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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
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including the right to development**

Protecting children from sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse: progress, new frontiers and the path forward

**Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and
sexual abuse of children, Mama Fatima Singhateh**

Summary

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, Mama Fatima Singhateh, reflects on how her six-year tenure has contributed to preventing and responding to the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. The Special Rapporteur also identifies the remaining and new challenges in tackling the scourge to inform the efforts of her successor.



I. Introduction

1. In the present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 7/13 and 52/26, the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, Mama Fatima Singhateh, reflects on the current state of affairs in relation to the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, new and emerging risks and how these risks manifest and affect the lives of children. The report is also dedicated to taking stock of how her six-year tenure has contributed to preventing and responding to the scourge and to identifying the remaining and new challenges to inform the efforts of her successor.

2. To inform her report, the Special Rapporteur sought input from a wide range of stakeholders, including Member States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations entities, and international and regional organizations, for which she received more than 120 submissions.¹ The Special Rapporteur has also drawn on her experience from country visits and information gathered through a review of literature and meetings held with various stakeholders. The Special Rapporteur wishes to thank all stakeholders for their contributions and welcomes the engagement demonstrated through this exercise.

3. The report also includes information on the activities carried out by the Special Rapporteur since her previous report.

II. Activities of the Special Rapporteur

A. Country visits

4. Owing to the ongoing liquidity crisis affecting the regular budget, the Special Rapporteur did not conduct any visits during the reporting period.

B. Communications and press releases

5. During the period under review, the Special Rapporteur transmitted communications to Governments jointly with other mandate holders related to issues that fell within the scope of her mandate. The Special Rapporteur also issued joint press statements with other mandate holders.

6. On 18 November, on the occasion of the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence, the Special Rapporteur announced the selection of her second youth adviser following the conclusion of the term of office of the first youth adviser.² That ongoing initiative is aimed at amplifying the voices of children and youth and fostering innovative solutions to protect children's rights worldwide on issues that fall within the scope of the mandate.

C. General Assembly and other activities

7. On 12 August, the Special Rapporteur spoke at an online event to promote cross-regional dialogue and solidarity among young people working on ensuring safety for children in the digital environment. The event was an initiative of the first youth adviser to the Special Rapporteur, Anjali Vurden from Mauritius, to celebrate International Youth Day. The Special Rapporteur highlighted some of the findings from her thematic report to the

¹ All submissions are available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-inputs-protecting-children-sale-sexual-exploitation-and-sexual-abuse>.

² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-sale-of-children/2nd-youth-human-rights-challenge>.

General Assembly in 2024³ and underscored the importance of meaningful youth engagement in addressing the gaps.

8. On 5 September, the Special Rapporteur's opinion piece was published by the Investigative Journalism Bureau at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.⁴ The Special Rapporteur highlighted that online child sexual abuse or exploitation is not an abstract problem; it is a reality that disproportionately affects children, especially those from marginalized communities. Addressing that problem requires a proactive, inclusive and survivor-centred approach. Without immediate action, the phenomenon of online child sexual exploitation and abuse will be further exacerbated by pre-existing inequalities, resulting in additional violations of children's rights.

9. On 13 October, the Special Rapporteur presented her report to the General Assembly,⁵ which was focused on a child-centred response to the sexual exploitation of children in street situations. In the ensuing interactive dialogue, she highlighted that, without deliberate legal recognition and targeted measures to address their unique vulnerabilities, the risk of such children being left behind or entirely excluded from national development agendas remained alarmingly high. On 14 October, the Special Rapporteur convened, jointly with the Consortium for Street Children, and spoke at a side event on the same topic. The side event was co-designed with children and young people in Bangladesh, India and the Philippines with lived experience of street-connectedness, ensuring that their diverse perspectives, lived realities and specific needs were centred throughout. Their engagement and participation in the event were facilitated by the Consortium's network members in the respective countries, namely: the Grambangla Unnayan Committee, the Children in Need Institute and Bahay Tuluyan.

10. On 8 December, the Special Rapporteur organized, together with Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International, a briefing for Member States and civil society networks in Geneva. The event was aimed at presenting and discussing the findings of the Special Rapporteur in her report to the General Assembly,⁶ as well as providing an opportunity to exchange promising practices and solutions to strengthen the protection of children in street situations against sexual exploitation.

11. On 10 December, the Special Rapporteur spoke at a conference against trafficking in persons held in Rome to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol), which was aimed at promoting dialogue on coordinated strategies and sharing tools to combat trafficking in persons at every stage. The Special Rapporteur underscored the importance of child-friendly access to justice and trauma-informed rehabilitation measures for child victims of trafficking, including for sexual exploitation. She also elaborated on effective measures to prevent the sale and sexual exploitation of children.

12. On 16 December, the Special Rapporteur provided a keynote address at the 2025 Maggie Eales and Roger Hayes Memorial Lecture organized by the Consortium for Street Children. In presenting her 2025 report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur called for coordinated, multisectoral action, tackling root causes, such as poverty and discrimination, and promoting trauma-informed, rights-based approaches that ensure children's safe and meaningful participation in shaping policy solutions.

³ See [A/79/122](#).

⁴ See <https://ijb.utoronto.ca/news/online-sexual-exploitation-disproportionally-impacts-vulnerable-children>.

⁵ [A/80/113](#).

⁶ *Ibid.*

III. Progress during the six-year tenure of the Special Rapporteur

A. Issues and trends relating to the mandate

1. Existing and emerging risks related to the digital environment

13. As the world rapidly became interconnected through technology, concerns emerged, including in relation to the protection of children in a digital environment, especially with the advent of new technologies that were used as tools to commit the offences of sale and sexual exploitation of children. At the beginning of her term of office, the Special Rapporteur committed to reflect on the trends, challenges and responses to the issues of child abuse and exploitation online.⁷ The Special Rapporteur reported on the misuse of existing and emerging technologies and how it exacerbated and amplified children's exposure to risks, harms and various forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.⁸ The Special Rapporteur highlighted how existing technologies were misused to sexually harass, take and share non-consensual images and videos, generate child sexual abuse materials, sexually extort children and livestream child sexual abuse. Moreover, emerging technologies such as deepfakes, "nudifying" and de-aging applications, artificial intelligence embedded peer-to-peer file sharing and voice cloning, exacerbate those crimes by amplifying and extending existing methods that exploit children and produce child sexual abuse materials.

