



**INSIGHTS: CHILD RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
AND CENTRAL ASIA**

Keeping children safe from violence

Making systems more supportive of families
and accountable to child rights

Abstract

Violence against children in this region is widespread, under-reported and extremely damaging to children. Despite increasing political attention and the development of appropriate services, child victims are not systematically identified and provided with appropriate responses. This represents a violation of their rights.

This Insight report is based on the experiences of more than 600 professionals in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia and Turkey who regularly come into contact with children who have been exposed to violence. The research found that, in spite of the many recent changes in policy, legislation and practices to improve the responses to violence, the capacity of systems to address violence against children remains limited. There is reliance on informal relationships for referral of cases, poor cooperation between different sectors, and an absence of clear legal definitions of what constitutes violence – **particularly in the case of physical violence, which is sometimes seen as a justified method** of disciplining children. Frequently, cases of violence against children are inadequately addressed, or slip through the net entirely. However, the study found strong support among professionals working with children for more preventative and family welfare-oriented policy models and highlighted a number of promising practices that could be used to inspire future reforms.

Based on the findings of this study, UNICEF recommends that governments: develop clear legal definitions of what constitutes violence against children; engage in public debate to build understanding and consensus around the issue; establish comprehensive cross-sectoral legislation and implementation guidelines that define roles and responsibilities for management of cases of violence against children; expand capacity of services, in particular of family support interventions endorsed by professionals; and strengthen monitoring, follow-up and information exchange systems.

Violence against children: Widespread and under-reported

Violence against children is widespread, under-reported and extremely damaging to children. The physical, emotional and psychological scars of violence can have a profound impact on a child's development, health and ability to learn.

While there has been increasing political attention and commitment to the issue in recent years in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there remains a lag between commitment and results. Violence against children remains a widely neglected area of children's rights in the region.

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According to UNICEF MICS¹ results from 2005 and 2010 in this region, more than 50% of boys and girls (and in some countries, more than 70%) aged 2-14 were subjected to at least one form of psychological or physical punishment by their parents or other adult household members.

Systems addressing violence against children need a multi-sectoral approach

A well-functioning system to address violence against children should aim to identify and address the root causes of all forms of violence against children, to make the prevention of violence a high priority and to offer an effective and child-centred response to violence when it occurs.

A good system to address violence against children relies on several sectors (social welfare, education, health and justice) to effectively respond to violence against children. Professionals who regularly come into contact with children must have clearly defined obligations to protect children from violence. Early identification of cases and rapid assessment, reporting and referral are crucial in ensuring that a child victim of violence is linked to the appropriate response, be it service provision or access to justice.

A reliable multi-sectoral system to address violence against children can only function with: appropriate laws and policies, a central government coordination mechanism with a clear mandate, effective regulation and monitoring at all levels, a committed, competent workforce and child-friendly, non-discriminatory services accessible to all children. The participation of children in the development and implementation of a system to address violence is also fundamental to its quality and credibility.

System models to address violence against children

There are different policy approaches and system models to address violence against children. Two dominant models are 'child protection' and 'family welfare/family support'. A 'child protection' model has a remedial focus, with families becoming eligible for services after maltreatment has occurred or when there is a significant risk of maltreatment. This model is focused on investigating allegations of abuse/neglect and taking corrective action for 'perpetrators'. The 'family support' model has a more preventive focus. Eligibility for services is based on knowledge of risk factors for abuse (such as poverty) and is based on a belief that the welfare of children is the responsibility of families, the community and society. This model is characterized by the promotion of healthy children and families through supportive social programmes (such as home visiting) which help families to care for their children.

Currently the 'child protection' model is predominant in this region. It tends to be reactive, responding to abuses after they have happened, rather than putting in place family support models for their prevention.

The research

The research summarised in this Insight report explored the challenges faced by professionals who come into contact with children when identifying, reporting, and referring cases of violence against children. The study was conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey and included nearly 600 professionals from a range of sectors. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire, part of which involved assessing a series of case studies. The data was supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 40 practitioners and policymakers from each of the study countries.

