Funded by the European Union

Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości

Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție

unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#1: Introduction

2026

Introduction

This study offers a comprehensive picture of the scale, forms, and contexts of violence affecting children in Romania today. The findings inform recommendations for stronger, more coordinated action - to prevent violence, support children who have been affected, and protect every child's right to safety and dignity.

Objective

To provide a national picture of the scale of violence against children in Romania, covering all forms of violence (as defined by the International Classification of Violence Against Children - ICVAC) and all settings, including technology-facilitated violence.

Methodology

Research Design
Mixed-methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, that combined a quantitative component (nationally representative survey), a qualitative component (focus groups, in-depth interviews, workshops) and a secondary data analysis component.

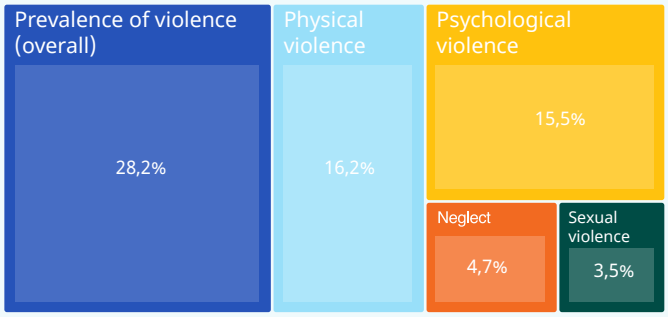
Sample Size
Number of participants

2,106 children and parents, 48 institutional representatives, 210 vulnerable children and adolescents in focus groups, six thematic focus groups on online violence, 20 in-depth interviews with children in protection and detention systems, and workshops with 70 children aged 6-10.

Data Collection
Quantitative & qualitative

Face-to-face, tablet-assisted personal interviews (TAPI) conducted with children and parents. The discussion and interview guides adapted to the age and level of understanding of the child. All instruments were aligned with the ICVAC framework.

Results



Data collection: June-September 2025
Based on Prevalence study available at unicef.ro/studii

The quantitative component of the study showed that 28% of children - representing approximately 1 million - have experienced violence at some point in their lives. The highest prevalence rates were reported for physical violence (16%) and psychological violence (16%), while 5% of children reported experiences of neglect and 4% reported sexual violence.

Key findings

01 Family-level factors are the strongest correlates of victimisation: lifetime prevalence almost doubles in homes marked by parental mental health and addiction problems, severe family dysfunction, intimate partner violence.

02 Boys show slightly higher rates of violence than girls (30% vs. 27% lifetime prevalence; 18% vs. 14% past 12 months), with the gender gap somewhat widening for recent victimisation.

03 Prevalence rises steadily with age, from 12% (lifetime) among 0–2 year-olds to 41% among 14–17 year-olds, which might reflect both cumulative exposure and greater disclosure capacity among older children. Recent (12-month) victimisation peaks earlier, at 10–13 years (20.6%), suggesting adolescence carries the highest active risk.

Funded by the European Union
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości
Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție
unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#2: Forms of Violence

2026

Physical violence reached a lifetime prevalence of 16.2% and a 12-month prevalence of 11.1%

Physical violence is often hard to detect ("*I had a friend [...] who told me how his mother and aunt beat him and left bruises while his father was a truck driver in another country. [...] He didn't seem like a very sad child, he seemed quite healthy*" said a boy from a rural area, 14-17 years old); at times it becomes internalised or perceived as justified ("*I have a sharp tongue and I used to talk back to my parents. I can't say it was a beating, but they'd give me a smack on the head. When I commented, when I ignored them [...]. When I lied*" mentioned a girl from a rural area, 14-17 years old), and it often goes unreported or is minimised by adults ("*I was bruised from the beatings and no one believed me*" explained a girl from a rural area, 14-17 years old).

