



HLPF 2024

Report

I. Background: High-Level Political Forum 2024

The [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#) is convened annually to review progress made towards achieving the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). It is held once a year in July under the auspices of the United Nation's (UN) [Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) and twice every four years, the second time in September, under the auspices of the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#).

(NB: ChildFund Alliance is an [ECOSOC-accredited NGO](#) with "special consultative status" at the UN, which grants us access to UN premises, permits us to take part in events and conferences, make written and oral statements at events, organize side-events, and advocate for child rights with key stakeholders within the [UN system](#), government representatives, and other civil society organizations.)

The 2024 HLPF was held at the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ) in New York from **Monday (8 July) to Wednesday (17 July)** under the auspices of ECOSOC. This year's theme was **"Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions"**. More than 90 heads of state and governments, ministers and vice-ministers as well as representatives from governments were in attendance to witness the participation of over 1,000 intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and civil society.

The HLPF presents an opportunity for governments, the private sector, civil society and other partners to exchange experiences and showcase innovative solutions to accelerate implementation of the SDGs at all levels. As the major platform to follow up on the implementation of the SDGs, every HLPF focuses on a select number of SDGs for in-depth review. This year's HLPF focused on the following specific goals:

- **Goal 1:** Eradicate Poverty in all its forms everywhere ([factsheet](#))
- **Goal 2:** End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture ([factsheet](#))
- **Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts ([factsheet](#))
- **Goal 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels ([factsheet](#))
- **Goal 17:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development ([factsheet](#))

The review of SDGs 13 and 16 during this year's HLPF also **strongly aligned with core priority areas of ChildFund Alliance** in striving to end violence against children and ensuring their protection from emerging threats, specifically the climate crisis.

The 2024 HLPF also followed up on the [Political Declaration](#) and other outcomes of the [SDG Summit](#), which had been convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (GA) in September 2023. The outcomes of the 2024 HLPF are also expected to contribute to the preparations for the [Summit of the Future](#), to be held on 22-23 September 2024 at UNHQ in New York.

II. Recapitulation of the 2024 HLPF (with an eye towards the Summit of the Future)

On the first day of the 2024 HLPF, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua, introduced headline messages from the UN Secretary-General's [2024 SDG progress report](#), noting that **only 17% of SDG targets are on track to being achieved by 2030**, reiterating the report's call for bold action on peace and finance. He highlighted the Summit of the Future, the [Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development \(FfD4\)](#) (30 June – 3 July, 2025), and the [Second World Summit for Social Development](#) (2025 date TBD) as critical milestones in advancing the SDGs.

Chair Paula Narváez, President of ECOSOC, described HLPF 2024 as “a critical moment of consequence and choice,” urging that **“the promise of sustainable development cannot be met in the absence of humanitarian and preventive interventions”**.

A recurring theme was the pressing debt crisis and its impact on the most vulnerable. Achim Steiner, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, said “some countries can only service the interest on debts by ‘raiding’ budgets for healthcare, education, and welfare services.”

The Chairman of the Environment Authority and President of the seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), Abdullah Bin Ali Al Amri of Oman, reminded member states that they are **gathering also “as stewards of our planet, united by a common target to achieve the 2030 Agenda”**.

In addition to the in-depth review of five SDGs (see p. 1), the **2024 HLPF featured several in-depth sessions** focusing on science, technology, and innovation (STI); small island developing States (SIDS); African countries, least developed countries (LDCs), and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs); middle-income countries (MICs); and Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS). It also included reports from the five UN regions, the ECOSOC ministerial segment, and a high-level general debate, which focused on linkages between the 2023 SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

Other highlights of the 2024 HLPF included the launches of:

- The first-ever [UN system-wide strategy on water and sanitation](#);
- The [2024 Global Report on Climate and SDGs Synergy](#);
- The Higher Education for Sustainability Initiative (HESI) [Action Group](#) on Futures of Higher Education and Artificial Intelligence (AI); and
- UNEP's 2024 [global foresight report](#) on planetary health and human well-being.

[Science Day](#) at the 2024 HLPF featured dialogues on strategies and case studies for accelerating SDG implementation while ensuring it is as evidence-based, strategic, and effective as possible.

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, called for a **“dramatic shift” in the global crisis on education**, speaking specifically on financial roadblocks, poverty and gender as major hindrances to making progress. **“Education is the single-most important investment any country can make. In its people. And in its future”**, the Secretary-General noted (see [here](#)).

One of the most outspoken and meaningful interventions on behalf of children came during the High-Level Segment (HLS) of the 2024 HLPF. **H.E. Brian Wallace, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations**, delivered a [statement](#) on behalf of the “Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs”. This group of 71 member states (Ambassador Wallace’s statement was given on behalf of 70 of the 71 members), was founded in 2016 as a collective bloc to advocate for children’s rights and strive towards a world free from violence where children can fulfill all of their potential. The Group of Friends also holds quarterly meetings with UNICEF, at each of which ChildFund Alliance and the other child-focused agencies (CFAs) with representation at the UN in New York are invited to collectively speak on the most pressing child-rights issues.

- In his statement during the HLS, Ambassador Wallace noted that **the world has a long way to go – with a mere 15-17% of SDGs on track to be achieved by 2030**. Importantly, if sustainable solutions are to be achieved for the world’s most pressing problems, they **must be viewed through a child-rights lens**. Children, who are the most vulnerable group of human beings, will inherit the decisions made by today’s leaders, most of whom will not be around by the time today’s children have grown-up and confront the issues not or insufficiently addressed today. 333 million children still live in extreme poverty and 200 million in conflict-ridden or fragile contexts – meaning without protection, health care, or educational opportunities. Children must have guaranteed access to all of these for in the current situation where this is not the case, **children are experiencing a violation of their human rights** (to food, water, education, health, etc.).
- Ambassador Wallace noted that the international community can end child poverty by making the right choices today to break the intergeneration cycle of poverty. In order for this to happen, inaction must turn to action, concretely:
 - **We must increase investments children in a more effective manner in their formative years**. The existing interventions usually happen too late and are too few;
 - **Social protection and cash transfers, including family benefits, should be a priority**. Cash transfers reduce poverty and inequality while having a stimulating effect on the wider economy. Social protection systems also mitigate the impact of shocks (economic, conflict, environmental, etc.).
 - **Nearly 1.8 billion of the 4 billion human beings who do not have social protection are children**. Only if we solve this problem can we break intergenerational cycles of poverty. Business as usual is not enough. Rather, what is needed is an extraordinary effort to meaningfully include and engage children in reviewing the SDGs, take them seriously, and genuinely make them feel heard.
 - The 2030 Agenda constitutes a framework of progress that can be achieved only when all parts of society, including children, can meaningfully participate. The foundation of this is for **every child to have full access to their rights as guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**.

