

Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence Against Children by 2030



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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Youth leaders stand in a circle, holding hands, to symbolize the slogan ‘We can do it together’, at a child care centre run by Precious Jewels Ministry, a local NGO that supports AIDS-affected children in Manila, the capital. Youth leaders are themselves affected by AIDS.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------------------|---|
| ABK | Pag-Aaral ng Bata para sa Kinabukasa (Children’s Education for the Future) |
| ACERWC | African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child |
| ACPF | African Child Policy Forum |
| ACWC | ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children |
| AMS | ASEAN Member States |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| AU | African Union |
| CAHENF | Ad Hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child |
| CARICOM | Caribbean Community |
| CBSS | Council of the Baltic Sea States |
| CDC | United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CSO | Civil Society Organizations |
| CSO Forum | Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children |
| DHS | Demographic Health Surveys |
| EAC | East African Community |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| ENOC | European Network of Ombudspersons for Children |
| ENYA | European Network of Young Advisors |
| FGM/C | Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GSHS | Global School-based Student Health Surveys |
| HBSC | Health Behaviour in School-aged Children |
| HLPF | High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development |
| ICTs | Information and Communication Technologies |
| IIN-OAS | Inter-American Children’s Institute of the Organization of American States |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| INEB | International Network of Engaged Buddhists |
| IPPDH | Institute of Public Policies in Human Rights of MERCOSUR |



| | |
|----------------|---|
| IPV | Intimate Partner Violence |
| LGBTI | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex |
| LGBTQI | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys |
| MMI-LAC | Movimiento Mundial por la Infancia de Latinoamérica y el Caribe (Global Movement for Children in Latin America and the Caribbean) |
| MNR | Model National Response |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organization |
| OAS | Organization of American States |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OPSC | Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography |
| PACE | Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe |
| PIRLS | Progress in International Reading Literacy Study |
| PKH | Program Keluarga Harapan (Family Hope Program) |
| SAIEVAC | South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SECTT | Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism |
| SICA | Central American Integration System |
| SOMSVD | Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNWTO | United Nations World Tourism Organization |
| VACS | Violence against Children Surveys |
| VNR | Voluntary National Review |
| VPA | Violence Prevention Alliance |
| VRU | Violence Reduction Unit |
| WHO | World Health Organization |



Foreword by the United Nations Secretary-General

Over the years, I have been haunted by my many encounters with children scarred by unspeakable acts of violence, enduring traumatic experiences of neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation, and often also stigmatized by their own communities. But I have also been inspired by their courage and resilience in recovery as they set about rebuilding their lives.

Violence against children is a silent emergency that must end. And zero tolerance for violence against children is a priority that I am committed to pursue. It is high time to change the continuum of violence that shapes children's lives to a continuum of protection of their human rights.

The transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gives us a pathway. It foresees a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from fear and from violence. The 2030 Agenda applies to every country, rich or poor, and requires that no one be left behind.

When it comes to children, however, we must go even further. If we are to guarantee that no child is left behind, we must put children first! If we want just, cohesive and peaceful societies, we must tackle the violence that threatens children's lives and compromises the enjoyment of their rights. By ending violence against children, we invest in our collective future. As this report emphasizes, we can transform the vision of the 2030 Agenda into reality if we match our ambition for a world free of violence with concrete action to safeguard the protection, development and wellbeing of children.

Sceptics may claim that ending violence against children is an unreachable goal, but this report shows it is within our grasp. Sound evidence and experience from around the world tell us what works, from strategic alliances and engaged social mobilization to strong legislative and policy frameworks and close partnerships with children themselves. Our task ahead is to take this to scale, backed by the necessary resources and a genuine commitment to prevent – not only respond to – the violence inflicted on children.

We do not claim that this will be easy. It means changing attitudes, reforming laws, policies and approaches and replacing pessimism with hope and determination. Equally, we are not naïve: this report does not shy away from the grim toll of violence children suffer at home, at school, within institutions and across communities, or the risks posed by persistent, new and emerging threats, including online abuse. But it also shows what can be achieved when the political will is there and when people come together to put children first.

The publication of this report could not be timelier as we mark the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. The Convention transformed the way we view children: as citizens of today and agents of change, rather than passive recipients of services. The Convention made a promise to every child of a life free from violence.

This report aims to help us keep that promise to children. It documents what has been achieved to date through collective action, reminds us of the prevalence and nature of violence, sets out the evidence on solutions, and charts a course for accelerated progress.

Violence against children is widespread and pervasive but is not inevitable! By placing children at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, and at the centre of all we do, we can realize its noble vision of a world free from fear and violence for all.

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations



Preface by the Special Representative

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has an ambitious vision: to build a world free from fear and from violence for each and every child. 2019 is a milestone year for this ambition. It marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and will see the first comprehensive review by the United Nations General Assembly of progress towards the strategic goals of the 2030 Agenda.

The Convention made a solemn promise to children by enshrining their right to reach their full potential, free from violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse. We can keep that promise through the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Children are telling us loudly and clearly that they dream of a world of peace and non-violence, a world where they can grow up happy, cherished, supported, safe, confident and empowered, and where no child is left behind. By achieving the 2030 Agenda, we can make their dream a reality.

The 2030 Agenda builds on a crucial lesson: development progress falters when violence is widespread. Given its impact on every aspect of development, the 2030 Agenda treats violence against children as a cross-cutting concern. And to support and consolidate progress, it includes a distinct target (Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2) which calls for the elimination of every form of violence against children. This is a historic breakthrough and provides unique momentum for an unstoppable movement to bring such violence to an end.

We must move ahead with a far greater sense of urgency. Every year, millions of children endure appalling levels of violence in their neighbourhoods, in schools, in institutions for their care and protection, online and within their homes. The cost for victims, families and entire societies is immense.

Violence often starts in early childhood and, as children grow, it becomes part of a grim continuum, with their lives engulfed by fear, pain and insecurity that undermine their health, education, development and wellbeing. Too frightened to speak up, uncertain they will be heard, lacking the information they need to get help, and falling through the cracks of protective services, they miss out on the support to which they are entitled for their healing, recovery and reintegration.

This report gathers expert analysis from a broad cross-section of stakeholders who are committed to bringing this unacceptable situation to an end. It draws out common findings and perspectives that demonstrate increasing cohesion in the action taken across regions to end violence against children. It shows how people the world over are stepping up to prevent and respond to violence and to protect children from its impact.

As this report demonstrates, success breeds success and there has been real momentum since the 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda. We see progress in stronger legal and policy frameworks, in better data and solid evidence, in greater coherence amongst actors, and in more effective measures to strengthen the protective environment around children. This momentum is spurred by growing partnerships and coalitions, including with the most important allies of all: children themselves.

Accelerated momentum is also fuelled by a shift in attitudes from complacency to optimism. There is a mounting consensus that violence against children is intolerable and can never be justified, and a growing body of evidence shows us how it can become consigned to the past.

There is no room for complacency: violence against children remains hidden and pervasive and new threats are constantly emerging. But violence is not inevitable, and the progress made to date provides powerful motivation to redouble efforts to secure children's protection, anywhere and everywhere. We know what works, and we know the unacceptable toll of violence to children, families and communities, as well as to the economy, human capital formation and the security of nations.



This report asks a key question: if the costs of inaction are so high and the solutions are known, why does violence against children continue to take place? What must we do to move better, faster and further in our urgent quest to bring it to an end?

We hope that this report, by recognising progress made, demonstrating what is needed and highlighting what can be done, will chart a course for accelerated action and for an ever-growing movement to end the scourge of violence. Children deserve no less! And they stand ready to join as active partners and genuine agents of change.

Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children



Executive Summary



Background

The stars are in alignment to end violence against children. We have the opportunity offered by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its vision of a world free from violence. We have the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a set of specific targets to turn that vision into a reality. We have SDG Target 16.2, which pledges to end violence against children by 2030. We have the 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), with its review of progress towards Target 16.2. We have a solemn commitment from the 196 states that ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to safeguard the right of every child to protection from all forms of violence. And we have momentum, as outlined in this report by the “Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children”.

This momentum builds on the ethical framework of the CRC, adopted by the United Nations 30 years ago. It is fuelled by shifting attitudes, with a widely shared consensus that violence against children is intolerable, and growing confidence – based on robust evidence – that it is not inevitable and can be prevented. It is seen in new laws and policies, new initiatives, new evidence and new partnership – with children increasingly taking the lead.

There is, however, no room for complacency: every five minutes, somewhere on our planet, violence takes the life of another child. The violence that children face remains pervasive, and new risks are constantly emerging to put them in danger.

We know that no child is ‘immune’ to violence, and that every child is vulnerable. The report outlines a number of key risk factors, including discrimination, poverty, disability and gender, with girls affected disproportionately by certain forms of violence, boys affected more than we once thought, and both unlikely to report the violence they experience.

We know that violence breeds violence, with children experiencing it in many forms across many contexts, and often carrying their experiences into adulthood where violence may be passed down as a grim

The toll of violence against children

1. Every year, at least 1 billion children – half of the world’s children – experience violence.
2. Three in every four children under the age of 5 experience violent discipline at the hands of caregivers.
3. Almost one-third of school students have been bullied by their peers at least once in the past month.
4. Children now account for 30 per cent of those who are trafficked, with the sexual exploitation of victims being the main driver of human trafficking.
5. Children with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than other children, while children from other disadvantaged groups also face disproportionately high levels of violence.
6. Refugee and migrant children often find that violence is a constant companion: driving them from their home countries, accompanying them on their journey, and waiting for them at their destination.

Sources: 1, 5 and 6: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/40/50, 2019
 2: UNICEF, Contribution to the Global Thematic Report on Ending Violence against Children
 3: UNESCO, *Behind the Numbers: Ending school violence and bullying*, 2019
 4: Scotti, ‘Rising human trafficking takes on “horrible dimensions”’: almost a third of victims are children’, UN News, January 2019.

legacy to their own children. Yet, as this report also shows, we also know that success breeds success: an incentive to redouble efforts on ending violence against children, anywhere and everywhere.



The report builds on the ground-breaking 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children, (the United Nations Study) and on 10 years of the implementation of its recommendations promoted by the mandate of the Special Representative. It also draws on expert contributions from a range of organizations, to reveal a new clarity of vision. These diverse sources yield markedly similar conclusions on the ingredients for success across five key areas.

1. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks
2. Reinforcing the protective shield around children
3. More and better data and research
4. Widening partnership: building the global movement to end violence against children
5. Amplifying the voice of children.

All five areas require massive additional investment from multiple sources. Governments have a lead responsibility, including in the allocation of all available resources to their maximum extent, in ensuring child-centred budgets and investments in legal and child protection systems and in strengthening data and evidence on violence against children.

Strengthening legal and policy frameworks

There have been advances in the legislative and policy landscape over the past decade at international, regional and national levels. At the international level, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, in particular, have provided an overarching impetus for action, building on the implementation of the CRC, its Optional Protocols, the implementation of the United Nations Study, and a range of other international standards that aim to prohibit violence. We have seen particularly rapid progress at regional level, with new inter-governmental policy frameworks on violence against children now spanning Africa and the Middle East, the Americas and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe.

At national level, almost 100 countries now have comprehensive policies in place to prevent and respond to violence against children, and around 60 countries have comprehensive legislation to ban violence against children in all its forms, everywhere, including at home and in schools. There has also been progress on ending female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, with a growing number of countries adopting legal and policy frameworks to outlaw these harmful practices. The work of the African Union (AU) is notable here, with its campaign to end child marriage having a clear impact on legislation and policy across the continent.

Challenges: Implementation and enforcement

Laws and policies are only as good as their implementation and enforcement, and there are clear concerns about a governance gap that must be narrowed – and can be narrowed – if we combine political will with adequate resourcing. The challenge is to ensure that policies on paper gain traction for children in reality.

Reinforcing the protective shield around children

Violence against children demands sustained and coordinated action across every sector, from child protection to justice for children, and from education and health to social protection. Growing evidence on what works for children and families is informing a welcome shift away from ad-hoc pilot projects and one-off schemes towards more comprehensive and multi-sectoral initiatives to strengthen entire systems so that they can prevent violence against children and respond to it effectively. This is one of many areas where there are clear linkages from SDG Target 16.2 to other goals, including SDG 5 on gender equality, with violence against children often framed by gendered norms and attitudes.



A systems approach recognizes both the interconnectedness of children's rights and the complex, multi-dimensional causes and consequences of violence. Rather than isolated schemes that work in isolation to respond to violence, more effective initiatives include 'one-stop' approaches where multi-sectoral teams provide tailored support to children and families not only to respond to violence, but to prevent it.

Child protection systems

Child protection services play a critical role in supporting children affected by violence, but also in violence prevention. But, to be effective, child protection services need to be well-resourced and supported as a priority in the policy agenda. Here, the report stresses the need for child-sensitive counselling, reporting and referral services that are accessible to all children, and it flags up the need for child protection systems that reach every part of every country. The report adds a note of caution, however: countries that strengthen their child protection services must be well-prepared for a surge in reporting and referrals. In Serbia, for example, improved national reporting and referral systems – a key element of the national child protection system development strategy since 2011 – led to a 92 per cent increase in reported cases of violence against children by 2015.

Justice for children

Child-friendly justice systems are essential to prevent and respond to violence, to protect child victims and witnesses, to end impunity and to hold offenders to account. The report highlights the Barnahus model, an idea that originated in Iceland in 1998, that has travelled extensively. This model provides multidisciplinary and interagency support to children who are victims or witnesses of violence, with criminal investigations taking place in parallel with child protection interventions. Measures to uphold justice are particularly important for children held in detention, who are severely vulnerable to violent and degrading treatment throughout the criminal justice process. It is vital to prevent deprivation of liberty and to

provide non-custodial alternatives for children's care, support and reintegration.

Education systems

Education systems are well-placed to address violence against children. Indeed, SDG 4 on a quality and inclusive education for all envisages schools that are safe and supportive, and that help to build peaceful societies. Yet schools too are places where children endure violence. They may be vulnerable to violence on the way to and from school, at the hands of their teachers and from their peers, and they may be victims of attacks against their own schools.

Worldwide, most reported cases of bullying happen at school, with children who are somehow perceived as 'different' among the most vulnerable. To this end, the Special Representative has supported the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN Women in the development of a one-stop guide to tackle gender-based violence in schools and lesson plans to address homophobic bullying.

Schools can also be catalysts for wider efforts to address violence. In Kyrgyzstan and Serbia, the School without Violence programme has been effective in raising awareness of this issue among teachers. In Jordan, the Ma'An (Together) Towards a Safe School Environment programme has helped to reduce corporal punishment in schools. In Central America, the schools-based Intergenerational Network of Multiplier Agents for the Safe Use of the Internet (RIAMUSI) brings children, parents, teachers and others together to help children learn to protect themselves from online abuse.

Ensuring access to education also reduces child labour and child marriage, with their attendant risks of violence and abuse. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, Plan India has brought thousands of former child labourers back into education through learning centres established in 80 villages.



Health systems

Health services play a key role in preventing and responding to violence against children. Health workers tend to have regular contact with families – particularly those with young children – and initiatives in a range of countries, from Kazakhstan to South Africa, are capitalizing on that fact. In the United States of America, for example, regular contact between low-income, first-time mothers and nurses from the Nurse Family Partnership has been found to reduce the number of trips to the emergency room during a child's first two years of life.

Social protection

While no child – rich or poor – is immune to violence, poverty reduction measures provide a bulwark against the stresses that can be a risk factor for violence. The most effective measures start with children. The report cites, for example, reforms in Indonesia that have integrated the distribution of several non-cash assistance and subsidy programmes into the banking system, and the expansion of the coverage of the Family Hope Program to reach 6 million poor families.

Raising awareness and challenging norms

Awareness of violence against children and its serious impact on children's development and well-being is essential to create demand for its end. Efforts to strengthen systems are enhanced through initiatives such as the #ENDviolence campaign by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which has stimulated debate and action in more than 100 countries to date. And a wide range of international agencies have developed and endorsed the evidence-based package INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children to help countries and communities achieve SDG Target 16.2.

Priority approaches for children on the move

Efforts are underway to reinforce children's rights to protection when they are on the move, including progress on ensuring the appointment of a guardian and ending the detention that heightens the risk of abuse and exploitation of refugee and migrant children. For example, most of the 20 countries participating in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Beyond Detention Strategy, 2014-19, have improved their legal and policy frameworks, and the detention of refugee and migrant children is now prohibited by law in Lithuania, Malta, Mexico and the United Kingdom. Elsewhere, the numbers of children in detention have fallen since the launch of the Strategy.

Challenges: The resource and capacity gap

There are gaps between the best intentions of many initiatives and the resources – human and financial – that they need. Child protection systems, in particular, remain weak in many countries, lacking enough skilled social workers to do the job. New guidelines from UNICEF set out how to strengthen the planning, development and support for social service workforces.

More and better data and research

To solve a problem, you need to understand it. To put it simply, children who are not counted do not count in the policies and initiatives intended to support them. Monitoring progress towards the SDGs – including Target 16.2 – demands more and better data, and there is indeed a growing body of evidence on violence against children.

'Big picture' data initiatives

Major data initiatives, such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) have vastly increased our knowledge on the scale and nature of violence against children in recent years. To date, VACS have generated comprehensive and reliable data for more than 10 per cent of the world's population under the age of 25.



Greater knowledge on the impact of violence on child development and well-being

The more we learn, the more daunting the challenges may appear. There are, for example, grim findings on the life-long damage caused by violence during early childhood, and the increasing severity and scale of online sexual exploitation of children. However, greater knowledge on the damage caused by violence reinforces a core argument: that no level of violence is 'harmless'. Information is power, and an understanding of the challenges aids efforts to overcome them.

Greater knowledge on once neglected areas

There is also a growing evidence base on issues that were once poorly understood, including bullying and school violence, child marriage, online sexual exploitation of children and violence against boys. For example, the United Nations Secretary-General has published two reports on bullying, while UNESCO has launched two global status reports on school violence, including bullying. One key success of the major campaign by the AU on child marriage has been the consolidation of evidence to support initiatives to prevent and tackle this rights violation.

The *Global Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism*, published by ECPAT International and its partners in 2016, has galvanized action, including the transformation of the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) voluntary code on this issue into an international convention. Even the limited data we have on the sexual exploitation of boys tell us that this is a bigger problem than we once thought.

Challenges: The need to narrow data gaps

The report emphasizes the need to narrow the data gaps that hamper efforts to end violence against children. As far back as 2006, the United Nations Study was calling for priority attention to this issue. This call was reinforced by the 2013 Global Survey on Violence against Children, which confirmed that information was scarce and fragmented. And despite the progress made, the picture remains sketchy today.

The data gaps include a lack of information on violence against children on the move, the sexual exploitation of boys, and beliefs linked to 'witchcraft' and other superstitions that endanger the lives of children, particularly those with albinism. The investment case for more evidence – and its effective use to end violence against children – must be made more powerfully.

Widening partnership: Building the global movement to end violence against children

No individual, community, organization or sector working alone can end violence against children. As recognized in SDG 17, partnership is crucial to deliver the 2030 Agenda. The past years have been marked by a growing global movement on violence against children, mobilizing the United Nations, civil society, the private sector, faith-based organizations and more.

Global and regional partnership

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda gave new impetus to this process. Many partners at global and regional level have come together to strengthen protection of children from violence, as seen, for example, in the work of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children; Alliance 8.7; the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; the Task Force on Justice; and the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Global Partnership, launched in 2016, has attracted growing attention from Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society and faith-based organizations. It works with Pathfinder countries worldwide to accelerate progress towards Target 16.2, with the number of such countries almost doubling in 2018 from 13 to 23.

Alliance 8.7 is a global partnership committed to achieving SDG Target 8.7, which aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. The Global Task Force on Justice, meanwhile, brings policymakers,



justice leaders and experts together to ensure access to justice for all, including children, and to foster societies that prevent and tackle violence, in line with SDG Target 16.2.

Together for Girls convenes governments, United Nations entities and the private sector to mobilize action, including the implementation of studies on violence against children.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role worldwide in shaping policies and opinions. Many have joined the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children (CSO Forum), which ensures a strong and coherent voice for CSOs on this issue at global level.

The WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online brings together national governments, global technology giants, major international organizations and leading CSOs and has been instrumental in the Model National Response (MNR) on this form of exploitation, which is being rolled out in a number of countries. The Global Alliance also illustrates the crucial role played by the private sector in preventing and addressing the risks of online violence for children.

Private sector partnership

The potential of the private sector to contribute to the SDGs is recognized by the United Nations Global Compact launched in 2000 and now the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, with more than 13,500 corporate participants. Developed by the Global Compact, Save the Children and UNICEF, the *Children's Rights and Business Principles* guide companies on respect and support for child rights, including the requirement to report concerns about exploitation or abuse.

The industry Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (known as 'The Code') aims to mobilize the tourism industry to recognize, prevent and respond to such exploitation. As of March 2019, the Code had 325 member companies across 150 countries, with around 960,000 trained staff.

Faith-based organizations

With most of the world's population – around 5 billion people – belonging to religious communities, faith-based organizations are in a unique position to champion children's rights, asserting their moral authority to make a difference. In 2006, religious communities adopted the Kyoto Declaration in response to the recommendations of the United Nations Study. In 2017, religious and spiritual leaders adopted the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence against Children. And in 2018, religious leaders from many faiths gathered in Abu Dhabi to learn more about the risks that children face in cyberspace.

The World Council of Churches and UNICEF have issued the Churches' Commitments for Children to stimulate and strengthen action with and for children and to promote collaborative efforts to improve children's lives. The Commitments aim to ensure child-safe church environments and speed the end of violence against children and adolescents across society. Religions for Peace (RfP) and ECPAT International have published guidelines for religious leaders and communities on how they can protect children from online sexual exploitation.