¹ MICS is a multi-indicator cluster survey (household survey) Reports used for this estimate are from Albania, BiH, FYR of Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Serbia (2005–2006) available at www.childinfo.org

6 Children rarely report cases of violence in the family because they often accept violence as a form of parental discipline and they perceive homes to be safe places. 9

–Respondent from Albania



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Experience on the ground

The four countries in this study have recently developed legislation, policies and institutional frameworks (national action plans and national strategies) to address violence against children. In addition they have started initiatives to improve the response to children experiencing violence, but they are often fragmented and require strengthening and scaling up.

Data gathered during the research revealed that:

1. The professionals interviewed showed very high levels of recognition of the existence of cases of abuse.

Professionals and service providers in all four study countries identified a range of different forms of violence (psychological, physical and sexual) suffered by children.

Most of the interviewees defined violence against children as sexual, physical, and emotional in nature. In their definition of emotional violence most included ignoring

the child, showing lack of compassion and discriminating against the child on any grounds.

2. Cases of physical violence at home or at school were less likely to be identified as abuse, and even less likely to be referred to services, than cases of sexual abuse or child exploitation

Table 1 shows that 93 per cent of professionals surveyed identified physical abuse in the home as abuse and 87 per cent identified physical violence in school as abuse. This compares to 99 per cent for all other forms of abuse. The percentage that would refer the case to services is even lower: only 69 per cent in the case of violence in school.

Only two-thirds of respondents indicated that there was a requirement to report cases such as the ones developed for the study depicting physical abuse in the home (67 per cent) and physical abuse in school (70 per cent), with participants indicating a much lower likelihood of actually reporting such cases (75 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively) compared to all other depicted forms of violence against children (Table 2).

Table 1: Identification of abuse and likelihood of referral

	Physical Abuse-Home	Physical Abuse-School	Sexual Abuse	Child Exploitation	Neglect	Emotional / Psych. Abuse
Assessment / response to case study	%	%	%	%	%	%
Incident is serious	93	91	99	99	99	99
Incident identified as abuse or neglect	93	87	99	99	97	96
Would refer for services	86	69	94	95	N/A	N/A
Would refer but no service	18	15	13	15	N/A	N/A



Table 2: Understanding of requirement to report and likelihood of reporting

	Physical Abuse-Home	Physical Abuse-School	Sexual Abuse	Child Exploitation	Neglect	Emotional / Psych. Abuse
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Required to report	67	70	93	91	89	84
Likely to report	75	79	96	93	95	91

3. Professionals felt that social norms around physical violence could affect identification and reporting of cases of physical abuse.

Social norms around physical violence being a private issue and an acceptable form of discipline were raised as a challenge by professionals interviewed. It was felt that if the purpose of the violent act was considered to be ‘educational’, it would significantly reduce the recognition of the need to refer the case.

Depending on the culture, the perception as well as the educational tradition, different types of violence (especially physical and emotional) are perceived in different ways.
–Respondent from Albania

The violence within the family is not visible so we rarely recognize it and it is harder to prove it, especially if even children don’t want to acknowledge it.
–Respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Some respondents suggested that children were unlikely to describe their home environment as violent:

Cases reported more frequently by children come mainly from schools and community, while there are fewer cases of violence in the family because the children consider the family environment as the most trusted and safe, and they often think that an acceptable model of parental intervention exists through violent forms.
–Respondent from Albania

Others suggested that, in their view, the public is not ready to accept a broad definition of violence that would include any violent act, regardless of the purpose or intention.

Our definition of violence would not conform with international standards. Emotional violence would not be considered as violence in our society.
–Respondent from Turkey

4. Professionals were concerned about the lack of services to respond to cases, particularly in rural areas

The study highlighted a general lack of prevention initiatives and appropriate response services – for example 18 per cent of professionals surveyed reported that there were no agencies to report cases of physical abuse to (Table 1).

Services that are available are usually provided by child and adolescent psychiatric units in hospitals, family counselling centres and by some NGOs. The lack of support services was particularly noticeable in rural areas.

If a commune does not treat each case of violence against children, this is because the access to service providers (either public or private, and NGOs) is very limited.
–Respondent from Albania

If there were relevant centres for abused children or parents, there would be more cases denounced. The lack of such centres is the reason why most people hide domestic violence.
–Respondent from Albania

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5. Respondents reported a lack of confidence in existing services, particularly when it comes to cases of physical abuse.