Psychological violence has affected 15.5% of children

Psychological violence, particularly terrorising, is often hard to recognise, being masked by dynamics of loyalty, shame, emotional dependence, fear, and a limited perception of the protection available after disclosure ("*Teachers see it, but they pretend not to. At most, they scold us and tell us to go to class*" said a boy, 14-17 years old, urban). Regarding harassment, contempt, and humiliation, the data suggest that this form of abuse is sustained by social norms tolerant of control and intimidation. The data also point to a normalisation of cyberbullying, especially among adolescents, which leads to underreporting (*"[Online bullying] I thought of violence as something physical, when someone hits you. And this doesn't seem like violence to me. If this happens, you can block them and stop talking to that person*" mentioned a boy from an urban area).

Neglect is reported by 4.7% of children

Neglect often involves inadequate supervision, poor nutrition and hygiene, and weak parenting skills.
Children often perceive the parent-child relationship as instrumental (*"There are parents who mostly have children just to have support in old age; otherwise, they don't care about them, they don't care how they grow up, they don't look after them at all. They are indifferent,"* said a boy from an urban area).

Sexual violence is reported by 3.5% of children

Children describe how online sexual violence can blur into offline physical aggression (*"There can be people who send indecent photos and threaten [...]. We have a girl who got into trouble because of a boy. He even ended up beating her, no one actually knew..."* explained a girl, 14-17 years old).

Funded by the European Union

Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości

Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție

unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

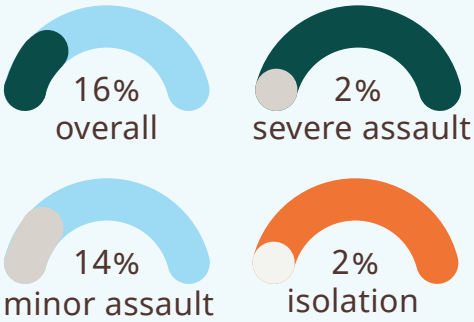
#3: Physical Violence

2026

16% of children report physical violence; reporting of minor physical violence is slightly higher among children from families with tertiary education, children from reconstituted families, those aged above 10 years old, and children of Hungarian ethnicity

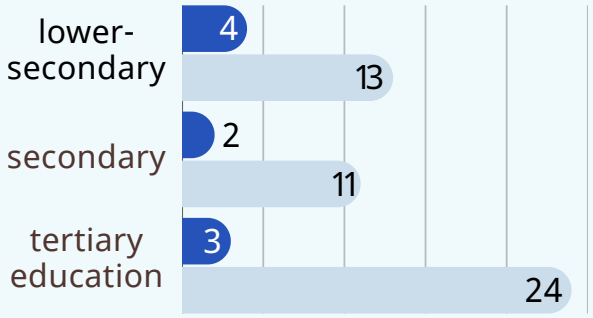
Forms of violence

Among physical violence, minor assault is the most commonly reported (14% of children); severe forms and isolation are rarely reported (2% of children)

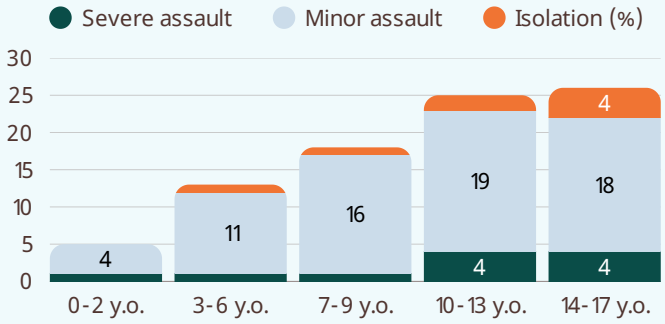


Parents' level of education

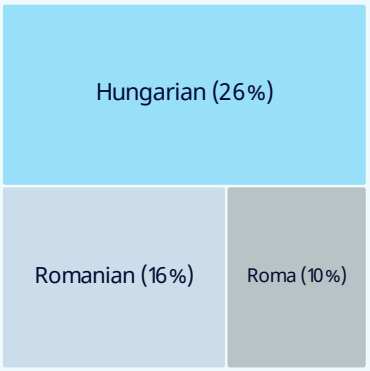
Minor physical violence rises sharply with parental education: 13% for parents with lower-secondary school to 24% for tertiary-educated parents; severe violence stays relatively flat



