

CHILD PROTECTION ADVOCACY BRIEFING

Violence Against Children



Fabliona, age 4, in Tirana, Albania, was physically abused by her father. Jeta, her mother, 24, was physically and mentally abused by her husband, who became violent after discovering that Jeta was pregnant with a girl. After Jeta gave birth to Fabliona, he continued the abuse, extending it towards his daughter.

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Violence against children is a pervasive human rights violation, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes a legal and ethical imperative to bring it to an end. Violence adversely affects the health and well-being of children everywhere and can limit life opportunities. Given its scale, it can significantly undermine national development and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Violence against children is usually hidden from public view.

Violence against children includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Children may be subjected to violence in everyday settings, such as in their homes, schools and communities, including online, and in institutions. Offenders go to great lengths to conceal abuse, and children may lack the capacity to report or even to understand their experiences. Common, everyday forms of violence may be socially accepted as a normal part of growing up and may not even be considered violence.

Typically, most children will experience violent discipline – in the form of physical punishment or psychological aggression – in the first 24 months of their lives.¹ For most people, this means that the first experience of violence is at the hand of parents or caregivers who wish to correct what they see as misbehaviour. Combined with other early and very common experiences – such as witnessing violence against their mothers – a behavioural script is established that grows with the child into adulthood and

contributes to the inter-generational transmission of violence. Prolonged exposure to such experiences can generate toxic stress and alter the structure and functioning of the brain.² This can manifest in more impulsive, risk-taking behaviour in adolescence.

As children move through adolescence, they begin to spend increasing amounts of time beyond their immediate networks, interacting with a wider array of people. This widening of their social world, while beneficial in many respects, also creates situations of risk. In schools, bullying and physical fights are regularly experienced by around half of all children from 13–15 years of age.³ Globally, around 71 per cent of youth go online, where they may be exposed to new forms of peer-to-peer violence and other harms.⁴ Sexual violence affects children of every age, but adolescents, especially girls, are particularly vulnerable. As children enter the second decade of their lives, the mortality rate from violence is more than double that of their first 10 years of life.⁵

1 United Nations Children's Fund, 'A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents', UNICEF, New York, 2017, <www.unicef.org/publications/index_101397.html>, accessed 8 October 2019.

2 Shonkoff, Jack P, et al., 'The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress', *Pediatrics*, vol. 129, no. 1, January 2012, pp. 232–246.

3 United Nations Children's Fund, 'An Everyday Lesson: #ENDviolence in schools', UNICEF, New York, 2018 <www.unicef.org/publications/files/An_Everyday_Lesson-ENDviolence_in_Schools.pdf>, accessed 8 October 2019.

4 United Nations Children's Fund, 'The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a digital world', UNICEF, New York, 2017, <www.unicef.org/sowc2017>, accessed 8 October 2019.

5 'A Familiar Face'.

Towards 2030 – Sustainable Development Goals



Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

- **Target 16.1** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
- **Target 16.2** End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.



Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

- **Target 5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- **Target 5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.



Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- **Target 4.a** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Challenges

CHILDHOOD VIOLENCE CAN HAVE LIFELONG IMPACT

Research has shown that children who have been subjected to violence in childhood are more likely to experience long-term negative outcomes in physical and mental health.⁶ These may include permanent physical injuries and disabilities, sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, unplanned pregnancy, and an inability to maintain stable relations and feel empathy for others. Violence impairs children's capacities to learn and attend

school, constraining children's ability to reach their full potential. Violence can sometimes result in the child's death.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN UNDERMINES NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The prevalence of violence and its effects can constrain economic development and human capital and undermine other societal gains. Violence significantly drains public resources through higher spending on child welfare, special education, medical costs, criminal justice and psychological services. Human capital is undermined as survivors deal with the consequences to their mental and physical health. Violence – particularly

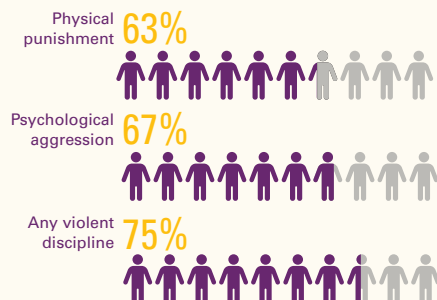
in schools – undermines children's learning, negatively impacting on their education and employment prospects. Violence in childhood also contributes to the adoption of violent behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. The global economic impacts of physical, emotional and sexual violence against children are estimated to be as high as \$7 trillion, costing as much as an estimated 8 per cent of the global GDP annually.

