



KEY ASKS

2021 • SDG National Reviews

SDG TARGET 16.2: END ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) area 16 includes Target 16.2 – *End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children* – which is of critical importance to both the achievement of the SDGs and UNICEF's mandate. As Governments are reporting SDG progress and plans, including for SDG 16.2, there is an opportunity to strengthen the connections between global reporting and national implementation, in particular, through the Voluntary National Review process

Millions of children experience emotional, physical and sexual violence in homes, communities, schools, workplaces, detention centres, and institutions and online. Close to 300 million (3 in 4) children aged 2 to 4 experience violent discipline by their caregivers regularly. Worldwide, around 15 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime. Every 7 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent is killed by an act of violence.ⁱ Around half of students aged 13 to 15 worldwide – around 150 million – report having experienced peer-to-peer violence in and around school.ⁱⁱ The ambition in SDG target 16.2 to end violence against children is relevant and necessary.

The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the risks of children experiencing violence, especially for the most vulnerable. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented disruption to education, with a peak of more than 1.5 billion children in 190 countries out of school.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, 1.8 billion children live in the 104 countries where violence prevention and response services have been disrupted due to COVID-19 containment measures.^{iv} Around two thirds of countries with disruptions reported that at least one type of service had been severely affected.^v Countries with weaker child protection systems are the most affected by the disruptions.

Children are particularly vulnerable during infectious disease outbreaks as they can disrupt the environments in which children grow and develop. Measures used to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases can expose children to protection risks.^{vi} Previous pandemics and epidemics have all generated insights into the negative protection impacts of health crises.^{vii} Outcomes are typically multi-layered, with immediate outcomes for children, families and communities leading to additional negative risks and outcomes for children in the intermediate term.^{viii} Child protection risks during COVID-19 include: increased psychosocial distress, self-harm, emotional and physical abuse including witnessing of domestic violence, neglect with basic needs unmet, online harassment, bullying and violence; and violence for those living on the streets, separated and unaccompanied; and in institutions and refugee and migrant camps.^{ix}

Unless mitigation measures are taken by Governments to ensure the delivery at national scale of essential prevention and response child protection services during the pandemic and public investment in programmes is sustained and strengthened over the next decade, achievement of Target 16.2 will be compromised. There is sufficient global evidence on effective services and programmes to end violence against children at the disposal of Governments to achieve Target 16.2. There is a legal and moral obligation to act, and an ever-growing body of evidence from around the world that shows how societies can be made safer for children. With implementation of the right laws, systems, policies and investments, as well as adequate monitoring

“We are mindful that the effects of the pandemic and the preventive measures taken may pose a challenge to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring the full enjoyment of the rights of the child...We must prevent and combat all forms of violence, including domestic violence, abuse and sexual exploitation of children online and offline [and] cyberbullying...We should be doing everything we can to cushion the impact on children’s well-being, especially for those whose vulnerability has increased as a result of the current circumstances.”

-- [Joint statement](#) issued by the European Union, GRULAC and the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs, April 2020

and evaluation and robust public education and campaigning, significant and sustained reductions in violence can be achieved.^x



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To achieve Target 16.2, progress must be driven from the national level. Governments must lead and be supported to implement multi-pronged evidence-based strategies to prevent and end violence at national scale. UNICEF urges all Governments to:

1. Establish high-level oversight of a coordinated national policy agenda to end violence against children.
2. Implement and reform laws to ensure the prohibition of all forms of violence against children in all settings.
3. Implement safe school policies, including focus on ending corporal punishment, bullying and sexual violence in schools.
4. Strengthen national coordination efforts to implement multisectoral programmes to prevent and respond to violence against children, underpinned by a robust social service workforce.
5. Promote norms that do not accept violence against women and children, by building capacity and promoting participation among communities, parents/caregivers and children to challenge harmful behaviours, and adopt positive norms.
6. Mobilize and invest resources in scaling up proven, effective interventions, and those with promise of innovation.
7. Monitor implementation of Target 16.2 through investment in the collection of quality, timely and disaggregated evidence on violence against children, and integration of data into national statistics systems and strategies.

MITIGATING RISKS DURING THE PANDEMIC: MAINTAIN THE ESSENTIAL CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES AND EXPAND PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

Governments must prioritize maintaining or adapting critical prevention and response services to protect children from violence, as part of their public health response. With consideration for the most vulnerable and applying a gender lens, UNICEF calls on Governments to:

- Designate the social service workforce as essential and assure their safety protection.
- Ensure child protection, health and justice service continuity through adopting programme adaptations.
- Strengthen child helplines (both for services and referral) and reporting mechanisms across sectors to be accessible and responsive.
- Make positive parenting resources available.^{xi}
- Increase online child protection – working notably with families, educators and technology companies.
- Maintain children's access to teachers and school-based counselling services during lockdown, and ensure schools have child-friendly procedures in place to identify, respond to, and refer incidents of violence as schools re-open.
- Invest in social protection to enable livelihoods to counteract shocks.



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

UNICEF urges all Governments to prioritize the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of disaggregated data for key SDG indicators. This imperative, indeed accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, 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 violence against children in other national household surveys.

16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month.