The abuse of children within religious institutions over the years has caused untold damage to children and has eroded public trust. The 2019 Vatican Summit on the Protection of Minors placed these concerns at the centre of the church's agenda. Since the Summit, the Vatican has introduced measures and regulations to protect children and end impunity for offenders.

Challenges: The need to mobilize at scale

Violence against children is everybody's business, and everybody can play a role in bringing about its end. The report calls for the further expansion and acceleration of the existing global movement to end violence against children, with every government, individual, organization, company and religious community joining this cause.





Amplifying the voice of children

The participation of children matters profoundly: efforts to tackle violence against them are more likely to succeed when informed by their views. Their role in the debate on violence has evolved over the years, from observing initiatives from the side-lines to setting their own agenda.

This evolution began with the CRC, which changed the way children were viewed: *“as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity”*. It continued with the 2006 United Nations Study (the first United Nations report developed with the active participation of children across different regions) and the 2009 adoption of General Comment No. 12 on the Right of the Child to be Heard by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Children are now seen as key players, with the 2018 Day of Discussion by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, for example, focusing on their role as human rights defenders.

What are children saying?

The most compelling motivation to end violence against children is that they are telling us that they want it to stop. Violence topped the list of concerns for 800,000 children who took part in consultations in the lead-up to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It was top of the list for 170,000 children and young people surveyed online on their views on refugee and migrant children by the Special Representative and UNICEF, and for more than 100,000 young people worldwide polled on bullying, with the resulting U-Report initiative finding that two-thirds had been victims of bullying.

Challenges: Supporting children as they take the lead

Many children are no longer waiting for adults to invite them to participate. They are increasingly setting their own agendas, as seen in the school strikes to highlight climate change, which started with one Swedish teenager in August 2018 and have since spread worldwide. Children and young people who have survived violence have also taken the lead, such as the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting

A snapshot of child participation initiatives

- **#StandTogether Malaysia**, a national campaign promoted by the Government of Malaysia, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector, extols kindness as a way to tackle bullying in schools. Within the first week, students submitted more than 130 projects and 750 schools had taken steps to promote greater kindness.
- **#KnotSoYoung in India** aims to prevent child marriage, mobilizing thousands of children and adolescents and creating a network of youth leaders. The emphasis is on girls' education and awareness of their own rights. As a result, 10 villages have declared themselves free of child marriage.
- **'Rise up for Girls' in Guatemala and Malawi** involves girls at every stage to tackle child marriage. In Guatemala, they have created a national violence observatory to report cases of violence against girls and women, with more than 700 girls referred to date. In Malawi, more than 10,000 girls supported the push to increase the legal age of marriage to 18, triggering a change in the Constitution.

Source: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, A/HRC/40/50, 2019.

in Parkland, Florida, who were instrumental in creating the 'Never Again' movement.

Outspoken children and adolescents have attracted massive support, but they have also faced suspicion and hostility. Adults working to end violence against children need to ensure that these children have opportunities to speak out safely and that their rights are safeguarded.



Next steps: Joined-up action against a joined-up threat

This milestone year, which marks 30 years of the CRC, the first review by the United Nations General Assembly of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and 10 years of the mandate of the Special Representative, is an ideal moment to highlight progress on violence against children and its continuing toll. There is a growing realization that violence against children threatens the achievement of all the SDGs, from poverty reduction to a quality education for all, and from ending hunger and social exclusion to the creation of peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

There is also a deeper understanding of how damaged childhoods translate into damaged families, communities, societies and nations. While there is some debate on the scale of the financial cost to economies, one thing is clear: the price of preventing violence against children is microscopic when set alongside the vast sums currently being lost by entire nations in wasted human and social capital. The report concludes that we cannot build the societies envisaged by the 2030 Agenda without ending the violence that threatens the lives and prospects of children.

Violence against children is not a single issue with a single solution. It is a joined-up threat that demands joined-up action. This requires a dynamic process that starts with strong laws and policies, backed by effective and progressive implementation, comprehensive approaches and robust evaluation. It must be collective – driven by partnership across regions, sectors and systems – and must be informed by the voices of children.

The report is blunt about the scale of the challenges ahead. Policies on paper still need traction in reality. Effective initiatives need expansion to reach all children at risk, especially those left furthest behind. We need to know far more about the challenges and solutions. We need stronger partnerships, especially with children – because what works, works better when they are part of the solution.

The report, promoted by the Special Representative, demonstrates that there is no reason to be fatalistic about the prospects of ending violence against children. Where this issue is prioritized and people work together, we see progress. The task ahead is to take what works to scale, backed by the necessary resources and a genuine commitment to prevent – not only to respond to – the violence inflicted on children worldwide.



1

Introduction



We believe that impunity cannot continue, and we must promote a strong Rule of Law.

For this reason, we understand that it is urgent to take actions so that children and adolescents do not continue to be harmed.”

Declaration of Adolescents,
First regional dialogue in Latin America
and the Caribbean¹

A global promise has been made to the world’s children: the violence they face will be brought to an end by the year 2030. This binding promise has emerged from a decades-long process that has reshaped the way in which we view children and, in turn, the way we are expected to treat them. This process has gained much-needed momentum in recent years as countries pursue implementation efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report draws on three decades of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),² as well as 10 years of the implementation of the 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children³ promoted by the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (the Special Representative). It builds on efforts to address emerging areas of concern and to identify what works to tackle this violence. It captures expert analysis and commentary from a range of organizations to reveal a new clarity of vision.

The report outlines positive change in global efforts to ensure that children are protected from violence. It covers five key areas: laws and policies; initiatives and interventions; data and research; partnership; and – crucially – the voice

of children. By highlighting what works, it makes a positive case for accelerated momentum to tackle violence. And by setting out the continuing toll of violence – as well as emerging threats to children – it accentuates the urgent need for action.

Background

Three decades ago, the United Nations adopted the CRC, the most ratified human rights treaty in history. This landmark treaty generated a paradigm shift in our perception of childhood. Far from being the passive recipients of care and support offered by adults, children were now seen as having fundamental and inherent rights that must be honoured everywhere and at all times – including the right to protection from violence.

The past 30 years have seen concerted efforts to uphold children’s rights, including through the adoption of three Optional Protocols to the CRC⁴ and a rich process of national implementation of measures to safeguard child rights across nations. This process was reinforced by the ground-breaking 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children.⁵ The Study, with its 12 overarching recommendations (see Box 1), remains a crucial benchmark for measuring progress on this issue and continues to inform efforts to address violence the world over.

“Children are intentionally targeted in politically driven processes, manipulated by organized crime, forced to flee armed and gang violence, sold and exploited for economic gain, groomed online, disciplined by violent means, sexually assaulted in the privacy of their homes, neglected in institutions, abused in detention centres, bullied in schools and in sports facilities, and stigmatized and tortured due to superstitious beliefs of harmful practices, including as a result of witchcraft accusations.”⁶

The Special Representative
of the Secretary-General on
Violence against Children



Box 1: Overarching recommendations from the 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children

1. Strengthen national and local commitment and action
2. Prohibit by law all violence against children
3. Prioritize prevention
4. Promote non-violent values and awareness-raising
5. Enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children
6. Provide recovery and social reintegration services for child victims
7. Ensure participation of children
8. Create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services
9. Ensure accountability and end impunity
10. Address the gender dimension of violence against children
11. Develop and strengthen national data and research
12. Strengthen international commitment.

Source: Pinheiro, United Nations Study, A/61/299, August 2006.

“The mandate for action on violence against children is firmly in place and is gaining momentum worldwide”

In 2015, the community of nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁷ which demands a world free from fear and violence. The 2030 Agenda includes a distinct Target (SDG 16.2) that pledges to: end abuse, exploitation, *trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children* by 2030.⁸

The mandate for action on violence against children is firmly in place and is gaining momentum worldwide. As this report shows, new international standards have been adopted, critical laws and policies are in place, strategic partnerships have been formed and campaigns are raising awareness on both the impact of violence on children and the need to invest in prevention. Initiatives are springing up to tackle specific forms of violence, including bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence, online violence and other harmful

practices such as child marriage.⁹ The challenge is to ensure that this momentum accelerates to speed the end of the crisis of violence against children.

The toll of violence against children

A lifelong concern, an intergenerational legacy

Despite the positive developments seen in recent years, the urgent need to protect children from violence has not diminished. No country or region is ‘immune’ to violence against children. Every five minutes, somewhere on our planet, violence takes the life of another child. Every year, at least 1 billion children – half of the world’s children – suffer violence.

We know that every child is vulnerable to violence. The report, however, outlines a number of key risk factors, including discrimination, poverty, disability and gender, with girls affected disproportionately by certain forms of violence, boys affected more than we once thought, and both genders unlikely to report the violence they experience.



“Every five minutes, somewhere on our planet, violence takes the life of another child”

The violence children endure is cumulative and interlinked, often spanning their home life, their school, their community and their online world, and children are rarely affected by one form of violence alone. Any child subjected to violence in any of these settings is likely to experience violence in any or all of the others.¹⁰

Studies show that children exposed to violence at an early age are more likely to be victims of violence later in life and become perpetrators, using violence against their partners and children; as well as being more likely to engage in criminal behaviour.

As children grow up, the cumulative impact of violence casts a shadow over every part of their lives and is often passed on to their own children – a grim legacy that may persist for generations.¹¹ The end result is often the perpetuation of a vicious, intergenerational cycle of violence,¹² with violence breeding more violence. We are also learning more about the close links between violence against children, against women, and domestic violence, which are mutually reinforcing.¹³

Violence in early childhood

The harm caused by exposure to violence in early childhood is often irreversible, damaging the development of the brain, compromising children’s physical and mental health and, in serious cases, leading to disability and death.

Children’s exposure to violence often starts in early childhood. According to UNICEF, shouting, yelling and screaming are common forms of discipline for one-year-olds. Close to 300 million children aged 2–4 years experience psychological aggression or physical punishment at home, and 176 million children under 5 years of age live with a mother who has been a recent victim of domestic violence.¹⁴

We know that the violence experienced in childhood rarely ends there. As highlighted in Section 4, an expanding body of research on neuroscience confirms the severe harm caused by stress in early childhood – including exposure to violence.¹⁵

Violence at school

As children grow, bullying and other forms of violence in and around schools may endanger their education, health and their capacity to develop open and trusting relationships. Even school pupils who are not the direct victims of violence will be affected by an atmosphere that undermines their learning and their sense of safety.¹⁶ Children may be affected by many forms of violence, including corporal punishment in the classroom, demands from teachers for sex in return for grades, bullying, sexual violence by peers, targeted attacks on schools and even abductions from schools in some parts of the world.

We know that children’s performance at school may suffer as a result of psychological distress and that it may lead children to stay away from school completely. The impact depends on the character and circumstances of the victim, the type of bullying or other violence they experience and the degree to which it violates their integrity and dignity. But victims commonly experience fear, distress, anger, insecurity, lower self-esteem, feelings of shame and even thoughts of suicide.¹⁷ These victims include children with disabilities and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) or who are seen as not conforming to gender norms.

Violence against children with disabilities

While violence against children is widespread and pervasive, the risks are disproportionate for children with disabilities: they are almost four times more likely to experience violence than other children. Their frequent marginalization and isolation from education and community life leaves them intensely vulnerable. At the same time, the challenges that children with disabilities face in reporting violence can be overwhelming, from possible dependence on the person who is



abusing them to a lack of appropriate reporting mechanisms, as well as perceptions that they cannot provide convincing and accurate testimonies.¹⁸

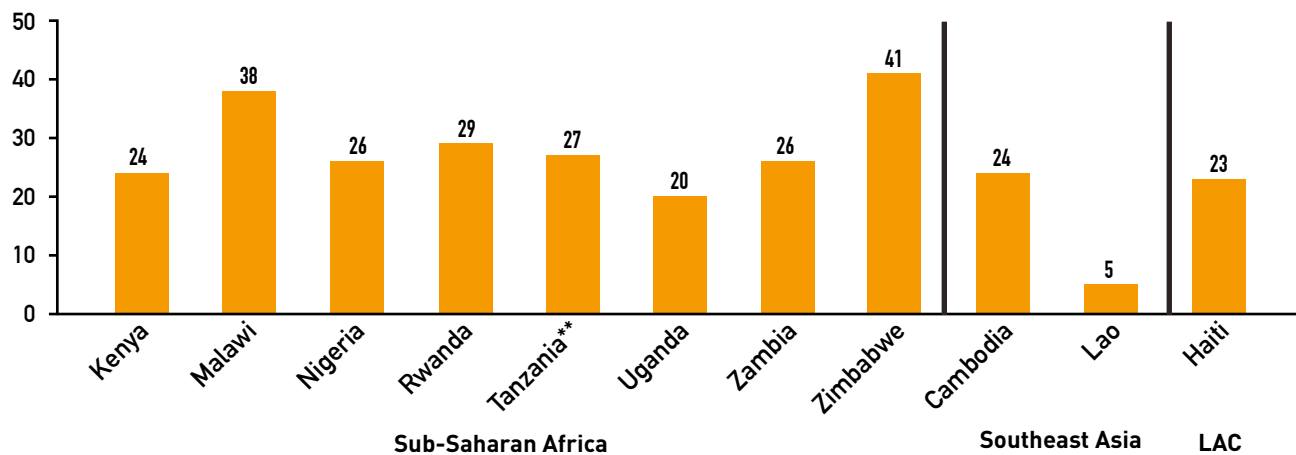
Sexual violence

Every country surveyed on the prevalence of violence reveals that high numbers of girls – and far more boys than we once realised – from all walks of life, are harassed, pressured, tricked, coerced or physically forced to have sex. As shown in Figure 1, more than 25 per cent of girls in countries from different regions, who had sex before the age of 18 report that their first sexual experience was physically forced or coerced.¹⁹

into taking part in criminal activities, with those who refuse to cooperate paying a heavy price. Marginalized children in such communities are locked into a vicious cycle of exclusion, stigmatization and violence.

Faced with such violence, children may embark on a perilous and uncertain journey to find safety. Many fail to benefit from the protection to which they are entitled, ending up in crowded facilities, often together with adults who are not family members. They may find themselves in places with fast-track proceedings where their best interests are barely considered, with the risk that they will be sent back to the very situations from which they have fled.²¹

Figure 1. Percentage of females aged 18-24 whose first sexual experience was forced or coerced



**Tanzania numbers may differ from the Violence Against Children Final Report, 2009 due to different analytic approaches

Source: Together for Girls, Contribution to the Global Thematic Report on Ending Violence against Children, 2019.

Children on the move

Violence may be a constant companion for the world’s refugee and migrant children, driving them from their homes, plaguing them throughout their journeys and blighting their lives at their destination.²⁰

Children on the move may witness horrific scenes: the killing of their parents, the rape of their sisters or the forced disappearance of friends. Their decision to move may have been fuelled by community violence, including exposure to street crime and systematic extortion and harassment by gang members. They may have been manipulated

Many also contend with the risks of life in urban or camp settings, often in their first country of asylum – risks that may push some to move on, while others remain where they are, despite the dangers.

The trafficking of children is taking on “horrific dimensions” according to a recent study from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with the sexual exploitation of victims being the main driver. Children now account for 30 per cent of those being trafficked.²²





A moving target

It can be difficult at times for policies and programmes to keep pace with emerging threats to children. In a world that is interconnected as never before, with the rapid evolution of information and communications technology (ICTs), children are increasingly vulnerable to online violence and to those who take advantage of cheap travel and skewed power relations to exploit them for sex.²³ At the same time, the rights of all children to protection must be safeguarded regardless of their origins and should not be jeopardized in the interests of political expediency or security concerns. Each time a new threat emerges, those working to protect children must move at speed to plug the gaps and remind duty bearers, yet again, of their responsibilities for the realization of children's rights.

A costly concern

Violence against children diverts billions of dollars from social spending, slows economic development and erodes human and social capital.²⁴ While estimates of the economic costs vary, as noted later in this report, one calculation puts it at US\$7 trillion a year through its direct impact on children, families and societies and on the adult lives of its victims.²⁵ One thing is certain: the costs of violence outweigh – by far – the costs of its prevention.

Intolerable, but not inevitable

There has been a fatalistic assumption that violence is inevitable. Yet evidence confirms that it is preventable, and that prevention helps to break the intergenerational cycle of violence.

Now, as never before, we have new momentum, consensus and opportunities. We have laws and policies that lay the foundation for effective prevention and response and for protecting children from violence at the global, regional and national level. We have more and better data and evidence on violence against children. We have strong partnerships including – very importantly – with children.

In this milestone year, which marks 30 years of the CRC, the first review by the General Assembly of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and 10 years of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, it is time to highlight the progress that has been made, and the continuing toll of violence on children, their families, communities and nations.

This report draws on the work of stakeholders the world over to call for accelerated action to end violence against children based on what works: proven solutions backed by adequate resources and strong political will. With the building blocks now in place, we have a solid platform for accelerated action that can enable us to tackle old, new and emerging risks to children. There is, therefore, no excuse for inaction or complacency.

While the task ahead is daunting, this report shows that the vision of the 2030 Agenda to end violence can be realized. From global leaders to youth activists, from heads of state to workers in the tourism industry, from policymakers to police officers, people are stepping up. And they are having a positive impact for children. We have a growing clarity of purpose: we know what works. And when we apply it, we find that success breeds success.

About this report

This report draws on official contributions and expert advice from many organizations working to end violence against children. It has also been informed by the 9th High-level Cross-regional Round Table on the prevention and elimination of violence against children,²⁶ organized by the Special Representative with regional partner organizations in Addis Ababa in February 2019.

- **Section 2 reviews efforts to strengthen legal and policy frameworks** to reveal a landscape that has been transformed and consolidated in recent years.



- **Section 3 highlights what works, with initiatives and approaches shifting** from ad-hoc pilot interventions to the strengthening of entire systems to reinforce the protective shield around children.
- **Section 4 reviews increasing efforts to generate – and use – more and better data and research.**
- **Section 5 outlines partnership to further reinforce the growing movement to end violence against children,** with more global and regional alliances and the increasing engagement of new players, including the private sector.
- **Section 6 summarizes progress on amplifying the voices of children,** describing a process that is seeing their engagement evolve from participation to leadership.
- **Section 7 provides conclusions and next steps,** calling for joined-up action to tackle a joined-up challenge.



2 Strengthening legal and policy frameworks



“With the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda, children’s freedom from violence can be placed at the heart of the policy agenda of every nation, helping to prevent the risk of violence in their lives and providing effective support to child victims.”

The Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children²⁷

- **Laws and policies to protect children against violence have gained ground over the past decade.**
- **A growing number of countries have outlawed violence against children in every setting, including in the home.**
- **But laws and policies are only as good as their implementation and enforcement and there is a governance gap between the two – a gap that needs to be narrowed.**
- **The challenge is to ensure that policies on paper gain traction for children in reality.**

Laws and policies on violence against children can now be found in a large number of countries and

across every region – a marked transformation that has largely taken place over the past decade. Almost 100 countries now have comprehensive policies to prevent and respond to violence against children, while legislation has been enacted to prohibit violence against children, to protect child victims and to fight impunity.²⁸ Around 60 countries now have a comprehensive legal ban in place that prohibits violence in all its forms, everywhere, including in homes and schools.²⁹

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda,³⁰ we are also seeing the rapid acceleration of policy development at regional level. This has been the result of decades of advocacy, persuasion and debate by many players, from national governments and parliaments to United Nations agencies, Ombudspersons for Children, civil society organizations (CSOs), professional associations, religious leaders, children themselves and, increasingly, the private sector.

The often lengthy process of bringing a policy development to the table has its own value and its own impact, generating public debate and mobilization, and embedding a sense of ownership, as well as a commitment to implementation. Once agreed, policies provide a public framework for action, demonstrating commitment to a direction of travel. At national level, in particular, they embody a country’s vision of itself and its commitments to its children.

Policies are also vital tools for accountability, providing a benchmark against which commitment to children can be measured. They promote the convergence and coordination of efforts, helping to place children at the centre of decisions, while mobilizing support and enhancing ownership of actions to keep the promises made to children (see Box 3).



Box 2. What should be included in a legislative framework to ban violence against children?

The CRC requires States Parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure the child is protected against all forms of punishment³¹ and in particular to adopt, “*all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures*” to safeguard every child’s right to protection from all forms of violence.³² This means that States should prohibit all violence against children; create accessible and child-friendly counselling, complaint, referral and reporting systems and services; and ensure accountability and end impunity.

Prohibit all violence against children:

- Nobody under the age of 18 should be subjected to the death penalty, nor should they face life imprisonment without the possibility of release.
- All forms of violence against children must be prohibited in all settings, including torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment, physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, sexual abuse or exploitation, harmful practices (such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage and crimes in the name of honour) or any form of school discipline contrary to the child’s human dignity.

Create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services:

- States should establish safe, well-publicised, confidential and accessible mechanisms for children, their representatives and others to report violence against children.
- All children should be made aware of ways to report violence.
- Independent children’s rights institutions and mechanisms should be established, such as telephone helplines where children can report violence, speak to trained counsellors in confidence and ask for support.
- Other ways to safely report violence through new technologies should be promoted.

Ensure accountability and end impunity:

- Incidents of violence against children should be investigated and addressed and those responsible should be held to account.
- Mandatory reporting should be established for institutions and professionals working regularly with and for children.
- Those convicted of violent offences and sexual abuse of children should never work with children.

Source: Office of the Special Representative, Global Survey, 2013, pp. 60–61.



Box 3. What should be included in a policy framework to end violence against children?

To address violence against children effectively, every State needs a robust policy framework that is consistent with international human rights standards – a framework that ensures that child protection issues are embedded in the national policy and development agenda, rather than an ‘afterthought’.

Such a framework helps to ensure effective coordination of efforts across departments and institutions, secure resources for effective implementation, the mobilization of public support, the monitoring of results and the evaluation of impact.