Although not part of the HLPF, over 50 international leaders, including former heads of state, ministers of government, and leaders of intergovernmental and civil society organizations, signed an [open letter to Heads of State and Government, and United Nations Member States](#), emphasizing the **critical need for effective and accountable follow-up measures to implement the proposed “Pact for the Future”**. (The “Pact” is the main outcome document under negotiation for the upcoming Summit of the Future this September, and is intended to revitalize global governance with the United Nations at the center.)

- The letter was released during the Ministerial Segment of the 2024 HLPF and highlights the **importance of clear benchmarks for implementation** to ensure that the over 50 “Action”

commitments in the “Pact” translate into verifiable measures prior to the anticipated review of the “Pact” two years following its adoption.

- The letter also states that **“civil society has demonstrated its capacity and commitment to work toward a successful Summit outcome”**. In this regard, since the release of the zero-draft of the “Pact” in late January of this year, **ChildFund Alliance** (in close collaboration with other child-focused agencies) **has been engaging in advocacy to call for a more child-sensitive “Pact”**. We have been doing this by submitting **suggestions to include specific language on protecting children and their rights to every draft version of the “Pact”** (there have been three versions so far). Because CSOs are not allowed to take part in the “Pact” negotiations, which are exclusively intergovernmental, the **success of our joint endeavors relies on the willingness of member states to take up and include our suggestions** in the final version of the “Pact”. This is also acknowledged by the 50 signatories of the open letter, who emphasize the importance of governments delivering on their promises and implementing their commitments, which **will require the active and sustained engagement of civil society** around the world.
- The open letter further references the so-called “ImPACT Coalitions”, established at the UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi May 2024, to raise the ambition and support follow-up on the actions and commitments contained in the “Pact”. It calls on governments “to do their part” by delivering on promises and implementing commitments, “thus building trust and ensuring the wellbeing of present and future generations”. **ChildFund Alliance**, together with the other child-focused agencies, in Nairobi **launched an “ImPACT Coalition on Child Rights and Child Participation”**. To carry the message to the Summit of the Future, the **child-focused agencies are organizing the below side-event**, further details and an invitation for which will be sent to Alliance members in the near future:



The poster features a photograph of a group of diverse children running joyfully on a dirt path through a lush green field. The background shows rolling hills and trees under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, sans-serif font.

**CHILDREN LEADING THE WAY: IMPLEMENTING THE
PACT OF THE FUTURE TO DELIVER FOR AND WITH
CHILDREN**

Side Event at the 2024 Action Days for The Summit of the Future
Organized by the Impact Coalition on Child Rights and Child Participation

**FRIDAY, 20
SEPTEMBER, 2024**

CHURCH CENTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS
777 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA, 10TH FLOOR
11:30 AM EST - 12:45 PM EST
RSVP HERE:

III. 36 Countries Presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the HLPF, meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC every year in July.

The so-called Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the exchange of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments, and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs.

A compilation of the main messages of the 2024 VNRs can be accessed [here](#). In addition, UNICEF's Global Coalition on Child Poverty will **analyze the data and narrative content of the 2024 VNR submissions from a child poverty perspective**, to be published in a [forthcoming report](#). A total of **36 countries**, listed below, carried out a VNR during the 2024 HLPF:

Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belize, Brazil, Chad, Colombia, Congo (Republic of the), Costa Rica, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Oman, Palau, Peru, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

Two VNRs of note as they pertain to children and their rights were those of Spain and Zimbabwe:

- [Spain's](#) VNR presentation highlighted progress in reducing inequalities through "a new social contract" to tackle child poverty and other structural inequalities.
- [Zimbabwe](#) identified key successes in increased food security, life expectancy and primary school completion rates. They also highlighted efforts to enhance multi-stakeholder engagement in the VNR process, including the integration of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and a children-led VNRs.

Child-Led & Child-Informed VNRs:

The integration of children's meaningful participation in the VNR process is critical to advance child rights and sustainable development, both of which are mutually reinforcing. In their VNR presentations, both **Nepal and Zimbabwe recognized the contribution made by children to the VNR processes**. They were part of a handful of countries presenting their VNRs this year, whose local governments and organizations partnered with **Save the Children International** to prepare **child-led and child-informed complementary VNR reports**. South Africa is the only exception to this list as it did not present its VNR this year. The complementary VNR reports of the following countries are available:

- [Colombia](#)
- [Georgia](#)
- [Nepal](#)
- [Zimbabwe](#)
- [South Africa](#)

To learn more about children's meaningful engagement in VNR processes, please see the following resources from Save the Children:

- [How to Use the Voluntary National Review to Advance Children's Rights](#)

- [How To Prepare a Child-Led Complementary Report for a Voluntary National Review: Case Study from Zambia](#)

In sum, most observers noted that the **VNRs were characterized by a positive spirit**, in stark contrast to a very “fractious” closing debate. The overarching message of the VNR presentations was that, despite many challenges, **on the frontlines of SDG implementation differences are being set aside and multi-stakeholder partnerships taking hold to impact “real lives”**. Notwithstanding this positive impression, CSOs continue to face significant obstacles to contribute to their countries’ VNR (*see pp. 20-21*).