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN CAN ACCELERATE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDGS

While violence against children has long been recognized as a serious human rights violation, the SDGs were the first to place the issue on the global development agenda. The SDGs have adopted targets to eradicate all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking against children – specifically, target 16.2 has been set to end all forms of violence against and torture of children by 2030. Underscoring its sector-wide criticality, this target also recognizes that ending violence against children can be an accelerator for development across all the SDGs, contributing to gender equality, educational and health outcomes, and poverty reduction.

3/4 of young children are regularly subjected to violent discipline by their caregivers

Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years who experienced any violent discipline in the past month, by type



1/4 of young children (176 million) live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence

9% of children under age 5 live in countries where corporal punishment at home is fully prohibited

15 million girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime

1/3 of students (130 million) experience bullying

An adolescent is killed by an act of violence every **7 minutes**

Data source: UNICEF, 'A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents', UNICEF, New York, November 2017

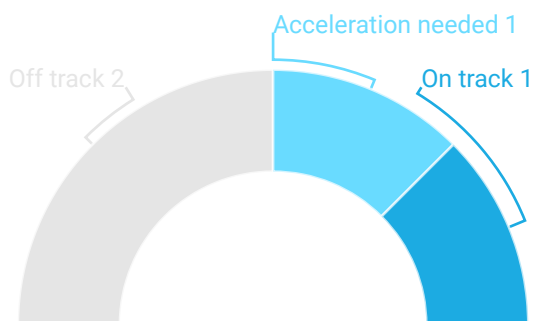
⁶ World Health Organization, United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Global status report on violence prevention 2014', WHO, Geneva, 2014, <www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014>, accessed 8 October 2019.

⁷ Fry, Deborah, 'Preventing Violence against Children and How this Contributes to Building Stronger Economies', Government of Malaysia and United Nations Children's Fund, Kuala Lumpur, 2016, <www.unicef.org/eap/reports/preventing-violence-against-children-and-how-contributes-building-stronger-economies>, accessed 8 October 2019; Know Violence in Childhood, 'Ending Violence in Childhood: Global report 2017', Know Violence in Childhood, New Delhi, India, <<http://globalreport.knowviolenceinchildhood.org>>, accessed 8 October 2019.

⁸ Perezniato, Paola, et al., 'The costs and economic impact of violence against children', Overseas Development Institute, London, September 2014, <www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9177.pdf>, accessed 8 October 2019.

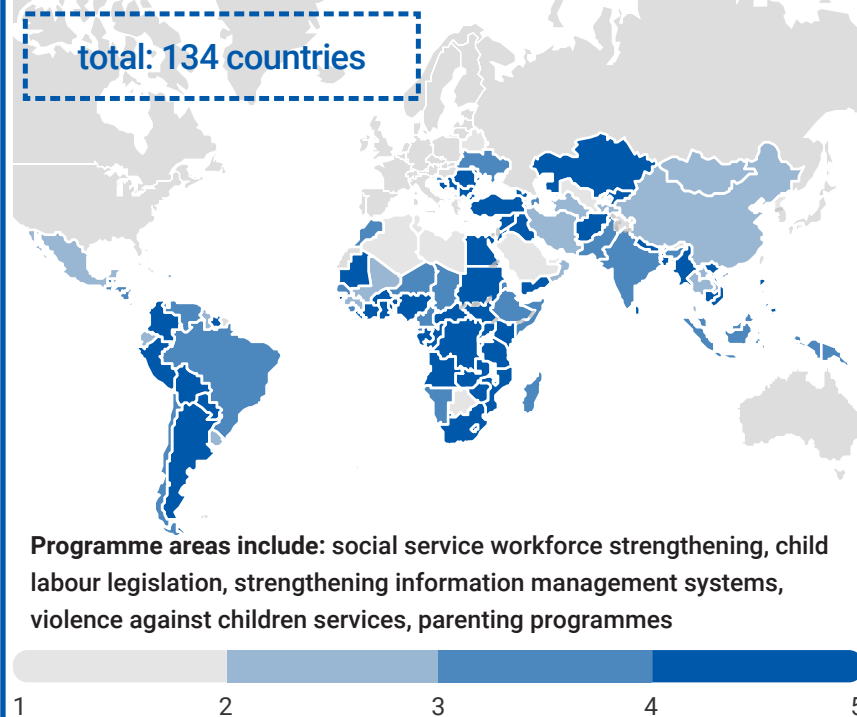
UNICEF Results Achieved in Prevention and Response to Violence Against Children in 2018