This strategy should guide a process of time-bound implementation and inform legal and policy reform, ensure the allocation and best use of resources, and encourage social and behavioural change to prevent violence and protect child victims.

The process itself should be led by a high-level coordinating body, with clear roles and responsibilities for relevant departments and institutions to avoid overlap and to promote synergies, and to ensure effective training on child-sensitive violence prevention and response mechanisms.

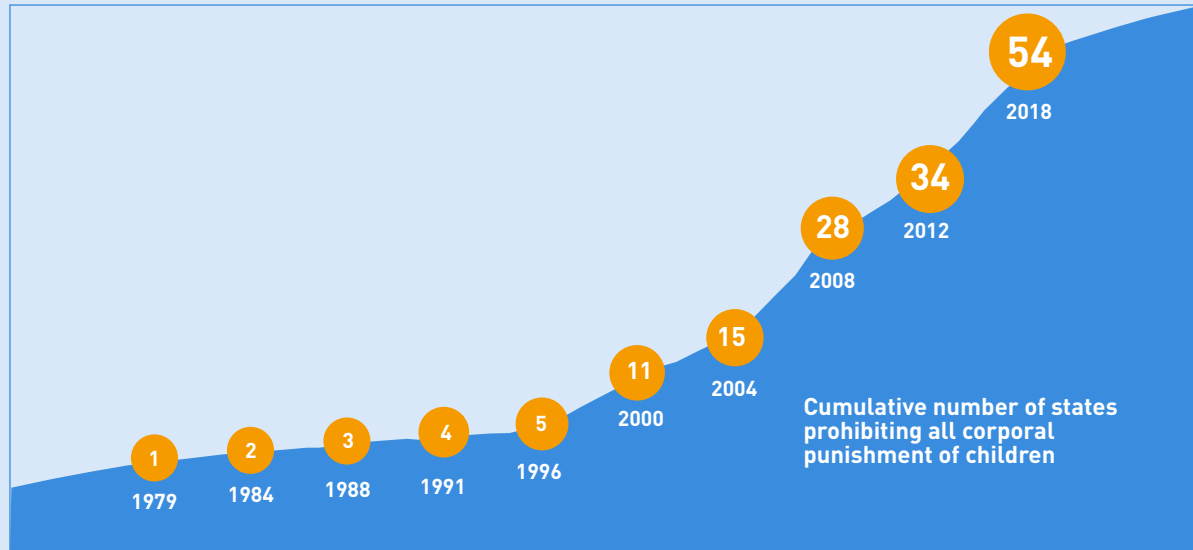
Violence against children can only be addressed through the systematic and effective engagement of all relevant ministries and at every level of public administration. At their most effective, national strategies generate change in the way institutions work through, for example, the establishment of a high-level inter-ministerial commission or task force to coordinate policies and activities. This is essential to avoid fragmentation, wasteful overlaps of resources and serious gaps in delivery. The establishment of a national strategy or agenda is also key to engage civil society on the prevention of, and response to, all forms of violence against children.^{33, 34}

Sources: Office of the Special Representative, Global Survey, 2013; Council of Europe Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence, 2009.



Box 4. Progress on banning corporal punishment

The world has come a long way since Sweden became the first country to ban all corporal punishment of all children, everywhere – including in the home – in 1979. To date, around 60 countries have adopted comprehensive legal bans on all forms of violence against children. These have helped to shift overall attitudes towards harsh discipline and are crucial for global efforts to prevent violence against children.³⁵



Source: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 'Countdown to universal prohibition', n.d.,

Countries in the South American trading bloc of MERCOSUR have achieved the legal prohibition of all forms of violence against children, with every Member State³⁶ banning physical and humiliating punishment in all settings, including the home.³⁷ In addition, 10 of the 11 Member States of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) have legal prohibitions on all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment.³⁸

While we have come a long way, we still have far to go. Only 10 per cent of the world's children are fully protected in law from all forms of violence. And in 68 states, corporal punishment has not been fully prohibited in schools.³⁹

Sources and notes: UNICEF, *Ending Violence Against Children: Six strategies for action*, 2014; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela; Institute of Public Policies in Human Rights, *Contribution to the Global Thematic Report on Ending Violence against Children*; Council of the Baltic Sea States, 'HRH Daniel of Sweden and President of Malta to attend a high-level conference on the prohibition of corporal punishment'; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 'Countdown to universal prohibition'.



Policies in one country can inspire policies in others, resulting in a cascade of positive change across regions. One example can be seen in the progress made on legislation to address corporal punishment over recent decades (Box 4).

There has also been progress on ending child marriage and FGM. In 2018, UNICEF reported that global rates of child marriage were falling, with 25 million child marriages averted over the past decade. More governments are raising the minimum age of marriage, with proposals to do so on the table in Indonesia and Malaysia, Norway approving a bill to ban the practice of child marriage, and the United Kingdom setting out a bill to raise the minimum age to 18 without exceptions. Two US states – Delaware and New Jersey – have also outlawed child marriage.⁴⁰

In 1995, 4 per cent of 105 low- and middle-income countries with available data had no legal minimum age of marriage for girls. By 2013, legislation had reduced the percentage of countries that had no minimum age of marriage for girls to 1 per cent.⁴¹

On FGM, 13 of the 17 countries supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation now have legal and policy frameworks banning the practice. All 17 countries

participating in the programme have a national coordination mechanism in place, while 12 have established a national budget line to fund services and programmes that tackle FGM.⁴²

Despite such advances in the legislative and policy landscape, there are concerns about weak implementation and enforcement, and about keeping pace with emerging risks to children, including those linked to surges in migration and the misuse of ICTs.

Global policy frameworks

The global agenda for action on violence against children is well-established. It is rooted in the provisions of the 1989 CRC – the most ratified human rights treaty in history – and in particular Article 19 (see Box 5).⁴³ The Committee on the Right of the Child monitors national progress on CRC implementation and, in 2011, issued guidance to ratifying countries to uphold their commitment to safeguard children’s freedom from violence through its General Comment No. 13.⁴⁴ This argued that measures to end violence must be massively strengthened and expanded to end practices that *“jeopardize children’s development and societies’ potential non-violent solutions for conflict resolution”*.

Box 5. A legal imperative and policy mandate for three decades: Article 19 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

Source: United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 1989, Part I, Article 19.



Other global policy developments have built on the foundation provided by the CRC:

- **2000:** adoption of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC). It has been ratified by 176 countries to date.⁴⁵
- **2000:** adoption of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. It has been ratified by 168 countries to date.⁴⁶
- **2010:** adoption of the United Nations Global Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons, foreseeing concrete actions to prevent trafficking, including protection and assistance for victims, the prosecution of related crimes and the strengthening of partnerships.⁴⁷
- **2011:** adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (now ratified by 28 countries).⁴⁸
- **2011:** adoption of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure (now in force in 43 countries).⁴⁹
- **2014:** United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.⁵⁰
- **2015:** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the vision of a world that invests in children and in which “*every child grows up free from violence and exploitation*”.⁵¹

The 2030 Agenda includes targets related to violence, including SDG Targets 4.7, 4a, 4e, 5.2, 5.3 and 8.7, and one focused on ending violence against children: 16.2: “*end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children*” by 2030.⁵² This puts violence against children on the development agenda, opening up opportunities for sustaining and measuring global and national progress.⁵³

- **2017:** UNWTO transforms its Code of Ethics for Tourism into an international, binding convention: The UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics. Ratifying countries commit to combat sexual exploitation of children in tourism.⁵⁴

Global accountability

The global policy framework provides a system of accountability for the protection of children from violence. Alongside mandatory implementation reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other treaty bodies, countries now submit Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which monitors progress towards the SDGs. In 2019, under the theme of Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality, the HLPF will review progress towards SDG target 16.2, with 49 countries submitting VNRs (including eight that are reporting for the second time).



Box 6. Policy approaches are needed to tackle bullying in schools

Children who are perceived to be 'different' are at particular risk of being bullied. International surveys reveal that physical appearance is the most common reason for being bullied, with race, nationality or skin colour in second place. In a 2016 opinion poll on bullying, to which 100,000 young people in 18 countries responded, 25 per cent reported that they had been bullied because of their physical appearance, 25 per cent because of their gender or sexual orientation and 25 per cent because of their ethnicity or national origin.⁵⁵ Children from poorer families and migrant children appear more vulnerable to bullying and cyberbullying. Studies also show that students who are, or are perceived to be, LGBTI are at greater risk of school violence and bullying than those who conform to traditional gender norms.

The 2019 report *Behind the Numbers: Ending school violence and bullying* by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reveals that almost one in three students (32 per cent) have been bullied by their peers at school at least once in the past month. Some children are bullied relentlessly: Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) data from 96 countries and territories show that 5.6 per cent of students aged 13-15 years had been bullied at school on three to five days, and 7.3 per cent on six or more days during the previous month. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data from 50 countries and territories across all regions show that 29 per cent of nine- and ten-year-olds had been bullied every month and 14 per cent had been bullied every week in the past school year.⁵⁶

The two reports of the Secretary General on Protecting Children from Bullying⁵⁷ set out a comprehensive legal and policy framework to guide prevention and response, including:

- information, awareness-raising and social-mobilization initiatives
- children's empowerment, participation and life skills and values
- support to parents and caregivers
- promotion of whole-school and whole-community programmes and capacity-building of education staff
- comprehensive legislation, including restorative justice approaches
- collection, analysis, use and wide dissemination of accurate, reliable and disaggregated data
- promotion of further research to break the silence and help address the drivers of this manifestation of violence
- counselling and reporting mechanisms for child victims.

Sources: United Nations, *Protecting Children from Bullying*, July 2016 (A/71/213) and July 2018 (A/73/265); UNESCO, *Behind the Numbers: Ending school violence and bullying*, 2019.



Regional policy frameworks

Global policy frameworks are being promoted at regional level. Regional organizations and institutions are generating high-level political and policy commitments, backed by strong regional platforms for advocacy, sharing of experiences and more monitoring.

Africa

Political commitment to end violence against children is at an all-time high in sub-Saharan Africa, as is the ratification of international treaties.⁵⁸ The past four years have seen the adoption of policy frameworks to prohibit violence across the region,

building on 30 years of implementation of the 1989 CRC and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.⁵⁹

2014 saw the creation of the mandate of the African Union (AU) Special Rapporteur on Child Marriage, and the launch of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage (for 2014-2016, and now renewed for 2019-2023, following national action in 24 countries). A review of the campaign confirms that it has raised the profile of this issue within Africa, has engaged multiple partners and Member States to drive national results, and has enhanced the evidence base (Box 7).⁶⁰

Box 7. Working to end child marriage in sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of world's highest levels of child marriage, with around 4 in 10 young women reporting that they were married before the age of 18⁶¹ (second only to South Asia, where 45 per cent of women aged 20-24 reported being married before their 18th birthday).⁶²

A 2018 AU review of legislation on marriage in 55 countries found that 27 countries have exceptions in law that allow child marriage, while 11 set the minimum age for marriage below 18.⁶³ Some have conflicting minimum ages for marriage and sexual consent: in Sudan, girls as young as 10 are legally allowed to marry while the minimum age for sexual consent is 18.

The AU joined with the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the African First Ladies institute in 2014 to mount its biggest and most successful initiative to date: the Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa and its Action Plan.

The Campaign has triggered region-wide momentum and has enhanced national action, with 24 countries launching their own campaigns to eliminate child marriage. In total, 30 per cent of AU Member States have enacted and enforced laws to protect girls since the launch of the campaign. In addition, 55 per cent of countries that have taken part in the campaign have developed national inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms to end child marriage.

Success stems from the comprehensive nature of the campaign, which spans policy, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and capacity-building.

The Campaign has also generated vital evidence to support programming to end child marriage, with country-specific and thematic research covering such issues as the links between harmful traditional practices and economic development, as well as the links between child marriage and HIV, teenage pregnancy and maternal health.

The Campaign has established the AU's leadership on this issue. Originally planned to run for two years across 10 countries, the Campaign has been extended until 2023 and to 30 countries.

Source: ACPF, Contribution to the Global Thematic Report, 2018.



In 2015, the AU launched Agenda 2063: The Africa we want, which aspires to a peaceful and secure Africa: “with sharp reductions in violent crimes, and safe and peaceful spaces for individuals, families and communities”, and an Africa that is “free from armed conflict, terrorism, extremism, intolerance and gender-based violence”.⁶⁴

In 2017, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) launched *Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040*.⁶⁵ This includes Aspiration 7 focused entirely on violence against children to ensure that “every child is protected against violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse”.

2017 also saw adoption of a key sub-regional policy framework by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): The Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to Prevent and Respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa. Through this, ministers responsible for the care and protection of children across the 15 ECOWAS Member States have committed to focus on five priority areas: sexual, physical and emotional violence against children, including female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C); child marriage; child labour; civil registration and vital statistics; and children on the move.⁶⁶

“We stand together more strongly than ever to ensure children are safe and protected. With the right framework, the right actions, the right resources and the right positive changes in attitudes and practices, we can ensure they have an opportunity to fully contribute to our societies.”

Dr Fatima Dia Sow, ECOWAS
Commissioner for Social Affairs⁶⁷

Europe

Launched in 2006, the Council of Europe (CoE) programme Building a Europe for and with Children aims to implement the United Nations Study⁶⁸ and has addressed most of its recommendations. This

includes the adoption by its Committee of Ministers of the Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence in 2009.⁶⁹ The Guidelines set out how to develop strategies that are multidisciplinary, using a systematic framework, integrated into national planning processes and rooted in the CRC.

*The CoE Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)*⁷⁰ addresses violence against children as a central concern. Its implementation is overseen by the Ad Hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child (CAHENF) and supported by the Group of Experts on Responses to Violence against Children (CAHENF-VAC), which is assessing how the 47 CoE Member States prevent and respond to violence. Since 2016, at least 21 member states⁷¹ have put in place a national programme, action plan or strategy, or have introduced policies to improve integrated measures on violence against children.⁷² Many other CoE guidelines and recommendations are shaping national policy agendas, including those on child-friendly justice, children’s rights and social services, child-friendly health care, child participation and the rights of children in the digital environment.

The 2007 CoE Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention)⁷³ provides a comprehensive legal framework to prevent, criminalize and respond to all forms of sexual violence against children, including abuse through the use of ICTs (such as grooming) and in the ‘circle of trust’. It also aims to ensure the protection of, and assistance to, child victims, including through child-friendly justice and support systems.⁷⁴ It is binding in 44 CoE Member States and has led to major changes in legislation, policies, provision of services and training.

The 2011 CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention)⁷⁵ is far-reaching as it addresses prevention, protection and prosecution, and calls on everyone, particularly men and boys, to contribute to the prevention of all forms of violence. Recognizing links between violence against women and violence against



children, the Convention addresses children as direct victims of violence, and those who witness violence between their parents.⁷⁶ The Convention has been ratified by 34 CoE Member States.⁷⁷

Other key CoE Conventions set high standards to fight against child trafficking⁷⁸ or cybercrime⁷⁹ and to protect children.⁸⁰ The monitoring mechanisms established by the treaties make it possible to review and guide progress achieved by States Parties. By ruling on cases of alleged breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights has triggered changes in legislation, policies and practices in member states that have translated into better protection for children.⁸¹ To support the implementation of its standards, the CoE has launched several campaigns and has produced handbooks and training materials, including child-friendly tools.

The Baltic Sea Region is virtually a 'no-corporal-punishment zone' for children: 10 of the region's 11 countries have legal bans on corporal punishment in all settings. Since these have come into force, guidance for parents, practitioners, advocates and policymakers and public information campaigns have raised awareness of the impact of corporal punishment. Today, more parents are rejecting its use in raising their children.⁸²

The Americas and the Caribbean

Efforts to tackle violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean build on a long process of reforms by countries in the region in cooperation with civil society. Since 2009, the Special Representative has promoted strategic collaboration with key actors in the Americas such as the Organization of American States (OAS), MERCOSUR, the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Movimiento Mundial por la Infancia de Latinoamérica y el Caribe (the Latin American and Caribbean Movement for Children, MMI-LAC), academia, civil society actors and children and young people to accelerate progress on regional implementation of the United Nations Study recommendations.⁸³

In 2011 and 2012, the Special Representative co-organized with MERCOSUR, SICA, CARICOM and MMI-LAC regional consultations covering South America, Central America and the Caribbean, as well as three regional analytical studies on follow up to the United Nations Study.⁸⁴ The three sub-regional roadmaps adopted at those high-level consultations, together with the commitments made at the Pan American Congresses promoted under the auspices of the OAS, played a critical mobilizing role and have helped to maintain momentum and promote the consolidation of progress.

SDG Target 16.2 is seen as a rallying point in Latin America, where 10 States have explicitly prohibited all forms of violence against children by law: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have introduced legislation to prohibit child marriage. A growing number of countries across the region have adopted national policy agendas on violence against children and are developing budgets for their implementation in line with the 2016 *Road Map of Strategic Actions for Investment in Children in Latin America and the Caribbean*.⁸⁵

In Central America, SICA Member States have also adopted a regional roadmap, based on the 2011 Santo Domingo Declaration, to prevent and respond to violence against children, which promotes regional cooperation and guides national agendas.⁸⁶ A proposal is now under discussion for a Central American Convention for the protection and restitution of the rights of child victims of sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking with the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.

In 2007, the region adopted the Inter-American Cooperation Program for the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Exploitation, Smuggling and Trafficking of Children and Adolescents.⁸⁷ The Inter-American Children's Institute, a specialized agency of the Organization of American States (IIN-OAS), has also promoted important policy developments across the Americas. The protection





of children from violence is central to the agenda of the OAS, as shown by its adoption of the OAS General Assembly Resolution on Violence and Exploitation of Children⁸⁸ and the unified Resolution adopted by the XXI Pan American Congress held in Brasilia in 2014.⁸⁹ The Resolution encourages member states to prevent, combat and eliminate violence against children, including corporal punishment in all settings, including the family, the education system and all institutions that care for children.

In North America, Canada's 2017 *It's Time: Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence* is a comprehensive, cross-ministerial initiative that includes five-year budget lines to tackle online child exploitation and to support those fleeing from family violence.⁹⁰

year by the Government of Morocco.⁹⁴ The second report, issued in 2013, reviewed progress made in the intervening years.⁹⁵

South Asia

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) is one of six inter-governmental Apex bodies of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) spanning Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through SAIEVAC, these countries share one vision: all children in South Asia enjoying their right to an environment free from all forms of violence. SAIEVAC focuses on five priority areas: child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour, corporal punishment and trafficking.⁹⁶

Box 8. Uruguay: New measures for children in the justice system

In Uruguay, the 2007 review of the Code on Children and Adolescents explicitly prohibited all forms of corporal punishment and other humiliating or degrading treatment. In 2019, further measures have been introduced to reinforce the right of the child to access to justice and have provided safeguards to children caught up in violence.

The new provisions apply to all children, whenever and wherever their rights are at risk or have been violated. They spell out children's entitlements during administrative or judicial procedures, from dignified treatment to comprehensive reparations, demand adherence to the principles of the CRC and other human rights instruments, and provide for the protection of the child during and after any legal proceedings.

Source: Amendment of 10 April 2019 to Chapter XI of the Childhood and Adolescence Code, approved by Law No. 17.823 Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia of 7 September 2004.⁹¹

The Middle East and North Africa

The Special Representative works with the League of Arab States and its Steering Committee on Violence against Children, which coordinates and reviews follow up to the United Nations Study,⁹² generating two comprehensive reports to date on the implementation of the Study's recommendations. The first regional study, presented in 2010,⁹³ informed the Marrakesh Declaration adopted at the Fourth High-level Arab Conference on the Rights of the Child, hosted that

SAIEVAC has been instrumental in promoting the implementation of the regional plan of action for the prevention and elimination of child labour for 2016–2021 in South Asia, as well as the development of a regional strategy and action plan to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, including online.

The regional action plan on child marriage has been extended for a further five years (2018–2023) and its implementation pursued through national



plans in Afghanistan and Nepal and a multimedia campaign in Bangladesh. The South Asia Parliamentarian Platform for Children in Dhaka in May 2018 brought together legislators from across the region to discuss how to strengthen laws and policies to safeguard children's rights, including their right to protection from violence.⁹⁷

Southeast Asia

In November 2015, as a result of cooperation with the Special Representative, Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (RPA-EVAC)*, 2016-2025.⁹⁸ This commits all member states to protect children from violence and support child victims, inspired by the recommendations of the 2006 United Nations Study.⁹⁹ The Regional Plan aligns with the 2030 Agenda and proposes concrete actions to

be achieved within a clear timeframe for violence prevention and children's effective protection.

The ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) promotes implementation of the Regional Plan and reviews progress across the region. An important review in 2019 took stock of significant developments to identify persistent challenges and inform progress (Box 9).

A 10-year inter-governmental process of High-level Meetings on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia Pacific Region has also generated policy commitments. The Beijing Declaration of 2010, for example, called for systematic approaches and resources for child protection, legislation and policies to ban all forms of violence against children. Such commitments were renewed at High-level Meetings in New Delhi in 2013 and Kuala Lumpur in 2016.¹⁰⁰

Box 9. Progress on a regional plan of action: Southeast Asia

The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016-2025 (RPA-EVAC) is the roadmap to implement the region's 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Children. The RPA-EVAC is Southeast Asia's first and only action plan on this issue.

It aims to institutionalize policies and prevention and protection services to eliminate violence against children in all 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) through eight actions:

1. prevention
2. protection, responses and support services
3. legal framework, prosecution and justice systems
4. capacity-building
5. research and data collection
6. management, coordination, monitoring and evaluation
7. partnership and collaboration
8. regional review and communication.

A review of the RPA-EVAC between December 2018 and May 2019 by the ACWC and the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSOD), with support from UNICEF, drew on national consultations with a wide range of stakeholders – including children – in nine AMS. The review confirmed that the RPA-EVAC has accelerated action and encouraged a more comprehensive approach to prevention and response.



