

# 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 protection and social welfare might in many contexts be reduced, meaning that while child abuse rates may go down, they are likely to stabilize at a higher level than before COVID-19.

Global responses to violence against children in the time of COVID-19 have focused on how governments and communities can shore up family capacity to cope with the stress of confinement and anxiety over the future. There has also been a concerted effort to provide all families with concrete behavioural suggestions on how to optimize positive and nurturing parent-child relationships, how to avoid the use of violent discipline, and what to do when violence threatens to erupt.



**Only one fifth of countries has fully funded national action plans or plans that include specified indicators on the prevalence of violence against children with baseline and target values**

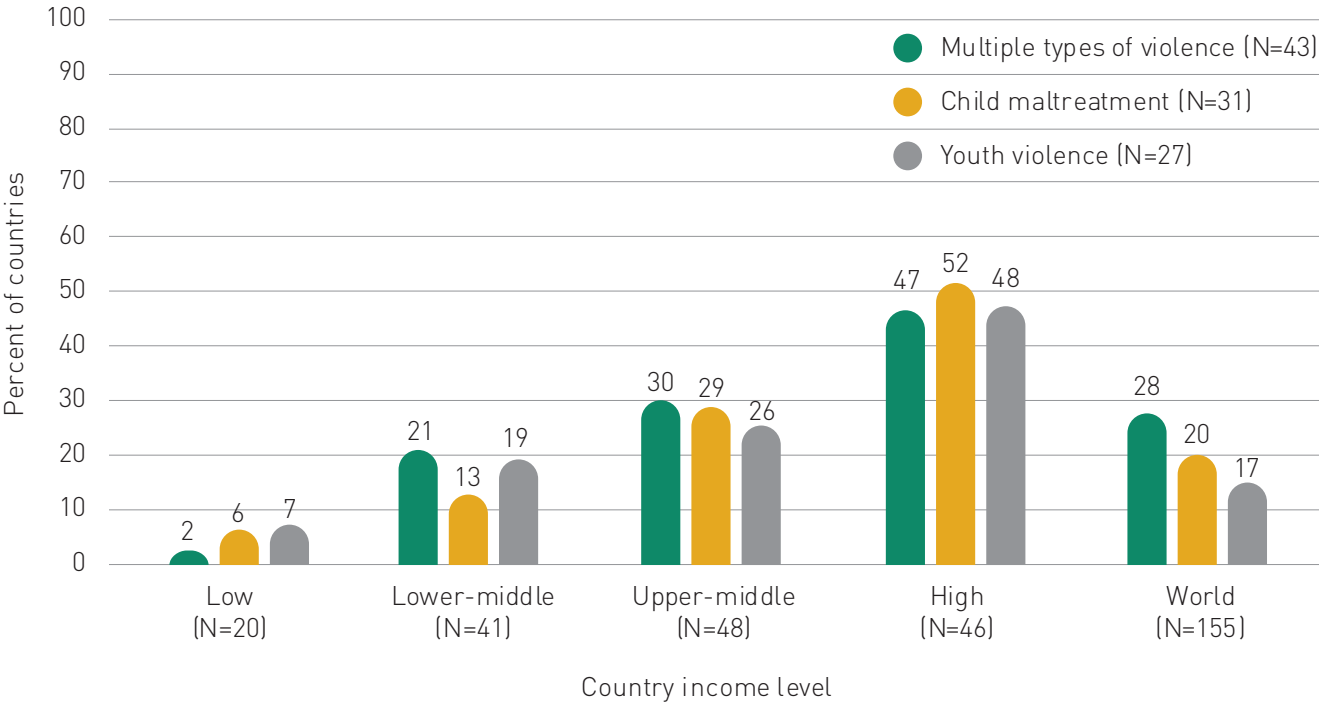
# Main survey findings

## Many countries have mechanisms to support national violence prevention work, but few have plans that are fully funded and include measurable targets

This report found that 89% of countries allocate responsibility to multiple sectors for addressing violence against children, with the education, health, justice and social sectors most often mentioned; and 80% of countries have at least one national action plan to prevent violence against children. These promising findings contrast

with the finding that just one fifth of countries reported that their national action plans were fully funded, and despite most countries having some nationally representative prevalence data, just 21% reported having in place quantitative baseline and target indicators by which to monitor the effects of their prevention efforts.

**Figure 1. Percentage of countries with fully funded national action plans by type of violence and country income level, 2018 (N=155 reporting countries)**



Note. The income levels are based on 2018 World Bank classifications.