First Voluntary Sub-National Review (VSR)

Of particular note is that The Nordic Associations of Local and Regional Governments (LRGAs) and Nordregio launched the **Nordic Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), the first cross national report of its kind**. Titled ‘*The Nordic View on Sustainability: Learning from the Local Level*’, the report highlights the progress achieved by Nordic municipalities and regional authorities in **localizing SDGs** and the challenges they encountered in the process. The Nordic VSR report provides an **assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of national support to the local level and suggests methods for meaningful citizen engagement**. It also highlights the 17 SDGs as a useful tool for local actors to identify their main sustainability challenges and measure progress in a more holistic way, involving citizens, businesses and civil society. The launch of the Nordic VSR **exemplifies the increased engagement of local and regional governments to complement and contribute to the national VNRs** and SDG implementation.

IV. ChildFund Alliance Engagement at the 2024 HLPF

a) Side-Event on Climate Change and Violence against Children

ChildFund Alliance, together with Caritas Internationalis, Save the Children International, and World Vision International, co-organized an official **side-event on how the climate crisis increases the risk of violence against children**, on 10 July 2024. The session was co-sponsored by the **Permanent Missions of Luxembourg and Malta to the United Nations**, and the **Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC)**.

Speaker Participants:

- H.E. Mr. Olivier Maes, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations
- Justine Micallef, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations
- Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC)
- Fatou Jeng, Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General (YAG)
- Meg Gardinier, Secretary General, ChildFund Alliance
- Keeva Duffey, Sr. Advisor, Climate Action, ChildFund International

Child and Youth Leaders Panel:

- Sathana Sagayam, young leader from India (Children Believe India)
- Anastasia Yuniarti Petra Lotu, young leader from Indonesia (ChildFund Indonesia)
- Alice Carwardine, young leader from Australia (Caritas)
- Kristyna Stecova, young leader from Czechia (Caritas)

- *Three other child leaders – from South Africa, Colombia and Sierra Leone – were supposed to be part of this dialogue. However, they were not granted visas in time to participate, a problem with which ChildFund Alliance and its sister agencies have been contending with for years and that we have raised collectively and multiple times with the UN).*

What follows is a detailed summary of the session:

The Intersectionality of Climate Insecurity and Violence against Children: How Young Leaders Are Taking Climate Action to Protect Themselves, Their Families and Communities

The side-event’s centerpiece, an interactive child- and youth-led dialogue, was effective and most appreciated for enabling the voices of children and young leaders to be heard on the threat that climate change poses to their lives, and the proactive climate action they are taking to protect the wellbeing of themselves, their families and communities.

Introduction and Opening Segment:

- **Fatou Jeng** highlighted the active and crucial role that children play in various capacities to mitigate the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Ms. Jeng made a call for bold action to safeguard the rights of children and young people amidst the global climate emergency through policies and programs that will guarantee their protection.
- **H.E. Ambassador Olivier Maes** expressed Luxembourg’s steadfast commitment to promoting children’s rights and support of the mandate to end violence against children. He noted **armed conflict and climate change as catalysts to violence against children**. In acknowledgement of the increased vulnerability of children due to the climate crisis, the Ambassador added that **children are at the forefront of the fight against the climate crisis with resilience and dedication**, factors that policy- and decision-making at the highest level must take into account.
- **Justine Micallef** referred to the [Secretary General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#), noting the tragic fact that **2023 was one of the most violent years for children** ever. She identified **children and young persons as agents-of-change** and urged governments to increase action to mitigate the nefarious effects of the climate crisis on children’s well-being. Ms. Micallef also expressed Malta’s firm commitment to address the evolving challenges of the climate crisis and protection of children.
- **Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid**, whose office had published an extensive [report on the climate crisis and violence against children](#) in October 2022, elaborated on the consequences of the climate crisis that pose a threat to children, such as climate refugees, child labor, and child marriage, among so many others. She affirmed that the **climate crisis is a major driver (“threat multiplier”) of violence against children**. Dr. M’jid applauded the efforts of young leaders and their tireless mobilization to push for climate action, and emphasized the need for continued efforts by states and other actors in mobilizing young leaders and providing them with meaningful opportunities to make their voices and ideas heard.

Interactive Roundtable:

- The session’s centerpiece opened with every young panelist climate action leader outlining the impact that climate change is having in their respective home geographies. **Sathana** began by sharing that families in her village in **India** abandon agriculture and migrate, which pushes them into poverty and imposes vulnerabilities on children, who subsequently become more susceptible to violence. In contrast, **Kristyna** noted that the effects of climate change may not be as evident in **Europe** when compared to other regions, but added that the narrative and communication

around climate change must be improved to nurture a better understanding of the negative effects of the climate crisis. **Anastasia** spoke on the impact of unpredictable weather patterns and disasters in the **Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia**, which leads to decreased crop yields that in turn result in unmet needs of families and an increased financial burden. As for **Australia and Oceania**, **Alice** highlighted the reluctance of indigenous communities to be displaced because of climate change given their strong connections with the natural flora and fauna. She noted the alarming loss of culture and identity for young people because of displacement induced by the climate crisis.

- Regarding the impact of the climate crisis on children and young people, both Sathana and Anastasia emphasized that **girls in their respective regions are disproportionately affected** as they are forced to drop out of schools and undergo marriage. In implementing strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change, Sathana denoted the **vital contribution of tree plantation and plastic-free communities in balancing the loss of biodiversity**. As for engaging young people in climate change initiatives, Kristyna proposed programs that build knowledge, strengthen advocacy and improve communication skills. She shared the example of a program developed by her organization that allows young people to choose areas to specialize in – such as recycling and sustainable food systems – to engage in countries like Zambia, Mongolia and Iraq.
- Anastasia highlighted the **positive impact that children and young people create when they are a part of the climate solution** through the child and youth forum in her village. Such systems empower children as agents-of-change in the promotion of sustainable practices to address climate change and violence against children. Similarly, Alice noted the active role of government leaders and politicians through the [Pacific-Australian Emerging Leaders' Network](#) to amplify the voices of young people on climate change and climate displacement. Alice also acknowledged the **improved enthusiasm among older generations to work on addressing the climate crisis**, and raised the **importance of intergenerational conversation** in this regard.
- The roundtable demonstrated additional initiatives undertaken by the young leaders to combat climate change, such as the **establishment of micro-forests by a mobilized group of young people** in Sathana's village. Sathana added that the group also led the **movement to suspend the use of plastic** in and around the village and promote sustainable practices. She further advocated for the **integration of climate change in school curricula**, and even proposed her idea of a green lab to be established in educational institutions for young people to develop knowledge on renewable resources.
- In their closing remarks, each of the four young leaders **urged the need for more young people to mobilize their efforts and make their voices heard**. More importantly, they **called for global leaders to listen to these voices and be accountable for their actions on the climate crisis**. The young panelists reiterated that young people need to be listened to and taken seriously as they **can provide innovative ideas and solutions to tackle the climate crisis**. As young leaders in climate action, they collectively **called for stronger implementation of policies to create a safer world for children**, young people, their families and communities.