14. The Special Rapporteur also identified gaps such as the lack of harmonized legal definitions and criminalization of all forms of child sexual abuse materials across jurisdictions, limited technical capacity, specialized units and investigative tools in many countries, weak cross-border cooperation and slow mutual legal assistance procedures and inconsistent or inadequate victim identification, protection and support services. The Special Rapporteur then called for comprehensive legislation to criminalize all forms of technology-facilitated abuse while avoiding the criminalization of child victims; robust regulatory oversight of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, extended reality, end-to-end encryption and virtual currencies; and mandatory privacy- and safety-by-design, age-assurance, child-friendly moderation and proactive detection, removal and reporting by technology companies, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.⁹

15. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse was a major concern in all the countries visited by the Special Rapporteur during her tenure – Montenegro, Mauritius, Philippines, Uruguay, Australia, Germany and the United Arab Emirates – with each facing distinct challenges.¹⁰ For example, in the Philippines, at the time of the visit, the country was identified as a major hub for online sexual exploitation of children, with alarming cases involving facilitation by family members.¹¹ In Germany, between 2019 and 2023, cases involving the production, distribution, acquisition and possession of child sexual abuse materials more than tripled, underscoring the urgent need for stronger prevention and enforcement measures.¹²

2. Pandemics, conflicts and other humanitarian crises

16. The Special Rapporteur was appointed during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and decided to dedicate her first-ever thematic report to the impact of the pandemic and the responses of States to the push and pull factors for the sale and sexual exploitation of children. In her report, the Special Rapporteur highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had unleashed an unprecedented crisis, with the world's poorest and most vulnerable affected the

⁷ See [A/75/210](#).

⁸ See [A/79/122](#).

⁹ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 25 (2021).

¹⁰ See [A/HRC/49/51/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/52/31/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/55/55/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/55/55/Add.2](#), [A/HRC/58/52/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/61/45/Add.1](#) and [A/HRC/61/45/Add.2](#).

¹¹ See [A/HRC/55/55/Add.1](#).

¹² See [A/HRC/61/45/Add.1](#).

most.¹³ The Special Rapporteur further assessed how the socioeconomic crises caused by the pandemic had exacerbated existing stark inequalities and the vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged children, thereby amplifying the risks of exposing them to sale, trafficking and sexual exploitation globally. School closures, lockdowns and mobility restrictions disrupted protection services for children, increasing the risk of domestic violence and online sexual exploitation.¹⁴ The Special Rapporteur called for protection programmes for children to be deliberately integrated during emergencies, with broad attention to policy, threats, risks, community assets, capacity-building and effective monitoring and reporting. The first visit that the Special Rapporteur conducted in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic was to Montenegro. During the visit, she learned first hand how the 2020 lockdown had resulted in remote learning, which had significantly increased children's exposure to online sexual exploitation and grooming.¹⁵ Reported cases have risen since, but the lack of comprehensive data made it difficult to gauge the full scale of the problem at the time.

17. From the outset, the Special Rapporteur aimed to strengthen the role of the mandate by tackling impunity for those responsible for the sale and sexual exploitation of children, while promoting and advocating for access to justice, reparation and rehabilitation for survivors.¹⁶ In that regard, she set out to address the persistent lack of accountability for child sexual abuse in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian settings. The Special Rapporteur recognized the undeniable efforts of the United Nations system to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, yet the offence of child sexual abuse persisted in those settings.¹⁷ She emphasized that sexual abuse of children perpetrated by United Nations staff and related personnel in crisis settings was a fundamental protection failure, a serious crime and a grievous violation of the human rights of a group of people in the most vulnerable situations. In a report to the Human Rights Council, she identified the gaps in the efforts of the United Nations and its partners in combating the problem and provided specific recommendations to bridge the gaps by integrating a child rights-based approach and ensuring the accountability of perpetrators. In that regard, the Special Rapporteur has commenced the process of advocating for the inclusion of an additional clause in the resolution renewing the mandate on the importance of the mandate holder working closely with the office of the Secretary-General and other relevant agencies to pursue the realization of mechanisms that will ensure the accountability of perpetrators in that context.

3. Tourism, travel and entertainment industries

18. Global travel and tourism have more than doubled over the past 30 years and new travel products, including voluntourism, have exposed children to additional risks to sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁸ In one of her reports to the General Assembly,¹⁹ the Special Rapporteur shone a light on the phenomenon of voluntourism and warned that unregulated and unmonitored volunteering had wide-ranging repercussions, including the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It is essential to take into account the existing gaps in national laws; the lack of awareness-raising on the issue; demand-supply power imbalances; and unchecked market forces and financial systems that commodify children and communities. The Special Rapporteur called for extensive and wide-ranging intervention at local, national, regional and international levels by all actors and stakeholders working together and for the laws regulating the activities of relevant public and private sectors to ensure adequate monitoring, early detection, investigation and penalization of wrongdoing. Child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism remains a concern in several countries visited by the Special Rapporteur. For example, during her visit to Mauritius, a major tourist destination, she learned of the significant challenges faced by law enforcement in detecting, investigating and

¹³ See [A/HRC/46/31](#).

¹⁴ Submissions from the University of Global Health Equity and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

¹⁵ See [A/HRC/49/51/Add.1](#).

¹⁶ See [A/75/210](#).

¹⁷ See [A/HRC/58/52](#).

¹⁸ See [A/75/210](#).

¹⁹ [A/78/137](#).

referring cases of child sex tourism, compounded by a lack of incentives among members of the public to report such crimes.²⁰

19. In another report,²¹ the Special Rapporteur drew attention to the urgent issue of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the entertainment industry. She highlighted that, disrupting the normalization of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the entertainment industry was attainable by means of the rigorous implementation of a zero-tolerance policy for those who exploit the vulnerabilities of child performers. The Special Rapporteur recommended the development of legal frameworks, policies and guidelines to safeguard the health, safety and privacy of children in the entertainment industry; reform of contractual and work arrangements in accordance with international labour laws aimed at empowering and protecting children from abuse, fear, stigma and discrimination; and data collection and international information-sharing on child sexual abuse cases in the entertainment industry to bridge any jurisdictional gaps and streamline efforts to bring offenders to justice.

4. Addressing the vulnerabilities of children through the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals

20. From the start of her term of office, the Special Rapporteur has consistently emphasized the need to identify children at greatest risk of being left behind and consider their protection needs, how they may be affected by manifestations of sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and what targeted measures need to be adopted to reach them.²² In a report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur analysed that issue in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals with a view to ensuring that no child was left behind. She identified children who were most at risk or vulnerable in the context of the situational status of the family (such as those living in poverty, on the move, belonging to minority and Indigenous communities, in rural settings, in street situations or with disabilities), the digital space and institutional settings.²³ She then provided guidance and recommendations on the protection of those children to States and other stakeholders when applying the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals to national processes, programmes and measures. For the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, addressing the vulnerabilities of children within that framework is therefore indispensable in a world in which no child is left behind.

5. Invisible victims

21. In her first report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur identified a gap in the fight against the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children within which the experiences of boys and young people who identified outside the gender binary had often been neglected (contrary to article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).²⁴ That is why the Special Rapporteur decided to delve into the gender dimension of the phenomenon. In a subsequent report, the Special Rapporteur emphasized that child sexual exploitation was deeply connected to gender stereotypes, patriarchal structures and power imbalances.²⁵ Boys often remain “hidden victims” due to underreporting, stigma and fears related to masculinity and homophobia. Children with non-conforming gender identities or sexual orientations are also more vulnerable due to, among other reasons, stigma, discrimination, rejection and homelessness. By focusing almost exclusively on girls as victims of sexual exploitation, support mechanisms and other services have been tailored mainly for girls, resulting in the invisibility of boys and children and young people who identify outside the gender binary as victims. In the report, the Special Rapporteur underscored the importance of gender-sensitive approaches and called for gender-inclusive child protection systems. That report, as well as the sustained advocacy of the Special Rapporteur on the protection of boys from sexual violence, including the campaign for recognizing 16 April as Blue Umbrella Day, have

²⁰ See [A/HRC/52/31/Add.1](#).