Even where services exist, their capacities are insufficient to provide for all those in need:

We lack personnel; we have insufficient number of professionals, psychologists, only one social worker – so it is very hard to explain how we manage cases of violence against children. We lack a body of experts that will work with victims after the legal case, and we don't know what is happening with victims later.
–Respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Table 3 shows that the professionals surveyed were not convinced about the helpfulness of reporting a case of physical abuse against a child. A quarter said a referral would be 'probably not' or 'definitely not' helpful in cases of physical abuse at home. Twenty-one per cent of professionals think that reporting physical abuse at school would be unlikely to be 'helpful'. There was more confidence about the usefulness of intervention for other types of violence.

Table 3: Perceived helpfulness to report

	Definitely	Probably	Probably Not	Definitely Not
Case scenario	%	%	%	%
Physical abuse-home	39	36	19	6
Physical abuse-school	43	36	18	3
Sexual abuse	86	10	3	1
Child exploitation	78	17	5	0
Neglect	76	17	6	1
Emotional/psychological abuse	69	24	6	1

During qualitative interviews, some professionals suggested that it could be harmful to report cases when there are no adequate services and processes in place to intervene.

The best interest of the child needs to be taken into account. Sometimes a child who has been exposed to violence is interviewed five times. Instead of gathering the information from the first interview and proceeding with the process, the information is actually lost or left somewhere and the child is called for another interview which for the child might not be healthy, especially when he is a victim of physical violence.
–Respondent from Albania

6. Professionals often rely on informal practices and relationships when responding to child protection cases

Interviewees noted that even when they identify cases of violence and recognize the need to refer them to services, or for an intervention in the family, they often lack standard regulation about information sharing between institutions. Information sharing tends to be based on personal relations among professionals.

“ Our definition of violence would not conform with international standards. Emotional violence would not be considered as violence in our society. ”

–Respondent from Turkey



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6 If we want to talk about a reform, it should be planned and sustainable, not a temporary solution to an urgent problem. 9
–Respondent from Turkey

We don't have standard referral procedures. It's based on personal knowledge and relations.
–Respondent from Turkey

There are no standards regarding information sharing. Sometimes unnecessary information gets shared; sometimes we cannot get the information we need.
–Respondent from Turkey

While informal contacts can be useful in building a systemic response, over-reliance on informal channels can make the response to violence against children unpredictable.

The fact that the systems in these countries are still informal is striking, especially as in some of the countries special protocols now exist as binding documents that guide the work of professionals. These are apparently not enough. As one professional from Serbia where such protocols have recently been adopted noted:

It is all still based on individual's responsibility, one's own morality. What I must and must not do, how I should proceed in specific cases, this is up to me. I may be working hardest and have best intentions, but still I may be completely wrong.
–Respondent from Serbia

7. Cooperation between sectors and professionals remains low

Weak collaboration and coordination between different sectors was highlighted as another issue in current systems to address violence against children in the four countries.

Cooperation between services is sadly low. There are maybe 15-20 per cent of municipalities where the mechanisms are in place.
–Respondent from Serbia

We don't have much contact with our colleagues in other institutions.
–Respondent from Turkey

Professionals in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey reported that they often do not know what happens to a case after it has been referred to another service.

8. There is strong support among professionals for preventative family welfare-oriented child protection models

Seventy-six per cent of professionals in the four countries cited education and counselling as the two most important interventions for children who have been exposed to violence. Half of the professionals indicated that punishment of the perpetrator was the least important intervention (Table 4).

This indicates a strong professional preference for non-punitive approaches for dealing with violence against children. This contrasts with the current situation where policy models and systems are mainly reactive and are less focused on prevention and support. It was pointed out that even if current systems have mechanisms for protection of children from violence, families who may need it do not necessarily know what support is available and how to access it.

The mechanisms for protection of children exist but the issue is how accessible it is and that depends on the information the family has and its capacity to use it.
–Respondent from Albania

Professionals noted that a prevention-focused, family welfare model of child protection requires carefully planned and sequenced reform, and a shift from reactive responses:

If we want to talk about a reform, it should be planned and sustainable, not a temporary solution to an urgent problem.
–Respondent from Turkey



Table 4: Ranking of importance of different types of intervention

Intervention	Most important		2 nd most important		3 rd most important		Least important	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Education ^a	191	34	182	33	82	15	100	18
Counselling ^b	239	43	231	42	61	11	24	4
Punishment of perpetrator ^c	35	6	76	14	227	41	216	39
Removal of child ^d	116	21	67	12	169	30	205	37