Closing and Key Takeaways:

The side-event concluded with a call to act on behalf of children and their future with urgency, commitment and accountability. **Keeva Duffey** summarized the roundtable discussion's key takeaways and provided the following recommendations for concrete action:

1. Enable meaningful child and youth engagement in climate policies through the creation of spaces for active engagement of children and youth in the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of climate policies and initiatives at all levels;

2. Address mental health in climate discussions: Children and young people must be taught coping strategies and resilience-building techniques to ensure their psychological well-being;
3. Respect child and youth participation as well as their right to childhood. Young people should not be overburdened with the responsibility of addressing climate change; and
4. Recognize the broad impacts of climate change on violence against children: Adopt a scaled-up integrated approach wherein existing frameworks on ending violence against children (EVAC) can be improved by connecting climate change risks and child protection mechanisms.

b) Side-Events with Panel Participation by ChildFund Alliance’s Secretary General

Moving Forward to Accelerate Progress on Ending Violence against Children (7 July)

Hosted by World Vision International

Participants: H.E. Ambassador Leonor Zalabata Torres, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations; Sho Ono, Minister - Head of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Section, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations; Imanuel, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations; Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Meg Gardinier, Secretary General, ChildFund Alliance; Stephen Blight, Senior Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF; Peter van Sluijs, Expert Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention, Cordaid; Tamara Tutnjjevic, Global Policy Director, World Vision International.

Minister Ono opened the session, noting Japan’s achievements related to ending violence against children (EVAC) in the recent past. These include the 2021 adoption of an [Action Plan to EVAC](#), the establishment of a process at the government level to hear and engage more effectively with CSOs, and the work of the [Children and Families Agency](#) which strives to **place the interests of children and youth more at the center of policy-making**. For example, the agency has been creating **spaces for children to speak about the importance of preventive measures on cyberbullying** and how to prevent it in the future, as well as the need to recognize that **every child is entitled to freedom of fear and harm, with full access to their rights to fulfill their potential**. Mr. Ono thus called on the international community to deliver on its commitments to protect all children from violence, and that Japan was determined to make every effort it can to achieve SDG target 16.2 and the security of all children.

Second Secretary Imanuel noted that SDG 16 is an “enabler” for all SDGs but also a “common goal” whenever progress is made towards other SDGs. In other words, achievement of other SDGs can be seen as progress towards realizing SDG 16 and SDG target 16.2. As one of the [Pathfinding Countries](#), Indonesia employs a **bottom-up approach when engaging with children**, their families and communities on preventing violence against children. Imanuel highlighted four aspects of this strategy: First, because **children themselves are the agents-of-change**, his government provides a platform for children to deliver their aspirations across Indonesia’s vast archipelago; second, existing mechanisms on child protections that the government has instituted need to continue to expand, including **hotlines where reports of violence are directed to the Women in Parliament group**, which investigates these reports and takes the necessary action; third, the **development of technology, and making use of it to protect children from online harm**, is indispensable to eradicate all forms of violence; and fourth, the good examples of and successes with mitigating the threat of violence against children **should not only focus on the national but the regional and local levels, too**.

Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid was pleased to be surrounded by Pathfinding countries, namely Colombia, Japan and Indonesia. She began her remarks by pointing out that violence against children (VAC), and its drivers, cuts across all SDGs. Her office is recording **increased vulnerability and exposure to violence due to compounding crises (economic, geopolitical, environmental, etc.), with the result that millions of children are being left behind** amidst poverty, the climate crisis, discrimination, social disparities, etc. Dr. M'jid noted that the same children can be victims of violence of various forms in various settings, and that **violence continues to be underreported and underprosecuted**. The **economic costs are also huge**: VAC in itself exacts a human toll and has a lasting impact on the victim, but the economic costs regardless of status, income or cultural context are stark as well: **4-6% of a country's national GDP is the estimated annual cost of VAC**, a number that exceeds (often by several times) a country's investment in its health infrastructure. Social protections are insufficiently available to children and must be made more child-sensitive. There is also an **urgent need to spend more on integrated cross-sectoral services**: policies, health, integrated set of services (e.g., birth certificates to prevent statelessness), and access to child-sensitive justice, to name a few. Dr. M'jid expressed confidence that the [First Global Ministerial Conference on EVAC](#), to take place in Bogotá on 7-8 November, will be game-changer in devising concrete ways to go forward on EVAC, including a relaunch of the new [Pathfinding 2.0](#) initiative. The SRSB-VAC also urged that we **must listen to children, because "they are so concrete and have such a great sense of the problems what is most important to do to end VAC"**. What is still lacking are the courage and aspiration to move forward.

Meg Gardinier delivered [these remarks](#) on behalf of ChildFund Alliance.

Speaking on behalf of UNICEF – one of the co-organizers of the [First Global Ministerial Conference on EVAC](#) alongside the SRSB-VAC's office, WHO, and the governments of Colombia and Sweden – **Stephen Blight** expressed hope that the Ministerial Conference's message is starting to come through to member state governments. He noted that we are the **first generation in history who can measure VAC, which puts us in the unique position to put an end to it**. Science says that evidence-based prevention can have an impact on the most immediate threats of violence to children, of which the most impactful evidence-based interventions include: parental support; universal access to safe environments (a school is the most important institution for children) that can break cycles of violence; and response and support services for children who need them, such as social welfare and justice systems that are child-sensitive and can reduce the long-term impact of VAC.