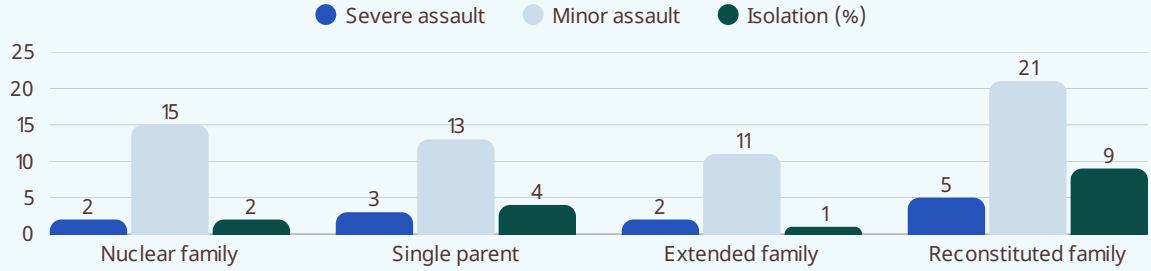
Child's age



Child's ethnicity



Family structure



Funded by the European Union
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości
Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție
unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

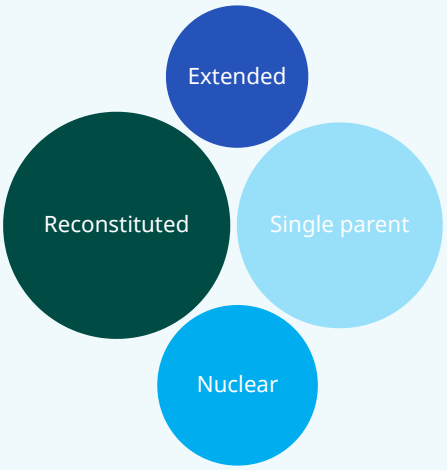
#4: Psychological Violence

2026

Forms of violence

- 16% overall
- 4% terrorising a child
- 6% exposure to domestic violence
- 8% harassment, contempt and humiliation in person
- 3% harassment, contempt and humiliation online
- 2% exposure to community violence

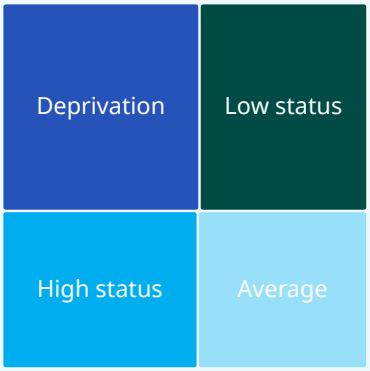
Family structure



Children with disabilities

- 5% terrorising a child
- 20% harassment, contempt and humiliation in person
- 7% exposure to domestic violence

Family status



Risk factors

15.5% of children report psychological violence. Children living in families affected by mental health issues or addiction face markedly higher psychological violence across every form: overall lifetime prevalence more than doubles (33.8% vs. 14.6%), with the largest gaps in exposure to domestic violence (22.6% vs. 5.2%) and terrorizing a child (11.3% vs. 3.5%). Moreover, children living in homes with intimate partner physical violence experience psychological violence at more than double the rate of their peers: 32.7% versus 15.2%. Children with disabilities and children living in single parent and reconstituted families also report higher psychological violence.

Funded by the European Union
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości
Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție
unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#5: Five most vulnerable categories of children

2026

Quantitative study findings

Parental mental health issues or addictions

Children living in homes marked by parental mental health issues or addiction problems

- Children living in families affected by mental health problems and/or addiction show markedly higher victimisation: 48.1% experienced violence over their lifetime, compared with 27.2% of children in families without such problems - nearly double the prevalence.