²¹ [A/HRC/55/55](#).

²² See [A/75/210](#).

²³ See [A/77/140](#).

²⁴ See [A/75/210](#).

²⁵ See [A/76/144](#).

helped mobilize global attention on this often-overlooked group and spark dialogue on inclusive protection.²⁶

22. The sexual exploitation of children in street situations represents one of the most acute and underaddressed manifestations of children's rights violations globally. Street-connected children face systemic discrimination and routine exclusion from essential services such as healthcare, education and access to justice. They are frequently excluded from national data collection exercises and household-based surveys, rendering them invisible in public planning. As a result, they are often not factored into national strategies addressing health, education and child protection, reinforcing cycles of neglect and marginalization. In a report to the General Assembly,²⁷ the Special Rapporteur outlined key response strategies grounded in the principles of prevention, protection, accountability, participation and inclusion. The Special Rapporteur emphasized the need to strengthen national child protection systems, enhance access to services and justice and ensure that children's voices shape the policies and programmes intended to safeguard them. In that regard, the Special Rapporteur believes that it is important to continue to galvanize international solidarity and sustained action to protect children in street situations, including through the formal recognition of 12 April as International Day for Street Children.²⁸

6. Victim-centred remedies and reparations

23. Through a report to the Human Rights Council,²⁹ the Special Rapporteur shone a light on the fact that child victims and survivors of sale and sexual exploitation had hardly ever been afforded due reparation, as enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments, for violations committed against them. No reparation endeavour has provided a comprehensive programme considering all categories of child exploitation, violence and abuse, placing children at risk of secondary victimization. When attempts are made at reparation, they are rarely effective in reaching the most marginalized groups of children, who are most often outside or on the fringes of the formal machinery of the State in terms of recognition of their identity.

24. The Special Rapporteur highlighted that reparation should go beyond monetary compensation to include restitution, rehabilitation, psychosocial and medical support, public acknowledgment and apologies, institutional reform and guarantees of non-repetition. The Special Rapporteur underscored that effective reparation must be survivor-centred, age-appropriate, and gender- and culturally sensitive, addressing both immediate harm and the underlying structural inequalities. To that end, the Special Rapporteur called for comprehensive legislation on reparation for child victims and survivors of sale, sexual exploitation and abuse with accountability measures, as well as education, awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes, in local and rural communities in collaboration with community and faith-based leaders, to develop and support access for child victims and survivors to reparative measures.

B. Achievements of the mandate

1. Positive impacts

25. In the contributions received, the instrumental role played by the mandate in elevating global awareness of the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children – all of which are serious violations of the human rights of the child that are often hidden, committed in secrecy and associated with stigma – was recognized.³⁰ The mandate has contributed to shaping donor priorities and programming to integrate child sexual exploitation and abuse,

²⁶ Submissions from Family for Every Child, the Global Alliance for the Protection of Boys from Sexual Violence and Protect Children (Suojellaan Lapsia ry).

²⁷ A/80/113.

²⁸ See <https://www.stretchchildren.org/idsc/international-day-for-street-children-2025>.

²⁹ A/HRC/52/31.

³⁰ Submissions from Togo, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and ChildFund International in Indonesia.

both online and offline, into broader child protection and human rights agendas.³¹ It also provides a critical platform to examine factors that heighten children's risks and vulnerabilities to the phenomena, such as conflicts and other crises, displacement etc.³² The mandate has guided Member States in legislative reforms and promoted child-centred policy design, resulting in significant legal and institutional advancements.³³ For example, following the Special Rapporteur's visit, Montenegro revised its Criminal Code to explicitly recognize sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse materials as distinct crimes and established specialized police and prosecutorial units on trafficking in children, including for sexual exploitation.³⁴ In Colombia, the Special Rapporteur's engagement has positively influenced public policy, particularly in the consolidation of strategies such as *Atrapasueños*, within which the *Voces que Previene* strategy is embedded. Those initiatives emphasize participation, prevention and comprehensive reparation, as well as improved frameworks for the training of officials, including in victim-centred care and early identification of victims.³⁵

26. Beyond legislative progress, the mandate has fostered stronger coordination among stakeholders and encouraged collaboration among States, civil society, United Nations entities and other regional and international organizations.³⁶ Its findings and recommendations have informed awareness-raising campaigns and inter-agency dialogue, including those led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),³⁷ reinforcing inter-institutional cooperation to combat trafficking and exploitation of children. By gathering insights from States and civil society, the Special Rapporteur has highlighted good practices, emerging risks and trends, offering a road map for more effective protection of children worldwide.³⁸ Those efforts have not only strengthened legal frameworks but also advanced comprehensive, child-centred approaches that prioritize prevention, accountability and the realization of children's rights.

2. Revision of the name of the mandate

27. There has been a conscious effort among child protection advocates and law enforcement bodies to move away from terminologies such as "child prostitution" and "child pornography", replacing them with phrases such as "exploitation of children in/for prostitution" and "child sexual abuse material", respectively.³⁹ The term "child prostitution" implies that the phenomenon represents a legitimate form of sex work or that children have provided their informed consent. Likewise, sexualized material that depicts or represents children is a form of child sexual abuse and should not be described as "child pornography" or "child porn" as it contributes to diminishing the gravity of the offence against the child. From the beginning of her tenure, the Special Rapporteur committed to advocating for the consistent use of child-sensitive terminologies when discussing matters related to child sexual exploitation and abuse.⁴⁰ One specific result of her commitment and advocacy is the change of the name of the mandate from the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, to the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children,⁴¹ putting an end to the use by the mandate of terminologies that stigmatize and retraumatize child victims and survivors.

³¹ Submission from UNODC.

³² Submission from the State of Palestine.

³³ Submissions from Mauritius, Togo, Uzbekistan and the State of Palestine.

³⁴ Submission from Montenegro.

³⁵ Submission from Colombia.

³⁶ Submissions from Jordan, Montenegro, Togo and Uzbekistan.

³⁷ Submission from UNODC.

³⁸ Submission from El Salvador.

³⁹ ECPAT International, *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* (2016), pp. 29 and 38.

⁴⁰ See [A/75/210](#).

⁴¹ [Human Rights Council resolution 52/26](#).