UNICEF's global databases include data for children aged 1-14 years. National statistical offices are required to expand this indicator to include children up to 17 years of age; methodological work is ongoing to assess whether modifications are needed to capture information relevant also for older adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17. Disaggregation by age and sex is required and disaggregation by household wealth, place of residence, and geographic location is also recommended.

16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18.

There is currently no established best practice for measuring and producing statistics on the sensitive issue of sexual violence that has been agreed upon internationally. As a result, different approaches have been developed to gather data that has made comparisons between countries problematic. Underreporting on experiences of sexual violence generally, and particularly among boys, is a challenge. Specialized approaches to ensure safe, ethical and confidential disclosure, especially among children, need to be built into surveys, which must also include a referral process. For more information on how UNICEF supports data collection for child protection please see [here](#).^{xii}



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

Failing to prevent and effectively respond to violence against children can have lifelong impacts on health, well-being and attitudes towards family and relationships, which can perpetuate the cycle of violence. The consequences of violence against children may place an important economic burden on society – estimated at up to USD\$ 7 trillion each year.^{xiii} However, in 2015, less than 0.6 per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) was allocated to ending violence against children.^{xiv} In terms of national budgets, the financial resources made available to support State's obligations to protect children from violence are rarely perceptible.

To ensure achievement of Target 16.2 by 2030, UNICEF urges all Governments to establish or strengthen tracking of resource allocation for child protection as a necessary first step to assess the degree to which children's right to protection from violence is realized. Depending on the country context, such mechanisms could include: a) a method of tracking the budget allocated to support implementation of national plans or strategies on children protection, b) a record/report of activities funded as part of the national plan in the past financial year; or c) a public expenditure tracking mechanism for investment in prevention and response to violence against children. Countries and donors are encouraged to use available tools to advance violence against children results through the best use of ODA and public budgets.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF calls on all Governments to sustain and progressively strengthen investment levels in violence prevention programmes and response services.



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

For national efforts to reach Target 16.2, Governments must tackle social acceptance of violence against children, including harmful attitudes and behaviours that exist among policy and law makers, government officials, front-line workers and communities; legislation which condones or fails to uphold violence; and lack of child-friendly reporting mechanisms.

Greater public awareness and stronger participation of children and adolescents are key to the development of prevention strategies, better reporting and promoting positive social norms.

NICEF urges all Governments to co-create powerful social change to end violence against children; and promote positive, protective social norms and practices. These efforts should be linked with legislative reform, for example, in the case of corporal punishment against children, to ensure a comprehensive prohibition in all settings – currently achieved in just 60 countries worldwide.^{xv} Efforts should systematically include the participation and empowerment of children and adolescents, especially for identifying and addressing unequal power dynamics, across all spaces and contexts where violence can happen. All efforts must be underpinned by coordinated multi-partner action, including with the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and other partners, and draw on the common package of evidence-based strategies – [INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children](#), which provides the first globally agreed set of actions to meet SDG targets for effective prevention of and response to violence against children during and beyond COVID-19.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs> • <https://www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children> • childprotection@unicef.org

ⁱ UNICEF, [A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents](#), 2017.

ⁱⁱ UNICEF, ['An Everyday Lesson: #Endviolence in schools'](#), September 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ [COVID-19: At least a third of the world's schoolchildren unable to access remote learning during school closures, new report says](#), 26 August 2020. For internal reference, see https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:p:/r/sites/EMOPS-2019nCoV/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B820B8772-6705-467D-B2AF-F561C34AF08B%7D&file=Back-to-school%20public%20activation%20toolkit.pptx&action=edit&mobileredirect=true

^{iv} United Nations Children's Fund, [Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services](#), UNICEF, New York, 2020. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/resources/protecting-children-from-violence-in-the-time-of-covid-19-brochure/>

^v United Nations Children's Fund, [Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services](#), UNICEF, New York, 2020. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/resources/protecting-children-from-violence-in-the-time-of-covid-19-brochure/>

^{vi} The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Guidance Note on the Protection of Children During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#), March 2018.

^{vii} Bakrania, S., Chavez, C., Ipince, A., Rocca, M., Oliver, S., Stansfield, C., ... & Unicef. (2020). Impacts of pandemics and epidemics on child protection lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19. *Florence: UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1104-working-paper-impacts-of-pandemics-and-epidemics-on-child-protection-lessons-learned.html?utm_source=covidmicrosite

^{viii} Bakrania, S., Chavez, C., Ipince, A., Rocca, M., Oliver, S., Stansfield, C., ... & Unicef. (2020). Impacts of pandemics and epidemics on child protection lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19. *Florence: UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1104-working-paper-impacts-of-pandemics-and-epidemics-on-child-protection-lessons-learned.html?utm_source=covidmicrosite

^{ix} [The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic, Version 2](#), May 2020.

^x [Agenda 2030 for Children: End Violence Solutions Summit](#). Report from Solutions Summit, February 2018.

^{xi} United Nations Children's Fund, [Tips for parenting during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips>

^{xii} United Nations Children's Fund, [Abuse, exploitation and violence: SDG Briefing Note #14](#), 2018.

^{xiii} Overseas Development Institute and ChildFund Alliance, [The costs and economic impact of violence against children](#), 2014.

^{xiv} ChildFund Alliance, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, World Vision International, and Development Initiatives, [Counting Pennies: A review of official development assistance to end violence against children](#), 2017.

^{xv} [Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children website](#), access 2 November 2020.