Tracking progress against 2018 output milestones



On-track: trafficking protocol
Acceleration needed: social service workforce strengthening
Off-track: child labour legislation, information management systems

Countries contributing to the result area on preventing and responding to Violence Against Children (VAC) in 2018



+ 5 countries

had an inter-operable information management system that supports and tracks case management, incident monitoring, and programme monitoring
(15 in 2018)



+ 4 countries

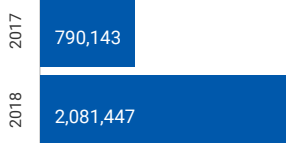
in 2018 had ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children

2.3 million girls and boys in 112 countries



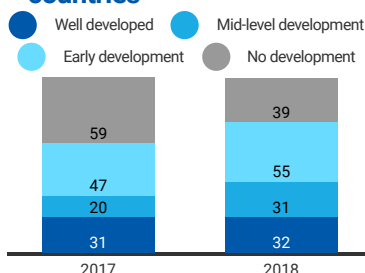
received health, social work or justice/law enforcement services that respond to violence*

Twice as many mothers, fathers and caregivers were reached through parenting programmes* between 2017 and 2018



33% of reporting countries

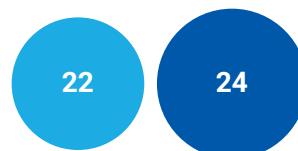
progressed in improving the quality assurance system in place for social service work



Number of countries with legislative and policy framework to eliminate the worst forms of child labour

2017

2018



*One of 5 Outcome indicators in UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 3

UNICEF approach

VIOLENCE IS NEVER JUSTIFIABLE AND ALWAYS PREVENTABLE

No violence against children is justifiable and all violence against children is preventable – this was the main conclusion of a 2006 report by the United Nations Secretary-General,⁹ and is the basic premise of the approach of UNICEF to programming. UNICEF works with partners across the globe to prevent and respond to violence against girls, boys and young people, including adolescents, in all settings and in all its forms, supporting governments to achieve SDG 16.2 by 2030.

Since 2008, the strengthening of child protection systems has been at the heart of UNICEF programmes to prevent and respond to violence against children. UNICEF experience demonstrates the importance of building coordinated core services that address the whole range of risks and harms that children are exposed to. Such an approach is almost always more effective than issues-based responses and helps to build the infrastructure for targeted prevention interventions.

In recent years, UNICEF, together with partners, has catalysed an unprecedented global, regional and national movement to commit to ending violence, exploitation and abuse in all settings, as the following two examples show.



In Puerto Cortes, Cortes, Honduras, Jose Angel Aguila Lizama sits at home with his mother, Lourdes Lizama. Jose Angel, who is 14 years of age and has autism, has been the victim of bullying since his first years of school.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

UNICEF is a founding member of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (www.end-violence.org). Launched in 2016, End Violence aims to promote and support accelerated action by governmental and non-governmental actors, including the private sector and academia. As a founding member and an active representative on its board, UNICEF supports its operation and actively contributes to identifying evidence-based solutions. UNICEF significantly contributed to the development of a common package of evidence-based strategies – INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children – which provides a global framework for multi-sectoral action to meet SDG targets.¹⁰ UNICEF

is supporting government efforts to address violence in some 134 countries, and plays a central role in mobilizing national action to end violence against children in the pathfinder countries of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