Peter Van Sluijs pointed out the tragedy that conflicts worldwide are on the rise, and that oftentimes and increasingly the rules of war are not respected, citing the alarming number of attacks on civilians across the globe. In Gaza alone, the number of children killed is higher than in all conflicts combined across the world. Mr. Van Sluijs informed that **while governments are making significant investments, these are not in furtherance of protecting children** but rather to beef up defense capabilities. It is thus that **civil society, as a first actor and often first responder, has such an important role to play**. Mr. Van Sluijs expressed regret that CSOs worldwide remain highly underfunded and the potential of their impact underrecognized, before concluding his remarks by citing the report "Mending Cracks, Filling Gaps" (no hyperlink available), which rightly puts an emphasis on the prevention of violence.

Tamara Tutnjevic pointed out that there has been progress on EVAC, not only legislative but also via ordinances, thus proving that things can change. Almost all countries now report progress (or some progress) on EVAC, even though this is not enough. Big loopholes remain, such as children often not having proper recourse to justice. Furthermore, the **implementation of evidence-based approaches is not on the scale it needs to be, which explains why we are not seeing the numbers improve fast**

enough. The reason, Ms. Tutnjevic noted, is simple: Investment in children is not enough, plus threats against children are multiplying, and the responses to VAC are either insufficient or, where they do exist, not (yet) implemented. In addition, **parents and children themselves are not enough involved in their protection, and we are not listening enough to children on how they can be helped, supported, and empowered.** While many changes are in fact being made, often they are not institutionalized or remain pilot programs without future follow-up. She ended by noting that we **need to open the door to and include children more.**

H.E. Ambassador Leonor Zalabata Torres noted in her concluding remarks that children are the seeds of society, and that without children there is no future. Representing Colombia as the host country of the Ministerial Conference on EVAC, the Ambassador noted that the **main objective is to accelerate progress towards SDG target 16.2**, building on previous efforts of Pathfinding countries and others. She also expects the conference to result in a new initiative by member states on EVAC and initiate a better dialogue on EVAC. For her, the expected outcomes are clear and ambitious, in hopes that they will contribute to accelerating achievement of SDG target 16.2 and inspire strategic actions to eradicate VAC. In short, the **Ministerial Conference’s ambition is to launch a process that will eradicate VAC by ensuring harmonious development for all children and providing them with the essential services needed (and to which they are legally entitled under the CRC) to make this possible.**

SDG16: Accelerating Progress to Achieve Justice for Children Leveraging Innovations to Close the Justice Gap (10 July)

Hosted by the Baker McKenzie law firm, sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Canada, Luxembourg and Spain



This side-event gathered governments, multilateral organizations, CSOs, and children and young people themselves, for a series of solution-focused sessions. The event profiled governments’ commitments, alongside effective local and national strategies that are delivering innovative policies and practices to achieve SDG 16 for children.

Key reflections and a recap of the day-long event are available [here](#). **Meg Gardinier** delivered [these remarks](#) on behalf of ChildFund Alliance.

c) General Debate Statement

The Alliance Secretariat was able to secure a slot for ChildFund to deliver a statement during the [high-level segment \(HLS\)](#) of the HLPF, which is attended by member state ministers and their delegations. The following statement was delivered by Meg Gardinier, Secretary General of ChildFund Alliance, before the ECOSOC ministerial plenary on 17 August:

Include Children Meaningfully!

Madame President, Excellencies –

Mandating the meaningful participation of children as agents-of-change in the formulation of policies and their implementation is paramount to leaving no one behind.

This is especially important in relation to the climate crisis, a “threat-multiplier” that magnifies the risk of children’s exposure to violence due to food insecurity, forced displacement, or child labor. It is thus critical to protect children’s rights by elevating their voices via meaningful participation in international dialogue on the climate crisis – from the HLPF to the Summit of the Future and beyond. As such, the 2024 HLPF Ministerial Declaration must reflect the principles and solutions committed to by Member States for the realization of children’s rights, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ChildFund Alliance urges the international community to enable meaningful child participation towards the achievement of the SDGs. Targeted actions across SDGs under review that can reduce children’s exposure to violence, especially if they are meaningfully included, are:

SDG 1: *Improving mechanisms to measure, monitor, and regularly report on children hit hardest by the climate crisis: the poor. Upholding children’s basic human rights impacting poverty, including adequate standard of living, right to social protection, and access to health and education.*

SDG 2: *Ending the hunger crisis by supporting communities especially exposed to the climate crisis. Empowering communities through early-detection programs, employment opportunities, and healthcare.*

SDG 13: *Creating spaces for children to participate as agents-of-change in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, including awareness-raising about heightened risks of violence, resilience-building, and disaster preparedness and prevention.*

SDG 16: *Harnessing children’s creativity to empower children to collectively work towards building a sustainable future with access to justice for all. Empowering children’s initiatives and participation with a seat at the table at all levels of decision-making, and protecting them from retaliation when claiming their rights.*

SDG 17: *Strengthening partnerships to unlock resources to realize children’s rights, and creating accountability mechanisms to consistently measure progress against trackable objectives.*

I thank you.

V. 2024 HLPF Ministerial Declaration

In resolution [67/290](#), the General Assembly (GA) decided that the meetings of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC shall result in a negotiated Ministerial Declaration for inclusion in the report of the ECOSOC to the GA.

The Dominican Republic and Norway had been appointed as co-facilitators of the [2024 Ministerial Declaration](#), which identifies contemporary challenges alongside future actions and investment pathways needed to reinforce the 2030 Agenda and deliver on the SDGs. There were two highly contested paragraphs in the Ministerial Declaration. One paragraph recognized that sustainable development cannot be attained without peace and security. The other, newly proposed paragraph, drew attention to the impact of unilateral coercive measures (economic sanctions) on poverty and food security, among other SDGs.