Key achievements

- Five AMS (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand) have national plans of action to address violence against children – with three of these established since the RPA-EVAC was adopted.
- All AMS have conducted family, school and community-focused communications campaigns on violence against children.
- The *ASEAN Guidelines for a Non-violent Approach to Nurture, Care and Development of Children in All Settings*¹⁰¹ were completed in 2016: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have introduced parenting support programmes that include violence-reduction modules, while Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam have introduced strategic approaches to tackle violence in schools, including positive discipline in the classroom. Protective and supportive services are being strengthened in all AMS.
- While alternative family-based programmes remain limited, with the majority of out-of-home children in residential care, most AMS have frameworks in place for alternative family-based care, and Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are establishing or scaling up such alternatives.
- All 10 AMS have alternative measures to detention in place for children in conflict with the law in various stages of development. To promote alternatives, ASEAN convened a regional consultation on the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty¹⁰² and conducted training on restorative justice.
- The inclusion of sensitive topics, such as child marriage, in the RPA-EVAC has opened space for dialogue, with the first ASEAN dialogue on child marriage taking place in 2019.
- With growing consensus on the need to strengthen protection of children in the online world, ASEAN is set to adopt a Declaration on Online Child Sexual Exploitation in 2019.

The ACWC–SOMSWD review also highlighted the need for accelerated action to ensure legal prohibitions of all forms of violence against children; strengthen data systems; improve coordination mechanisms for child protection; build long-term capacity of the social service workforce; increase investment for child protection; enhance initiatives to change social norms; engage the private sector and media on cyber-safety; and mobilize children and adolescents.

Source: UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Contribution to Global Thematic Report on Ending Violence against Children, 2019.

Serious concerns about implementation and enforcement

Policies and laws are crucial dimensions of states' accountability for children's rights and protection. But they are only as good as their implementation and enforcement. Despite the progress that has been made, there is still a wide gap between international standards and commitments and the reality on the ground. It is crucial to bridge this gap, including by investing in the prevention of violence

against children, supported by the mobilization of financial and human resources.

The World Health Organization (WHO), for example, recognizes the urgent need to tackle the causal and risk factors that fuel violence.¹⁰³ MMI-LAC talks of *"a difference between the legal-formal recognition of rights and the effective implementation of public policies to ensure compliance, particularly the creation of targeted budgets and a more inclusive approach"*.¹⁰⁴



There are also concerns that policies are being outpaced by the sheer scale of violence against children and the relentless evolution of new and emerging risks. Implementation of the OPSC,¹⁰⁵ for example, faces new challenges because of a massive growth in the use of ICTs to sexually abuse and exploit children.¹⁰⁶

“Ministries for children almost everywhere are at risk of being trapped in downward spirals. They are allocated small budgets because they are given less attention and seen as ineffective, but their lack of effectiveness is due in part to their inadequate funding and the ill effects it has on human and other resources.”

Drawn from the contribution by the ACPF to this report¹⁰⁷

Call to action

- Comprehensive and integrated laws and policies are needed that look beyond a narrow focus on response to violent behaviour to tackle the risk factors that fuel violence.
- Laws and policies need to strengthen the prevention of violence, as well as ensuring the protection, recovery and long-term reintegration of victims.
- Policies and laws need to be backed by political buy-in, public support, adequate resources and all the services needed for full implementation – well-coordinated and well-funded.
- Action is needed to ensure that every policy framework has the power it needs to gain real traction, building on the progress already made. Otherwise, there is a risk that these frameworks will simply be spinning their wheels.

The next section moves from policy to practice, setting out a range of initiatives and approaches that are translating the vision of a world free from violence into tangible action for children.



3 Reinforcing the protective shield around children



“Targets to end violence against children are hollow, however, unless they are matched by a strong commitment to action. There is a legal and moral obligation to act and a growing body of evidence from around the world that shows how societies can be made safer for children.”

Drawn from the contribution by UNICEF to this report¹⁰⁸

- **Effective initiatives to address violence against children promote comprehensive approaches and integrated efforts, rather than reactive, ad-hoc pilots and one-off projects.**
- **Children may experience many different forms of violence, with cumulative impact: we need joined-up approaches to tackle a joined-up threat.**
- **Greater efforts are being made to raise awareness of, prevent and respond to violence against children.**
- **Child protection systems still face chronic shortages of skilled workers and financial resources.**
- **We know what works. The task ahead is to take effective initiatives to scale and back them with all the resources and support they need.**

There has been a shift in efforts to tackle violence against children, with a growing realization that isolated and ad-hoc programmes and approaches – while valuable for those they reach – cannot prevent risks effectively or generate the needed impact on children’s safety and well-being.

While distinct strategies may still be required to target specific forms of violence against children, there is a welcome push for comprehensive, cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and child-centred approaches to tackle the multidimensional and cumulative manifestations of violence as a whole. Given that the lines between different forms of violence are often blurred, and children may endure many or all of them, it is vital to build systems that are strong enough – and flexible enough – to provide a protective safety net for all children in every circumstance. This is one of many areas where there are clear linkages from SDG Target 16.2 to other goals, including SDG 4 on education – a bulwark against violence – and SDG 5 on gender equality, with violence against children often framed by gendered norms and attitudes.

There are, however, gaps between the best intentions and the resources – human and financial – that are needed. Child protection systems remain weak in many countries, lacking the skilled social workers to do the job, and often placing too heavy a burden on the shoulders of the workers they already have.

There has been growing evidence over the years about what works for children and families. Many promising initiatives were flagged up at the landmark End Violence Solutions Summit in Stockholm in 2018, hosted by the Government of Sweden, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and the WePROTECT Global Alliance (see Section 5 on partnerships), and in which close to 70 countries participated.¹⁰⁹ The task ahead is to apply what is known to work, not only at scale, but also to both current and emerging threats.

A snapshot of international approaches

A number of international initiatives to end violence against children are attracting attention, partners and support. UNICEF’s #ENDviolence campaign, for example, launched in 2013, aims to make all forms of violence against children visible – a crucial step in efforts to tackle an issue that is often hidden



away. The campaign spans violence in the home, community and school, helping to focus attention not only on the violence in children's everyday lives, but also on the solutions. More than 100 countries have taken part in the campaign to date.¹¹⁰

The WePROTECT Global Alliance has developed a Model National Response (MNR) to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse. MNRs are now being rolled out at the country level, including in Jordan, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines and Tanzania, with the support of partners, including UNICEF, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) and Child Helpline International. Through a strategic combination of needs assessment, legislative review, and both in-person and online training, this joint project will enable child helplines, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, educators and other professionals to inform and empower children, to prevent and respond to online child sexual abuse and exploitation, and to provide effective support for child victims.¹¹¹

Building on the recommendations of the United Nations Study,¹¹² international agencies have developed and endorsed the evidence-based package *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*,¹¹³ to help countries and communities achieve SDG Target 16.2. The strategies are based on evidence on what works to help prevent different forms of violence, while generating benefits in other areas, such as mental health, education and crime reduction.¹¹⁴ The core INSPIRE document spells out what needs to be done; the handbook explains how to do it, and the indicator framework provides uptake and impact measures.¹¹⁵

There has also been a surge of interest in the INSPIRE Working Group, co-chaired by WHO and the Child Protection and Care Learning Network, with membership expanding from 10 agencies in 2016 to more than 100 agencies in 2018. Grants have been approved for INSPIRE promotion and dissemination in 13 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and South Africa. And there is high demand for

INSPIRE training: since mid-2018, national training events have been held in Malawi, the Philippines, Tanzania and Uganda, while regional and global events have provided training for participants from more than 40 countries to date – confirming the strength of demand for evidence-based approaches.¹¹⁶

Strengthening systems to protect children from violence

Systems strengthening is crucial for violence prevention and response, helping to identify children at risk of violence and address the issues that put them in danger, as well as offering protection and long-term support to victims. A systems approach recognizes the interconnectedness of children's rights and the complex causes and consequences of violence.¹¹⁷

Rather than working in isolation, approaches must place children's rights and best interests at the heart of all sectors and disciplines. As well as working closely with the justice, education, health and social protection sectors, child protection services also need to engage with planning and financial institutions, and with research and statistical bodies. When strong systems come together, we see 'one-stop' approaches, with multi-sectoral teams providing tailored support to children and families who are struggling.

Strengthening child protection systems

Child protection services play a critical role in supporting children affected by violence, and in violence prevention. However, weaknesses in such services only help to perpetuate the violence. To be effective, child protection services need far greater investment as a matter of urgency and they need to be supported as a priority in the policy agenda.

Ending violence against children requires strong, fully functional and well-resourced child protection systems: coordinated formal and informal structures working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children.¹¹⁸



Box 10. Independent human rights institutions for children

If we are to end violence against children, we need champions to keep this issue high on national agendas. Independent human rights institutions for children, such as Ombudspersons for Children, provide children with much-needed support and with a voice, guided by the child's best interests. The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), for example, has gone from strength to strength since it was established at a meeting of 10 Ombudspersons in Norway in 1997. Today, it includes 42 institutions in 34 countries and aims to:

- encourage the fullest possible implementation of the CRC
- promote needed legal and policy reforms
- support collective mobilization for children's rights
- inform and empower children
- share information, approaches and strategies
- promote the development of effective independent offices for children.

The Network is particularly active on empowering children and young people through its European Network of Young Advisers (ENYA).

In 2015, ENYA's 'Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk About Violence!' child participation project gave children and young people from 11 European countries the chance to share their views on violence. Working with media professionals and with social media tools, participants talked about cyber violence and sexting, violence in school, gender-based violence, psychological violence and social isolation, witnessing domestic violence, spiteful attitudes towards those with disabilities and many other aspects of violence.

Later that year, their views informed ENOC's position paper on this issue, stating that *"all violence against children should be eliminated. No degree of violence against children can be excused; child maltreatment is utterly unacceptable."*¹¹⁹ ENOC also issued a joint statement on violence against children with the Special Representative.¹²⁰

Sources: European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), 'Position Statement on Violence against Children', 2015; ENOC and Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 'Joint Statement', 2015.

One critical step is to map the services that are already available. In the Middle East and North Africa, for example, UNICEF is working with the Social Services Workforce Alliance to carry out the first-ever regional mapping of the social services workforce to accelerate investment. At least nine countries have signed up to be part of this important review.¹²¹

Another step is to ensure that services are available in every part of a country. In China, a community-based safety net for children and their families, known as the Barefoot Social Workers,¹²² is helping to embed child protection and welfare services at local level. The Government has now expanded an initial pilot scheme to reach 120,000 villages, with plans underway to take it to the national level.¹²³



There is a pressing need to develop effective, child-sensitive counselling, reporting and referral services to support children who have been identified as victims or at risk, as well as those who seek help.¹²⁴ Such services should be established by law as a core dimension of any well-functioning and well-resourced national child protection system. They should be driven by the best interests of the child and informed by children's own viewpoints, as well as being universally available to – and accessible by – all children without discrimination of any kind.

Too often, children – in particular the most vulnerable – lack information about existing support services and complaint mechanisms or find them difficult to access.¹²⁵ Children may not trust the services that are available, fearing that they will not be believed, and that they will be judged rather than respected. And they may also fear public exposure, stigmatization, harassment and reprisals if they report violence. These services must guarantee children's safety, ensure confidentiality and provide prompt and speedy response and follow up. Children must have confidence that they will be listened to in an ethical and safe manner, that their testimonies will not be disclosed or misused, and that their safety will not be put at risk.¹²⁶

That confidence is enhanced when children play a part in their own protection. Plan International's *Stick and Stones* manual, for example, offers a broad range of practical activities to help children of different ages learn how to recognize the risks of – and protect themselves against – violence.¹²⁷ One positive development is the increasing engagement of children and their families in models of social service delivery, with social workers increasingly taking on the role of facilitators and coaches to help families find their own solutions to their difficulties. The question is whether social workers have the resources and support to take on new and additional roles.¹²⁸

Child helplines are another crucial part of the child protection mix: in Pakistan, Plan International has supported the expansion of the Madadgar helpline, once limited to Karachi, to cover the entire country.

Importantly, the helpline not only has focal points in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta, it also has around 2,000 referral partners¹²⁹ (see also [Box 18](#) in Section 6).

But countries that are strengthening their child protection systems, including counselling, reporting and referral systems, need to brace themselves for a likely upsurge in cases. In Serbia, for example, UNICEF provided support to improve national reporting and referral systems with a particular focus on building the capacity of social workers – a key element of the national child protection system development strategy since 2011. This resulted in a 92 per cent increase in reported cases of violence against children by 2015.^{130,131}

Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs has prioritized case management and improving the collection of administrative data for children who have been victims of violence and abuse. The National Child Protection Authority has streamlined its hotline, provided training, and launched guidelines and standards for the police on how best to handle child abuse cases. The country has seen a major rise in reported cases, partly as a result of increases in the number of trained professionals available to handle cases.¹³²

Strengthening access to justice for children

Well-functioning justice systems that are child-friendly are essential to prevent and respond to violence and to protect child victims and witnesses.¹³³ They are also vital to end impunity and hold those who inflict violence on children to account. They provide access to effective remedies to challenge the violence children may endure, to prevent the risk of children's deprivation of liberty, and to ensure their care, support and rehabilitation.

Access to justice is particularly important for children held in detention, who are so often subjected to humiliation, abuse, and violent and degrading treatment, both by staff and other detainees.



While many children face serious barriers to access justice, girls are confronted with significant obstacles, including the risk of finding themselves criminalized when exploited through trafficking or prostitution rings. This can lead to further violence against them, while perpetrators are rarely held accountable for their actions.¹³⁴

Access to justice for children is not only a right in itself. It is also the way to uphold and enforce all rights that should be guaranteed for every child, including protection from violence. It generates a 'triple win' for communities and nations, as well as for children themselves: ensuring the safeguarding of human rights, reinforcing the rule of law, and supporting sustainable development.

UNICEF research in the Europe and Central Asia region confirms that most children whose rights are violated never come into contact with the justice system or with any other means of redress. Children report that violence at home would be their main reason for seeking justice, but while 60 per cent of children in the Region experience such violence,¹³⁵ few would seek help outside the family. Few, if any, know about their right to redress, let alone how to claim that right – or any other rights. And even if children had the information they need, they would struggle to navigate their way through the justice system without specialized support.¹³⁶

One prime example of a child-friendly system is the Barnahus model inspired by an approach used by the United States-based child advocacy centers. The model was used in Iceland in 1998 and has since travelled extensively, particularly across Europe. The Barnahus model provides multidisciplinary and interagency support to children who are victims or witnesses of violence, with criminal investigations taking place in parallel with child protection interventions. One key feature of Barnahus is that the model is, or aspires to be, embedded in national child protection and judicial systems.¹³⁷

With Barnahus, children receive a coordinated and effective response to prevent trauma, or their re-traumatization during investigation and court proceedings, and to ensure their right to protection and support. The model pools the skills and resources of all relevant authorities and agencies such as police, social services, child protection, physical and mental health services and prosecutors to provide a 'one-stop' child-friendly service under one roof. Services, including forensic interviews and medical and therapeutic interventions, are carried out by trained professionals in a child-sensitive manner. Since 2015, the PROMISE initiative, managed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in collaboration with Child Circle, has aimed to expand such approaches across Europe, with 20 countries expected to establish Barnahus-style services by the end of 2019.¹³⁸

UNICEF is supporting similarly child-friendly approaches: in 2017, more than 70 UNICEF country offices worldwide backed efforts to increase the capacity of national justice systems to serve children appearing before criminal or civil courts as defendants, victims, witnesses or parties to a civil procedure. In Mexico, for example, UNICEF and Supreme Court Justices developed online courses to train psychology professionals and Ministry of Justice staff, benefiting as many as 230,000 children subjected to human rights violations.^{139, 140}

In Bulgaria, UNICEF supports the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee in providing legal aid and counselling to refugee and migrant children who have arrived in the country without their families. In particular, the Committee files lawsuits to get these children out of detention, where they may be at severe risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. In more than half of these cases (51 per cent), the court has proclaimed the child's detention to be null and void, resulting in their immediate release.¹⁴¹

Strengthening education systems

Globally, children spend the most time when they are not at home at school.¹⁴² Schools play a key role in violence prevention and in ensuring



child protection, and education itself is crucial for safeguarding children's rights.¹⁴³ Indeed, SDG 4 on a quality education for all envisages schools that are safe and supportive, and that help to build peaceful societies.

Yet children often face violence on the way to and from school, and within schools at the hands of their teachers and from their peers. Schools may even be singled out for violence by those who want to undermine education itself, or who see them as valid targets.

As well as causing immediate physical and emotional trauma, violence can also derail children's performance at school. There is growing evidence from the Young Lives studies in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam that violence in schools contributes to school abandonment.¹⁴⁴ And in Central America, thousands of children have dropped out of school to get away from gang threats and harassment, particularly as they travel to and from school through gang-controlled areas.¹⁴⁵

The vast majority of cases of bullying that are reported worldwide take place in school. All children are at risk of bullying, but children who are already marginalized because of their backgrounds, disability, ethnicity, because they are LGBTI or perceived as not conforming to gender norms, are particularly vulnerable. A report by Child Helpline International on violence against children notes that bullying is the reason given most frequently by children for calling in.¹⁴⁶ (See Section 6, [Box 18](#) for more information on the critical importance of helplines.)

"The teacher showed us a sheet of paper and said we should scribble on it, stamp on it, crumple it – but not tear it. Then she asked us to try and straighten it out again, but it was impossible to smooth out all the creases. Then she said this is what it's like when someone gets bullied."

Eleven-year-old boy¹⁴⁷

Strenuous efforts are underway to address violence and bullying in schools as well as monitoring the situation worldwide, UNESCO and UNWomen, with the support of a number of partners, including the Office of the Special Representative, have worked to provide a comprehensive guide to tackle gender-based violence in schools.¹⁴⁸ Using this guide, UNESCO has organized a series of multi-country and regional capacity-building workshops in Africa and the Caribbean; pre- and in-service training in the Russian Federation; and supporting education sector diagnosis and response planning in West and Central Africa.

Building on important work in this area, 2019 saw the launch of the latest UNESCO report on school violence and bullying¹⁴⁹ and the Safe to Learn initiative, promoted by UNESCO, UNICEF, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) and other members of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. The initiative is driven by a shared vision of ending all violence in every school by 2024.¹⁵⁰

UNICEF's School without Violence (SwV) programme aims to create safe schools for every child and protect children affected by violence. Evaluations in Kyrgyzstan and Serbia have confirmed that such programmes have resulted in greater awareness among teachers, more openness about violence and a better understanding of gender stereotypes.¹⁵¹

Such programmes are clearly having an impact at national level. In Jordan, the Ma'An programme has helped to reduce corporal punishment in schools,^{152, 153} and the School-wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) framework in Jamaica is reducing school violence while improving both attendance and punctuality.¹⁵⁴

Indeed, schools can become the catalyst for wider efforts to address violence.¹⁵⁵ In Central America, for example, the Intergenerational Network of Multiplier Agents for the Safe Use of the Internet (RIAMUSI), a schools-based initiative, brings together a whole range of actors – children, teachers, parents, school directors and others with responsibilities for child protection – to help



children learn to protect themselves from the risks of the online world. Managed by IIN-OAS, this initiative was implemented in 2019 in schools in the Dominican Republic and Panama. As well as promoting children's rights, it aims to guide children on where to get help and report violations of those rights, establishing focal points they can turn to.

IIN-OAS and the OAS Department of Social Inclusion also developed *Guidelines for the Empowerment and Protection of Children's Rights on the Internet in Central America and the Dominican Republic*, known as 'Conectados'. This initiative developed intergenerational workshops in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama where children, teachers, parents, child protection professionals and the private sector identified online risks to children and made recommendations for their protection. Evidence suggests that this model of an intergenerational school-based network can be adapted to provide protection against other threats such as bullying and substance abuse, as well as to support victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation.¹⁵⁶

Increasing access to education has also been found to reduce child labour and child marriage, both of which expose children to the risks of violence and abuse. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, Plan India has helped to bring thousands of former child labourers back into education through learning centres established in 80 villages. Thousands more have benefited from education support for their enrolment in school and continued education.¹⁵⁷

As noted by the World Bank, each year that a girl spends in secondary education may reduce the likelihood of her marrying before the age of 18 by five percentage points (or more in many countries).¹⁵⁸ In stark contrast, child brides are far more likely to drop out of school and complete fewer years of education than peers who marry later. Girls who complete secondary education tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labour market, earn more, marry later, have fewer children and provide better health care and education for the next generation. These factors

combined can help to lift households, communities and nations out of poverty.

Strengthening health systems

Health services can play a critical role in the prevention of, and response to, violence against children as part of a multi-sectoral approach. Health workers tend to have regular contact with families and are often first responders for child and adolescent victims. They need to be equipped, therefore, with the skills, knowledge and resources to identify violence and abuse and to respond appropriately.¹⁵⁹

In 2016, a World Health Assembly resolution endorsed the first-ever WHO *Global Plan of Action* on strengthening the role of the health system in addressing interpersonal violence, in particular against women and children.¹⁶⁰ The resolution commits WHO Member States and other partners to a whole range of strategies to address such violence.¹⁶¹

Many positive parenting initiatives work through the health system, capitalizing on the regular links between health workers and, in particular, new parents. Such parenting programmes aim to strengthen positive relationships through play and praise, and provide positive discipline, with the clear potential to reduce or prevent violence.^{162, 163}

In Pakistan, for example, a parenting programme significantly increased the knowledge of and positive attitudes about infant development among mothers in the intervention group.¹⁶⁴

Two parent support programmes in South Africa – the Isibindi Child and Youth Care programme and the Sinovuyo programme – have shown real promise in reducing violence in the home. The Isibindi initiative reached 352,000 children in 2017, through home visits as well as access to 400 'safe parks' nationwide. Meanwhile, the Sinovuyo programme to prevent maltreatment and violence against adolescents trained 1,200 caregivers in four provinces.¹⁶⁵ Results have included increased matriculation pass rates, decreased violence and better relationships at home.