Adverse family event

Children living in homes marked by adverse family events

- Adverse family events (e.g. severe health issues/death of a family member, divorce) in the past five years show a strong dose-response relationship with victimisation: lifetime prevalence rises steadily from 21.6% among children with no such events to 48.3% among those exposed to three or more - more than doubling.

Environment of conflict and violence

Children living in an environment of conflict and violence

- Conflict within the family shows a clear dose-response relationship with victimization: lifetime prevalence rises steadily from 23.1% in families that never experience conflict to 40.6% where conflict is frequent. The effect is sharpest where intimate partner violence is present: 47.1% vs. 28.0%.

Single-parent and reconstituted families

Children living in single-parent and reconstituted families

- Family structure is also associated with victimization: prevalence is highest in reconstituted families (45.2%) and single-parent households (33.5%), compared with nuclear (27.3%) and extended families (22.6%) - though the very small number of reconstituted families (n=31) warrants caution.

Disability and health limitations

Children with disabilities or health limitations

- Children with a health limitation or disability are notably more exposed to violence: 40.2% have experienced victimisation over their lifetime, compared with 27.8% of children without such limitations - though the small subgroup size (n=64) warrants some caution.

Funded by the European Union
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości
Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție
unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#6: Understanding violence through children's perspectives ✱ 2026

Qualitative study findings - These reflect themes emerging only from the discussions held and cannot be considered representative for the population at large. Some observations are based on a limited number of accounts.

Exposure to online violence

- Older children, especially boys, tend to normalise digital violence as less serious than in-person violence and as unavoidable. Many describe everyday cyberbullying (harassment, humiliation, threats) and have experienced or know peers who experienced online situations of a sexual nature. Normalisation, fear of losing digital access, and doubt that anything will change all drive underreporting.

Children with parents working abroad

- Their vulnerability stems mainly from emotional neglect, stigmatisation (in communities where migration is less common), bullying, and exposure to community or online risks. The qualitative analysis shows that these problems are not caused by the "child with migrant parents" status alone, but rather by its combination with other risk factors: low involvement of current caregivers, poverty, the limited emotional engagement of absent parent(s).

Children in residential care

- Many have suffered severe family violence and continue to face arbitrary sanctions, favoritism, conflict, bullying, and stigmatisation - including serious incidents - across centers, schools, and the community. At school, many are exposed to bullying and stigma through the "child in care" label, with some situations even involving insults or humiliating behavior from teachers. In the community, they face intrusive stares, curiosity, and labels like "child from the children's home" or "orphan", which deepen their sense of difference and vulnerability.

Children in detention centres

- While children in detention centers are classified as vulnerable overall, certain subgroups face higher risk: those from poor families or with weak family support are more prone to victimization. Some are forced by other children to perform extra tasks within the center (e.g., laundry or cleaning), simply because they are seen as weaker or easier to control.

Adolescent motherhood

- Adolescent motherhood carries distinct meanings across cultural contexts: in traditional Roma communities it is a socially accepted norm conferring status, though one that often leads to school dropout; in non-traditional settings it is linked to stigma, discrimination, lack of support, and greater exposure to domestic violence.

Funded by the European Union

Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości

Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție

unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#7: Perpetrator's profile

2026

Study:	Prevalence of Violence against Children in Romania
Project:	Strengthening the response to violence against children through better-informed policies and enhanced institutional capacity project
Funded & implemented:	European Commission, NAPCRA & UNICEF in Romania

384 Total incidents

excluding cases of exposure to domestic violence, community violence, and neglect