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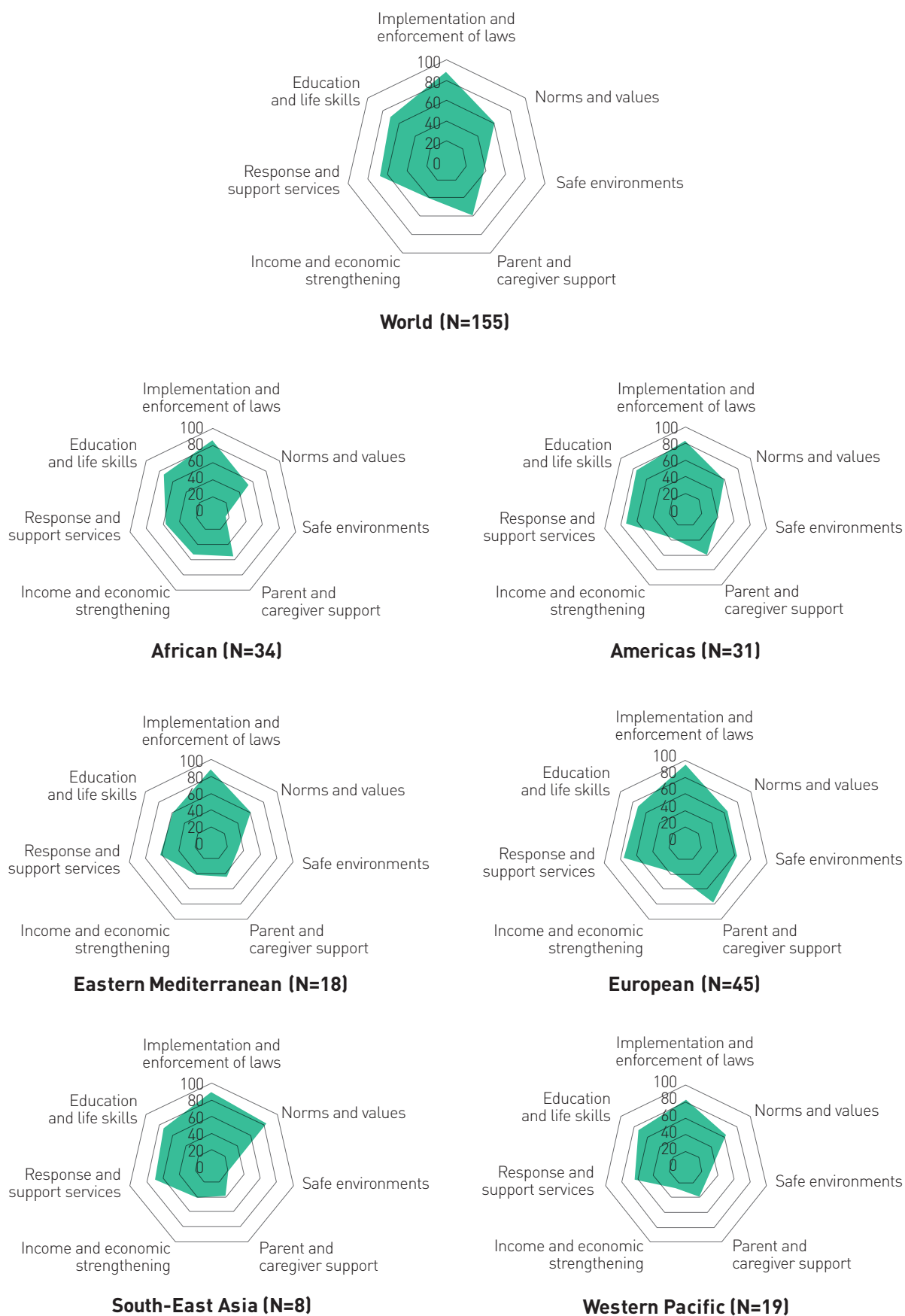
**56% of countries provide support for INSPIRE strategies, but this varied by WHO region and INSPIRE strategy**

**There are marked differences in the level of government support depending on WHO region and INSPIRE strategy**

While 56% of countries provide some national support for implementing the INSPIRE strategies, this varied markedly by strategy and WHO region. For example, implementation and enforcement of laws was supported by 88% of countries globally, whereas support for the parent and caregiver support strategy ranged from 78% in the European Region, 56% of countries in the African Region and under half of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions.

The least-supported strategies were those on safe environments and income and economic strengthening. Under one third of countries in the African, South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions provided national support for the safe environments strategy. Income and economic strengthening was the only strategy where the highest level of support (at 53%) was reported by the African Region, compared to 28%–42% of countries in other regions.