Box 11. Patronage nurses heal a family in Kazakhstan

Five-year-old Nazerke and her family are overcoming a dark past: back in 2016, her father, unemployed and drinking heavily, was being violent at home. “It was a highly unsafe environment,” says patronage nurse Gulmira Sansyzbaeva.

Gulmira stepped in, empowered by a new approach pioneered by Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Health and UNICEF that addresses the family environment as a whole. As a result, patronage nurses provide far more than the usual medical check-ups, including support for parental and child attachment and nurturing care, as well as tackling violence or neglect at home.

Nurses also link the health and social sectors to support children in vulnerable families. So Gulmira joined colleagues in her neighbourhood clinic, as well as a social worker and law enforcement officers to talk to the father, using skills they had learned in UNICEF-supported training.

Gulmira explains that the father was very receptive, and the family situation is now far more stable. The cross-sectoral team helped to find jobs for both parents and mobilized youth volunteers to repair the family home, helping to ease the serious pressures that had contributed to the violence.

Teachers at Nazerke’s kindergarten have also seen a change. “I remember Nazerke looking frightened and taking a long time to answer simple questions,” says one. “Now, she has opened up. She is self-confident, very active, and takes part in every celebration.”

Source: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, ‘Violence Poses One of the Greatest Threats to Children Worldwide’, 2016.

In the United States, nurses from the Nurse Family Partnership¹⁶⁶ visit the homes of low-income, first-time mothers during pregnancy and until their child is 2 years old. Research has shown that children of parents who received these visits had 32 per cent fewer visits to the emergency department in their second year of life than those in the comparison group. Of those visits, there were 56 per cent fewer for injuries and swallowing dangerous substances. Follow-up research 15 years later found that rates of child abuse were almost half the rate of the children in the control group. And research 19 years later found that girls whose mothers had benefited from the programme were less likely to enter the criminal justice system than girls in the comparison group – a clear sign that early intervention can prevent later problems.¹⁶⁷

Strengthening social protection

While no child – rich or poor – is immune to violence, the stresses of poverty can fuel family tensions and undermine children’s access to services that could, or should, protect them, including education and health. And no country – rich or poor – is immune. Violence against children is found in the most affluent countries on our planet. But where poverty is pervasive, the risk of neglect, abuse and exploitation can become particularly acute.

The evidence is clear: poverty, social exclusion and violence are intertwined, presenting serious risks for children and for their societies.¹⁶⁸ As we learned from the experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), countries affected by violence also



tend to lag behind economically, with higher levels of child poverty and malnutrition, poor health and school performance and special risks for vulnerable children, including those forced to leave their homes to seek refuge in a place of safety.¹⁶⁹

Efforts to reduce poverty can be reinforced by policies to overcome child poverty, in particular. These include good-quality and accessible services for the most deprived children and support to ensure a minimum income for families with children. Another benefit of such approaches is that they help to prevent the abandonment and institutionalization of children (so often the result of family poverty and severe family stress) with all the associated risks of violence.

Indonesia has developed a Unified Database for Social Protection Programs to enhance its social assistance programmes. One breakthrough has been the integrated distribution of several non-cash assistance and subsidy programmes into the banking system via a single card. This enables families to access conditional cash assistance from the PKH (Program Keluarga Harapan, Family Hope Program), the non-cash food subsidy and an electricity and gas subsidy for vulnerable families. This non-cash distribution method uses local shops as agents and is expected to promote local economies and encourage financial inclusion. In 2016, the coverage of PKH expanded from 3.5 million to 6 million poor families, with the emphasis on families with pregnant women, children under 5 years, school-age children, the elderly and people with disabilities.¹⁷⁰

In the Philippines, the ABK (Pag-Aaral ng Bata para sa Kinabukasa, Children's Education for the Future) coalition has aimed to address poverty, child protection and education while reducing child labour in the sugarcane industry.¹⁷¹ A community-based approach to strengthen social support to address poverty and engage children and their community in policymaking has proven effective in ending the child labour that exposes children to the risk of violence.¹⁷²

Most high-income countries have some form of social protection in place to protect children against poverty. They may, however, vary in terms of their scope. The Government of Norway implemented a cross-sectoral strategy for children living in poverty (2015-2017) that looks beyond income poverty to ensure that children and young people in low-income families have equal opportunities to participate in education and social activities. The aim: to not only improve children's living conditions in the short term, but also to prevent poverty being passed on from one generation to the next.¹⁷³

Changing harmful norms and practices

Ending violence against children requires more than laws, policies and services. It also means changing mindsets and behaviour, challenging social norms and confronting often deep-rooted traditions that tolerate or justify violence. It requires legislation, public campaigns and long-term investment in national action plans that promote gender equality, positive parenting, early child development and learning, education and life skills.

"We cannot talk about our attitudes, because of uncertainty about the prejudices and stereotypes of our community"

Children aged 12–16 years in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁷⁴

According to a report by the Special Representative and Plan International, millions of children face the cruelty of practices such as FGM, early and forced marriage, breast ironing, son preference, female infanticide, virginity testing, honour crimes, bonded labour, forced feeding and nutritional taboos, and accusations of witchcraft. Such practices may be traditional, or they may represent emerging forms of violence against children. They may well have



cultural, social or religious underpinnings. But one thing they share is their association with violence and their devastating consequences for children.¹⁷⁵

Research in Asia by Plan International has confirmed that child, early and forced marriage continues to rob millions of girls of their childhoods across the region, forcing them out of education, undermining their prospects and increasing their risks of violence, abuse, ill health or early death. Common solutions include the strengthening of laws to prevent child marriage and to ensure robust birth and marriage registration, more synergy and harmonization among various policies, and – very importantly – support for education, which has been shown to delay marriage in Asia.¹⁷⁶

Such practices may be – by their very nature – difficult to track, making it hard to quantify and monitor norm change. Yet efforts to challenge prevailing norms are increasingly embedded in programmes and are gaining traction. In Malawi, for example, traditional leaders are playing a crucial role in raising awareness of harmful practices and ensuring that children stay in school. One of their accomplishments has been the development of by-laws to prohibit child marriage and help children who are already married return to school. In Salima district, for example, religious leaders have stopped officiating at child marriages; an increasing number of girls have gone back to school; and a growing number of cases of violence are being reported to the authorities.¹⁷⁷

Promoting change in attitudes and social norms forms a key part of the INSPIRE package, and while hard to evaluate, norm-change activities at community or small-group level appear to be most effective when combined with other elements such as legislation or life-skills training. INSPIRE approaches to promote positive norms and to change or reduce the impact of harmful norms include bystander interventions, loosening adherence to restrictive and harmful gender and social norms, and community mobilization.¹⁷⁸

Gender norms can often harden during emergencies, and UNICEF has focused on strengthening systems to improve core services for women and girls as part of its programming on gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE). As a result, in 2017, more than 1.6 million women and children who experienced or were at risk of experiencing sexual violence received multi-sectoral support.^{179, 180}

Another major development is emerging knowledge and action on the extreme violence linked to harmful social norms and persistent myths around albinism and children accused of witchcraft. The appointment of an Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism in 2015¹⁸¹ has helped to get such issues on to the agenda at last – but there is a long way to go.¹⁸² In the same year, the General Assembly expressed concern at the attacks against persons with albinism, including women and children, which are often committed with impunity. Recognizing the need to increase awareness and understanding of albinism in order to fight against discrimination and stigma, the General Assembly also proclaimed 13 June as International Albinism Awareness Day.¹⁸³

While albinism is not exclusive to Africa, the challenges faced by those living with the condition are extreme in parts of that continent, leading the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to endorse the Regional Action Plan (RAP) to End Attacks and Related Violations against Persons with Albinism in Africa (2017–2021).¹⁸⁴

Even the words we use in relation to violence against children can reflect prevailing norms, with different definitions and terms blurring both the picture and the response. As shown in [Box 12](#): words matter.



Box 12. Words matter: The Luxembourg Guidelines

“Don’t call it ‘child porn’. It is a crime scene. There is an abuser and a victim. It is child sexual abuse.”

Interpol¹⁸⁵

Child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are complex phenomena that involve multiple actors and require a multi-sectoral response that speaks with one voice. At first sight, the lack of a common language to describe such exploitation and abuse may not appear to be a major problem. In reality, however, it has hampered global efforts to protect children, with national legislation, law enforcement agencies, civil society groups and the media often using varied terms that have blurred both the issue and the response. Some terminology, such as ‘child prostitute’ has led to the stigmatization and marginalization of children and has even masked the fact that children are – first and foremost – victims.

In June 2016, an Inter-Agency Working Group including representatives from the United Nations, as well as human rights bodies and CSOs took steps to put this right. They released the *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* (the Luxembourg Guidelines).¹⁸⁶ The Guidelines aim to strengthen collaboration to address sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, reflecting real consensus on terminology. All 18 partner organizations are now applying the Guidelines across their work.

Source: ECPAT International, Contribution to Global Thematic Report, 30 November 2018.

Priority approaches for children on the move

“We knew it was dangerous, I knew it was dangerous, but when you have a lion at your back and the sea in front, you take the sea.”

A teenager from the Gambia interviewed in Italy¹⁸⁷

The past few years have witnessed growing numbers of children on the move, alone or with their families, within and across countries. In 2017, children accounted for 52 per cent of the world’s refugees, up from 41 per cent in 2009.¹⁸⁸ Every minute, 20 people are forced to flee their homes as a result of violence, persecution or conflict. In 2016, children accounted for more than half of the total refugee population, and more than 75,000

asylum claims were lodged by unaccompanied or separated children.

Refugee, internally displaced and stateless children are often at great risk of all types of violence. They may have fallen prey to smugglers and traffickers, and are in danger of recruitment into armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence, kidnapping, child labour and child marriage. An estimated 77 per cent do not attend secondary school, depriving them of a key safeguard against such child rights violations.

Child labour and child marriage continue to be persistent phenomena in many countries that host refugees. For example, court data show that the number of Syrian marriages in Jordan that include a child bride has more than doubled since 2014. And according to a 2015 survey, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of the 1,510 street-based children in Lebanon originate from Syria.¹⁸⁹



A child's decision to leave home is often an escape strategy to secure safety and protection and is made in the hope of reaching a safe haven from violence and exploitation, political instability, conflict and natural disasters. For children on the move, violence infuses daily life, fear and insecurity is widespread and impunity prevails. Having been driven from their homes by violence, they often find themselves running alongside violence on their journeys, rather than leaving it behind them.

Children on the move often fail to receive the protection to which they are entitled. They can be perceived as interlopers rather than vulnerable victims at risk. They may lack proper documentation or not speak the local language. For the most part, they are simply too frightened to report incidents of abuse or to speak about the trauma they have endured. They do not seek help for fear that it may undermine decisions on their status or expose them to arrest or deportation.

Time and time again, children on the move experience fear, anxiety, panic, depression, sleep disorders, mental health problems, an increased risk of self-harm and an aggravated sense of hopelessness, which have a severe impact on their development and well-being.¹⁹⁰ All too often, migrant, asylum-seeking, displaced and stateless children also find themselves exposed to yet more violence and abuse because of their particular status. But there has been some success in reinforcing their rights to support, regardless of their origins, including progress on ending their detention and guaranteeing their right to child protection services. Above all, children on the move need to be treated as children first.

To support such approaches, the Special Representative and UNICEF conducted an online opinion survey to capture the views of young people in different parts of the world about the situation of children impacted by migration and refugee situations. Violence was identified as a serious concern. For example, in Latin America, 36 per cent of those surveyed believed that violence was the main cause of children fleeing their country; over

half saw violence, abuse and exploitation as the hardest challenges, while 24 per cent listed sexual violence as their top concern. When asked what governments should do, half of those surveyed said that living conditions in countries of origin should be improved; 19 per cent said that children should be allowed to stay in the country of destination; and only 3 per cent identified deportation as an appropriate measure.¹⁹¹

An expert consultation in Mexico in 2017 organized by the Special Representative and the Universidad Iberoamericana, in cooperation with other United Nations partners, academia, civil society and community-based organizations, agreed on overarching principles that should guide action to safeguard the best interests of children on the move, namely:

- Inform children about their rights and legal safeguards at all stages.
- Ensure they have access to child-friendly information and counselling.
- Ensure that they are genuinely consulted about the decisions that affect them.
- Establish safe age assessment procedures that are child- and gender-sensitive, and culturally appropriate, to be conducted only when there is a well-founded doubt about the age of the child.
- Ensure the prompt appointment of a guardian for each unaccompanied and separated child to uphold their rights.
- Transfer the responsibility for the care of children on the move to child protection authorities rather than border or security officials.
- Support independent national children's rights institutions in monitoring the protection of these children.
- Consolidate and share data and other evidence on their situation.

These concerns received close attention in the two Global Compacts adopted at the end of 2018: the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*¹⁹² and the *Global Compact on Refugees*¹⁹³ (Box 13).



Box 13. Special protection for children on the move

The need to provide special protection for children on the move has become ever-more urgent in recent years. The number of refugees and migrants has soared worldwide as people leave their homes to escape conflicts, natural disasters and poverty in search of a better life.

The response often focuses on the containment of refugees and migrants, rather than support and protection. Well-established policies to safeguard the rights of all children, regardless of their origins (often based on the CRC) have on occasion been ignored or swept aside in the face of major influxes of refugees and migrants.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and many other partners have been striving to uphold and enhance rights-based approaches and policies for children on the move.

UNHCR's Beyond Detention Strategy, 2014-19 aims to end the detention of children on the move, recognizing that no child should be locked away because of their immigration status. Most of the 20 countries participating in the Strategy have improved their legal and policy frameworks. Such detention is now prohibited by law in Lithuania, Malta, Mexico and the UK. Elsewhere, the numbers of children in detention have fallen significantly since the launch of the Strategy in 2014.¹⁹⁴

Under the UNHCR *Framework for the Protection of Children*,¹⁹⁵ more than 74,000 children and families were resettled between January 2017 and November 2018. Over the course of 2016 and 2017, UNHCR and partners conducted almost 130,000 Best Interests Assessments to determine the best course of action for individual children.¹⁹⁶ At regional level, the Live, Learn & Play Safe initiative in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen from 2014-2016 to improve the well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking unaccompanied and separated children and other children at risk has produced impressive results, including the strengthening of case management.

A total of 13,460 unaccompanied and separated children received targeted assistance in just the first 18 months of the project, and access to services to address their basic needs was improved. The number of young people taking extreme risks, such as resorting to criminal networks to help them on their journeys, fell significantly in Shire (Ethiopia) and Khartoum (Sudan).¹⁹⁷

On access to child protection for children on the move, the Global Compacts for Migration and on Refugees, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, are major advances. The Global Compact for Migration was the first international agreement prepared under United Nations auspices to cover all dimensions of international migration in a comprehensive and holistic way, aiming for migration that is safe, orderly and regular.¹⁹⁸ The Global Compact on Refugees calls specifically for “investment in national child protection systems and cross-border cooperation and regional partnerships to provide a continuum of protection, care and services for at risk children.”¹⁹⁹

Progress has been made on the inclusion of refugee children in national child protection systems in specific countries and regions, and in strengthening asylum and protection systems for refugee children. In 2016, for example, UNHCR and UNICEF launched the Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. Since the launch of the #IBelong campaign and the Coalition, six States – Estonia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Luxembourg, Cuba and Iceland – have introduced reforms to allow stateless children born in their territory to acquire citizenship.²⁰⁰

Sources: UNHCR, 'Detention'; UNHCR, *A Framework for the Protection of Children*, Geneva, 2012; UNHCR, *Contribution to Global Thematic Report*, 2019; United Nations, 'Global Compact for Migration'; UNHCR, *Global Compact on Refugees*, A/73/12, 2018.



Gaps between best intentions, resources and capacity

Contributors to this report raise serious concerns about the lack of well-resourced, well-staffed child protection systems. There are also concerns that social workers, teachers, health workers and others are carrying too heavy a burden, with over-stretched, under-paid professionals expected to take on additional responsibilities in the quest to prevent and respond to violence.

The contribution from the ECOWAS Commission to this report is blunt on the issue, and its list of concerns resonates far beyond West Africa:

- inadequate political and financial commitment of member states to implementing international and regional legal frameworks
- conflicting socio-cultural and religious factors
- weak cooperation within and among member states, including between the state, the communities and families
- weak coordination mechanisms and synergy amongst various agencies involved in child protection
- weak political commitment to increase budgetary allocation for child protection amongst many competing priorities
- lack of access to child support services
- inadequate commitment of member states to sign and implement bilateral and multilateral agreements and cooperation for the protection of children
- weak capacities of institutions responsible for child protection
- weak reporting and emergency response mechanisms
- lack of comprehensive child protection information management systems.²⁰¹

The CBSS also flags up concerns about the failure of some child protection programmes to provide prolonged support, failing to “stick with” child victims of trafficking, in particular. It stresses the need for a strong human rights-based approach rooted in the best interests of

each individual child.²⁰² The Council's work on the protection of children from trafficking has included training professionals to use avatar-based innovative technology (AvBIT) for child-sensitive interviews, and developing methodologies to help professionals communicate with children in shelter homes and other facilities who have experienced trafficking. Children are encouraged to guide fictional ‘child heroes’ through difficult situations with the help of different scenarios.

New guidelines from UNICEF, working in partnership with the Global Social Service Workforce, outline ways to plan, develop and support the child protection workforce. The guidelines set out the concrete steps needed, from establishing a national leadership group and assessing the current state of play to setting standards and ensuring professional development. They also aim to improve conditions to retain skilled staff and ensure that child safeguarding policies, such as the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) policy that applies to social service workers, are applied equally to volunteers and other community-based actors.²⁰³

Call to action

- There is an urgent need to address violence against children as a human rights, child protection and public health issue that affects us all, rather than a purely legal matter. We cannot arrest our way out of this problem.
- Violence against children is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be addressed by a single actor, department or solution. It is time to work across – and strengthen – entire systems.
- It is time to invest in and scale up what we already know works for children: comprehensive approaches that reinforce entire systems so that they can reach every child, preferably long before they experience any violence.
- It is important to build on good practices using existing guidance materials and tools, such as the INSPIRE strategies.



Box 14. A public health approach to knife crime in the UK

In February 2019, frightening figures were published by the UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS): the number of fatal stabbings in England and Wales in 2018 was the highest since records began in 1946. What's more, there had been a 45 per cent increase in the number of victims aged 16-24 over the previous year, with young black men from that age group facing the largest annual increase in homicides as a result of stabbings, up by 78 per cent.²⁰⁴

With more young victims losing their lives – on a weekly or even daily basis – a valid media outcry has led to calls for concerted action.

One solution can be found further north, in Glasgow, Scotland, where the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has achieved impressive success over the past decade by treating knife crime as a public health issue. The VRU has combined zero-tolerance policing and tough sentencing for those found carrying knives with specialist, child-friendly interventions in courtrooms, help with education, training, employment, housing and, where necessary, relocation.

The results could not be clearer: between 2006 and 2011, 15 children and teenagers were killed with knives in Scotland's largest city. Between April 2011 and April 2016? Not one.²⁰⁵

London, which is at the epicentre of this crisis, is now looking closely at this example, as are many other cities in the UK and beyond.²⁰⁶

Sources: UK Office for National Statistics, 'Highest Number of Sharp Instrument Homicides Seen in Year Ending March 2018', *Homicide in England and Wales: Year ending March 2018*; Young and Barr, 'How Scotland Reduced Knife deaths Among Young People', *The Guardian*, 3 December 2017; Office of the Mayor of London, 'A Public Health Approach to Violence'.

- For those children who are already facing violence, or at greatest risk, we need well-funded and well-staffed systems that offer protection and support through every stage of their recovery and long-term reintegration, including their access to justice and redress.
- It is critical to expand and intensify communication with the public, building greater dialogue on sensitive matters and bringing often hidden subjects into the light through public awareness campaigns and similar measures.
- It is time to close the governance gap between international standards and policy commitments and the resources made

available for implementation – particularly for child protection systems that may have too few social workers who are often carrying too heavy a burden.

The initiatives and interventions outlined in this section have been shaped by robust evidence, creating a virtuous circle of feedback loops, where success breeds more success. The next section looks more closely at the notable expansion of new data, research and other evidence on violence against children seen in recent years, driven in part by the new demands for monitoring generated by the SDGs.



4 More and better data and research



“We cannot take meaningful steps to address violence against children without first understanding it. The more we understand the context and nature of violence, the better we can work collectively to end violence against children and youth.”

Drawn from the contribution by Together for Girls to this report²⁰⁷

- **To solve a problem, we need to understand it. To put it simply: a child who is not counted does not count.**
- **Monitoring progress towards the targets of the SDGs, including Target 16.2, requires more robust, accurate, reliable and timely data and research.**
- **The good news is that we have more and better evidence about violence against children than ever before.**
- **The greater our knowledge, the more daunting the challenge may appear, but information is power.**
- **Evidence encourages debate, shows us what works, informs action and mobilizes resources.**
- **The investment case for new evidence on violence against children from more varied sources – and its effective use to drive progress – must be made, and made far more powerfully.**

Solutions to prevent and respond to violence against children require robust evidence, including far more – and far better – data, from a wider range of sources and covering broader issues related to this rights violation.

Sound research and accurate, reliable, objective and disaggregated data are indispensable to our understanding of the environment within which children grow and develop; and if we are to prevent violence against them, we must assess how this undermines their enjoyment of their rights.

The good news is that we have more data, research and other evidence on violence against children than ever before, fuelled by increasing demand, including for the monitoring of progress towards the SDGs. However, there are still significant data gaps that must be addressed, particularly on issues that have been overlooked or that are only just emerging.

