First", which seeks to ensure better conditions for equal opportunities in childhood.



Dominican Republic's main messages state that citizen security and access to justice present challenges, noting the homicide rate shows a downward trend (although highest in men and young people).



Guatemala's main messages state that the preparation of its VNR report included the participation of girls, boys and adolescents, who, through a series of virtual workshops, expressed their opinions and main demands.



Indonesia's main messages state that the child poverty rate increased from 11.76% (2019) to 12.23% (2020). It also strengthened social spending from 12% in 2019 to 13.3% in 2020, the highest ever recorded. The prevalence of stunting in children under five declined from 37.2% to 27.67% (2019) and the prevalence of wasting from 12.1% to 7.44% from 2013-2019. Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) also rose from 21.21% (2019) to 23.85% (2020), while disabled youth rose from 52.32% (2019) to 53.37% (2020). Finally, Indonesia's main messages state that 77.2% of children under five years old and 58.03% of children under one year old have obtained legal identity (2020).



Iraq's main messages state that young people are the engine of change and a tool for attaining development, noting that: the popular youth movement is a declaration of change towards a new social contract (the state and society); youth represent the demographic gift that is qualified to drive change, rehabilitation and participation; and active citizenship (embracing diversity, enhancing participation, and preserving rights and privacy).



Japan's main messages state that its VNR was prepared not only through discussions within the government, but also discussions with the youth generation who will lead society in the future.



Lao People's Democratic Republic's main messages state that administrative data systems in many goals still need to be harmonized, streamlined and strengthened while enhancing institutional and statistical capacity building, noting that high quality and disaggregated data is essential to ensure equitable progress against SDG goals and targets.



Madagascar's main messages state that the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined efforts to implement the SDGs, noting that there has been a decrease in attendance at health facilities leading to a decrease in vaccination coverage, deliveries assisted by health personnel, and access to information and services relating to sexual and reproductive health. In relation to education, taking measures to temporarily close schools has also had negative influences on the access rate and quality of education. Although children are not mentioned specifically, Madagascar states that in the fight against gender-based violence, Law No. 2019-008 of January 16, 2020 was promulgated to strengthen the legal regime on prevention, prosecution, repression, care and reparation, as well as the protection of victims.



Marshall Islands' main messages state that it needs to continue developing an economy that delivers effective public services and productive opportunities for all Marshallese children, women and men, living in urban areas and the outer islands. It also notes that while infant and child mortality rates and educational attainment have steadily improved since independence, overall progress in building human capital can still be improved.



Myanmar's main messages highlight its engagement in international commitments including its ratification of the CRC and its two optional protocols (CRC-OPSC and CRC-OPAC), noting that the CRC's combined fifth and sixth reports are near completion. In relation to health, Myanmar has made substantial progress in minimizing mortality among children under the age of five and infants, however, a child under the age of five living in a rural environment is nearly twice as likely to die as a child who lives in an urban setting. Between 2016 and 2019, the rate of antenatal treatment, institutional delivery and qualified birth attendants also improved. In relation to education, the number of students who finished primary and secondary school increased from 2015 to 2019. Notably, the government has granted scholarships and stipends to disabled children living in remote areas totaling more than 18 billion kyats. Myanmar also emphasizes that the ratio of spending on education, health and social protection is increasing.



Namibia's main messages state that the unemployment rate remained high at 33.4% in 2018, the highest being amongst the youth at 46.1%. Namibia's Social Protection Policy and social assistance programs targeting the poor and vulnerable are highlighted, noting that the non-contributory grant spending increased from N\$5.1 billion in the 2018/2019 fiscal year to N\$6.2 billion in the 2020/2021 fiscal year. The coverage rate of the child grant for the same period increased from 60% to 66%. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Namibia implemented three new non-contributory programs including a special allowance/grant targeting the poor and vulnerable population, as well as workers and/or dependents. The government also spent N\$560 million on the Emergency Income Grant, which benefited 769,000 Namibians, above the age of 16 years.



Nicaragua's main messages state that it provides free public education to more than 1.7 million students and school lunches to 1.2 million children and youth. In addition, it delivered 5,760,560 Solidarity School Packages, building 35,393 schools and other social programs. The provision of free public health and the construction of the largest hospital network in Central America are also highlighted.



Niger's main messages state that the government will continue to translate SDDCI Niger-2035 into inclusive development plans focused, among other things, on human capital, in particular the education of girls and the training of women.



Norway's main messages state that gender-based violence and labour market disparities remain and show that persisting or rising inequalities between groups of society must be addressed.



Paraguay's main messages state that with the implementation of its Education Transformation Strategy 2030, a process has been initiated that seeks to respond to the challenges involved in providing quality, inclusive and equitable education, through the development of skills and competencies according to the current demand for work, meeting the needs of girls, boys and adolescents with disabilities, and emphasizing the challenges of greater access to connectivity, innovation and technologies. Paraguay also states that it understands that it will not be able to make visible those furthest behind or implement policies appropriate to their needs without disaggregated data that allows it to have a complete diagnosis of their reality. Accordingly, at the end of 2020, a law creating the new National Statistics Institute (INE) was enacted.