3. Engagement with young people

28. In her first report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur committed to strengthening the meaningful participation of children and young people in accordance with their evolving capacities as key agents and partners. In realizing that commitment, the Special Rapporteur established the position of a youth adviser to the Special Rapporteur, a first of its kind, designed to strengthen her engagement with young people, amplify their voices and foster innovative solutions to protect children's rights worldwide.⁴² The youth adviser is selected through a youth human rights challenge. For the first challenge, the Special Rapporteur invited young people to produce digital content regarding their views on technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. The winner of the challenge, Anjali Vurden from Mauritius, was appointed as the Special Rapporteur's first youth adviser. Ms. Vurden played a pivotal role in embedding youth perspectives into the Special Rapporteur's activities and led awareness-raising activities among young people on child sexual exploitation and abuse in the digital environment, particularly through social media. Building on that success and ensuring the sustainability of youth engagement, the Special Rapporteur launched the second challenge at the end of 2025, selecting Felicity Feleke from Ethiopia as the second youth adviser.⁴³ Ms. Feleke will focus on addressing the sexual exploitation of children in the entertainment industry and implementing youth-driven solutions to combat the phenomenon.

29. The Special Rapporteur has consistently prioritized the meaningful participation of children and young people in her work in accordance with article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One notable example relates to her thematic focus on the sexual exploitation of children in street situations. In collaboration with partners, including the Consortium for Street Children and Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International, the Special Rapporteur personally engaged with children and young people with lived experiences as street-connected children from Bangladesh, Cameroon, India and the Philippines. The process was designed to be safe, inclusive and empowering, ensuring that children and young people could freely express their views and actively contribute to shaping policy discussions. Their insights were not only heard but integrated into the Special Rapporteur's report, presentation to the General Assembly and subsequent dialogues with policymakers from multiple countries. That approach reflects the Special Rapporteur's commitment to bridging the voices of those most affected with decision makers, thereby placing the perspectives of children and young people at the centre of international responses.

4. Practical approach

30. Despite the rise in the knowledge of and attention given to child victims of sale and sexual exploitation over the past years, many existing initiatives remain at the legislative or policy level. Concerned by the limited implementation in practice, which represents one of the most significant challenges in tackling those issues, the Special Rapporteur dedicated one of her reports⁴⁴ to the urgent need for an effective implementation of prevention, protection and rehabilitation measures for children who are, or may become, victims of sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Along with the report, the Special Rapporteur formulated a checklist for States and other stakeholders to use as a specific and user-friendly tool in their work to prevent the phenomena, protect children and provide adequate services to child victims and survivors.⁴⁵ By focusing on a more practical approach to addressing the sale and sexual exploitation of children, the Special Rapporteur hoped to support more decisive steps by States towards effectively implementing their obligations. For example, taking the report into consideration, Mexico amended its national and state legislation to prohibit marriage under the age of 18. The Special Rapporteur's recommendations have also strengthened the General Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Crimes related to Trafficking in Persons,

⁴² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-sale-of-children/1st-youth-human-rights-challenge>.

⁴³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-sale-of-children/2nd-youth-human-rights-challenge>.

⁴⁴ [A/HRC/49/51](#).

⁴⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Checklist-SR-Children.pdf>.

reinforced a comprehensive approach to child protection and promoted coordination among institutions to ensure the protection of children’s rights in the country.⁴⁶

IV. Gaps and new frontiers in the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children

A. Rapidly evolving risks in the digital environment

31. Technology used to commit child sexual exploitation and abuse is advancing faster than the safeguards and policies designed to prevent it, amplifying the scale and complexity of the crimes and overwhelming detection and response capabilities.⁴⁷ Existing laws still rely on terminology such as “child pornography” or fail to address emerging threats, including child sexual abuse materials generated by artificial intelligence, livestreamed exploitation, crypto-enabled sextortion, grooming or online enticing, encrypted platforms etc.⁴⁸ Policies still lack comprehensive, cross-sectoral and dedicated coordination mechanisms, leaving responses fragmented and reactive.⁴⁹

32. Operational gaps further undermine protection efforts. Law enforcement and child protection services face escalating caseloads and severe resource constraints, with limited digital forensic capacity, insufficient specialist training and inadequate tools for monitoring online crime.⁵⁰ For example, child sexual abuse materials are being detected and reported at unprecedented levels; statistics from the first half of 2025 showed a dramatic increase in reports of child sexual abuse materials generated by artificial intelligence: from 6,835 during the same period in the previous year to 440,419.⁵¹ In 2024, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children documented 546,000 reports of grooming or online enticement, a 192 per cent increase compared with the year before.⁵² It bears noting that such upward trends may also reflect positive developments: more children are coming forward to report harm, companies are improving detection systems and more transparency in data-sharing among others.⁵³ Online child sexual exploitation and abuse often transcend jurisdictional boundaries as offenders may operate in one country, target a child in another and store or sell content in a third country.⁵⁴ Differing definitions of offences, evidentiary thresholds and data-retention laws across jurisdictions cause delays and lost data, impeding effective investigation and prosecution.⁵⁵

33. Offenders change tactics quickly. They start connecting with children on mainstream games or social applications and then move the conversation into encrypted channels where contact continues as private and unmonitored – a tactic known as “off-platforming”.⁵⁶ In immersive extended reality spaces, adults can interact with children through avatars, concealing their identities and exploiting children’s reduced ability to distinguish between safe and unsafe interactions in such lifelike and engaging virtual settings.⁵⁷ Another emerging tactic is the use of predictive artificial intelligence and recommender systems to identify and disseminate child sexual abuse materials, such as using custom artificial intelligence models

⁴⁶ Submission from Mexico.

⁴⁷ Submissions from Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, North Macedonia, the State of Palestine, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Slovenia, the National Council for Human Rights (Egypt), Asociación Alanna, Haurralde Fundazioa, COMPI and Federación de Mujeres Jóvenes (Asociación Alanna et al.) and the WeProtect Global Alliance.

⁴⁸ Submissions from Malaysia, ChildFund International in Indonesia, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Stacy Cecchet and Devangana Sujay.

⁴⁹ Submission from the Inter-American Children’s Institute.

⁵⁰ Submissions from Jordan, North Macedonia, the Breck Foundation, Stacy Cecchet and Frente Joven.

⁵¹ See <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2025/spike-in-online-crimes-against-children-a-wake-up-call?>

⁵² See <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline/cybertiplinedata>.

⁵³ WeProtect Global Alliance, *Global Threat Assessment* (2025).

⁵⁴ Submissions from Malaysia, North Macedonia and the WeProtect Global Alliance.

⁵⁵ Submission from the Breck Foundation.

⁵⁶ Submission from Protect Children.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

trained on real abuse material to generate synthetic content or testing grooming strategies on child-like chatbots.⁵⁸ Often online and offline child sexual exploitation and abuse offences are intermingled and present in combination with each other: from offences related to child sexual abuse materials, offenders may move to meeting up with children to commit abuse against them or to manipulate them to procure others and vice versa.⁵⁹

34. Another barrier to preventing technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is the widespread lack of digital literacy and child safeguarding among children, caregivers and educators.⁶⁰ Children navigate increasingly complex digital environments without adequate guidance or protection. Digital literacy and online safety are not always integrated into school curricula. Many parents and teachers are unable to detect or respond to such threats. Addressing those gaps requires a holistic approach that combines technology-neutral and forward-looking legislation, robust regulatory oversight and enhanced technical and forensic capabilities, alongside embedding child online safety within national education curricula and implementing large-scale awareness programmes for children, caregivers and educators.