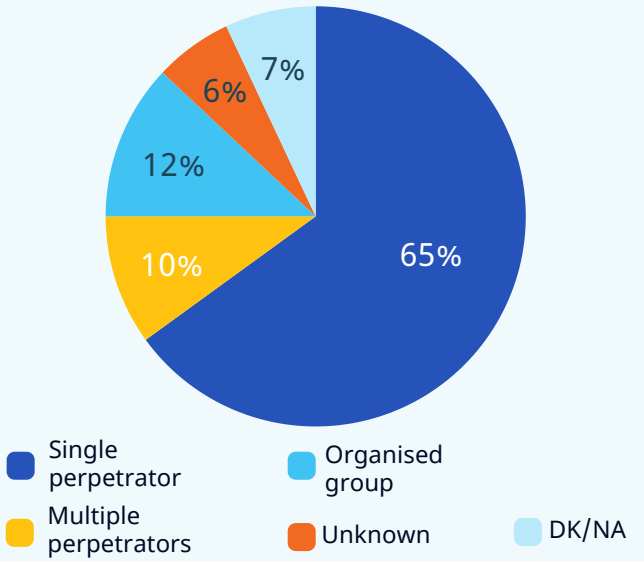
Perpetrator's age

76%

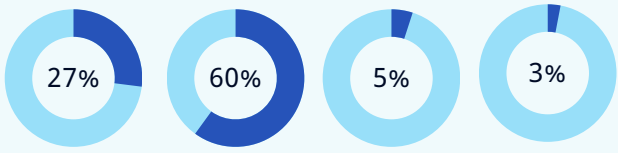
below the age of 18 y.o.

Violence against children is committed largely by other minors (colleagues/friends) within the child's immediate social circle, rather than by strangers or unknown aggressors.

Distribution of violence incidents, by perpetrator's characteristics



Perpetrator-child relationship



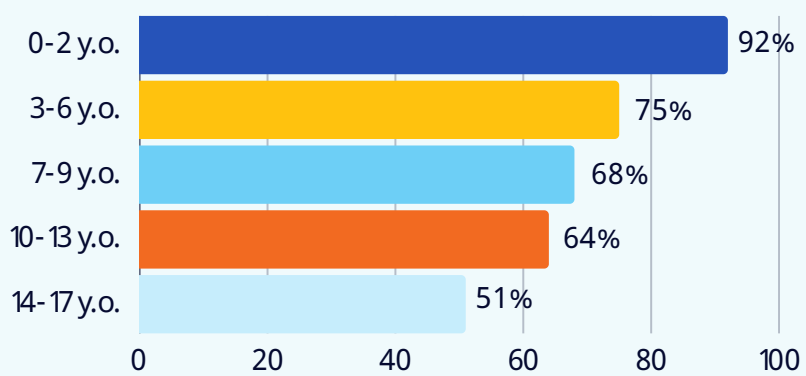
Distribution of violence incidents by perpetrator's sex

61% Male

33% Female

6% unknown perpetrator

Share of total incidents (%) with a single perpetrator, by victim's age group



Share of incidents against girls, by perpetrator's sex (%)

Male perpetrator	38%
Female perpetrator	54%

Share of incidents against boys, by perpetrator's sex (%)

Male perpetrator	74%
Female perpetrator	21%

Funded by the European Union

Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości

Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție

unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#8: Place of occurrence

2026

Study:	Prevalence of Violence against Children in Romania
Project:	Strengthening the response to violence against children through better-informed policies and enhanced institutional capacity project
Funded & implemented:	European Commission, NAPCRA & UNICEF in Romania

