

# GLOBAL STATUS REPORT ON PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN 2020





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World Health  
Organization



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



**End Violence  
Against Children**

Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020: executive summary

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## Scope and aims of the report

The elimination of violence against children is called for in several targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but most explicitly in Target 16.2: “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”. The *Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020* explores the progress that countries have made in implementing activities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets on ending violence against children. It focuses on interpersonal violence which accounts for most acts of violence against children, and includes child maltreatment, bullying and other types of youth violence, and intimate partner violence. The report provides a baseline against which governments can monitor their progress toward reaching these goals over the course

of 2020–2030, through the lens of the seven INSPIRE evidence-based strategies for ending violence against children.

The report aims to document if governments:

- have national plans of action, policies and laws that are consistent with those identified as effective by INSPIRE;
- are accurately measuring fatal and non-fatal instances of violence;
- have established quantified baseline and target values against which to monitor their progress in ending violence against children;
- are supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions along the lines of those included under the seven INSPIRE strategies.

### Box 1. INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children

INSPIRE is a set of seven evidence-based strategies for countries and communities working to eliminate violence against children. Launched in 2016, INSPIRE serves as a technical package and handbook for selecting, implementing and monitoring effective policies, programmes and services to prevent and respond to violence against children.

INSPIRE is an acronym, with each letter representing a strategy: **I** for the implementation and enforcement of laws; **N** for norms and values; **S** for safe environments; **P** for parent and caregiver support; **I** for income and economic strengthening; **R** for response and support services; and **E** for education and life skills. There are also two cross-cutting activities (multisectoral action and coordination, and monitoring and evaluation) that connect the seven strategies and monitor the extent of their implementation and impact on the problem.

**Table 1. INSPIRE strategies, approaches and cross-cutting activities for preventing and responding to violence against children**

Strategy	Approach	Cross-cutting activities
 <b>Implementation and enforcement of laws</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws banning violent punishment of children by parents, teachers or other caregivers</li> <li>• Laws criminalizing sexual abuse and exploitation of children</li> <li>• Laws that prevent alcohol misuse</li> <li>• Laws limiting youth access to firearms and other weapons</li> </ul>	
 <b>Norms and values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing adherence to restrictive and harmful gender and social norms</li> <li>• Community mobilization programmes</li> <li>• Bystander interventions</li> </ul>	
 <b>Safe environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing violence by addressing “hotspots”</li> <li>• Interrupting the spread of violence</li> <li>• Improving the built environment</li> </ul>	<p>Multisectoral actions and coordination</p>
 <b>Parent and caregiver support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivered through home visits</li> <li>• Delivered in groups in community settings</li> <li>• Delivered through comprehensive programmes</li> </ul>	<p>Monitoring and evaluation</p>
 <b>Income and economic strengthening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cash transfers</li> <li>• Group saving and loans combined with gender equity training</li> <li>• Microfinance combined with gender norm training</li> </ul>	
 <b>Response and support services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling and therapeutic approaches</li> <li>• Screening combined with interventions</li> <li>• Treatment programmes for juvenile offenders in the criminal justice system</li> <li>• Foster care interventions involving social welfare services</li> </ul>	
 <b>Education and life skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase enrolment in pre-school, primary and secondary schools</li> <li>• Establish a safe and enabling school environment</li> <li>• Improve children’s knowledge about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it</li> <li>• Life and social skills training</li> <li>• Adolescent intimate partner violence prevention programmes</li> </ul>	

## Method

The *Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020* was developed through a consultative process with Member States. All 194 Member States were invited to participate. In a multisectoral survey administered from mid-2018 to mid-2019, 155 countries reported on the status of their national action plans, laws, indicators, and data collection mechanisms, and on programmes and services along the lines of those given as examples under each of the INSPIRE strategies. The final responses were formally cleared by the relevant government ministry, underlying the report's unique value as being the first time ever that governments are self-reporting on their work to specifically address violence against children.

## Preventing violence against children: global status

### Violence affects the lives of up to 1 billion children, with long-lasting and costly emotional, social and economic consequences

Globally, it is estimated that one out of two children aged 2–17 years suffer some form of violence each year. Worldwide, close to 300 million children aged 2–4 years regularly experience violent discipline by their caregivers. A third of students aged 11–15 years worldwide have been bullied by their peers in the past month, and 120 million girls are estimated to have suffered some form of forced sexual contact before the age of 20 years. Emotional violence affects one in three children, and worldwide one in four children lives with a mother who is the victim of intimate partner violence. An estimated 40 150 children worldwide were victims of homicide in the year 2017. The global homicide rate for 0–17 year olds was 1.7 per 100 000 population, and the rate for boys of 2.4 per 100 000 was over twice that in girls (1.1 per 100 000 population). The COVID-19 pandemic and societies' response to it has had a dramatic

impact on the prevalence of violence against children and is likely to have long-lasting negative consequences.

Over their lifetime, children exposed to violence are at increased risk of mental illness and anxiety disorders; high-risk behaviours like alcohol and drug abuse, smoking and unsafe sex; chronic diseases such as cancers, diabetes and heart disease; infectious diseases like HIV; and social problems including educational underattainment, further involvement in violence, and crime. The economic costs of these consequences are enormous. In the United States, the estimated lifetime costs of child maltreatment occurring in one year were estimated to be US\$ 428 billion, and in East Asia and the Pacific the economic costs of the consequences of child maltreatment equate to between 1.4% and 2.5% of the region's annual gross domestic product.



## Much of this violence can be prevented, and the associated human and economic costs averted

The evidence behind the INSPIRE approaches shows that 20% to 50% decreases in prevalence have been achieved by well-designed programmes, many of which were implemented in low- and middle-income countries.

This clearly indicates that rapid reductions in violence are possible if there exists political will and strong leadership, evidence-based policies and interventions, and adequate finance.

### Box 2. The COVID-19 pandemic and violence against children

The COVID-19 pandemic and societies' response to it affects all aspects of our lives. School closures have impacted some 1.5 billion children. Movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, and overcrowding have heightened levels of stress and anxiety in parents, caregivers and children, and cut families and individuals off from their usual sources of support.

These consequences have altered the prevalence and patterns of interpersonal violence. Decreases in homicides and violence-related injuries receiving emergency medical treatment (which mostly involve older adolescents and adult males) have been reported, particularly where lockdowns are accompanied by bans on alcohol sales. Spikes in calls to helplines about child abuse and intimate partner violence have been observed, alongside declines in the number of child abuse cases referred to child protection services. An increase in potential or actual online harms, including sexual exploitation and cyber-bullying resulting from increased internet use by children, has also been identified.

The economic devastation wrought by COVID-19 and the response to it may take years to overcome, and could exacerbate economic inequalities, poverty, unemployment, and household financial insecurity. These long-term effects can be expected to drive homicides and violent assault back up to (and even beyond) their pre-lockdown levels and could potentially impact on many risk factors for later violence, including on brain development, early learning, and schooling. A return to school and work may reduce the stress on parents, caregivers and children and re-invigorate their social support systems, and thus lessen the risk of children experiencing and witnessing abuse in the home. However, despite a return to work, unemployment and household financial insecurity may remain chronic, and access to social

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