B. Fragmented implementation

35. Fragmented implementation of legislation remains a pervasive challenge in addressing the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. While many countries have adopted legal frameworks and policies, their application is uneven and often dependent on territorial or administrative structures.⁶¹ Countries with decentralized systems reported challenges in the harmonization of legislation, resulting in overlaps in laws and systems at various state levels.⁶² Policy implementation often falls short at state and local levels, where national guidelines are not consistently translated into clear standard operating procedures – and such is often the case in rural and resource-constrained areas.⁶³ During her country visits, the Special Rapporteur observed similar challenges. In Australia, for example, at the time of the visit, the Special Rapporteur noted that, while most child rights issues fell under state and territory jurisdiction, the absence of a harmonized or federal legal framework compromised equal protection for children nationwide.⁶⁴

36. Lack of coordination among institutions further undermines effective responses. Weak intersectoral collaboration among law enforcement, justice, health, education, social protection and child protection agencies leads to delayed responses, duplication of efforts, lengthy procedures and revictimization.⁶⁵ Even when mechanisms for cooperation exist, they do not always translate into effective practice.⁶⁶ That issue is compounded by the lack of specialized skills and technical capacities among key stakeholders to prevent and respond effectively to the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. Many officials are unfamiliar with specialized regulatory frameworks and child-centred and trauma-informed approaches.⁶⁷ For example, Argentina, through Act No. 27709 of 2023, aims, among other things, to strengthen institutional capacities for the early detection, response and prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse by putting in place a federal training plan that includes mandatory and continuous training for public officials from the three branches of government in the area of children's rights.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ WeProtect Global Alliance, *Global Threat Assessment*.

⁵⁹ Submission from Project Paradigm.

⁶⁰ Submissions from El Salvador, North Macedonia and ChildFund International in Indonesia.

⁶¹ Submission from Asociación Alanna et al.

⁶² Submission from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁶³ Submissions from Malaysia and Fundación para la Democracia Internacional.

⁶⁴ See A/HRC/58/52/Add.1.

⁶⁵ Submissions from Colombia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Togo and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Slovenia.

⁶⁶ Submissions from Guatemala, Malaysia and the Office of the Ombudsman (Colombia).

⁶⁷ Submissions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malaysia, Frente Joven and Red Humanum.

⁶⁸ Submission from Argentina.

C. Prevention and early detection

37. In the submissions received, stakeholders pointed to the shortcomings that hindered the prevention and early detection of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Current approaches frequently prioritize responses after harm has occurred rather than investing in prevention mechanisms.⁶⁹ Professionals who come into contact with children in key areas, such as in schools or health facilities or at borders, often lack the necessary skills to detect abuse.⁷⁰ While anonymous and confidential helplines and web-based reporting portals are valuable tools for reporting abuse,⁷¹ underreporting remains a pervasive challenge across contexts as stigma, victim-blaming and cultural sensitivities continue to discourage children and families from seeking help.⁷²

38. Despite existing gaps, the Special Rapporteur received examples of promising practices from Czechia through The Child Abuse Identification (KID) Card initiative, which strengthens prevention by actively involving the general public, including children, in recognizing and reporting child abuse and providing unified, cross-ministerial procedural guidelines that equip anyone who comes into contact with children to identify the early warning signs and respond appropriately.⁷³ Another example that demonstrates how prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse can be incorporated into everyday school life is from the EDUCAR Network, which, since 2015, has implemented a child protection plan across its schools. The plan includes annual training programmes for teaching and non-teaching personnel, families and children themselves, written protocols and action mechanisms for the detection, communication and follow-up of cases, while guaranteeing confidentiality, and evaluation and continuous improvement.⁷⁴ Ensuring safe recruitment also adds an additional layer of safeguards across sectors. For example, in 2024, Lithuania launched mandatory background verification through a QR code system whereby all individuals working or volunteering in child-related activities must undergo checks every six months, ensuring parents and employers can confirm their suitability before any engagement with children.⁷⁵

D. Data and monitoring

39. As observed by previous mandate holders, the magnitude of the problem of the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children is generally unknown, owing to the unavailability of centralized and disaggregated data on the forms of the crimes and on the number of cases identified, investigated and prosecuted.⁷⁶ That gap remains critical to this day. First, data collection and analysis on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children may face severe limitations in some countries due to the clandestine nature of the crimes.⁷⁷ Underreporting due to stigma, lack of trust, fear of reprisals and cultural taboos poses an obstacle to drawing accurate conclusions from existing data.⁷⁸ Disaggregation of data, including by age, gender, disability, geographic location, the type of abuse or exploitation and the relationship between the perpetrator and the child victim is often missing,⁷⁹ which presents challenges to observe patterns and inform targeted prevention and response measures. Rapid technological developments also exacerbate data gaps. Child sexual abuse material generated by artificial intelligence and crypto-enabled exploitation have outpaced detection capabilities, while access to critical tools, such as the International

⁶⁹ Submission from Actuar es Urgente.

⁷⁰ Submissions from Montenegro, Asociación Alanna et al and Mehari Fiseha.

⁷¹ Submissions from Cyprus and Guatemala.

⁷² Submissions from Colombia, Lithuania and Malaysia.

⁷³ Submission from Czechia.

⁷⁴ Submission from the EDUCAR Network.

⁷⁵ Submission from Lithuania.

⁷⁶ See [A/75/210](#).

⁷⁷ Submissions from UNODC and the Stichting Justice Initiative.

⁷⁸ Submissions from Lithuania, Mexico, Morocco and Protect All Children from Trafficking.

⁷⁹ Submissions from Guatemala, Montenegro, ChildFund International in Indonesia, Educo and Family for Every Child.

Child Sexual Exploitation Database, remains limited.⁸⁰ It is important therefore to develop data systems that are able to respond to new and emerging forms of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.⁸¹

40. In many of the submissions, the lack of integrated and standardized data systems were highlighted as another persistent gap that renders it difficult for policymakers to design evidence-based policies.⁸² Various data, including on complaints, victims support, investigations and judicial outcomes, are scattered across different sectors, which often results in duplication, inconsistencies and loss of case traceability.⁸³ That gap is also confirmed by the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Committee) in a recent report, in which it found that, while all Parties collected some relevant data, that was generally done through existing criminal justice data collection systems, with few specialized or coordinated mechanisms, and limited integration of data from child protection, health, education or civil society actors.⁸⁴

41. On a global scale, while various tools and research initiatives exist for measuring data on child sexual exploitation and abuse exist, the proliferation of approaches (i.e. diverse definitions, methodologies, respondents and indicators) has made cross-country comparisons problematic, especially for global monitoring and reporting against the Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework. As an example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as the custodian agency for indicator 16.2.3, which measures sexual violence in childhood, flagged that the global Sustainable Development Goal database for the indicator contained only data for girls from 68 countries and for boys only from 12 countries – and the data are not fully comparable, largely due to differences in definitions used to classify acts as sexual violence and variations in implementation and data collection protocols.⁸⁵

42. The absence of disaggregated data and centralized systems is a consistent gap across all countries visited by the Special Rapporteur, who has emphasized that, without comprehensive, nationally disaggregated data on the various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, efforts to identify root causes, assess risks and design effective prevention strategies are severely hindered. Reliable data are essential for evidence-based policymaking and for monitoring the effectiveness of measures aimed at protecting children.