^a Based on a sample of 555 due to missing data

^b Based on a sample of 555 due to missing data

^c Based on a sample of 554 due to missing data

^d Based on a sample of 557 due to missing data

Policy issues emerging from current experience

The research shows that decisions to report and refer cases of violence against children are frequently subjective and conducted informally. It also revealed that professionals working within the system to address violence against children lack confidence in the existing services to respond to cases of violence against children. These findings raise a number of significant challenges for policymakers that apply to many countries across Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

1. There is a need to develop clear and widely accepted definitions of what constitutes violence against children

The social acceptance of violence against children is a major barrier to any potential reform, as it makes the problem less visible and more difficult to deal with. General social acceptance of certain behaviours, for example using violence to discipline children, contributes to situations where violence against children goes unreported and unaddressed.

Physical and emotional violence is often accepted as a form of discipline for children

and is a part of traditional family culture. A professional in Turkey noted:

The purpose of violence is important. Slapping, etc. may be justified as long as it is with good faith and for educational purposes.
–Respondent from Turkey

Physical violence in school also often goes unreported. This is a cause for concern. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has several times highlighted that corporal punishment is a violation of children’s rights under the Convention of the Rights of the Child, as it violates children’s human dignity and negatively impacts on the enjoyment of other rights and aspects of children’s development, including their psychological, health, education and social status.

Education and training to change public (especially media) and professional perceptions of violence against children and responses to it are necessary to support systemic change and promote early intervention and prevention efforts, but are often lacking. This requires thorough research into the norms and attitudes surrounding these issues, and engagement of the public in open debate to reach consensus on these definitions.

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Note: Although legislation can support and steer debates, attitudes cannot be changed by decree, and proper engagement is needed.

Spotlight on interesting practices:

- The law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child that came into force in May 2011 in Albania makes corporal punishment of children unlawful in all settings, including by parents in the family home. The law outlines accountabilities for its implementation by both central and local bodies: the National Council for Protection of Child Rights, the Minister Coordinating Action on Protection of Child Rights and the State Agency for the Protection of Child Rights, and at local level the Unit for the Rights of the Child at the Regional Council and the Children's Protection Unit.
- The goals of the **School Without Violence** programme – Towards a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children in Serbia was to prevent and reduce violence against and among children and to create a secure environment for their learning and development. The programme gives students, parents, teachers and staff practical knowledge on how to prevent and solve problems of violence when they arise. It aims to increase their awareness of, and motivation for, action in this field, to influence their attitudes about zero tolerance towards violence and to teach them communication skills for constructively resolving disputes, if and when they occur.
- The **Communication for Behavioural Impact** (COMBI) programme is designed for basic education in elementary schools in Albania. It targets teachers, parents and children by engaging them in discussions on modes of discipline and classroom management that are not based on fear, intimidation, humiliation or use of physical force.

2. Without comprehensive cross-sectoral legislation and implementation guidelines, the system relies on informal practices without proper accountability

In the four countries covered by the study, and in other countries in the region, there are numerous initiatives to make the legislative basis more comprehensive in responding to violence against children. Several structures and sectoral policies have been established within countries as part of the response to violence against children.

However, child protection professionals reported that reforms are often patchy and lack clear implementation guidelines. Comprehensive cross-sectoral policies that outline the roles and responsibilities of professionals in responding to violence against children, and how different sectors should coordinate their response, are not yet in place in most countries. This makes any kind of robust accountability in the system difficult to implement.

In the absence of strong legal frameworks and definitions of violence to support practitioners in their decision-making processes about what is, and what is not, a reportable offence, there may be reluctance to report. From a child rights and public health standpoint, this is alarming, as the number of reports will influence the system's capacity to collect data on incidence to inform policy and service support in the future.