**Figure 2. Percentage of countries reporting any support for INSPIRE strategies globally and by WHO region, 2018 (N=155 reporting countries)**



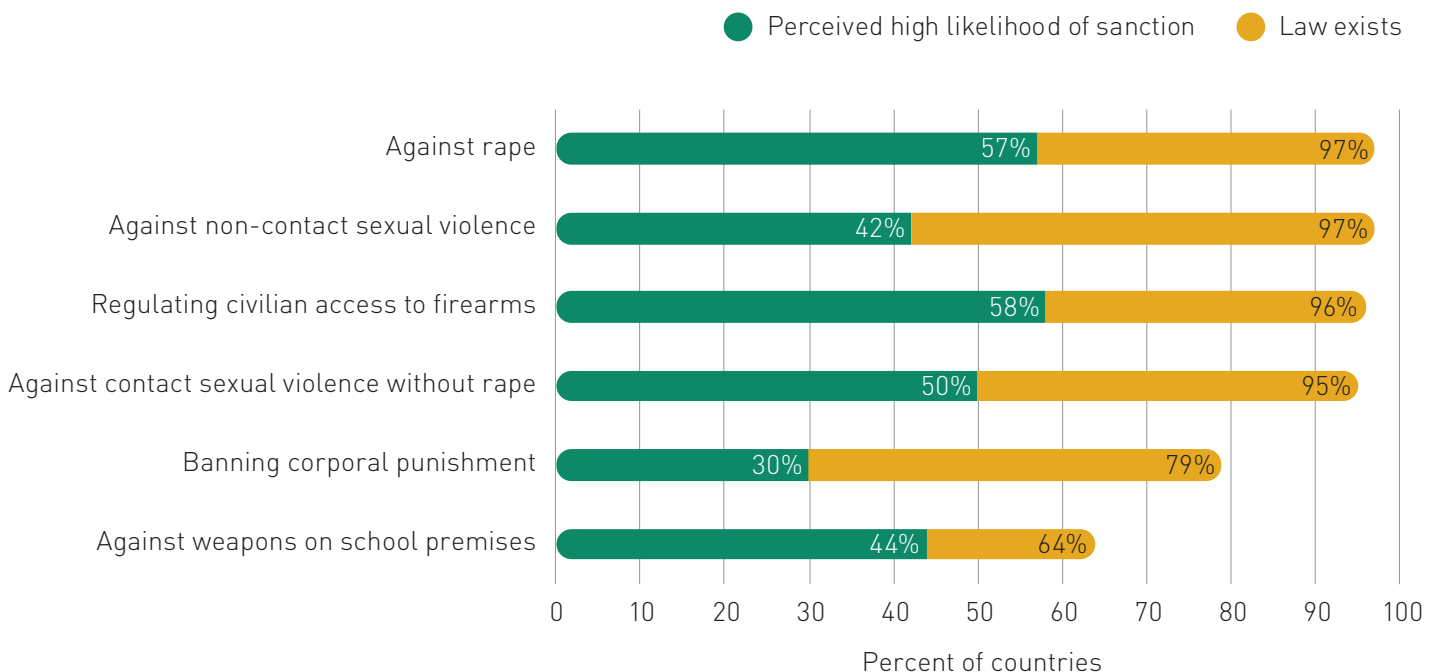
## Laws against violence that affects children and laws restricting exposure to alcohol and firearms are widely enacted but often inadequately enforced

Overall, 88% of countries reported having all six laws in place, with close to 100% of countries reporting that they had laws in place against sexual violence and laws regulating civilian access to firearms. Laws banning corporal punishment were present in 79% of countries, while 64% of countries had laws against weapons on school premises. However, the proportion of countries where the perceived enforcement level was considered sufficient to ensure a high likelihood of sanction for people breaking the laws

was just 47% overall and ranged from 30% for bans on corporal punishment and 44% for laws against weapons on school premises, to 42%–57% for laws against sexual violence, and 58% for regulations on youth access to firearms.

Findings about laws restricting access to alcohol were taken from the WHO *Global status report on alcohol and health 2018*, which showed that 93% of countries have minimum legal purchase ages for alcohol ranging from 18–25 years but does not provide information on the extent to which such laws are enforced.