Sierra Leone's main messages state that it continues to give great focus to its accelerator goals –SDG 4 and SDG 16 – with the importance of these goals to pursuing other SDGs highlighted. In relation to SDG 4, ensuring basic, inclusive and free quality education is a top priority in the Government's Human Capital Development flagship programme within the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023). Accordingly, the national budget allocation to the education sector has remained around 21 percent since 2018 to ensure all public school pupils have: access to basic and senior school education; free access to textbooks for core subjects; and school feeding, with the Government providing food for more than 300,000 pupils in 2020 (in addition to the efforts of development partners). The school feeding initiative has benefitted 2.5 million pupils and saved parents an estimated US\$500 per year, per beneficiary pupil, coupled with free school bus service for all districts headquarter towns. This has resulted in significant increases in the Gross Enrolment Rate for the primary level, which exceeded 135 percent in 2019 and 2020, compared to 109 percent in 2018. Sierra Leone also states that it has continued to maintain gender parity in primary education and has achieved parity in junior secondary education. In relation to SDG 16, the provision of free legal representation, advice and related services is highlighted, including for interventions covering child and women's rights issues and criminal cases including domestic violence, rape, and juvenile offences.



Spain's main messages state that its Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (EDS 2030) identifies eight Country Challenges, whose approach will be articulated through eight Accelerating Policies for Sustainable Development. These policies have been designed to enable a comprehensive approach to problems such as poverty and inequalities, with a particular focus on those that affect women, children and LGBTBIQ people, among others. In defining the EDS 2030, six specific consultations were developed to gather the contributions of different groups including boys, girls and adolescents, as well as young people.



Sweden's main messages state that young people are exposed to more mental health challenges, violence and bullying. It emphasizes that SDG delivery and accelerated actions require – among other things – child and youth perspectives. Under this heading, Sweden states that the perspectives, engagement and innovation of young people are of great importance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Issues of importance to Swedish young people include the environment and climate, gender equality and preventing oppression and discrimination.



Thailand's main messages state that its VNR underlines the importance of a whole-of-society approach and the interconnectedness of the SDGs, showcasing key examples of the role of various stakeholders including youth networks. In relation to SDG 2, it states that projects aimed at improving nutrition for school children and food security boost progress on SDG 2. In relation to SDG 4, efforts have been expanded to provide financial support for poor students through the use of digital tools and the Education Equality Fund (EEF). In relation to SDG 5, gender equality initiatives, including efforts to address domestic violence, are the cornerstone of Thailand's implementation of SDG 5. In relation to SDG 16, Thailand's implementation centers on several areas including anti-trafficking.



Tunisia's main messages state that school is compulsory and free for children aged 6 to 16, with the enrolment rate for 6-year-olds reaching 99.5% for 2019-2020. In relation to health, the State guarantees access to health services to vulnerable populations, with 263,000 families in 2020 benefitting from the "Free Medical Assistance Programme" and 470,000 families benefitting from reduced-rate medical assistance. In order to support vulnerable populations in relation to COVID-19, the government has taken compensatory measures for 260,000 needy families and 370,000 families with limited incomes, among other population groups.



Uruguay's main messages outline four priorities including: "[3] Develop public policies that ensure quality education, social protection and health for all people"; and "[4] Move towards a society that promotes people's development and rights and leaves no one behind." Under the fourth priority, Uruguay states that the programmatic actions that will take place within this priority area are linked to two pillars or principles of the 2030 Agenda, such as peace and development partnerships, as some of the results relate to the elimination of all expressions or manifestations of gender-based violence (against women and girls).



Zimbabwe's main messages state that progress has been made towards universal health coverage including through sustained investment in public health infrastructure, equipment, capacitation of human resources for health, procurement and distribution of medicines and sundries. This has resulted in a reduced maternal mortality ratio, reduced under-five mortality, and the general decline in HIV prevalence. In relation to education, there has been increased access through inclusive programs, infrastructure, human skills capital development and innovation. Zimbabwe notes that progress has also been recorded in reducing all forms of violence and related deaths, although children are not mentioned specifically. This has been achieved through awareness raising campaigns on exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against vulnerable groups, enhancing law enforcement visibility in crime hotspot areas and the establishment of crime prevention and peace committees.



KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A review of the main messages of 42 VNR countries in 2021 reveals the following level of coverage of children's rights:

- **Child poverty** is addressed directly by only one country (Indonesia), while Spain notes that its policies for sustainable development have been designed to enable a comprehensive approach to problems such as poverty and inequalities, with a particular focus on those that affect children, among others. Regrettably, over 95 percent of countries do not refer to poverty in relation to children within their main messages.
- **Children's food security and nutrition** is addressed by only four countries (Indonesia, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone and Thailand) with three-quarters of them highlighting children's food security and nutrition in relation to school feeding. Only Indonesia refers to children's food security and nutrition outside of education. Accordingly, over 90 percent of countries do not refer to children's food security and nutrition.
- **Children's health** is addressed by eight countries (Angola, Bhutan, Chad, Madagascar, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Sweden and Zimbabwe) with almost every country highlighting some aspect of maternal, newborn and/or child health. Only Sweden refers to children's health in relation to young people's mental health challenges. Accordingly, almost 81 percent of countries do not refer to children's health.