It is worth reminding ourselves why evidence matters so much. First, evidence from research and evaluation helps us to understand the magnitude of the problem, capturing priority concerns and showing us who is at risk, the kind of violence they face and where violence strikes. It tells us if services are available to help children and, if so, whether children use or trust them.

Second, evidence helps us to plan services and resources to overcome risks and challenges while supporting the investment case for sustainable and effective solutions. Third, by shining a light on what works, evidence can help to overcome fatalism about violence against children, instilling confidence that efforts to end the violence are having an impact. It shows us where we are making headway, where we are lagging behind, and where we need to change course. Finally, evidence is essential for accountability, demonstrating progress (or the lack of it) on realizing the right of every child to freedom from violence.

‘Big picture’ data initiatives

The availability of comparable data on certain forms of violence against children, including FGM, child marriage, violent discipline, school violence and bullying, has increased significantly in recent years through the inclusion of violence-related questions in several international survey programmes. National household surveys, including the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator



Cluster Surveys (MICS), the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and the Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) have hugely increased what we know about the scale and nature of violence against children, and about the way children trust and use available services for their care and protection.

We are learning more from a range of school-based surveys. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) managed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), and the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) managed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are revealing more information on bullying in schools.²⁰⁸

The WHO and United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Global School-based Student Health Surveys (GSHS) and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)²⁰⁹ study managed by the HBSC Consortium cover bullying concerns in different ways and could be brought together to help to provide a global picture.

MICS provide a sound source of information on violence against children. The Violent Discipline module has been embedded in MICS national surveys in low- and middle-income countries since 2005, and has been applied in 94 countries to date.²¹⁰ It includes a standard set of questions that cover non-violent forms of discipline, psychological aggression and physical means of punishing children aged 1 to 14 years. Some DHS have also included the standard, or an adapted version of, the MICS module.²¹¹

Other surveys focus specifically on violence against children, the prime example being the VACS led by CDC as part of their role in the Together for Girls partnership. The VACS are developed through a widely participatory process, often associating governmental departments, academia, CSOs, religious leaders and children themselves. They provide invaluable evidence on the acceptability and tolerance of violence against children around

the world, reinforcing efforts to overcome harmful norms and attitudes that allow or even justify such violence. These surveys have been critical to inform an evidence-based national policy agenda on violence prevention and response in a growing number of countries in Africa and Asia, and more recently in Latin America.

Tanzania's 2009 VACS generated a policy agenda that was notable in being complemented by a full implementation and costing plan; in 2016, the new *Five-year National Plan of Action (2017-2022)* took on board lessons from previous implementation, consolidating eight different Action Plans to address violence against women and children into one comprehensive plan.²¹² In 2014, Nigeria became the first country in West Africa to conduct a VACS, resulting in one of the broadest surveys to date. The survey found that more than 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. The results have informed national- and state-level agendas on violence against children on prevention, as well as response.²¹³ Cambodia's *Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children 2017-2021* was informed by its 2014 VACS and includes both prevention and improved services for victims.²¹⁴

To date, VACS have generated comprehensive and reliable data for more than 10 per cent of the world's population under the age of 25, with 14 national reports published to date (most recently in Honduras and El Salvador) and 12 in progress.²¹⁵ Other types of national surveys on violence against children have been – and are being – carried out in many countries, including in the Philippines.

Tracking progress over time – including visiting the same families and communities at regular intervals – has proved its worth. The Young Lives international study of childhood poverty, for example, is following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Viet Nam over 15 years. While it aims to shed light on what drives poverty, and how poverty affects children, it also explores how children experience specific risks, such as violence in the home or at school or FGM/C.²¹⁶



Growing evidence on the scale and nature of violence against children

The 2013 Global Survey on Violence against Children²¹⁷ was a seminal moment in efforts to track progress since the 2006 United Nations Study.²¹⁸ Drawing on responses from more than 100 governments to its questionnaire, the 2013 Survey revealed some clear progress on violence against children. But it also argued that this progress was too slow, too uneven and too fragmented to bring violence to an end, with the 12 recommendations remaining as urgent and as relevant as they had been in 2006 (see Section 1, [Box 1](#)).

2013 also saw the publication of the *Global Study on Homicide* by the UNODC, which found that children under the age of 15 accounted for over 8 per cent of all homicide victims worldwide. When combined with the share of victims aged 15-29, the Study estimated that more than half of all global homicide victims were under 30 years of age.²¹⁹

The 2014 *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention* by WHO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNODC drew on data from 133 countries and was the first of its kind to assess national efforts to tackle interpersonal violence, namely child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner and sexual violence, and elder abuse. Similarly to the United Nations Study, the Global Status Report called for violence prevention programmes to be scaled up, stronger legislation and enforcement of laws to prevent violence, and enhanced services for victims of violence.²²⁰ A second report will assess relevant infrastructure, partnerships and multi-sectoral collaboration, as well as the availability of a relevant plan of action, indicators to track the magnitude of the problem and support for the INSPIRE prevention and response strategies.²²¹

Numerous studies and reports have followed over the years. Landmark reports by UNICEF, for example, have helped to raise the visibility of this issue of violence – most notably *Hidden in Plain Sight* in 2014,²²² and, in 2017, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children*.²²³ This 2017 report presented the latest statistics and analysis on violent discipline and exposure to abuse in

early childhood, violence in schools, violent deaths among adolescents and sexual violence in childhood and adolescence.

The 2017 *Ending Violence in Childhood: Global report*,²²⁴ produced by the Know Violence in Childhood Initiative, documented the scale of violence experienced by millions of the world's children in their everyday lives and relationships, in their homes, schools and communities. The report presented the latest evidence on the causes and consequences of violence in childhood and demonstrated how such violence can be prevented.

Violence against young children: Growing evidence on the impact

It seems that the more we know, the more appalling the picture becomes. Indeed, some evidence reveals violence that is almost beyond comprehension – particularly when it affects very young children. One key finding of the ECPAT and INTERPOL flagship research report *Towards a Global Indicator on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material* was that where seized images or videos of child sexual abuse depict boys and very young children, the abuse was likely to be more violent and more severe. The research also found that the age of victims in such images seemed to be falling.²²⁵ An estimated 72 per cent of children exploited online are under the age of 10, and 7 per cent are infants.²²⁶

We also know more than ever before about the catastrophic developmental harm to children caused by exposure to violence. As a result of advances in research on the neuroscience of childhood maltreatment, we now know that stress in early childhood, including exposure to violence, alters the structure and function of a young child's brain, compromising development, health and education. This permanent damage increases the likelihood that, as children grow into adulthood, they will be affected by cognitive disabilities; social, emotional and mental health problems; as well as an increased tendency to maladaptive behaviour.²²⁷

Longitudinal studies show that children exposed to violence are more likely to be victims of violence later in life and become perpetrators, using



violence as adults against domestic partners and their own children. These studies also show that the risks that they will engage in criminal behaviour as adults are heightened.²²⁸

Disturbing as such evidence may be, it strengthens our case. It confirms that the harm to children caused by violence is extreme, that it damages every part of their development and that the damage can be irreparable.

More evidence on inter-connected forms of violence

Given the greater recognition of the close links between different forms of violence, research is starting to look more closely at how they interact and combine to shatter the lives of both children and adults.

Recent research by UNFPA and UNICEF has explored the connections between violence against children, violence against women and intimate partner violence (IPV).²²⁹ It finds that exposure to IPV can have devastating impact on a woman's health, well-being and ability to function in society. IPV affects not only individual women, but also their families, communities and countries, and is often passed from one generation to the next, with childhood exposure heightening the risks of experiencing or perpetrating violence in adulthood.

The research demonstrates that men and women who have suffered childhood trauma are more likely, in turn, to use harsh discipline against their own children, with their boys and girls experiencing different types of punishment that are often shaped by gender norms. It confirms that IPV and violence against children share many of the same causes, patterns and consequences, and often happen at the same time, and in the same households.

This matters, because violence against children and violence against women are often treated separately. Many organizations, agencies and surveys deal with one of these issues in isolation. The research stresses the need to tackle these areas together as a way to break intergenerational cycles of violence and tackle its underlying causes.

Growing evidence on once neglected forms of violence

We are starting to build a knowledge base on issues that were poorly understood – or even completely overlooked – a few decades ago. These issues include bullying and school violence, child marriage, violence driven by harmful practices linked to witchcraft, online abuse and violence against boys as well as girls.

Bullying and school violence

In 2016, the report of the United Nations Secretary-General *Protecting Children from Bullying*²³⁰ drew on submissions from Member States, independent national human rights organizations, United Nations agencies, civil society and a range of other stakeholders to present a summary of the challenges and the solutions. A second report, published in 2018, reviewed measures promoted by Member States over the previous two years to protect children, focusing on laws and policies and awareness-raising initiatives to prevent bullying, including online.²³¹ Taken together, the conclusions and recommendations of these two reports provide an important agenda for prevention and response, and empowerment and protection of child victims.

UNESCO compiles, analyses and shares up-to-date and comprehensive global evidence on school violence and bullying, as well as on prevention policies and practices. It is now possible to have an overall picture of the prevalence of student victims of bullying collected through six international surveys in over 190 countries and territories, thanks to a new SDG Thematic Indicator, developed under the leadership of UNESCO and endorsed by the international community in 2018.²³² UNESCO has also published two global status reports on school violence and bullying, with the best available data on this issue, and efforts to tackle the problem.^{233, 234}

The *Global Guidance on Addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence*, published by UN Women and UNESCO in 2016, is an operational tool to measure education sector responses to school-related gender-based violence, which makes it easier for countries to conduct in-depth analysis to reveal and address any gaps.²³⁵



UNESCO's report on the first-ever global review of data on the nature, scope and impact of homophobic and transphobic violence in education settings²³⁶ informed the development of the 2016 'Call for Action by Ministers: Inclusive and equitable education for all learners in an environment free from discrimination and violence',²³⁷ which has since been affirmed by the governments of 56 countries. That call has been monitored in Europe since 2017 with support from the Government of the Netherlands, the European Union, UNESCO, and CSOs led by the International LGBTQI Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) through the development and use of an LGBTQI Inclusive Education Index.²³⁸

Child marriage

As noted, the AU child marriage campaign described in Section 3 has already shared information on progress on child marriage and has strengthened the evidence base to support programming to end this rights violation. It has featured country-specific and thematic research on links between child marriage and a whole range of other issues, from HIV to socio-economic development. Given the importance of this body of research to the continued success of the campaign, plans are underway to enhance this component.²³⁹

Evidence on violence linked to harmful practices and beliefs

While there is a growing pool of knowledge on harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage, it is harder to find evidence and data on the impact of harmful practices linked to beliefs in witchcraft, for example – and in particular the impact on children with albinism in areas where they face extreme human rights violations.²⁴⁰

The appointment in 2015 of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism and the adoption of the *Regional Action Plan to End Attacks and Related Violations against Persons with Albinism in Africa (2017–2021)* have helped to raise awareness about these important concerns and pave the way for more concrete evidence.²⁴¹

The ACPF shone a much-needed light into this secretive world with its 2016 report *Crimes and Extreme Violence Against Children in Africa: A glimpse into our hidden shame*.²⁴² This exposed the abuse of children accused of witchcraft, the infanticide of children with disabilities and albinism, and the murder and mutilation of children – particularly those with albinism – for body parts to be used in magical 'medicines'. The report was open about the lack of data, with a veil of secrecy exacerbated by inadequate crime reporting in general.

Cyberbullying and other forms of online violence

There is a growing pool of evidence on the risks of online violence, from live streaming of sexual abuse to sexting, cyberbullying and harmful information that incites hatred of others or even of one's self. But these risks are shifting and expanding on an almost daily basis, making it extremely difficult to track what is happening. There is a sense that current efforts are being outpaced by the speed of these changes, including growing concerns about the online networks of children and adolescents focused on self-harm and even suicide.²⁴³ The thematic report produced around this issue by the Special Representative, which paved the way for important work by the Human Rights Council,²⁴⁴ called for a safe, inclusive and empowering digital agenda for children, placing special emphasis on the need to inform and empower children as a key strategy to prevent and address online abuse.²⁴⁵

One particularly robust attempt to tackle this problem has been the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) Database, hosted by INTERPOL as a key part of its work to identify victims. Law enforcement and other accredited personnel from more than 50 countries, plus trained and certified INTERPOL and Europol staff, are connected to and use the database to share seized child sexual abuse materials and child sexual exploitation materials and case-related information.²⁴⁶ And as noted in Section 3, the WePROTECT Global Alliance has worked with its partners worldwide to develop a MNR to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse that is being rolled out in a number of countries.²⁴⁷



“It ruins your life. Your life is stolen from you. It’s loss of freedom, that’s what bullying is.”

Nineteen-year-old boy²⁴⁸

Evidence on the sexual exploitation of boys

Even the limited data available tell us that the sexual exploitation of boys is a far greater problem than we once thought. We now know that boys may be just as heavily impacted as girls, and in some contexts, maybe even more so. Despite signs of greater awareness, the problem is still under-researched, unrecognized in relevant legislation and policy, and unaddressed in programming.²⁴⁹ According to VACS data, boys experience high levels of sexual violence, often with severe consequences (see Figures 2 and 3). Furthermore, boys who experience sexual violence in childhood are more likely to become perpetrators themselves.²⁵⁰

Growing evidence on evolving threats to children

Children on the move

As noted by work conducted by the Special Representative, we are learning more about violence against children on the move, including the grave risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking,

and the continuum of violence they face from their countries of origin, to transit countries during their journeys, and at their destinations.²⁵¹ UNHCR points out that reliable, timely and accessible data and evidence are essential for understanding how migration and forcible displacement affect children and their families – and for putting in place policies and programmes to meet their needs.²⁵²

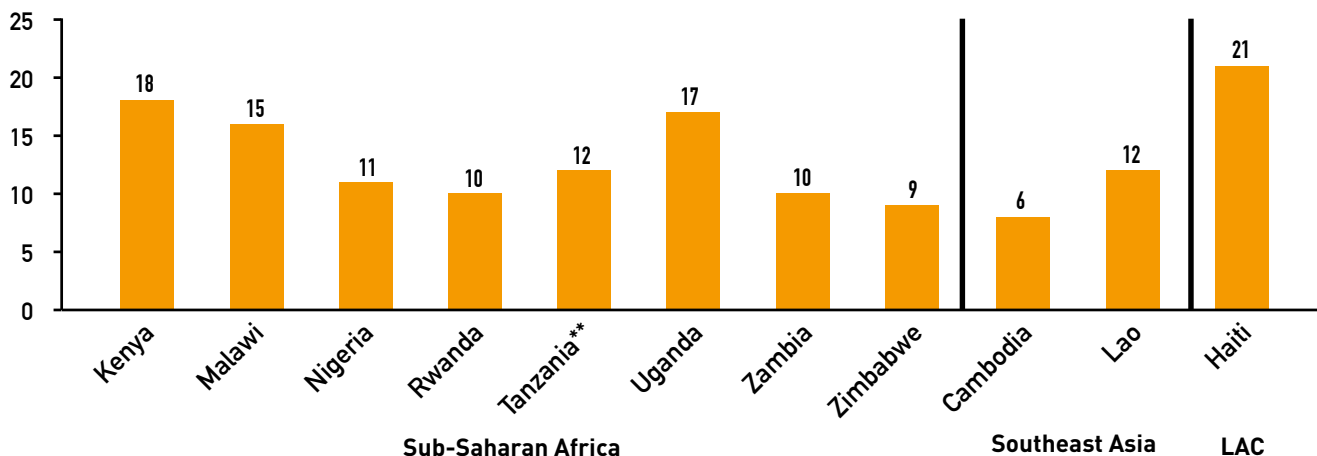
A recent study commissioned by ACERWC has confirmed gaps in protection measures for children on the move. The study presents the key drivers that spur children to leave home, as well as migration routes, the challenges they face on their journeys, the policies and approaches in place to protect them and potential ways forward.²⁵³

In East Africa, UNHCR and UNICEF have conducted a multi-country research and consultation process to identify good practice in strengthening access to national child protection systems for refugee children. The work has generated guidance for practitioners, as well as a joint initiative with the East African Community (EAC) to develop a Statement of Good Practice on Inclusion of Refugee Children in National Systems, signed and endorsed by the EAC.²⁵⁴

Gang violence

There is a chronic lack of evidence on children and gang violence, as pointed out in the 2016 report

Figure 2: Percentage of males aged 18-24 who experienced sexual violence prior to age 18



**Tanzania numbers may differ from the Violence Against Children Final Report, 2009 due to different analytic approaches

Source: Together for Girls, Contribution to Global Thematic Report, 2019.



Figure 3. The consequences of sexual violence against boys



Source: Together for Girls, Contribution to Global Thematic Report, 2019.

by the Special Representative *Protecting Children from Armed Conflict in the Community*, despite the scale and severity of the problems associated with gang violence.²⁵⁵ More studies are needed for example, about the cause-and-effect link between children on the move and violence. Children who are affected by gang and community violence may well be more likely to feel pressed to leave their homes, as we have seen in Central America - the subregion with most violence in the world.

But there is another data challenge: the extreme imbalance between the countries where violence occurs and those where research is done. In all, 90 per cent of scientific research on interpersonal violence comes from high-income countries. Only 10 per cent comes from the low- and middle-income countries that account for 85 per cent of violent deaths globally.²⁵⁶

Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism

The 2016 *Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism*²⁵⁷ (SECTT) emerged from a two-year research process to gather evidence on this gross violation of children's rights. This was the first attempt to consolidate knowledge on the global nature and scope of SECTT, with contributions from 67 partners around the world,

as well as experts and children. It brought SECTT into the light, setting out clear recommendations for concerted action from international and regional intergovernmental bodies, national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector including the travel, tourism and transportation sector, ICT industry and companies whose staff members travel for business.

The Global Study has fuelled further research on SECTT in every region and in an ever-expanding list of countries, and a task force is working to promote the implementation of its recommendations. As a follow-up, the first International Summit on the Protection of Children in Travel and Tourism took place in Bogotá, Colombia, in June 2018, hosted jointly by government and civil society actors. The resulting Call for Action laid the groundwork for committed partnerships and a comprehensive, child rights-centred, collaborative approach to end impunity for traveling child sex offenders.²⁵⁸

Progress on guidelines and indicators

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Statistical Commission and the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Violence against Children (IAEG-VAC) have focused on the development of indicators to monitor progress on SDG implementation. UNICEF is the custodian agency



Box 15. Follow the money: Data on the costs of violence against children

Investing in violence prevention is, first and foremost, a moral imperative. It is a question of good governance and respect for human rights. However, it also makes sound economic sense.

There have been various attempts to estimate the cost of violence against children to national economies over the years.

- Researchers from CDC, for example, estimated that violence against children in the United States cost the country at least US\$124 billion in 2008, but that the costs could be as high as US\$585 billion.²⁵⁹
- The Copenhagen Consensus has estimated the global cost to be US\$9.5 trillion, or 11 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).²⁶⁰
- A 2014 assessment by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), commissioned by the ChildFund Alliance, estimated that the global economy loses US\$7 trillion each year to violence against children: equivalent to 8 per cent of global GDP.²⁶¹

Whatever the precise figure, one thing is clear: prevention is a whole lot cheaper. Just as violence costs, so prevention pays. According to an earlier European Union study, every €1 invested in preventing violence would save €87 on the total cost of domestic violence.²⁶²

It is also important to track how money is being spent, and whether budgets intended to protect children are actually doing the job. Nigeria, for example, conducted its first baseline assessment of child protection expenditure, the *Child Protection Financial Benchmark*, in 2017. This will inform the development of a sound budget to implement the *National Action Plan to End Violence against Children*, developed in partnership with CSOs and religious groups.^{263, 264}

In the Philippines, the CSO Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child worked with Social Watch Philippines on a 2018 baseline study of public investment for child protection systems at local level. The study aimed to set benchmarks and identify indicators to measure and assess the application of the budgeting principles for child rights. It will identify gaps in the budgeting process and provide concrete recommendations on budgeting for children's rights.²⁶⁵

Sources: Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 'The Economic Costs of Violence against Children', 2015; Perezenieto et al., *The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children*, 2014; Speech by Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, 2010; CSO Forum, Contribution to Global Thematic Report, November 2018.

for two of the three indicators selected to monitor progress towards Target 16.2.²⁶⁶

The Special Representative and UNICEF, under the aegis of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, have been leading an initiative to establish a multi-stakeholder forum on data, research and evidence on violence against children. The forum would be a platform to promote shared

indicators on violence, to harmonize data collection methodologies and to identify research and data gaps.

Data concerns

Despite the progress made in recent years, data gaps still present a critical barrier to preventing and ending violence against children. The ACPF,



for example, notes that only slightly over 40 per cent of AU Member States have national monitoring systems to generate data on child marriage, and less than 25 per cent of reporting member states can provide all the data required.²⁶⁷ Similarly, the CoE raises concerns about the lack of specific data collection mechanisms or focal points tasked with collecting data on child sexual abuse generally, including in cases of sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust.²⁶⁸

UNICEF, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Eurostat and OECD have called on member states to address the data and evidence gaps pertaining to children affected by migration or forcible displacement.²⁶⁹ According to these partners:

“Despite greater efforts over the past decade, we still do not know enough about children on the move: their age and sex; where they come from, where they are going and why they move; whether they move with their families or alone, how they fare along the way, what their vulnerabilities are, what they need, and how migration and asylum policies affect them.”²⁷⁰

UNESCO points out that the lack of proper mechanisms for the systematic reporting of school violence and bullying makes it difficult to develop appropriate responses. It calls for a monitoring framework that goes beyond the recently developed SDG Thematic Indicator, which measures school bullying alone, rather than the full spectrum of school violence.²⁷¹

CSOs at the Solutions Summit in Stockholm in 2018 called for a Child Protection Index to scrutinize implementation of the legislation and strategies adopted to tackle violence against children. Such an instrument has been developed with the support of a coalition of CSOs in Romania (Romania Federation of NGOs for Child Protection, FONPC) and is providing vital information on the capacity of the child protection system.²⁷² The CSO Forum also highlights the need for data disaggregated by age and gender, as well as data from a more diverse range of sources, including citizen-led data that can strengthen national-level accountability.