The 2024 Ministerial Declaration also encourages the full, equal, and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in the VNR process. However, **language on child rights was notably and alarmingly weak in the final version of the Ministerial Declaration, especially following the deletion of verbatim agreed language from the 2022 HLPF Ministerial declaration on children’s meaningful participation** in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

For several months (since the release of the [zero-draft](#) of the 2024 Ministerial Declaration on 30 April) **ChildFund Alliance, together with sister organizations Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children’s Villages, and World Vision, had collectively and individually advocated with Member States and UN agencies for more child-sensitive language** to be included (or at least remain) in the 2024 Ministerial Declaration. While the zero-draft had made not a single reference to children, the final version contained the following **five references**:

*§19. People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all **children**, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants. We intend to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and all peoples and for all segments of society. We will take action to combat inequalities within and among countries and pursue policies that stem the tide of rising inequality, including through social protection systems and universal health coverage. We will endeavor to identify those who are being left behind and reach those who are the furthest behind first.*

*§35. The 2030 Agenda remains our commitment to the **children** and youth of today so that they may achieve their full human potential, as critical agents of change and torchbearers of the 2030 Agenda for current and future generations.*

*§39. We commit to eradicate forced labour and human trafficking and end **child** labour in all its forms.*

*§44. We recognize the need to make special efforts to meet nutritional needs, especially of women, **children**, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, rural and local communities, persons with disabilities, as well as of those living in vulnerable situations, and recognize that infant and young **child** mortality can be reduced through the improved nutritional status of women of reproductive age.*

VI. Select Child-Focused HLPF Side-Events

Justice for Children in Armed Conflicts, Justice for All Accountability with reference to SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (8 July)

Hosted by Defence for Children International, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Child Rights International Network, Human Rights Watch

Participants: Alex Kamarotos, Defence for children International (DCI); Marie-Adelaide Mathew Permanent Mission of Belgium; Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC); Jamil Khan, Young refugee from Afghanistan; Bethany Ellis, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict; Manaff Kemokai, DCI-Sierra Leone; Zama Neff, Human Rights Watch (HRW); Khaled Quzmar, DCI-Palestine.

The side-event delved into the context surrounding the grave violations against children in war crimes and armed conflict. The speakers identified key challenges and discussed **strategies to enhance accountability for perpetrators related to children and armed conflict (CAAC)** by also taking into account SDG 16 objectives, which were under official review at the 2024 HLPF. The session highlighted **ending all forms of violence against children (VAC) as fundamental to the achievement of SDG 16**. In this regard, the discussion identified **pathways to connect the CAAC and VAC mandate with SDG 16**. Participants raised the urgency to invest in child protection and wellbeing through the integration of children's lives in all processes and ensuring that they have access to **child-sensitive justice**. **Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid** urged the importance of robust systems and services accessible to all children, especially in times of conflict. She also highlighted the provision of legal identity and documentation to address statelessness.

Florene Gaaspard advocated for action plans to end the cycle of violence with measures of formulating accountability to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. **Jamil Khan** shared his experience as a refugee and mentioned that **most countries still do not recognize value in the inclusion of children's voices**. A key recommendation to involve children in peace processes and integrating their active participation was made throughout the session. **Bethany Ellis** elaborated on the [Watchlist Policy note](#) on CAAC and discussed the progress made since its release.

The discussion brought attention to post-conflict efforts and called for judicial processes to be an enabler, oriented towards the recovery of children. Issues surrounding the **rise in attacks on education systems** were also raised during the discussion. In this context, Zama Neff brought attention to the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) which has been endorsed by 120 states. The session emphasized that **accountability is the best defense for protection of schools and children**. Participants also highlighted the **pivotal contribution made by civil society through monitoring and reporting, and the provision of complementary information and insights on situations at ground level**.

The event concluded with the recommendation for the adoption of a **child-rights approach** to all investigations and practices in addressing grave violations against children in war crimes and armed conflict. In this regard, the Summit of the Future and Pact for the Future were identified as critical opportunities to reaffirm commitment to child rights.

Responding to Climate Anxiety: Cultivating Resilience and Hope in Youth (8 July)

Hosted by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace NGO to the UN, Medical Mission Sisters, Maryknoll Sisters of St Dominic (Maryknoll Office of Global Concern), Regis-St. Michael's Faculty of the Theology, Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology, The Mary Ward Centre

This webinar raised awareness and informed about faith-based tools and responses to climate anxiety in youth. Participants engaged in a conversation concerning climate change and climate anxiety, offering means for young people to cultivate resilience and hope in the face of this threatening reality. A recording of the session is available [here](#).

Special Event on Transforming Education at the 2024 HLPF (11 July)

Hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

This event was convened as a part of a series of high-profile special events during HLPF organized by UN DESA and key partners. The session considered the outcomes of the [Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#) in 2022 and the [TES Stocktake](#) in June 2024.

In the high-level opening, **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** outlined that quality education is inadequately financed and reiterated that **education is the single-most important investment any country can make** for its people and its future. In setting the stage, speakers highlighted the importance of ensuring **every child has access to education** and the reduction of education disparities between the more affluent and less privileged children. The special event had two panels on the **transformation of education financing** and **building of learning societies** respectively. The panels featured esteemed speakers who brought attention to key issues in these areas and suggested concrete measures to address them. The first panel elaborated on the remarks of the Secretary General and called for a long-term approach to education. Subsequent discussions revealed the **alarming costs to the global economy with the continued trajectory of children and youth being uneducated**. Panelists proposed the strengthening of education systems with a priority focus on teachers. They also called for innovative financing methods to secure better investment in education, especially in developing countries.

Building on the Secretary General's remarks on learners lacking the skills needed to succeed in a dynamic world, the second panel addressed the challenges of skills mismatch and effective strategies to ensure institutions are equipped to identify the correct needs of the market. The panelists emphasized the provision of guidance to students on what is available in the labor market and called for the involvement of all stakeholders in the process. Access to technological connectivity and its instrumental role in facilitating education was underscored throughout the event. The panelists noted the importance of effective and sustainable use of digital technology in this context. Furthermore, speakers emphasized the integration of social-emotional skills, including interpersonal skills, in education systems as a key for building peaceful societies.