E. Increased vulnerabilities and new risk factors

1. Protracted and emerging conflicts

43. In 2024, 520 million children, or one in five children worldwide, lived within an active conflict zone.⁸⁶ That consistently growing number in the last three decades reflects the escalating toll of war on children.⁸⁷ Sexual violence against children, especially girls, is endemic in almost all conflict situations and is routinely used as a weapon of war.⁸⁸ In a report to the General Assembly, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict observed that rape and other forms of sexual violence had increased by 35 per cent compared with 2023, with cases of gang rape increasing dramatically.⁸⁹ However, in a context of limited and eroding legal protections, sexual violence remains chronically

⁸⁰ Submission from UNODC.

⁸¹ Submission from the Council of Europe.

⁸² Submissions from El Salvador, Malaysia, Mexico, Montenegro, Togo, the State of Palestine and the Human Rights Ombudsman of Slovenia.

⁸³ Submissions from Guatemala, Lithuania, Uzbekistan, Actuar es Urgente, Asociación Alanna et al. and the Inter-American Children's Institute.

⁸⁴ Lanzarote Committee, *Implementation Report: Data Collection Mechanisms on Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* (Strasbourg, 2025).

⁸⁵ Submission from UNICEF.

⁸⁶ Save the Children, *Stop the War on Children – Security for Whom?* (2025).

⁸⁷ See [A/HRC/60/51](#).

⁸⁸ Submissions from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, GEMTigray and the University of Global Health Equity.

⁸⁹ See [A/80/266](#).

underreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, harmful social norms, absence or lack of access to services, and impunity and safety concerns.⁹⁰ Moreover, conflicts dismantle governance structures, weaken legal systems and erode social safety nets, creating environments in which children face heightened risks of sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.⁹¹ Chronic underfunding of child protection systems and fragmented institutional frameworks exacerbate those risks, leaving children without protection and rehabilitation mechanisms.⁹² Even in a post-conflict context, children remain in highly vulnerable situations as the environments are often characterized by broken institutions, destroyed infrastructure and lingering insecurity,⁹³ hindering recovery and perpetuating exploitation.

2. Climate change and climate-related disasters

44. Children today are growing up amid increasingly frequent and extreme weather events and climate-related shocks, such as rising sea levels, floods, cyclones and typhoons, desertification, droughts, wildfires, storms and biodiversity loss. In the aftermath of disasters, families often experience worsening economic conditions, lack of employment, scarce resources, reduced security and separation from their children during a disaster, all of which increase children's vulnerability to, among others, gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking and sexual violence and exploitation.⁹⁴ For example, following a natural disaster, traffickers often exploit the resulting anxiety and desperation and offer fraudulent job opportunities to boys and girls to help their families, only to later subject them to trafficking, including sexual exploitation.⁹⁵ Addressing those risks requires integrating child protection into climate adaptation and disaster response strategies, strengthening cross-border cooperation and investing in resilient social systems. Without urgent, coordinated action, climate change will continue to amplify vulnerabilities and perpetuate cycles of exploitation for millions of children worldwide.

3. Forced displacement

45. Children fleeing conflict often face rights violations before, during and after displacement, including violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.⁹⁶ Millions of children uprooted by war lose access to education, healthcare and social protection, forcing families into survival strategies that expose children to abuse.⁹⁷ The adverse impacts of climate change and climate-related disasters also contribute to increased human mobility worldwide. From sudden disasters or slow-onset climate processes that erode livelihoods to rising sea levels rendering entire villages uninhabitable, children and families are often forced to leave their homes.⁹⁸ Between 2016 and 2021, an estimated 43.1 million children were subjected to internal displacements linked to weather-related disasters – the equivalent of approximately 20,000 child displacements a day.⁹⁹ That number is expected to grow. Overcrowded shelters for emergency or transitional housing with poor lighting and lack of privacy often become

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Submissions from Montenegro, Togo, the State of Palestine, UNICEF, Cameroon Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman (Colombia), the University of Global Health Equity and Jonathan Mbondo Mutamba.

⁹² Submissions from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights and Jonathan Mbondo Mutamba.

⁹³ Submissions from the Office of the Ombudsman (Colombia) and GEMTigray.

⁹⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 26 (2023) and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, *Violence Against Children – The Forgotten Impact of Climate Change* (Bangkok, 2025).

⁹⁵ Barnfonden, *Exploring the Link between Climate Change and Violence against Children* (Malmö, 2021).

⁹⁶ See [A/HRC/60/51](#).

⁹⁷ Submission from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.

⁹⁸ UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, *Violence Against Children*.

⁹⁹ UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Preparing for a Future Already Underway* (2023).

hotspots for trafficking and sexual exploitation, thereby further heightening children's vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁰⁰

4. Online sexual exploitation and abuse during emergencies

46. In a study exploring whether and how crises influence the hosting and sharing of child sexual abuse materials, the authors suggested that conflict-affected countries had the highest number of IP addresses linked to possession of child sexual abuse materials.¹⁰¹ During emergencies, disruptions to routines and schooling often lead to increased, unsupervised online activity among children, exposing them to content and contact risks. Online platforms are increasingly exploited for trafficking in children, with traffickers using online platforms such as social media, messaging applications and online job portals, which provide anonymity and a broad reach, to manipulate, recruit, groom and exploit victims. Under economic stress, some caregivers may also turn to harmful coping mechanisms such as going to online platforms to sexually exploit their children.¹⁰² That points to the need for more focused monitoring in emergency contexts, in which Internet accessibility and digital footprints may evolve rapidly, heightening children's risks to online sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁰³ Further research in that area is needed in order to design effective evidence-based interventions.

5. Extractive industries

47. The growing nexus between the extraction of critical minerals and the sexual exploitation of children creates increasing threats for children globally.¹⁰⁴ In response to climate change, pledges to achieve climate neutrality and ensure a just transition mark a shift away from oil and gas towards sustainable energy and have driven exponential demand for minerals that are needed for the green energy transition.¹⁰⁵ To meet the global demand for mobile phone technology, electric cars, wind turbines etc, minerals such as cobalt, nickel, lithium and other rare earth elements are in great demand and give rise to the ever-growing mining operations worldwide, including artisanal small-scale mining zones.¹⁰⁶ Mining zones are often located in remote areas, with weak law enforcement and limited social services, and attract large male-dominated workforces, fuelling high demands for sexual services.¹⁰⁷ Those create conditions in which women and children are particularly vulnerable as they are not only exploited as cheap labour in the mining sites, but also subjected to trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, domestic violence and other human rights abuses. Despite documented cases,¹⁰⁸ data remain scarce, leaving a critical gap in understanding and response.