The CBSS maintains that: “An absolute prerequisite is that governments are ready to accept even negative results of progress and be ready to take further actions if needed.”²⁷³

In 2013, the *Global Survey on Violence against Children* noted a serious lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data systems to inform interventions on violence against children.²⁷⁴ It also highlighted challenges such poor coordination between national statistical bodies and the institutions responsible for policies, programmes and resources to protect children from violence.

The Survey’s recommendations remain valid today: governments must build strong systems for data and other evidence to address violence against children, backed by the development of monitoring tools and indicators to capture the incidence of violence against girls and boys of every age and in every context. There is a pressing need for more research on neglected areas, including children’s exposure to the cumulative impact of violence across their life cycle. With adequate resources, more robust data, research and evidence can contribute to a better understanding of the hidden face of violence and its root causes and enhance the impact of efforts to prevent violence in the first place.²⁷⁵

Call to action

- As policies and programmes to end violence against children ramp up, we must monitor their progress and their impact.
- We need investment in more and better evidence, based on strong national data capacity.
- But evidence and data alone are not enough: they need to be shared and used strategically to inform positive change and sustain progress – whether the results they show are impressive or disappointing.

Evidence and data need to be tailored to influence policymakers. But they also need to be packaged and shared in a way that resonates with a multitude of other stakeholders, including professionals working with children, the media, the general public and, of course, children themselves. They are vital tools for the movement to end violence against children, which is highlighted in the next section.



5 Widening partnership:
Building the global
movement to end
violence against children



“We have to stand up for this child. Because if no-one does, that child will be left to suffer. And if it’s not my job, whose job is it?”

Rabbi Diana Gerson, New York Board of Rabbis, speaking at the 2015 Interfaith Forum on Religious Ideals and Reality, Geneva, August 2015²⁷⁶

- **No single individual, community, organization or sector working alone can bring violence against children to an end.**
- **Violence against children is everybody’s business. Everybody can become part of the global quest to end it. And change starts with each one of us.**
- **The movement to end violence against children is expanding to include more diverse players, bringing new strengths, skills and energy to our efforts.**
- **But it must be expanded still further, and its efforts must be accelerated, if we are to consign violence to the distant past.**

As the unacceptable toll of violence against children becomes widely understood, more partners are lining up to help, united by a common commitment to end the violence, once and for all.

The critical importance of partnership is emphasised in the Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a specific goal – SDG 17 – on the need to revitalize global partnership to deliver on the promises made. We are now seeing the rapid emergence of partnership as a strategy to accelerate momentum at global, regional and national level to address violence against children, mobilizing the strengths and resources of leaders from all walks of life, including national

governments, regional organizations, the United Nations, civil society, the private sector, the sporting world, faith-based organizations, children and young people and many, many more.

Governments have pledged to safeguard children’s protection and have the lead responsibility in efforts to end violence against children. However, an increasingly diverse and growing partnership reflects a growing realization that this is everybody’s business, that everybody has a part to play, and that no government, organization or sector working alone can address this complex and multi-faceted challenge.

Partnership at global and regional level

The 2030 Agenda²⁷⁷ has given new impetus to efforts to accelerate progress in violence prevention and elimination and to develop and strengthen new partnerships and alliances, including – among others – the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children; the Global Alliance to Eradicate Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Child Labour (known as Alliance 8.7); the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; the Task Force on Justice; and the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals.²⁷⁸

Together, these partnerships work on areas of direct relevance to violence against children. Alliance 8.7, for example, is an inclusive global partnership that is committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the SDGs, which calls on governments to take immediate and effective measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour – with clear implications for the reduction of violence against children.²⁷⁹

The Global Task Force on Justice brings together a distinguished group of justice leaders, organizations and experts to ensure access to justice for all and to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence, in line with the ambitions of SDG Target 16.2.²⁸⁰ The 2019 report of the Global Task Force²⁸¹ recognizes the critical importance of



children's right to access to justice, including for child victims of violence who too often lack information and feel frightened to report ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation, or to seek the care and support services to which they are entitled.

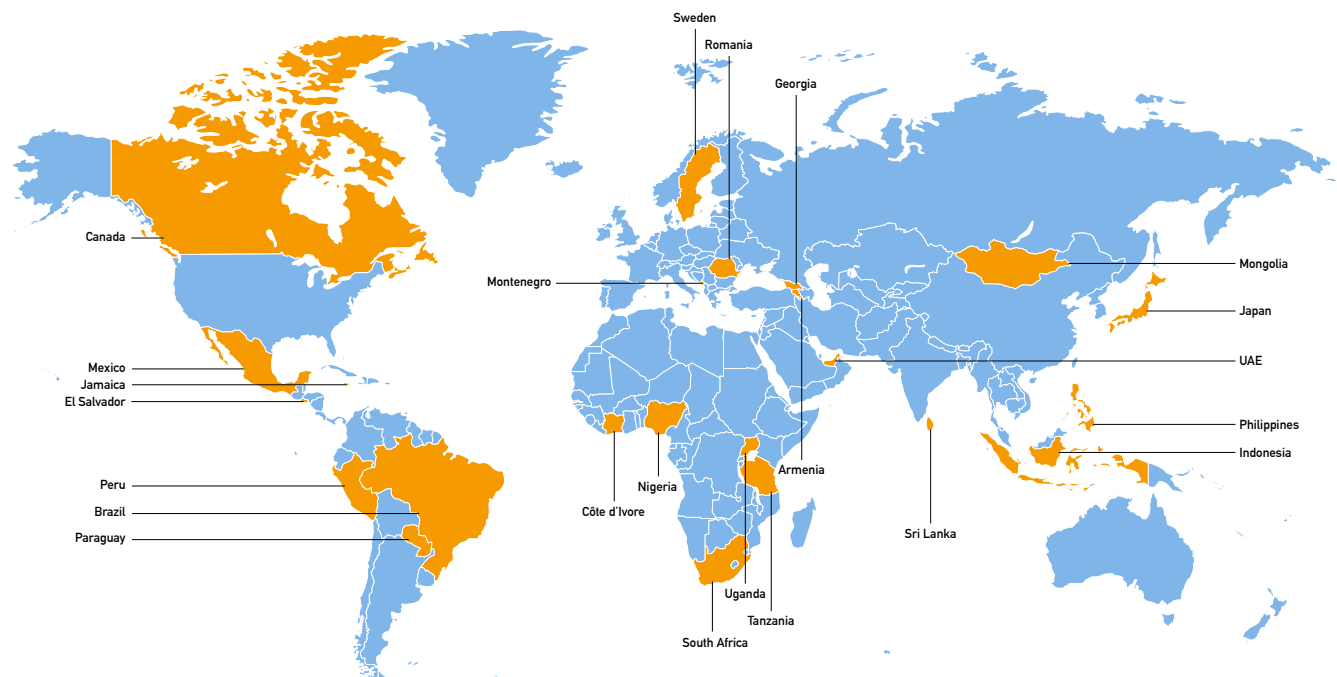
There are also crucial partnerships with major international CSOs, including the ACPF, Arigatou International, the Better Care Network, Child Helpline International, ChildFund Alliance, ECPAT, Girls Not Brides, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, Internet Watch Foundation, the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), One Third Sweden, Plan International, Promundo, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes, World Vision and others, many of whom have contributed to this report.²⁸² Foundations also play a key role in supporting the

agenda to end violence against children, including Ignite Philanthropy, the Oak Foundation and Wellspring.

Global partnership

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, launched in July 2016, has already attracted a wide membership, including national governments, the United Nations system, civil society and faith-based organizations. It aims to unite voices, actions and resources in a unique collaboration to end the violence against children.²⁸³ The Partnership works with Pathfinder countries in every region that have committed to accelerate action on SDG Target 16.2 via concrete action plans. In 2018, the number of Pathfinder countries almost doubled, from 13 to 23 (see Figure 4).²⁸⁴

Figure 4. Pathfinder countries working with the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children



Source: Global Partnership to End Violence against Children



The Partnership's End Violence Fund supports programmes to tackle violence in three priority areas: online abuse; in homes, schools and communities; and during conflicts and other crises. As of July 2018, it had invested more than US\$29 million in such programmes in 21 countries.²⁸⁵

CSOs play a crucial role in helping to shape national policy and public opinion and in acting as champions for child victims. The NGO Advisory Council was created in 2007 and includes international, regional and national NGOs to encourage and maintain NGO involvement in the full implementation of the recommendations emerging from the United Nations Study.²⁸⁶

Many of the Council's members are now part of the CSO Forum, which convenes a diverse coalition to ensure a strong, single voice for CSOs at global level.²⁸⁷ The success of the CSO Forum lies in the way it works, with its member organizations working closely together to contribute to global, regional and national action plans to end violence against children.²⁸⁸

National-level civil society campaigns are being organized to end violence against children in 74 countries, including in five fragile countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Niger and South Sudan. Corporal punishment, child marriage and violence at home (including neglect) are the top priorities, while many campaigns in fragile contexts focus on children in armed conflict, emergencies and children on the move. In 2018, CSOs campaigned successfully for 183 policy

changes in 36 countries that are addressing issues of vulnerability to violence for approximately 104 million children. Nearly 60 per cent of these changes were new or amended policies, over 70 per cent took place at the local level, and 23 per cent involved increasing or defending a budget.^{289, 290}

Another example of a focused partnership is Together for Girls, founded in 2009 and bringing together national governments, United Nations entities and private sector organizations to raise awareness, promote solutions and galvanize action across sectors. It now works with more than 20 countries around the world, aiming to bridge the gap between efforts to end violence against children and violence against women and supporting the development of violence against children surveys to inform an evidence-based policy agenda on violence prevention and elimination.²⁹¹

The Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA), formed in 2004, is a network of WHO Member States, United Nations entities and international agencies and CSOs working to prevent violence through a public health approach based on sound evidence.²⁹² The focus is firmly on prevention, with more than 60 partners uniting around a shared vision that works to address the root causes of violence and improve services for victims. As well as supporting the implementation of WHO's INSPIRE strategy (see Section 3), the VPA includes a project group that is working to reduce violence against children through effective parenting.



Box 16. Tackling sexual violence against children in sport

A wide alliance is needed to tackle violence against children in sports, with all of those involved in sporting activities, from coaches to parents, aware of the need for vigilance and for positive forms of encouragement for children as they pursue their sporting ambitions.

Sport is great for children, boosting self-esteem and creating a sense of belonging. For some children, however, sport has a dark side that exposes them to the sexual violence that thrives wherever there is tolerance for discrimination, physical violence and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Victims may have many reasons to remain silent. They may be paralysed by fear, shame and guilt. Very young children may not realize that they are being abused, while teenagers may believe they are in a 'relationship'. Love for their sport, peer pressure, ambition and taboos around sexuality may all contribute to their silence.

In April 2018, the CoE launched the Start to Talk campaign, a call for action by public authorities, sports movements and other partners to take action to stop child sexual abuse in sport.

Organizations in 18 countries have joined the initiative so far with campaigns underway in the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Spain. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) are among the many sports organizations supporting the initiative.

By joining this call, governments, sports clubs, associations and federations, as well as athletes and coaches, pledge to take concrete measures to prevent and respond to abuse. Start to Talk is about adults breaking the silence and giving children a voice.²⁹³

Source: CoE, 'starttotalk.org', Strasbourg, n.d.

Regional partnership

The wide and ever-growing movement to end violence against children has gained a renewed impetus at the regional and national level. In Africa, for example, the African Partnership to End Violence against Children was established by the ACPF in 2016, and is a coalition that brings together like-minded national, regional and international organizations for collective action. The Partnership was born out of the need for an Africa-wide platform to address the targets related to violence against children set out in the SDGs, the *African Agenda for Children's Rights 2040*,²⁹⁴ the aspirations of *Africa's Agenda 2063*²⁹⁵ (see Section 2) and other continental and sub-regional frameworks in Africa. The Partnership prioritises

the embedding of this issue within the agendas of the AU and the continent's Regional Economic Communities (RECs).²⁹⁶

The work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to prevent and respond to violence against children illustrates how the mobilization of parliaments can be instrumental to the ratification of treaties, the adoption of laws and the improvement of policies. The creation of a group of contact parliamentarians on the *One in Five* campaign²⁹⁷ against child sexual abuse accelerated the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention.²⁹⁸ PACE is currently working on a report on how to accelerate efforts to reach SDG Target 16.2.



MMI-LAC is a strategic alliance that brings together UNICEF, IIN and CSOs, including child-led organizations, regional networks and international NGOs, to promote, monitor, protect and defend the rights of children and adolescents across Latin America and the Caribbean. While its priority is to reduce all forms of violence against children and adolescents in the region, MMI-LAC has placed a special emphasis over the past four years on the promotion of the SDGs related to violence against children, child-friendly budgeting and region-wide issues such as child migration. MMI-LAC also prioritizes gender-based violence and child participation as cross-cutting issues.²⁹⁹

The South Asia Coordinating Group on Action Against Violence Against Children (SACG) brings United Nations agencies and international and regional NGOs together at the regional level for child rights and protection. These include ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, UNESCO, World Vision International, ECPAT International, Plan International, Save the Children, Child Helpline International, SOS Children's Villages International, the Centre for Reproductive Rights, Terre de Hommes, and Planete Enfants, working in partnership with the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat and its national mechanisms.

Evolving partnership with the private sector

The private sector is emerging as a strong partner in efforts to end violence against children, as highlighted in the joint 2018 report by the Special Representative and UNICEF on the role of the sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.³⁰⁰

Launched at the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, the report sets out private sector measures to protect children from violence and invest in its prevention.³⁰¹

The vast potential of this sector to contribute to the SDGs, including to Target 16.2, has been recognized by the United Nations Global Compact. Launched in 2000, this is now the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, with more than 13,500 corporate participants. The Compact is based on commitments by chief executive officers to align

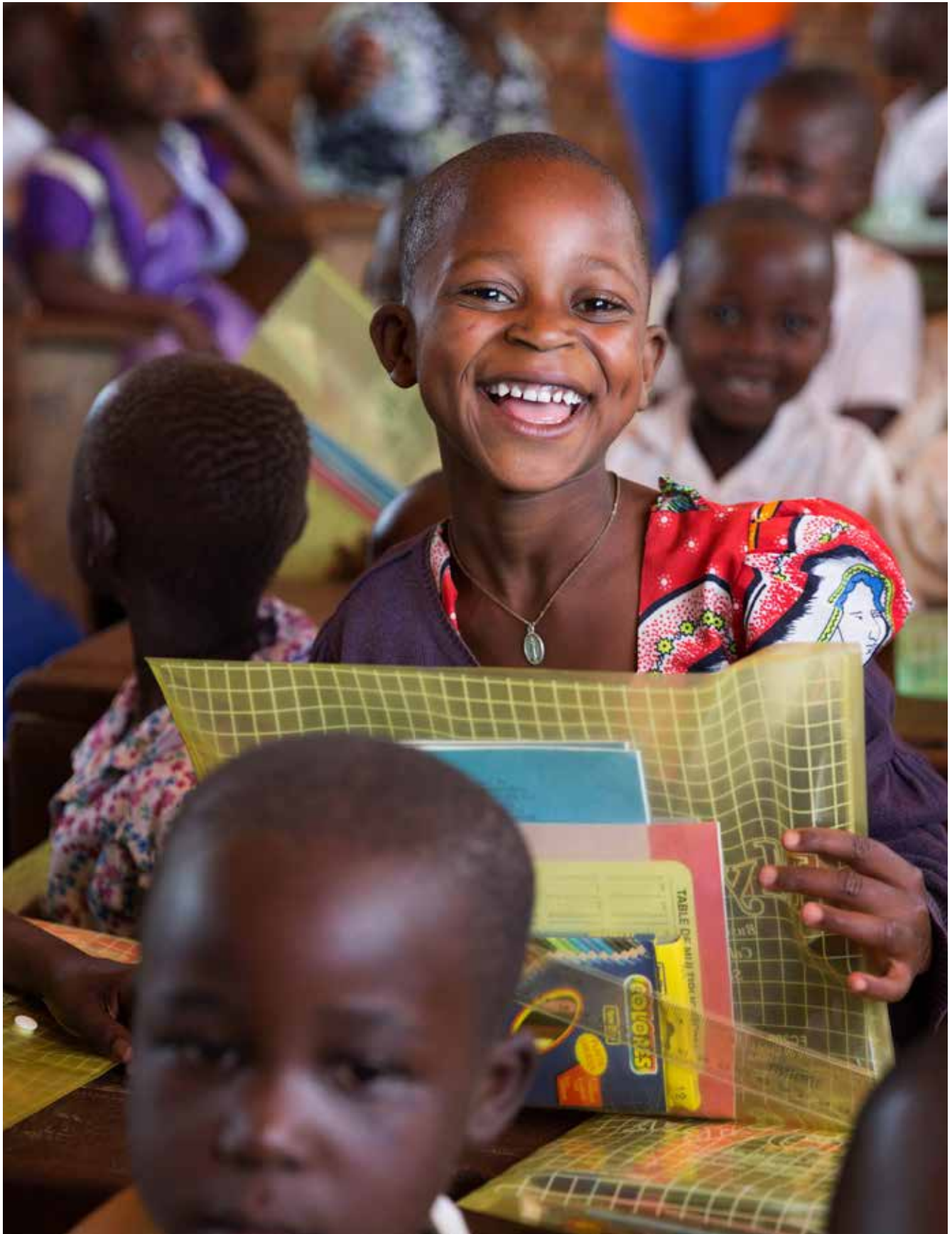
their strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and its focus area on social sustainability covers the human rights of specific groups, including children.³⁰²

Developed by the Global Compact, Save the Children and UNICEF, the *Children's Rights and Business Principles* (the Principles) agreed in 2012 were the first principles to guide companies on their action in the workplace, marketplace and community to respect and support children's rights.³⁰³ Principle 4 states that companies should:

- ensure that company facilities are not used to abuse, exploit or harm children
- ensure that potentially dangerous areas of company facilities do not pose a safety threat to children, during or outside business hours
- make clear to staff that the business's zero tolerance policy for violence, exploitation and abuse applies in all business activities, even when conducted away from business facilities
- take appropriate action when concerns about possible violence, exploitation or abuse arise
- ensure that young workers above the minimum age for work are protected from hazardous labour.³⁰⁴

In January 2019, the United States-based NGO No Bully joined forces with the private sector, (AT&T, Facebook, Hasbro, Microsoft and Scholastica, among others) and with United Nations entities (UNESCO, UNICEF and the Special Representative) to launch Power of Zero – a campaign to prevent and respond to cyberbullying among very young children worldwide.³⁰⁵

The campaign will teach young children how to be compassionate, resilient and inclusive online. It will help parents, caregivers and educators guide children's use of the Internet and their online behaviour, laying the groundwork for children to develop the digital citizenship skills they need to protect themselves from cyberbullying. Resources developed by the campaign and its educational partner Scholastic will be available on Powerof0.org and distributed to schools globally, with learning materials and games to prepare children to thrive in a digital world.³⁰⁶





The WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online is an international partnership dedicated to national and global action on this issue. WePROTECT combines the Global Alliance, led by the U.S. Department of Justice and the EU Commission, and WePROTECT, convened by the UK. This merged initiative has unprecedented reach, given that 84 countries were already

members of WePROTECT or the Global Alliance, together with major international organizations, 24 of the biggest names in the global technology industry, and 20 leading CSOs.³⁰⁷ WePROTECT has been instrumental in the development and roll-out of the MNR on online sexual exploitation of children (see Section 3).

Box 17. The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism

The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism ('The Code') supports the tourism industry in preventing the sexual exploitation of children. The goal is to create a knowledgeable and well-trained industry that can recognize and prevent potential abuse. The Code also aims to build zero-tolerance environments, so that travellers understand that the sexual exploitation of children is a crime, that it is unacceptable, and that offenders will be prosecuted. The Code was originally developed by ECPAT Sweden, UNWTO and Swedish tour operators in 1996, and its Secretariat is now hosted by ECPAT International in Bangkok.

When a tourism company joins the Code they commit to take six essential steps to help protect children:

- 1 TO ESTABLISH A POLICY AND PROCEDURES** against sexual exploitation of children
- 2 TRAIN EMPLOYEES** in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation and how to report suspected cases
- 3 INCLUDE A CLAUSE IN CONTRACTS** throughout the value chain stating a common repudiation and zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children
- 4 PROVIDE INFORMATION TO TRAVELERS** on children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and how to report suspected cases
- 5 SUPPORT, COLLABORATE & ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS** in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children
- 6 REPORT ANNUALLY** on your implementation of The Code

As of March 2019, the Code had 325 member companies across 150 countries, and around 960,000 staff had been trained. Those known as 'Top Members' – companies that have excelled in their implementation of the six steps – include Accor Hotels, Carlson, Hilton Worldwide, the Tui Group and the Mexican airline Volaris.

The commitment of Volaris has resulted in child traffickers being brought to justice. In May 2016, for example, Volaris alerted law enforcement to a trafficker who was trying to buy a ticket for a flight for his victim, a seventeen-year-old boy. This follows similar cases of Volaris staff stepping in to protect children at risk in recent years (at least four times in 2016 alone).³⁰⁸

Source: [←http://www.thecode.org/→](http://www.thecode.org/)



Strengthened alliances with faith-based organizations

Religious leaders and faith communities are in a unique position to prevent violence against children by mobilizing their moral authority to influence thinking, generate debate and set standards for others to follow. With most of the world's population – around 5 billion people – belonging to religious communities, their potential to make a difference is immense. They are well-placed to give families the advice and the tools they need to protect their children and to take action when offenders ask for guidance. They are also the most inter-connected and grass-roots social organizations on our planet.