95
percent

of countries do not refer to poverty in relation to children within their main messages.

90
percent

of countries do not refer to children's food security and nutrition.

81
percent

of countries do not refer to children's health

83
percent

of countries do not discuss the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to children.

There are no direct references to violence against children by over **90 percent** of countries, and no direct or indirect references by nearly 74 percent of countries.

- **Children's education** is addressed by 14 countries – or one-third of all countries reviewed – with approximately half of them providing some information on the provision of free education and/or attendance, enrolment, retention or completion rates. Among those countries that refer to education, nearly 36 percent also refer to girls' education or gender parity in education. Regrettably, two-thirds

of countries –almost 67 percent – do not refer to children’s education in their main messages.

- **Violence against children** is addressed directly by four countries: the Dominican Republic (homicide rate among young people); Sweden (violence and bullying among young people); and Angola and Uruguay (gender-based violence against girls). Three countries also potentially refer to violence against children indirectly: Bhutan (issues of online safety as education went online due to COVID-19); Sierra Leone (legal aid for juvenile offences); and Thailand (anti-trafficking efforts under SDG 16). There are also references to gender-based violence or domestic violence generally – which may or may not include children – by six countries (Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Madagascar, Norway, Sierra Leone and Thailand). Zimbabwe also refers to progress in reducing all forms of violence and related deaths, however children are not mentioned specifically. As a result, there are no direct references to violence against children by over 90 percent of countries, and no direct or indirect references by nearly 74 percent of countries. Regrettably, there are no references by any country to child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, sexual violence against children, child marriage or education to end violence.
- **Social spending, budgeting and/or investment in children** is addressed by 13 countries or nearly 31 percent of all countries reviewed. Investments in education (including the provision of free education) are referenced by nine countries, while investments in health (including the provision of free or subsidized healthcare) are referenced by six countries. Social spending is also referenced by three countries (Indonesia, Myanmar and Namibia), with Namibia highlighting the provision of its child grant. Approximately 69 percent of countries make no reference to social spending, budgeting and/or investments that benefit, or are likely to benefit, children.
- **Child, youth and/or young people’s participation** is addressed by seven countries, with three countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Guatemala and Japan) noting that their VNR preparations involved the participation of children and/or youth. Spain also refers to consultations with children and young people in developing its national sustainable development strategy. Both Iraq and Sweden emphasize the importance of young people’s participation and/or perspectives, while Thailand states that its VNR showcases examples of the role of youth networks in

advancing the SDGs. Regrettably, roughly 83 percent of countries do not refer to children, youth or young people’s participation.

- **Vulnerable or marginalized groups of children** are identified by nine countries (Angola, Cabo Verde, Chad, Indonesia, Myanmar, Niger, Paraguay, Thailand and Uruguay). In order of frequency, the following groups of children are identified: girls; children, adolescents and/or youth with disabilities; rural children; children living in remote areas; and poor students. Almost 79 percent of countries do not refer to any specific group of vulnerable or marginalized children.
- Regrettably, there are no references to **children living in fragile contexts** by any country, despite the fact that 13 of the VNR countries in 2021 are considered to be affected by some degree of economic, environmental, political, security or societal fragility according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.⁸
- **Disaggregated data** is addressed by only three countries (Azerbaijan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Paraguay), mainly in terms of the need to strengthen statistical capacity and/or the importance of disaggregated data to ensure equitable progress on the SDGs. Almost 93 percent of countries thus do not refer to disaggregated data.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic** – in relation to children’s lives – is addressed by seven countries (Angola, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Czech Republic, Madagascar, Namibia and Tunisia). More than half of them highlight the negative impact of the pandemic on children’s lives, including in relation to health, education, domestic violence and protection issues, and youth unemployment. More than half of these countries also identify measures to respond to the pandemic including in relation to children’s health, education and/or financial assistance for families or dependents. Regrettably, roughly 83 percent of countries do not discuss the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to children.

In conclusion, a review of the main messages of 42 VNR countries in 2021 suggests that most children’s rights issues are not receiving adequate attention, with almost every area – except education – addressed by less than one-third of countries, if at all. Consequently, all VNR countries in 2021 should make greater efforts to ensure that children’s rights issues receive significantly greater attention in their VNR reports and presentations at the HLPF.

⁸ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020). *States of Fragility 2020*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-fa5a6770-en.htm>

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We believe a world without violence against children is possible, and World Vision's global campaign It takes a world to end violence against children is igniting movements of people committed to making this happen. No one person, group or organisation can solve this problem alone, it will take the world to end violence against children.

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