**Countries failing to prevent violence against children, agencies warn**

*Global status report on preventing violence against children calls for more government action and warns of ‘dramatic impact’ of COVID-19*

Half of the world’s children, or approximately 1 billion children each year are affected by physical, sexual or psychological violence, suffering injuries, disabilities and death, because countries have failed to follow established strategies to protect them.

This is according to a new report published today by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, UNESCO, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children, and the End Violence Partnership.

“There is never any excuse for violence against children," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “We have evidence-based tools to prevent it, which we urge all countries to implement. Protecting the health and well-being of children is central to protecting our collective health and well-being, now and for the future.”

The report – *Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020* – is the first of its kind, charting progress in 155 countries against the “INSPIRE” framework, a set of seven strategies for preventing and responding to violence against children. The report signals a clear need in all countries to scale up efforts to implement them. While nearly all countries (88%) have key laws in place to protect children against violence, less than half of countries (47%) said these were being strongly enforced.

The report includes the first ever global homicide estimates specifically for children under 18 years of age – previous estimates were based on data that included 18 to 19-year olds. It finds that, in 2017, around 40,000 children were victims of homicide.

“Violence against children has always been pervasive, and now things could be getting much worse,” said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. “Lockdowns, school closures and movement restrictions have left far too many children stuck with their abusers, without the safe space that school would normally offer. It is urgent to scale up efforts to protect children during these times and beyond, including by designating social service workers as essential and strengthening child helplines.”

**Progress is generally uneven**

Of the INSPIRE strategies, only access to schools through enrollment showed the most progress with 54% of countries reporting that a sufficient number of children in need were being reached in this way. Between 32% to 37% of countries considered that victims of violence could access support services, while 26% of countries provided programmes on parent and caregiver support; 21% of countries had programmes to change harmful norms; and 15% of countries had modifications to provide safe physical environments for children.

Although a majority of countries (83%) have national data on violence against children, only 21% used these to set baselines and national targets to prevent and respond to violence against children.

About 80% of countries have national plans of action and policies but only one-fifth have plans that are fully funded or have measurable targets. A lack of funding combined with inadequate professional capacity are likely contributing factors and a reason why implementation has been slow.

**The COVID-19 response and its impact on children**

Stay-at-home measures including school closures have limited the usual sources of support for families and individuals such as friends, extended family or professionals. This further erodes victims’ ability to successfully cope with crises and the new routines of daily life. Spikes in calls to helplines for child abuse and intimate partner violence have been observed.

And while online communities have become central to maintain many children’s learning, support and play, an increase in harmful online behaviours including cyberbullying, risky online behavior and sexual exploitation have been identified.

“Ending violence against children is the right thing to do, a smart investment to make, and it’s possible. It is time to fully fund comprehensive national action plans that will keep children safe at home, at school, online and in their communities,” said Dr Howard Taylor, End Violence Partnership. “We can and must create a world where every child can thrive free from violence and become a new generation of adults to experience healthy and prosperous lives.”

**Editor’s note:**

The data for the report was compiled through a survey administered between 2018 and 2019 with responses from over 1000 decision-makers from 155 countries. The INSPIRE strategies launched in 2016 call for the implementation and enforcement of laws; changing norms and values to make violence unacceptable; creating safe physical environments for children; providing support to parent and caregivers; strengthening income and economic security and stability; improving response and support services for victims; and providing children with education and life skills.

**Related links**

To download the report (in English only) and executive summary (in English, French, Russian and Spanish), go to: <https://who.canto.global/b/SSHOR> and use password: 490759.