WEPROTECT GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO END CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ONLINE

UNICEF serves on the board of the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online (www.weprotect.org), launched in 2016. WePROTECT is a global coalition focused on establishing and developing coordinated national responses to online child sexual exploitation, guided by its model national response to child sexual exploitation and abuse.¹¹

9 United Nations Secretary-General, 'Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children', A/61/299, United Nations, New York, 29 August 2006, <www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports/SG_violencestudy_en.pdf>, accessed 8 October 2019.

10 World Health Organization, 'INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children', WHO, Geneva, 2016, <www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire>, accessed 8 October 2019.

11 WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online, 'Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA): A model national response', WePROTECT, November 2016, <www.weprotect.org/the-model-national-response>, accessed 8 October 2019.

Key Asks

1 Establish a high-level, whole-government agenda to end violence

High-level political engagement can have a catalytic effect on action to end all forms of violence against children. UNICEF supports governments to establish national coordination frameworks, and to implement comprehensive national, multi-sectoral plans and policies for prevention and response. Such an agenda should be informed by evidence-based strategies, such as those set out in the INSPIRE inter-agency package.

In the United Republic of Tanzania, findings from its 2011 survey on violence against children triggered significant political commitment to strengthening the child protection system. With the support of UNICEF, this culminated in the establishment of a multi-sectoral task force to translate high-level commitments into national action plans. There has been considerable progress since, including strengthening social services, expanding child protection teams, and training front-line social workers. These actions have resulted in a 40-fold increase in the number of reported cases of violence against children. Additionally, to strengthen justice systems for children, specialized gender and children's desks are now available in police stations, with 130 specialist juvenile courts, compared with just one in 2011.

2 Prohibit violence against children in all settings – without exception

Despite near-universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in September 2019 only 57 countries had passed legislation to prohibit all forms of violence in all settings. UNICEF calls for full legal prohibition that (1) includes all forms of physical punishment of children in the home, schools, care institutions and detention centres, and that provides a penal sentence for the offences; and (2) fully criminalizes child sexual abuse and exploitation in line with international standards.

In 2015, the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office completed an analysis of domestic laws related to violence against children in member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It showed that while all countries in the subregion had strengthened laws to protect children from



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Over 100 children joined UNICEF, the Minister for Social Development, and the National Council for Family Affairs, as Joud Mbaideen, author, and Emanne Beasha, singer, were announced in Amman as UNICEF Jordan's first Champions for Children to celebrate World Children's Day.

violence, significant gaps remained in meeting international standards. Further, it found that some narrow or gendered definitions of violence in legislation effectively denied legal protection to some children; and that violence was condoned in the context of certain relationships (teacher-pupil, parent-child, husband-wife). This analysis is now informing the reform of children's legislation in ASEAN member states.

3 Strengthen prevention, response and support systems across sectors

The social welfare, justice, health and education sectors all have an important role to play. At the heart of the child protection system is the workforce that delivers social services across these sectors. It has a critical role in identifying and responding to situations where children are at risk of violence and strengthening the protective capacities of families and communities. UNICEF calls for increased investments in a well-planned, trained and supported social service workforce to effectively

deliver prevention, response and support services to children and families.

In South Africa, as part of the government's 'Integrated Programme of Action on Violence against Women and Children', over 6,700 child and youth care workers were trained, and more than 400 safe parks and drop-in centres were established. In Timor-Leste – a country where social services are still in relative infancy – a major milestone was reached in the form of a training-of-trainers programme, and the piloting of a child and family welfare policy in three municipalities during 2017. These efforts provided strong guidance by clarifying and delineating the goals, principles, values, mandates and responsibilities to streamline and improve service coordination. In Solomon Islands, following six years of UNICEF-supported advocacy and technical support, the government passed a new child and family welfare act in 2017, mandating the social service workforce to provide a continuum of care for children – a first in the country.