Finally, the special event called for international cooperation to launch a concerted effort to establish genuine learning environments that will provide learning opportunities from childhood to adult stages.

Gender and Climate: Peace and Security: impact on women's poverty and food security (11 July)
Hosted by the Permanent Mission of Australia

Participants: H.E. Nosipho Jezile, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO); Sima Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women; H.E. Juan Jose Quintana, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the UN; Lt. Colonel Dana Humaid Ai Marzouqi, Director General of the International Affairs Bureau, United Arab Emirates (UAE); Dr. Melchior Mataki, Solomon Islands; Sergio Colina Martin, Spain; Kehkashan Basu, Green Hope Foundation.

The side-event was organized to discuss the **interlinkages of climate, peace and security through the gender lens** and identify efforts to address the disproportionate impact of issues in these areas that negatively affect women and girls. The event showcased examples from **Colombia, the UAE, the Solomon Islands and Spain** on the integration of women's participation in national development strategies.

Several speakers brought attention to the **enhanced exposure of women and children to disasters and their increased vulnerability to global crises**. At the same time, the discussion recognized the **invaluable knowledge and understanding that women and girls have on local conditions and sustainable processes**. Many speakers emphasized that, despite being disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, women and girls are at the forefront as **peacebuilders and climate justice leaders** in humanitarian and climate action. The session highlighted the urgency of investing in women to elevate the success of addressing multilateral challenges. In this regard, supporting efforts to ensure all spaces of decision-making are inclusive of women's leadership was identified as critical to address the multifarious crises surrounding climate, peace and security.

In recognition of the interlinkages between climate, peace and security, the discussion emphasized the **triple nexus approach** of capturing the links between sustainable development, humanitarian action and peace with a strong focus on climate and the integration of women in key decision-making areas. The call for a development approach to addressing climate, peace and security concerns at the national level was also made, as gender inequality and issues in these areas are all deeply rooted within development challenges.

Aside from national experiences, the side-event also showcased civil society experiences with empowering young women and girls in climate action through education and health programs, which contribute to lifting them out of poverty and securing their livelihood.

Meaningful Reporting on the SDGs with and for Children (16 July)
Hosted by Save the Children

Participants: Bonnie Berry, Senior Advocacy Officer, Save the Children; Valentina Buj de Lauwerier, Team Leader for Public Sector engagement Hub, UNICEF

Child Presenters: Ashutosh and Rajnandani, young leaders, Nepal; Bethel, young leader, Uganda

This virtual session highlighted the **significance of involving children in SDG reporting** and illustrated the impact of the SDGs on children through first-hand accounts of their participation in the **VNR process in Nepal and Uganda**. In setting the stage, **Valentina Buj** raised the need for appropriate methods to bring the SDGs back on track and underscored the **need to place child rights at the forefront of the SDGs**.

Ashutosh and Rajnandani presented their VNR engagement map and process as members of the **National Child Advocate Council (NCAC) in Nepal**. The process was a joint effort led by the NCAC and Save the Children International. Rajnandani highlighted the challenges in putting together the scorecards that assess the level of implementation of **child-related SDGs**, such as time constraints and limited understanding of SDGs among children. Nonetheless, she noted that the **government of Nepal appreciated the efforts of children in the VNR process and ensured that their contribution would be reflected in the VNR presentations during HLPF**. Ashutosh shared some key insights on the progress of the SDGs in Nepal. He noted that **SDG 13 (on climate change and the environment) was neglected by local governments in their development programs**. Both Ashutosh and Rajnandani put forward some core recommendations through their findings and experiences. This included accelerated investment in essential and quality services for children such as health, education, child protection and social protection systems. The children also called on global leaders to pursue child-led and child-informed climate action.

Bethel and her friends shared the findings to some of the questions in their VNR engagement process in **Uganda**. Bethel gave particular emphasis to **SDG 2 (quality education)** and **SDG 4 (zero hunger)** and holding governments accountable for their commitments towards these SDG targets. On SDG 4, Bethel and her friends shared creative drawings that illustrated sustainable farming practices and crops to fight hunger and promote food security.

The children from both countries identified the **complexity of the terms and concepts** encountered in their VNR engagement and the **lack of child-friendly materials**. The session reiterated that the SDGs revolve around fundamental issues that affect children’s lives, growth and future. The young leaders thus emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability on delivering promises, including those related to children’s rights. In essence, the side-event **demonstrated the invaluable contribution of children through their innovative thinking and fresh perspectives to measure progress on the SDGs**.

IntegrateSDGs: Advancing the Environmental Dimension of Sustainable Development for Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions for SDG Progress (16 July)

Hosted by Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future and Bahá’í International Community in New York

During this session the Stakeholder Forum and Bahá’í representatives, along with other experts, **focused on strengthening the effective integration of all three dimensions of sustainable development** (economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection) and, in particular, **reinforcing the environmental dimension** with a particular focus on the SDGs under review at the 2024 HLPF (*see p. 2*). During the event, the [IntegrateSDGs](#) initiative launched three “communities of practice” (used here to refer to networks of individuals and organizations pursuing specific sustainable development objectives). Communities of practice are a valuable tool for effective policy and practical integration. And yet few have managed to cooperate effectively across specializations to tackle trade-offs and leverage synergies between different goal areas and dimensions of sustainable development, including by catalyzing new multi-stakeholder partnerships. The aim of the IntegrateSDGs communities of practice is to change that. Click [here](#) to see the full program, a video recording of the entire meeting, and to view and download the presentations given during the session.

Accelerating Action on SDG16.2 to Leave No Child Behind in the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons: A HLPF Event to Mark the 2024 World Day against Trafficking in Persons (17 July), hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC

Participants: Delphine Schantz, Representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); H.E. José Alfonso Blanco Conde, Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the UN; H.E. Antonio M. Lagdameo, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Philippines to UN; Pavel Evsenko, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the UN; Ghada Waly, Executive Director, UNODC; Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC); Darin Jones, Executive Director for Partnerships and Planning, INTERPOL; Kendall Alaimo, Artist, Activist and Survivor; Lori Cohen, CEO, Protect all Children from Trafficking (PACT) by ECPAT USA; Tsitsi Matekaire, Global Lead, End Sexual Exploitation, Equality Now; Taina Ben Aime, Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

This session was organized to focus on the theme of this year's **World Day against Trafficking in Persons** (30 July), which is to "**leave no child behind**". The event drew upon intersecting intergovernmental processes, including the 2024 Working Group on Trafficking in Persons and the official review of SDG 16 during HLPF 2024, to provide recommendations to be integrated into the Summit of the Future.