Total Incidents

384

excluding cases of exposure to domestic violence, community violence, neglect

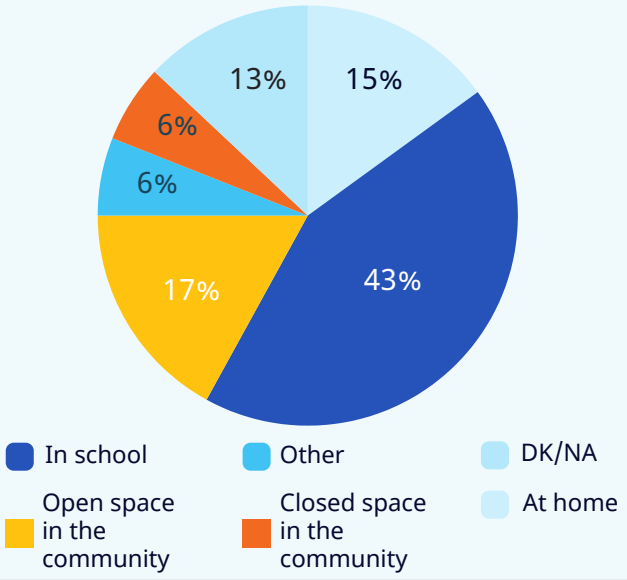
Online Incidents

50

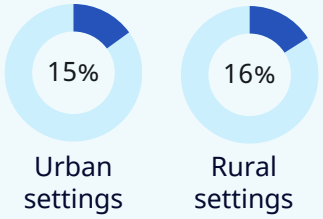
with more than half of incidents occurring on a social media platform

Violence against children is not confined to a particular place or time; it is cross-cutting - it can arise in the family, at school, in the community, or online, transferring between these settings.

Distribution of violence incidents, by place of occurrence

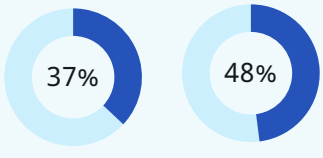


Distribution of violence incidents occurring at home



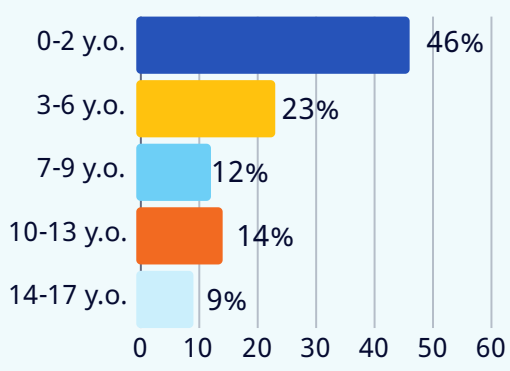
Violence occurring at home shows no difference between urban and rural settings.

Distribution of violence incidents occurring in school

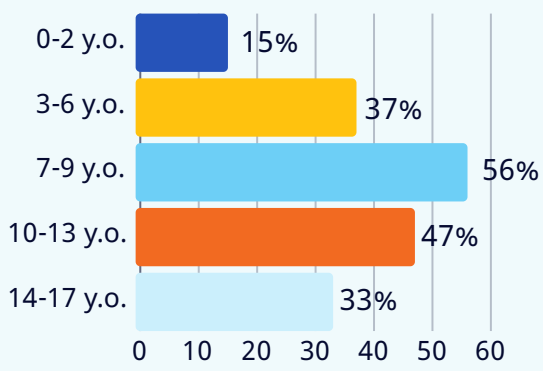


Violence in school shows a clear urban–rural gap: children in rural areas are more affected.

Distribution of violence incidents occurring at home



Distribution of violence incidents occurring in school/kindergarten



Funded by the European Union

Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości

Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție

unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#9: Disclosed violence

2026

Study:	Prevalence of Violence against Children in Romania
Project:	Strengthening the response to violence against children through better-informed policies and enhanced institutional capacity project
Funded & implemented:	European Commission, NAPCRA & UNICEF in Romania

Reported Incidents

454

brought to the attention of authorities (most recent incident the child can remember), out of which 242 for physical violence.

Told someone

67%

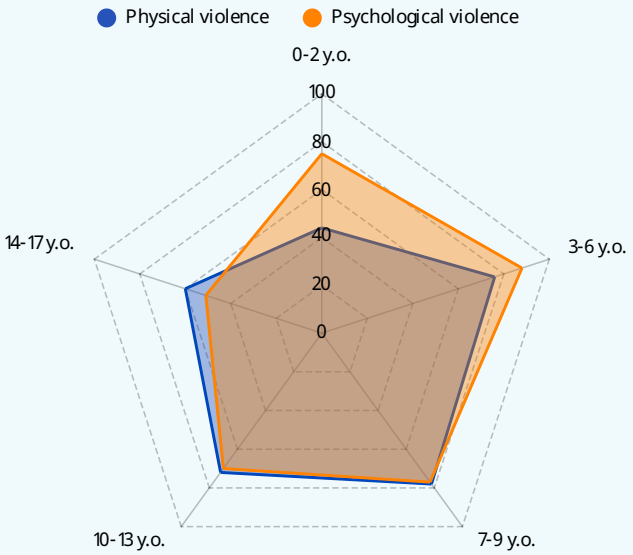
Children disclose the acts of violence to their parents or a teacher; to a lesser extent, they also confide in a sibling.