8 OCHA (2019). OCHA Fund for Investigations into Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/ocha_sea_fund_flyer.pdf>

4 Enhance support to parents and caregivers

Helping parents and caregivers with positive, non-violent discipline and close, effective parent-child communication reduces harsh parenting practices, creates positive parent-child interactions and helps to increase bonding with parents or other caregivers. These are all factors that help to prevent violence against children. UNICEF calls for the institutionalization and scaling-up of evidence-based parenting support programmes.

The 'Parenting for Lifelong Health Philippines' ('Masayang Pamilya Para sa Batang Pilipino') programme, launched in 2016, is an international and multi-sectoral partnership, with UNICEF as a founding member. The programme seeks to enhance parenting skills by promoting positive interactions with children, and non-violent discipline practices in the country. It adopts the South African 'Sinovuyo for Caring Families' programme as a pilot in the Philippines for feasibility and acceptability when delivered to low-income families. An evaluation of the pilot programme showed overwhelmingly positive results in the uptake of positive parenting behaviours and a reduction of child maltreatment. It is now being considered for institutionalization into the Philippines national social protection programme.

5 Challenge the social acceptance of violence against children

Efforts to prevent violence against children will not succeed where the discussion is inhibited, and structural factors and the environment enable or condone violence against children. Governments have a key role to play in creating an environment of open public dialogue on difficult and sensitive child protection issues. UNICEF calls for sustained communications initiatives that challenge the social acceptance of violence against children, targeting all levels of society. This should meaningfully engage adolescents as agents of change.

Since 2012, the 'Protection and Prevention of Gender Violence of Children and Adolescents in Schools in Selected Municipalities' programme has been operating in about 40 schools in El Salvador. Supported by UNICEF and Oxfam in cooperation with the country's Ministry of Education, the programme implements interventions to empower children, adolescents, teachers, parents, families and communities to prevent gender-based violence and to transform social norms and behaviours that support violence against children.



Zheng Rong, a Barefoot Social Worker in North China's Shanxi Province, visits Xiaoyu, 5 years of age, at her home. Under the programme supported by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and UNICEF, she has helped Xiaoyu's family to raise money for brain surgery and apply for government subsidies.

6 Use data to make violence visible and to measure change

Despite an increase in data availability on all forms of violence against children in recent years, including on violent disciplinary practices, current projections suggest no country with trend data is on track to eliminate violent discipline by 2030. Building the evidence base is fundamental to understand the magnitude and demographics of violence against children and to track progress towards its elimination. Data are essential to generate evidence to inform policy, influence national agendas and public investment, and design services. As the agency with special responsibility for SDG indicators 16.2.1 and 16.2.3, UNICEF urges all governments to prioritize the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of disaggregated data for key SDG indicators. This includes strengthening systems to collect administrative data on incidents of violence reported to authorities or service providers and collecting data on the prevalence and circumstances of violence through dedicated violence-against-children surveys, or through the inclusion of modules to capture these data in national household surveys.

To measure a country's progress in achieving the SDG targets, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators has developed a global indicator framework. UNICEF Data and Analytics is providing technical guidance to national statistical offices on the steps needed for designing, planning and implementing national data collection and research efforts on violence against children. This guidance is designed to meet the growing needs of national statistical and other government agencies, especially in low-resource settings, are planning to establish or enhance a data collection and monitoring system on violence against children.

7 Strengthen public financing for child protection

Government commitment to ending violence against children must be realized through budget allocations that are meet the challenge. UNICEF calls on governments to ensure that related strategies, plans and programmes are fully costed and visible in national budgets, and that funding is made available to the maximum extent of the available resources.

With the support of UNICEF, Nigeria's Ministry of Budget and National Budgeting developed a comprehensive strategy to increase public expenditure on prevention and response to violence against children. An assessment was made of the current levels of public primary expenditure on related activities across the different sectors, which found that a small re-prioritization of expenditure could significantly increase the resources available for child protection. For example, a 0.1 per cent shift in the budget allocation at federal level would result in 1.3 times the available expenditure for child protection. The ministry has now undertaken a costing exercise of the key ministries and related child protection services to inform 2019 and 2020 budget request submissions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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