**Figure 3. Percentage of countries with national laws to prevent violence and extent to which enforcement was considered sufficient to ensure a high likelihood of people breaking the laws being sanctioned, 2018 (N=155 reporting countries)**



Note: A few countries did not provide enforcement ratings for some laws checked as existing, and rating completeness ranged from 93–95%. Findings on legislation for the minimum age for purchase of alcohol from the WHO *Global status report on alcohol and health 2018*

## While countries are investing in prevention, decision-makers in every country accept they need to scale up their efforts

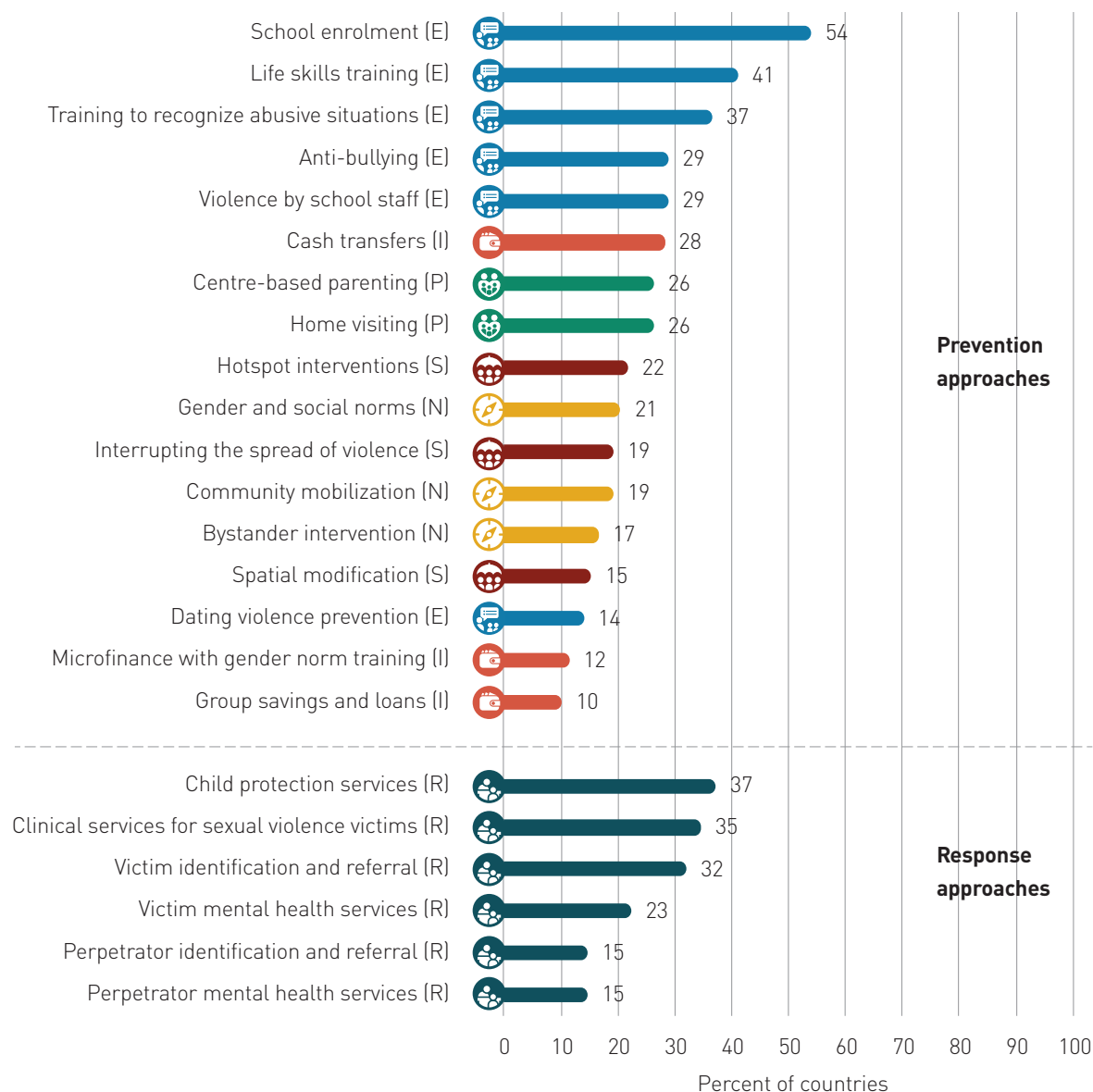
Of the prevention approaches, only school enrolment was considered by over half of countries as sufficiently supported to reach all in need. This was followed by four other education and life skills approaches rated as sufficiently supported by 29% to 41% of countries. Of the response approaches, child protection services, clinical services

for sexual violence victims and victim identification and referral were rated as sufficiently supported by just a third of government respondents. Victim service approaches were twice as likely to be considered as reaching all who need them compared to perpetrator service approaches.

Key: E=Education and life skills; I=Income and economic strengthening; N=Norms and values; P=Parent and caregiver support; R=Response and support services; S=Safe environments.

Note: A few countries did not provide reach ratings for some approaches receiving national support, and rating completeness ranged from 85–100%.