Religious communities have come together at a number of landmark events in recent years:

- 2006: the Religions for Peace VIII World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, adopted the *Kyoto Declaration*,³⁰⁹ paving the way for action by the world's religions on the recommendations of the United Nations Study.³¹⁰ The Declaration noted consensus across religions on this issue, and pledged to raise awareness, provide moral leadership and call on governments to prohibit violence against children in all its forms.³¹¹
- 2017: the fifth Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children in Panama City brought together more than 500 religious leaders to find ways to tackle violence against children. The resulting Panama Declaration on Ending Violence against Children recognizes that violence is not justified in the teachings of any of the world's major religions.³¹²
- 2018: the first Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities Forum on Child Dignity in a Digital World, in Abu Dhabi, brought religious leaders together to learn about the risks children face in cyberspace, about solutions to help children protect themselves, and about the critical role of religious leaders.³¹³
- 2018: faith-based organizations gathered in Rome for the Faith Action for Children on the Move conference to reflect on how they could contribute to ending the violence experienced by this group of children.³¹⁴

The World Council of Churches and UNICEF have issued the *Churches' Commitments for Children*³¹⁵ to strengthen action with and for children and to promote collaboration to improve their lives. The Commitments aim to ensure child-safe church environments and to speed the end of violence against children and adolescents across society, in line with the CRC. They include commitments to child safeguarding policies that are developed with the participation of children, and the appointment of focal points to provide confidential support.³¹⁶

Religions for Peace (RfP) and ECPAT International have published *Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation*, which provides guidance on how religious leaders and communities can provide the moral compass that is needed to end this crime. Capturing the perspectives of different religions on child protection, the guide also provides step-by-step tips to help religious leaders and communities take action, seek justice and protect children.³¹⁷

To mark the 30th anniversary of the CRC, Arigatou International has worked with religious scholars and a wide range of partners to promote the development of a comprehensive study of perspectives across many religions on violence against children.³¹⁸ Arigatou International is already working with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) to establish a network within INEB to convene teachers at Buddhist monastic schools and local Buddhist organizations in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia. The aim is to create policies for violence-free monastic schools and to build the capacity of Buddhist teachers to implement them.³¹⁹

Some academic institutions have also developed important studies and tools for religious communities. For example, Egypt's Al-Azhar University and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Coptic Orthodox Church, have published a guidebook that examines specific issues such as child and forced marriage, FGM, discrimination, child labour, sexual abuse, absence of family care and children living on the street, trafficking, children in armed conflict and violence against children online and in the media.³²⁰



Incidents of child abuse within religious institutions has caused untold damage to victims and eroded people's trust. It has led to strong mobilization to promote religious spaces and communities that are safe for all children. The Vatican Summit on the Protection of Minors in the Church, in February 2019, signalled a new climate of openness and transparency on this issue. Following the Summit, the Vatican put new measures in place that focus on the protection of minors and vulnerable adults and the prevention of crimes against them, as well as new regulations on duties to report, caring for victims and their families, removing offenders from their positions, and prosecuting those guilty of abuse.³²¹ Pope Francis has since announced that it will be mandatory for members of the clergy to report cases of clerical sexual abuse to the church.³²²

"I make a heartfelt appeal for an all-out battle against the abuse of minors both sexually and in other areas, on the part of all authorities and individuals, for we are dealing with abominable crimes that must be erased from the face of the earth: this is demanded by all the many victims hidden in families and in the various settings of our societies."

Pope Francis, Vatican Summit on the Protection of Minors in the Church, February 2019³²³

Call to action

Our call to action is very simple: join the cause!

There is no upper limit on how many individuals, organizations, agencies or sectors can be involved. Everyone has something to contribute: everyone can make a difference. The challenge is to expand the growing partnership to end violence against children still further and to accelerate and intensify collective efforts.

This section has looked very largely at partnerships that are adult-led and that so often set the agenda. But contributors to this report also made a common plea for a stronger focus on the voices of children and young people. Given their critical importance in efforts to tackle the violence, the next section looks at how children's voices are being amplified and, increasingly, being heard.



6 Amplifying the voice of children



I hope that young people will not be afraid to speak up for themselves because the world needs to hear our voice. We are the ones responsible to make the world a better place in the future. Kindness is contagious and kindness begins with us. It began with me. If it worked in my school, it can happen anywhere.”

Sailful Ikhwan, aged 19, Malaysia³²⁴

- **The participation of children and young people in advocacy, policy development and action on violence is evolving.**
- **Children are increasingly setting their own agendas to prevent and tackle the violence against them and are driving change.**
- **Programmes and approaches to end violence against children are more effective when guided by their perspectives – they recognize patterns of violence that may be invisible to adults and identify opportunities for positive change.**
- **Adult champions for children need to learn how best to promote and support meaningful child participation and, increasingly, leadership.**
- **They must also balance the need to amplify children’s voices with the need to ensure they can do so safely.**

The right of every child to be heard and to have their views taken seriously is one of the core principles of the CRC. The Convention represented a radical shift in perspective – the first time in history that the world recognized that children had the right to express their views on matters

that concerned them, and to have those views considered by authorities and decision-makers.

Since the CRC adoption in 1989, there has been progress on child participation in terms of the development of legislation, policies and methodologies. The term ‘child participation’ has come to describe ongoing processes such as information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, where children learn how their views – and indeed those of adults – are taken into account.³²⁵

The 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children³²⁶ was the first United Nations report developed with children across different regions – an important catalyst for their greater participation. And children have been increasingly involved in high-level consultations and initiatives to address violence prevention and response ever since. In 2009, the value of their involvement was reinforced when the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 12 on the Right of the Child to Be Heard, which guides governments on this issue.³²⁷

Child participation resonates with the core theme of the 2019 HLPF: Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality, which includes a strong focus on SDG 16 – promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, including SDG Target 16.2 to eliminate all forms of violence against children. This is a golden opportunity to document positive experiences of child participation in solutions to the violence they face, and the results achieved with their support.

This matters, because policies and approaches to tackle this violence are likely to be more effective when informed by the views and experiences of children. As those most directly affected, they see patterns of violence that adults may well miss; and they are best placed to identify solutions that will make a difference to them. Children may even be the first to learn about certain forms of violence, as seen, for example, in the case of violence online that is often ‘invisible’ to the adults around them. We need their knowledge, and we will miss vital information if we rely solely on adult perceptions of what is happening [Box 18].



Box 18. The importance of child helplines

Child helplines to support children experiencing violence are uniquely placed to capture their voices. The real-time information shared by these children often fills gaps missed by official statistics, flags up emerging trends and new online risks, and can be used to transform child protection systems. This makes it vital to integrate child helplines within national child protection systems, where they can act as both a resource for children and as a referral system to other services they may need.

Unfiltered information from children can be used to protect a child immediately, and to strengthen collective global efforts to protect children from all forms of violence. Examples include:

Africa: The neighbour of a fifteen-year-old girl contacted the child helpline to report a marriage ceremony planned for the next day between the girl and a man in his forties. The child helpline supported the neighbour to report this to local authorities, which intervened to stop the marriage.

Asia-Pacific: A twelve-year-old girl called the child helpline to saying that her father had hit her because of a bad school report. She did not want to go to school because she did not want anyone to see her bruises. She said she did not feel safe at home. The counsellor gave the girl time and space to talk and asked if she wanted to involve child protection services, but she was too fearful. After two months of regular contact with the child helpline, she told the counsellor she had contacted child protection services for help.

Europe: A fourteen-year-old girl is a regular caller to a child helpline. She lives in foster care, having been sexually abused by her caregiver in the past. The girl talks to the child helpline about how the abuse has affected her relationships, and her struggles to trust anyone. The girl says that the child helpline helps her cope and makes her feel normal.

Children need to be able to share their voices and experiences in a safe, protective, confidential way that encourages their participation in addressing and providing solutions to end all forms of violence against themselves and other children.

Source: Child Helpline International, *Contribution to Global Thematic Report on Violence against Children*, April 2019.

As noted by UNICEF, child participation means including children:

“on their own terms, within their own realities and in pursuit of their own visions, dreams, hopes and concerns. Most of all, authentic and meaningful child participation requires a radical shift in adult thinking and behaviour – from an exclusionary to an inclusionary approach to children and their capabilities.”³²⁸

What are children and adolescents saying about violence?

Perhaps the most compelling and urgent reason for action to end violence against children is that they are telling us, loudly and clearly, that they want the violence to stop. And they expect us to make that happen. Even in the most desperate situations, children are optimistic about the prospects for a better world and lasting change. They join hands with national authorities, civil society and many other allies to raise awareness about the impact of violence and to inspire each other to take action.



“Teachers and parents could punish children beyond compare. Instead of asking why a child made a mistake, then counseling and guiding them, they opt for severe punishments and harm children”

Fifteen-year-old girl from Tanzania³²⁹

Violence consistently tops children’s list of concerns. It was the top priority for the more than 800,000 children who took part in consultations in the lead up to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The same concern has been reaffirmed in survey after survey with children and adolescents. In 2016, the Special Representative and UNICEF carried out an online poll to gather the views of more than 100,000 young people worldwide on their experience of bullying. The resulting U-Report platform presents compelling data on pervasive bullying: 9 in every 10 of the respondents saw bullying as a problem, and two-thirds reported that they had been victims.³³⁰

Migrant and refugee children share this concern too, with many of the 170,000 young people whose opinions were gathered by an online poll by The Special Representative and UNICEF citing violence as a reason for leaving their homes, as a constant challenge during their journeys and as a continuing threat at their destinations. Violence, fear and insecurity are also massive concerns for children in detention.³³¹

In 2015 and 2016, UNHCR and the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) held Global Refugee Youth Consultations (GRYC) to amplify youth voices in decisions that affect them and their communities. Almost 1,900 young people took part in consultations in 23 countries, flagging up 10 common challenges, including gender inequality, discrimination, exploitation and violence. Young refugees saw gender inequality and discrimination not only as distinct challenges, but also as underlying causes of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, including domestic

violence, child and forced marriage, sexual assault and rape. They called for the following core actions to be taken:

- empower refugee youth through meaningful engagement
- recognize, utilize and develop the capacities and skills of refugee youth
- ensure protection that is focused on refugee youth
- support the physical and emotional well-being of refugee youth
- facilitate refugee youth networking and information-sharing
- reinforce refugee youth in their role as connectors and peace-builders
- generate data and evidence on refugee youth to promote accountability.³³²

In 2017, children at the 7th High-Level Cross Regional Roundtable on Violence against Children shared their views on violence, and what is being done about it. Asked to select their own priorities, they focused on sexual violence against children, children affected by drugs and family neglect, and physical violence at home and at school, as well as developing detailed recommendations on each area.³³³

As well as wanting to be heard, children and adolescents want to know where to turn. In November 2018, youth representatives from the Americas and the Caribbean made their views clear at the 1st Regional Dialogue “On the Road to Equality” as a prelude to the 30th anniversary year of the CRC. Their own Declaration lamented the lack of options for reporting and for support, and appealed for an end to impunity:

“We observe that violence is normalized. Many times, we live or witness it within the educational system or within families, and this affects our development in school and in life. Recurrent victims of violence do not report and have lost hope of receiving support. We believe that impunity cannot continue, and we must promote a strong Rule of Law. For this reason, we understand that it is urgent to take actions so that children and adolescents do not continue to be harmed.”³³⁴



In December 2018, UNICEF South Africa, the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, Global Citizen and Junior Chamber International convened more than 100 young people to draft a first-of-its-kind #ENDviolence Youth Manifesto as part of UNICEF's global #ENDviolence campaign. Children and young people travelled from countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas to draw up the Manifesto, which highlighted the need for protection, calling for legal measures to keep students safe in school and on their way to and from school.³³⁵

World Vision's global campaign It Takes a World was launched to support progress towards SDG Target 16.2 and to have a positive impact on the most vulnerable boys and girls by 2021.³³⁶ The campaign is now active in 74 countries and has had a number of successes, including child-led advocacy in Bangladesh that has contributed to the allocation of US\$228,000 for local programming to tackle violence against children.³³⁷

A snapshot of child participation initiatives

The most successful approaches to child participation promote their involvement from planning to action. They ask children to pinpoint their main concerns and take a lead in proposed solutions. Many utilise the ICTs that children and adolescents use to communicate with each other and the wider world, as well as working through the school system.³³⁸

- **#StandTogether Malaysia:** a national campaign promoted by the Government of Malaysia, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector, extols kindness as a way to tackle bullying in schools, encouraging children and adults to work together and suggest solutions. Within its first week, students had submitted more than 130 projects and 750 schools took steps to promote greater kindness. Manuals and toolkits have been made available, both online and offline, and ICTs are used to share resources and collect real-time data.³³⁹

- **Mexico's national online polling system:** the Government of Mexico launched this initiative to advance implementation of its law on children and adolescents and gather information from children aged 13 and older, working closely with the community network of the National Council for Educational Development to ensure that out-of-school children could have their say. Children have shared their worries about the use of corporal punishment at home, and discrimination in schools.³⁴⁰
- **Chile's Yo Opino initiative:** this national consultation has collected the views of children aged 4 to 18 via the school system, with the results presented to Congress and the 2017 HLPF on Sustainable Development. Children have expressed strong concerns about poverty and violence, calling for respect for diversity and non-discrimination, for their freedom from verbal and physical punishment and for an end to bullying and cyberbullying.³⁴¹
- **#KnotSoYoung in India:** this child empowerment initiative has mobilized thousands of children and adolescents to prevent child marriage, creating a network of youth leaders. The emphasis is on girls' education and awareness of their rights to enable them to stay in school. As a result, 10 villages have declared themselves free of child marriage.³⁴²
- **'Rise up for Girls' in Guatemala and Malawi** aims to tackle child marriage and gender-based violence, with girls identifying major protection concerns. In Guatemala, girls have led the creation of a national violence observatory to report cases of violence against girls and women, with more than 700 girls referred to date. In Malawi, more than 10,000 girls have supported the push to raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18, using ICTs to lobby politicians. This has triggered changes in the Constitution and the banning of child marriage in 184 communities.³⁴³



- **Child Parliament in Bangladesh:** While children's parliaments are found in many countries, the Child Parliament in Bangladesh scored a success in 2017 when the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs attended a session. Having listened to their recommendations on violence against children, the Minister later brought Child Parliamentarians to meet senior officials, who reported on the actions taken so far and plans to implement the recommendations in the future. While Save the Children helped children develop their capacity for these activities, the children spoke for themselves.³⁴⁴
- **Plan Z:** this multi-agency international pilot is working towards the ending of violence against children through Child-Led Innovation Labs in countries such as Sri Lanka.³⁴⁵ Children identify the problems they face and provide innovative solutions through workshop exercises. They then collaborate with innovators to bring their solutions to life, and then advocate for the use of these solutions by civil society.³⁴⁶

Mainstreaming child participation

Many organizations are mainstreaming child participation into their core business. The CoE, for example, aims to embed the genuine involvement of children in decision-making at CoE, national and local levels. Children have been consulted on many aspects of the CoE *Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)*.³⁴⁷ For example, over 3,800 children were consulted during the development of the CoE *Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice*,³⁴⁸ and in 2018, 200 children from 8 countries provided feedback to the current monitoring cycle of the Lanzarote Convention.³⁴⁹ Children with disabilities were involved in the preparation of a report on the opportunities and risks they face in the digital environment. And Roma and non-Roma children were involved in designing the child-friendly version of the *Dosta* (Enough in Romani) Campaign.³⁵⁰

The CoE has developed a Child Participation Assessment Tool³⁵¹ that has been tested in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Romania. Preliminary results reveal, however, that further efforts are needed, as states are not equipped – and sometimes do not feel the need – to involve children systematically in decisions.³⁵²

The IIN-OAS prioritizes the voices of children and adolescents. Its Network of Child and Adolescent Correspondents³⁵³ is drawn from children's and adolescents' groups from member States who, after basic training, function as correspondents. They prepare notes on the realities of the region that are compiled every six months by the Institute. Child participation is also institutionalized in the Permanent Council of the OAS and in the Directing Council of the IIN-OAS.³⁵⁴

Child participation is one of the six goals of UNHCR's Framework for the Protection of Children.³⁵⁵ In March 2018, UNHCR updated its Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity to reinforce the importance of child participation. And its consultations with refugee children led to the creation of the Global Youth Advisory Council in December 2017, enabling young people to share their views and bring the perspectives of their communities into the work of UNHCR at all levels.³⁵⁶

From participation to partnership to leadership

We are now seeing another evolutionary leap: from children and young people participating in adult-led agendas, to being consulted on those agendas, to setting agendas that are entirely their own.

In April 2019, the Government of Iceland agreed to increase the participation of children and young people in the formulation of policies, and it adopted a proposal to review the likely child-rights impact of legislation in the future. The aim is to ensure that child participation will become systematic, regular and genuine.



As noted by the Minister of Social Affairs and Children of Iceland:

“If we believe that the country’s best investment is the children, it is important that all major actions are valued on the basis of their interests and that children and young people have a voice in work related to the decision-making and rulemaking that concerns them.”

Children are now ‘at the table’, making their voices heard as never before. Their potential contribution is being recognized: the 2018 Day of Discussion by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, for example, focused on children as human rights defenders, with child participants helping to shape the agenda and taking part in every working group discussion.³⁵⁷

Children are no longer waiting for governments or organizations to open up space for them to participate; instead they are increasingly creating those spaces and making good use of them. They are pressing adults to act with a far deeper sense of urgency, as seen in recent school movements – including the movement on climate change that began in August 2018 when one Swedish girl refused to go to school until her Government reduced carbon emissions.

They include children and young people who have faced extreme violence, such as the survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, in 2018, which took the lives of 17 of their classmates. These children and youth were instrumental in creating the ‘Never Again’ movement – a student-led action committee for gun control. As a result, an estimated 1 million students took part in protests against gun violence across the United States.

The CoE contribution to this report notes that:

“Children are also trend setters with the power to influence. Children’s awareness of human rights issues and social justice has increased. Alongside the awareness comes children’s demand for greater and meaningful participation in decisions

on political, legal, social and other matters. Children are participating in peaceful protests, forming their own organisations and movements, and interacting with local and national legislators through youth parliaments. Many claim the right to vote and to be recognized and protected as human rights defenders.”³⁵⁸

There is a major responsibility to ensure that children – particularly those who are victims or survivors of violence – can speak out safely and that their concerns are taken into account without exposing them to any further risk. Any safeguarding protocols and principles that are applied across sectors such as child protection and education must also be diligently applied in relation to adults working to support child participation. Plan International, for example, has produced a toolkit specifically for adults who are supporting children involved in international events, covering everything from the responsibilities of a chaperone to helping children handle media exposure.³⁵⁹

The CoE has also stressed that children and young people need to be shielded from harm and that it is vital not to ‘over-promise’:

“In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances. Children and young people who exercise their right to freely express their views must be protected from harm, including intimidation, reprisals, victimisation and violation of their right to privacy. Children and young people should always be fully informed of the scope of their participation, including the limitations on their involvement, the expected and actual outcomes of their participation and how their views were ultimately considered.”³⁶⁰

Contributors to this report have also emphasized the need to ramp up the representation of children from various backgrounds, geographic regions and ages, as well as those who are the most marginalized, including those with disabilities.³⁶¹



Call to action

We have pledged to give children a voice, to listen to that voice and to act on what we hear.

We must make sure children are supported and protected from harm as their influence increases as agents of change.



7

Conclusion



Where we have seen progress, we see five key ingredients for success.

- Committed political leadership, strong policy frameworks and legislation, backed by predictable resources – human as well as financial – for implementation and enforcement.
- Comprehensive, cross-sectoral approaches to strengthen entire systems and create a preventive as well as protective safety net for all children, with targeted interventions to identify and support the children at greatest risk, as well as the monitoring of progress and impact.
- Robust evidence and data to address the drivers of violence and break the silence around children’s exposure to neglect, maltreatment, abuse and exploitation; and that inform advocacy, laws, policies and approaches.
- Partnership and alliances that are strengthening a growing movement for children’s freedom from violence: no single organization or sector can tackle violence against children on its own. This is everybody’s business, and we will have more impact if we pool our different strengths.
- The voice of children is no longer an optional extra or a ‘nice to have’. It is vital. What works, works better when children are part of the process and on the front line of prevention and protection.

These five ingredients must be combined for maximum impact. This requires a rolling and continuous process that builds upon effective, integrated and well-coordinated policies equipped to cope with new and emerging threats, backed by

strong and well-resourced implementation. This process must, in turn, be driven by collaboration across all relevant stakeholders as well as across entire sectors, disciplines and level of national administration. It must support child protection systems to prevent and tackle all forms of violence in all contexts and protect the rights of child victims. It must be informed by robust evaluation that has the best interests of the child at its core and enable us to change course wherever necessary. And it must be informed by the voices of children and young people.

Such a process requires sound investment from multiple sources. Governments, in particular, need to allocate adequate resources to their maximum extent and ensure child-centred budgets and investments in legal and child protection systems, as well as infrastructure to collect, analyse and share data on violence against children to sustain positive change.

We have made the case. We know what works. It is high time to deliver on the promises made to children, translating into reality their right to freedom from violence, as called for three decades ago in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reaffirmed by the 2030 Agenda.

As this report shows, there is no reason to be fatalistic or pessimistic about the prospects for reaching the global goal of eliminating all violence against children. Wherever this concern has been prioritized, wherever people have moved as one, we see progress. Violence against children is everybody’s business: it can be overcome when everybody makes it their business.



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OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children is an independent global advocate in favour of the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, mobilizing action and political support to achieve progress the world over. The mandate of SRSG is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments and framed by the UN Study on Violence against Children.

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