The session illustrated the gravity of child trafficking through alarming statistics – notably and frighteningly, **1 in every 3 trafficked persons are children**. The discussion addressed the root causes and circumstances that facilitate child trafficking, such as poverty, family dysfunction, internal displacement and migration, climate change and environmental disasters that exacerbate the vulnerability of children. Other issues noted in the discussion concerned the grave violations as a consequence of child trafficking, including gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and recruitment of child soldiers. The rise in organized crime and the detrimental impact on children's safety worldwide was underscored throughout the session, further exposing the failure of the international system to protect children in its response. Cybercrime was noted as a threat multiplier in this regard.

Prevention, prosecution, protection and partnership were cited as the 4Ps in some of the country examples from the Philippines and the Dominican Republic through which to fight child trafficking. The **Group of Friends (GOF) United Against Human Trafficking** also called for collective efforts and comprehensive strategies centered on the 4Ps to protect children. Additionally, the GOF **urged governments to prioritize the needs of child victims with an age- and gender-sensitive approach**.

Recommendations called for early detection measures, efforts to address root causes, and enhanced investment in the protection of children. The speakers also suggested the **integration of child protection services accessible to all children regardless of their citizenship status**. Most importantly, the discussion identified **children's voices as a critical part of the solution with the power to shift policies**. Solutions that harness technology and leverage international agencies and security networks were identified as crucial in countering human trafficking. There was also a call on the international community to account for long-term and intergenerational trauma of child trafficking. In an effort to tackle child trafficking, international cooperation with organizations such as INTERPOL was noted as key to dismantling human trafficking networks. In closing, the participants expressed their commitment to work with all stakeholders to combat the crime of human trafficking.

VII. Key Takeaways and Impressions (as Pertains to the Protection of Children and their Rights)

In the coming weeks the UN Representative will provide Alliance members with the official summary of the 2024 HLPF, capturing the key messages of the discussions that took place. The President of ECOSOC, H.E. Paula Narváez, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in New York, is currently preparing this report.

The following thus constitutes the ChildFund Alliance Secretariat's assessment of the 2024 HLPF's key takeaways as regards protecting children and their rights, informed by conversations that ChildFund Alliance staff have had throughout the event.

- The 2024 HLPF was of particular importance to ChildFund Alliance because two of the five SDGs under official review relate closely to ChildFund member priorities: SDG 13 (on climate change) and SDG 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions), including SDG target 16.2 (“End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”). It is against this background that the Alliance Secretariat, together with members ChildFund International and Children Believe, organized an official side-event on the impact of climate change on violence against children that enabled us to bring two young leaders from India (Children Believe) and Indonesia (ChildFund International) to come to New York and speak on the issue (see summary on pp. 7-10).
- The child-focused agencies (CFAs) with representation at UNHQ in New York (ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages, and World Vision International), together with UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC), had during the months leading up to the 2024 HLPF advocated for a strong child-rights lens and language in the 2024 HLPF Ministerial Declaration. As noted under section V. 2024 HLPF Ministerial Declaration (p. 14), while the zero-draft of the document did not include a single reference to children, the final version contained five references. It is important to also note that CSOs were excluded from the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration, which were exclusively intergovernmental, and thus “forced” to work through child-friendly member states and UN agencies to propose the child-sensitive language necessary to ensure the protection of children and their rights in the document.
- Nonetheless, the collective assessment of the CFAs is that for two consecutive years now the HLPF (and hence the assessment and tracking of the 17 SDGs) has been losing momentum to two other summits organized as part of UNGA in the fall, namely the [SDG Summit](#) (Sep. 2023) and the [Summit of the Future](#) (Sep. 2024). As a result, the 2023 HLPF had not resulted in a Ministerial Declaration (after member states had “kicked the can down the road” to the SDG Summit that took place two months later). Similarly, the 2024 HLPF handed the responsibility to turbo-charge acceleration of the SDGs to the Summit of the Future, also two months later.
- The result is that ECOSOC, under whose auspices the HLPF takes place, has not been leading on tracking the fulfilment of the SDGs. That responsibility has now largely fallen on civil society, which has had some successes but is also facing a number of challenges in our endeavors to keep member states on track towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

- For example, as part of the VNRs numerous national CSOs/NGOs presented strong “shadow reports” that (unofficially) assess their countries’ progress towards achieving the SDGs. Given SDG achievement is lagging behind significantly across all SDGs and virtually all countries, these shadow reports have taken on even greater importance as a “reality check” on where the world stands on SDG fulfilment. Regrettably, even though the UN encourages all [members states conducting a VNR](#) (which, naturally as the name suggests, is “voluntary”) to include CSOs in their assessment, numerous CSOs had not been made aware that their country/government was conducting a VNR at the 2024 HLPF. This indicates a disconnect in the process that needs to be addressed.
- Another setback for CSOs compared to previous years was that, due to the UN’s “liquidity crisis”, a mere 60 side-events took place at UNHQ over the two-week period (a fraction compared to past years). In addition, other than in years prior, CSOs could only submit an application to host a side-event on UN premises once they had secured co-sponsorship from a member state, thereby further limiting space and opportunities for CSOs to bring pressing issues to the fore and discuss them with member state representatives and UN leaders, who are the principal decision-makers on said matters.
- Overall, it appeared that CSO participation was noticeably lower this year, the reasons for which once again lie beyond our immediate control: lack of funding, lack of support in obtaining visas, or even fear of reprisals from member states (e.g., CSOs from certain countries appeared less willing to criticize their governments during the VNR process, resulting in the most interesting yet unofficial VNR-related sessions taking place outside UNHQ).