The vision and purpose of reforms and the type of support and services available must be clearly communicated. As a professional in Turkey said:

We know that there is a new law on family protection, but no further information has been provided to service providers at the local level.
–Respondent from Turkey

“ (The response) is all still based on individual’s responsibility, one’s own morality. I may be working hardest and have best intentions, but still I may be completely wrong. ”

–Respondent from Serbia



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Spotlight on interesting practices:

- To implement the National Action Plan for Children and the National Strategy for prevention and protection of children against violence in the Republic of Serbia, the government has developed **General and Special Protocols for prevention and management of child abuse and neglect**. These legally binding documents provide a framework for an integrated inter-sectoral collaboration in child protection. They define, for the first time, the steps, roles and responsibilities of all main actors (social care, education, health, police, NGOs, local authorities, parents, media, etc.) in the process of child protection in the local community. The adoption of the General Protocol was followed by training of inter-sectoral child protection teams. As a result, the number of children identified as at risk of abuse and neglect has increased in the targeted municipalities, and actions to stop the abuse and neglect were undertaken in many of those cases.
- Clear roles and accountability for identification, referral and reporting has been established in Albania at municipal level with child protection units (CPUs). This is a **social work centre that provides an entry point** to the system for children at risk. Additional children's rights units (CRU) monitor the situation and assess how the policies for children's rights are implemented at the regional level. It has a supportive role within the administrative structure of the Regional Council to coordinate and facilitate the work of CPUs and when necessary, collaborates with a child protection unit within the region in cases of children at risk.
- **Protocols for cooperation** in cases of peer violence in Republika Srpska enables clearer segregation of duties between child

protection institutions, providing a base for initial adequate response to violence against children. Development of an **Index for Inclusion** that requires school management to include children, parents, teachers and local community members in identification of key priorities for action within the school is another tool to enable schools to integrate violence prevention campaigns and activities within the school development programme.

3. There is an ongoing need to expand services: in particular of family support interventions endorsed by professionals

Increased training and awareness about the existence of abuse and the process of reporting it will result in increased demands on practitioners at all levels throughout the trajectory of a case. Reforms should be carefully planned to minimize the risk of overwhelming the capacity of the system to respond to cases. Human resource capacity is not sufficient to deliver the necessary services in a consistent, accountable way, and there are skills gaps – for example an insufficient number of psychologists and social workers. Reporting cases when there is no adequate intervention or follow-up available can be even more risky for the child, as it creates conflict and tensions.

Physical violence even though it is recognized, is not being reported often in order to avoid conflict with parties involved. It is considered to be someone else's business and private business...
–Respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina

The capacity and reach of services must be addressed, especially in rural areas.

There is a group of professionals working in different provinces across sectors who are motivated to find creative ways to overcome the weaknesses of the system. Their practices and ideas have the potential to bring about significant improvements to the system.

6 Physical violence, even though it is recognized, is often underreported. It is considered to be someone else's business and private business... 9

–Respondent from Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Spotlight on interesting practices:

- In Turkey, several efforts have been made to improve responses to violence. These include expansion of services, such as the establishment of child protection centres in state and university hospitals, provision of counselling services and establishment of public guesthouses as urgent placement centres for women and children victims of violence. There is also a pilot effort to introduce specialized prosecutors in the justice system to deal with cases of domestic violence. Additionally, efforts have been made to **increase the use of social media** to raise public awareness of the new services. The Office of the Prime Minister has recently established a **communication centre which aims to strengthen public relations with the government**.
- Turkey has focused on family care and support by **increasing access to prenatal and postnatal services and home visiting programmes** as a mechanism of early identification of risk, intervention and prevention. Hospital-based child protection centres are designed to prevent secondary victimization of children through specialized interview, assessment and reporting services.
- **Within the overall reforms in social sectors in Serbia, a number of initiatives are helping to improve the multi-sectoral response** to violence. A new software programme to track social assistance and services to vulnerable groups, managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has been introduced. Teams in charge of violence against children have been established in several schools and a new annual medical check-up is now used as an opportunity to screen for violence against children. A system of case management and internal professional supervision has been introduced in the centres for social work.

4. Developing effective monitoring and information exchange systems.

Dealing with child abuse cases is perhaps the most difficult situation a professional can face. Clear guidelines for staff, regular in-service training, access to opportunities for professional exchanges and support networks can help the system to continuously improve its practices and provide professionals with the support they need to do their work well – which often includes taking difficult decisions. Developing such opportunities should be a priority for policymakers. The findings of the study illustrated that there is currently no mechanism for knowledge exchange within the current systems. Also, mechanisms for monitoring staff conduct and performance were identified as weak. One professional in Turkey noted:

We had some training during our undergraduate studies on this issue, but we did not have any further training after that. We learned it on the job. More experienced staff supports the new ones.
–Respondent from Turkey

The lack of impact assessment of services prevents appreciation of good work, and hampers the process of continuously improving system performance. One way of restoring confidence in the response capacity of the system is through improving information about the services available and how people can access them.