6. Harmful sexual behaviours

48. A high percentage of child sexual abuse cases reported globally are perpetrated by children against other children, which presents complex challenges as children are

¹⁰⁰ Barnfonden, *Exploring the Link between Climate Change and Violence against Children*; and submission by GEMTigray.

¹⁰¹ Childlight Global Child Safety Institute, *Searchlight 2025: Who Benefits? Shining a Light on the Business of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse* (Edinburgh, 2025).

¹⁰² UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, *Violence Against Children*.

¹⁰³ Childlight, *Searchlight 2025*.

¹⁰⁴ Submission from Terre des Hommes Netherlands.

¹⁰⁵ Lea Kutscher, Eva Notté and Kimberley Anderson, "Child labour in the extraction of strategic raw materials: a review and risk assessment", *Green Health*, vol. 1, No. 2 (2025).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid; and André Shongo Diamba and others, "Living conditions for girls from artisanal small scale mining zones in the Democratic Republic of Congo", Medicus Mundi Switzerland.

¹⁰⁷ International Labour Organization Child Labour Platform, "Child labour in mining and global supply chains" (Geneva, 2019); and *Global Analysis on Crimes that Affect the Environment – Part 2b: Minerals Crime: Illegal Gold Mining* (United Nations publication, 2025).

¹⁰⁸ United States, Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, "The link between extractive industries and sex trafficking" (2017); and German Corporation for International Cooperation, *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Mining Sector in Africa: Evidence and Reflections from the DRC, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda* (Bonn, 2020).

simultaneously the victims and perpetrators.¹⁰⁹ Harmful sexual behaviours among children have been further complicated and escalated by the intensification of technology and the Internet, especially social media.¹¹⁰ However, data and research on that issue remain scarce, resulting in the lack of specialized prevention, intervention and response strategies to effectively address those dynamics.¹¹¹ Most interventions start too late, missing a critical early window for prevention.¹¹² The responses provided remain simplified and punitive, where children are labelled as offenders rather than recognized as children with specific protection and developmental needs.¹¹³ As a result, children experience shame, stigma, depression, anxiety and trauma, leaving them vulnerable to future victimization or further harmful behaviours.¹¹⁴ There are various drivers of harmful sexual behaviours in children, including histories of abuse and trauma, neurodivergence and cognitive impairment, mental health issues and unstable household environments – which suggests that the children have themselves experienced harm.¹¹⁵ Many contributors to the report pointed to children’s exposure to pornography as the biggest risk factor.¹¹⁶

F. Private sector accountability

49. Technology companies remain insufficiently accountable in preventing and addressing the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.¹¹⁷ Despite existing national, regional and international regulations and guidelines calling for the design and development of digital products with the highest level of privacy, safety and security for children,¹¹⁸ enforcement remains inconsistent, with limited oversight and liability frameworks.¹¹⁹ Many companies fail to implement safety by design approaches, robust age verification and algorithmic transparency.¹²⁰ Features such as private messaging, livestreaming and recommendation systems continue to facilitate grooming and dissemination of child sexual abuse materials, while encrypted environments create impunity for perpetrators. Current approaches are often reactive, addressing harm after it occurs rather than embedding proactive safeguards into platform development and governance.¹²¹ Companies should, for example, conduct child rights due diligence, which includes carrying out child rights impact assessments in relation to the digital environment and disclosing them to the public.¹²² In its analysis of 195 corporate reports from 95 companies (published between 2022 and 2024), UNICEF found that only 17 per cent of reports contained meaningful disclosures on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment.¹²³

¹⁰⁹ Submissions from Lithuania, UNICEF, Juristes pour l’enfance, and MacKillop Family Services and the University of Melbourne.

¹¹⁰ Terre des Hommes Netherlands, *Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSBs) Research Report* (The Hague, 2025).

¹¹¹ Submissions from Lithuania, UNICEF, WeProtect Global Alliance, and MacKillop Family Services and the University of Melbourne.

¹¹² Submission from WeProtect Global Alliance; and Safe Futures Hub, *Children Displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour: Evidence and Responses* (2025).

¹¹³ Submission from Terre des Hommes Netherlands; Safe Futures Hub, *Children Displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour*; and the WeProtect Global Alliance, *Global Threat Assessment*.

¹¹⁴ Submission from Terre des Hommes Netherlands.

¹¹⁵ Submission from the WeProtect Global Alliance; Terre des Hommes Netherlands, *Harmful Sexual Behaviours*; and Safe Futures Hub, *Children Displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour*.

¹¹⁶ Submissions from the European Centre for Law and Justice/Centre européen pour le droit, la justice et les droits de l’homme, Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles, Juristes pour l’enfance and We are Lovers.

¹¹⁷ Submissions from ChildFund International in Indonesia and Voice of Children Nepal.

¹¹⁸ See [General Assembly resolution 78/187](#); Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 25 (2021); and the European Union Digital Services Act (2022).

¹¹⁹ Submissions from the State of Palestine, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, the Inter-American Children’s Institute, the National Helpline for Children SOS 1056 and Mehari Fisseha.

¹²⁰ Submissions from the All India Sustainable Development Council and ECPAT Germany.

¹²¹ Submission from the Breck Foundation.

¹²² Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 25 (2021).

¹²³ Submission from UNICEF.

50. In the travel and tourism sector, limited oversight and inconsistent adoption of child protection standards leave room for exploitation and abuse.¹²⁴ Internationally, frameworks such as the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism exist,¹²⁵ but their implementation is largely voluntary.¹²⁶ Nationally, in Ecuador, for example, there exists the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in the Context of Travel and Tourism, issued by the Ministry of Tourism in 2022. Through that framework, the Ministry seeks to oblige tourism service providers to implement preventive measures, training their staff and establishing channels for reporting any suspected exploitation; as at 2024, more than 300 tourism establishments in the country had adhered to the Code of Conduct. However, monitoring still faces challenges as control mechanisms are based mainly on self-declaration of compliance.¹²⁷ The existence of informal or unregulated service providers, such as guesthouses, homestays, private apartments, transporters, guides and intermediaries, further complicates oversight.¹²⁸ Trends such as voluntourism and sharing economy platforms (i.e. home rentals and ride-sharing services) add additional layers of risk, as these businesses often operate beyond formal accountability frameworks.¹²⁹ To address those gaps, binding legal obligations must replace voluntary codes, requiring all tourism actors to adopt child protection protocols and conduct child rights impact assessments. Robust enforcement mechanisms are essential to ensure accountability and prevent impunity across both formal and informal tourism markets.