Reported to police

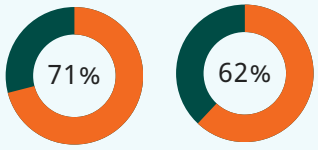
12%

Severe physical assault, sexual assault, and terrorising are the forms of violence most likely to be reported to police.

Distribution of disclosed incidents, by age categories



Distribution of disclosed incidents, by rural/urban

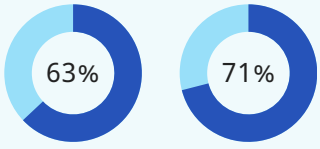


Urban settings

Rural settings

Disclosure is more common in urban than rural areas: only 62% of incidents were disclosed to someone in rural.

Distribution of disclosed incidents, by sex

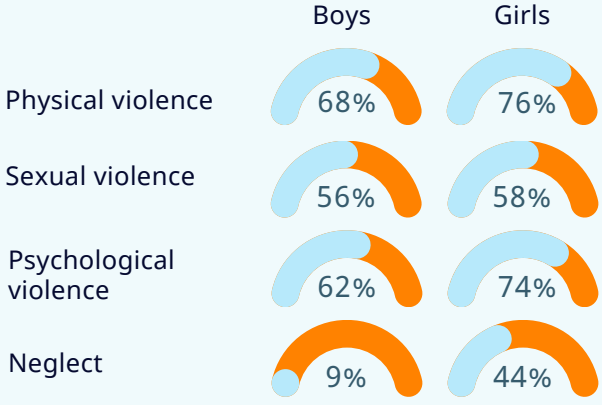


Boys

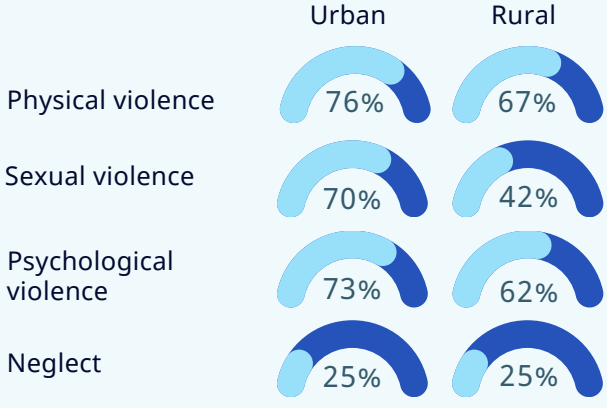
Girls

Disclosure differs by sex: 71% of incidents were told to someone by girls, compared with 63% by boys.

Distribution of disclosed incidents, by sex and form



Distribution of disclosed incidents, by context and form



Funded by the European Union
Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości
Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Tineretului și Solidarității Sociale
Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție
unicef for every child

Prevalence of Violence against Children

#10: Perceptions about violence in Romania

2026

Study:	Prevalence of Violence against Children in Romania
Project:	Strengthening the response to violence against children through better-informed policies and enhanced institutional capacity project
Funded & implemented:	European Commission, NAPCRA & UNICEF in Romania

Parents overwhelmingly recognize violence against children as serious. For nearly every act, around 80–90% rate it as "extremely serious", with severe physical abuse (87%), sexual contact against the child's will (90%), and forced sexual relations (87%) at the top.

Children perceive same acts as less serious than parents do. The gap is greatest for milder forms: only 53% of children rate slapping or pushing as "extremely serious" (vs. 64% of parents), and 73% rate repeated verbal harassment as such (vs. 86%).

Perceptions of the severity of acts of violence against children (acts of violence perceived as extremely severe by parents vs. children)