Spotlight on interesting practices:

- In Turkey, the government is using a **mapping technology for measuring accountability** to respond to violence against children. It started in 2008 as a pilot project and was made public in 2010. Information collection is done through visualization and interactive mapping which increases transparency. The Child Rights Monitoring and Assessment Board was established in April 2012 and is headed by the Minister of Family and Social Policies.

The board members include representatives of ministries of justice, labour and social security, foreign affairs, youth and sports, development, education and health, the Turkish Bar Association, the Human Rights Presidency, NGOs and children.

- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees has initiated a collection of data on violence against children as part of the **monitoring mechanism for implementation** of the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Children 2007–2010 and is publishing this data annually. Data on violence against children is collected directly from institutions in education, social care, health, interior and justice sectors. A specially designed questionnaire has been designed for each sector.
- In Albania, a **safe, confidential, independent and accessible reporting mechanism** is provided through the **National Child Helpline**, in cooperation with the Human Rights Ombudsman Office, police and national educational authorities. Data generated through this mechanism represents an important – and often unique – insight into the situation of children at risk in Albania.

Recommendations

In the context of the policy issues raised, there are several recommendations that can be broadly applied across the region.

1. Develop clear definitions of what constitutes violence against children

Professionals noted that physical and emotional violence is accepted to a certain extent as a form of discipline for children. This makes intervention difficult.

- **Introduce clear legal definition of violence against children** that applies regardless of the stated purpose of the violence.

- **Engage the public in debate about definitions of** violence against children, particularly physical abuse, which according to the research, continues to be accepted as a justifiable form of discipline in some cases.
- **Develop campaigns aimed at: changing attitudes** towards the use of physical punishment in home and school settings and showing alternative ways of disciplining and 'educating' children.

2. Establish comprehensive cross-sectoral legislation and implementation guidelines

Professionals told us that they currently rely on informal relationships and practices to report and refer cases of violence against children. This undermines accountability in the system. A number of actions can address this issue.

- **Clearly identify government bodies responsible** for the implementation of policy dealing with violence against children and define roles and responsibilities of all persons who regularly come into contact with children at risk of violence.
- **Improve and regulate inter-sectoral communication** and collaboration by establishing mechanisms for information exchange between sectors. Develop regulations on the exchange of data on individual cases and guidelines, tools and opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation between police, social protection and health care professionals.
- **Establish logical, transparent pathways of accountability** that ensure the trajectory of a case through the system is clear and consistent.
- **Ensure adequate funding for accountability mechanisms.** All institutions should include within their annual budgets the resources needed for the implementation of all legal measures as prescribed by law. Governments need to ensure institutions have adequate resources to do this.

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3. Expand the capacity of services, in particular for family support interventions endorsed by professionals

Research participants were concerned that the services do not have sufficient capacity to handle increasing reports of violence against children. There is an urgent need to:

- **Invest in human resources by addressing skills gaps: Ensure that professionals are given adequate training** and that this is regulated and standardized to govern practice. Investing in human resources also requires improving the status of child protection professions, such as psychologists and social workers.
- **Work with professionals on the ground to find solutions.** The professionals interviewed were aware of the weaknesses in the system and were motivated to improve it. Encourage and document innovative solutions and practices from those who are familiar with the problems.
- **Identify and evaluate new and promising practices** which are emerging in all four countries. The research highlighted interesting solutions to policy challenges in all the countries. These must be developed and scaled-up where appropriate.

- **Focus on expanding services in rural areas to address their underdevelopment**, as highlighted in the research.

4. Strengthen monitoring, follow-up and information exchange systems

The professionals interviewed suggested that inter-sectoral communication and follow-up of cases referred to other parts of the child protection system are currently inadequate. There is a need to:

- **Establish effective data recording mechanisms** on violence cases to ensure effective follow-up of cases and to inform policy and system reform.
- **Engage civil society in complementing the work of government** in fulfilling children's right to protection. Governments should encourage, support and make effective use of independent research and data from civil society, universities and independent monitoring mechanisms.

Credits

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