51. It is estimated that technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse represents a multi-billion-dollar industry, profiting not only the offenders but also companies whose platforms are used to disseminate child sexual abuse materials or to pay for them.¹³⁰ Financial institutions, including banks, payment processors and cryptocurrency platforms, play a pivotal role in enabling or disrupting child sexual exploitation networks.¹³¹ They are well placed to monitor and detect suspicious transactions that are indicative of exploitation and abuse.¹³² However, given the lack of child-safeguarding policies and mandatory reporting obligations, accountability remains inadequate. It is important to mandate enhanced due diligence for child sexual exploitation and abuse risks. Artificial intelligence tools could be deployed to detect patterns linked to child sexual abuse materials and trafficking.¹³³ Global protocols for information-sharing between financial institutions and law enforcement are critical to trace cross-border transactions and disrupt illicit networks. Without those measures, financial systems will continue to provide safe havens for perpetrators, undermining efforts to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse.

V. Path forward: conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

52. Over the past six years, the Special Rapporteur has observed persistent and evolving forms of the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. Online child exploitation and abuse have surged, driven by misuse of technology and emerging tools.

¹²⁴ Submissions from Fundación para la Democracia Internacional, the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Helpline for Children SOS 1056.

¹²⁵ See <https://thecode.org>.

¹²⁶ Submission from Clinique de Droit International d'Assas.

¹²⁷ Submission from the Office of the Ombudsman (Ecuador).

¹²⁸ Submissions from the Office of the Ombudsman (Colombia), Protect All Children from Trafficking and Voice of Children Nepal.

¹²⁹ Submissions from MacKillop Family Services and the University of Melbourne, and Protect All Children from Trafficking.

¹³⁰ Childlight, *Searchlight 2025*.

¹³¹ Ibid; and submission by Protect All Children from Trafficking.

¹³² Submissions from the All India Sustainable Development Council and Clinique de Droit International d'Assas.

¹³³ Submission from the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other crises have amplified children's vulnerabilities, increasing their exposure to sexual exploitation and abuse. Challenges in child protection continue to increase in industries such as travel and tourism, as well as entertainment. Some children in vulnerable situations, including boys, gender-diverse children and street-connected children, remain largely invisible in protection efforts, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and rights violations. Addressing the vulnerabilities of children within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals is essential to ensure that no child is left behind and that targeted, inclusive measures reach those most at risk.

53. Throughout her term of office, the Special Rapporteur has advanced global efforts to combat the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. Among others, the Special Rapporteur has promoted child-sensitive terminology, guided States in legislative reforms and child-centred policy designs and amplified the voices of children and young people. The practical tools developed have supported States in translating commitments into action, while advocacy initiatives have spotlighted invisible victims and strengthened inclusive protection.

54. Children continue to face growing risks due to rapidly evolving digital threats and intersecting global crises. Technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse have intensified, with offenders increasingly exploiting technology for rapid dissemination and evading accountability. Conflicts and climate-related disasters continue to create conditions conducive to child sexual exploitation and abuse. Growing extractive industries further heighten children's vulnerabilities. Harmful sexual behaviours among children add another layer of concern.

55. Despite progress in relation to legal frameworks, fragmented implementation remains a major barrier. The lack of harmonized legislation, standardized protocols, intersectoral collaboration and technical capacity result in inconsistent approaches. Prevention and early detection of child sexual exploitation and abuse remain weak, as systems often act only after harm occurs and many professionals lack the skills to identify abuse. Data gaps persist globally, with underreporting and lack of national centralized systems hindering evidence-based policymaking. Private sector accountability is another critical gap. Monitoring and enforcement remain weak without clear compliance mechanisms, leaving prevention and response largely dependent on commercial choices rather than binding obligations.

56. As the mandate enters a new chapter, the incoming Special Rapporteur should build on those foundations with renewed urgency. Closing implementation gaps, strengthening accountability across all sectors and prioritizing children in the most vulnerable situations are imperative.

B. Recommendations

57. The Special Rapporteur urges States to accelerate efforts towards eradicating the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including by:

(a) Ratifying and ensuring full compliance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation for Combating Certain Crimes Committed by Means of Information and Communications Technology Systems and for the Sharing of Evidence in Electronic Form of Serious Crimes and other relevant instruments;

(b) Continuing collaboration with and strengthening the mandate of the Special Rapporteur in order to ensure proper monitoring and follow-up to the recommendations, including the possibility of providing the necessary technical assistance if requested;

(c) Harmonizing legislation and policies on both offline and online child sexual exploitation and abuse, while ensuring the use of child-sensitive terminology, as

well as technology-neutral and forward-looking provisions adaptable to emerging technologies;

(d) Establishing and implementing cross-sector coordination mechanisms at the federal, state and territory levels where relevant, to facilitate real-time information-sharing and coordination and with clear mandates on child-centred and trauma-informed approaches;

(e) Investing in digital forensic capacity and tools to detect and disrupt technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse;

(f) Strengthening prevention systems, including community- and school-based prevention models, and promoting early identification of child sexual exploitation and abuse through accessible, child-friendly reporting and public engagement tools;

(g) Conducting regular capacity-building of professionals who come into contact with children on child protection, including effective detection of abuse and response mechanisms;

(h) Creating an integrated database on different forms of sexual exploitation and abuse and exploitation of children, with a focus on children in situations of vulnerability, and improving disaggregated data collection;

(i) Conducting meaningful efforts to tackle the impunity of the perpetrators of the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, both online and offline, in all contexts, including in crisis situations;

(j) Incorporating age-appropriate digital literacy as a compulsory subject for all children in all schools across the country;

(k) Implementing awareness-raising programmes on child online safety for caregivers and educators;

(l) Embedding child protection in emergency preparedness plans and responses, such as national climate adaptation policies and disaster risk reduction strategies, and including specific provisions on early warning and monitoring systems to identify, prevent and respond to risks of child sexual exploitation and abuse, harmful practices and child marriage in crisis situations;

(m) Building resilient and shock-responsive social protection systems to reduce the reliance of families on risky coping mechanisms that may expose children to sexual exploitation and abuse;

(n) Allocating sufficient resources to child protection systems and programmes, ensuring that they remain one of the priorities during crisis situations;

(o) Conducting comprehensive research on the prevalence, scope and various manifestations of the phenomena, including threats to children in the digital environment during emergencies, in the extractive industries and harmful sexual behaviours among children, as well as emerging threats, with a view to informing evidence-based, targeted preventive and response strategies;

(p) Integrating prevention and response to harmful sexual behaviours into national child protection policies, ensuring that they are child-centred, gender-responsive and trauma-informed rather than punitive;

(q) Mandating the private sector to conduct mandatory child rights impact assessments and due diligence, ensuring that the rights and best interests of children are a key consideration when designing and delivering their products and services, including by implementing child safety testing, monitoring their compliance with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and general comment No. 25 (2021) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and introducing enforcement mechanisms and proportionate penalties to those failing to comply;

(r) Collaborating with international partners to develop cross-border information-sharing protocols between financial institutions, financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies to trace transactions and disrupt illicit networks;

(s) Galvanizing international solidarity and sustaining advocacy to protect marginalized groups of children by recognizing 12 April as the International Day for Street Children and 16 April as Blue Umbrella Day for the protection of boys from sexual violence.