**Figure 4. Percentage of INSPIRE prevention and response approaches where support was considered adequate to reach all or nearly all in need, 2018 (N=155 reporting countries)**



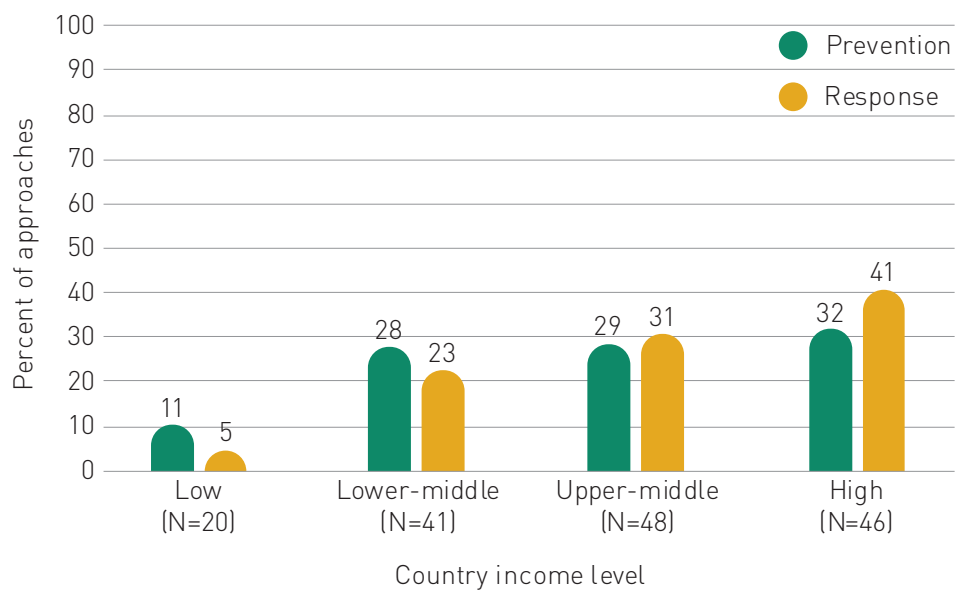
**Efforts to increase support for INSPIRE implementation in low- and middle-income countries must be stepped up**

**Drastic action is needed to scale up our collective support for evidence-based prevention efforts if we are to end all forms of violence against children by 2030**

This report shows that many countries have begun to implement prevention programmes and victim services, and to develop national action plans, policies and laws required to support violence prevention programmes and response efforts that are consistent with the INSPIRE evidence-based solutions. But while countries are investing in prevention, decision-makers in every country accept they need to scale up their efforts.

Of the approaches rated as being adequately supported to reach all who need them, just 11% of the prevention approaches and 5% of the response approaches are being implemented in low-income countries, in contrast to the 32% of prevention responses and 41% of response approaches that are being implemented in high-income countries.

**Figure 5. Percentage of prevention and response approaches considered to be reaching all in need by country income level, 2018 (N=155 reporting countries)**



Note. The income levels are based on 2018 World Bank classifications.



# Recommendations

Because government decision-makers and programme planners are the primary target audience for this report, national-level recommendations are prioritized. A second set of global recommendations highlight research priorities and networking opportunities that can support national action.

## National recommendations

### Promote good governance and coordination

These recommendations are intended to strengthen the prevention potential of multisectoral action. Governments must ensure that:

- an appropriately resourced agency is explicitly mandated to coordinate multisectoral action to end violence against children;
- ministerial line responsibility is mandated for the delivery of the norms and values, parent and caregiver support, safe environments and income and economic strengthening strategies which may not be clearly aligned with existing sectoral roles and responsibilities;
- INSPIRE strategies and approaches are integrated into national policy frameworks and capitalize on the violence prevention potential of the economic, education, employment, health and social development sectors by using policies in these sectors to reduce risk factors for violence and strengthen those that protect against it.

### Prioritize data collection and national action plans

Countries should prioritize collection of data on key violence-related indicators as part of regular SDG reporting and use these to set measurable targets in data-driven national action plans.

- Countries that have yet to conduct nationally representative surveys including questions on violence against children should prioritize the initiation of such surveys.
- Homicide data collection must be improved, and low- and lower-middle-income countries must do more to ensure that such data can be disaggregated by age so that the number of child homicides can be counted.
- Existing national action plans should be critically reviewed against best practice standards and where necessary revised to ensure that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
- Governments should invest more in monitoring the uptake, reach and impact of evidence-based prevention and response approaches to balance the focus on measurement of the problem with equal attention to the measurement of solutions.

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### **Strengthen legislative frameworks**

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To optimize the effectiveness of legislative frameworks in helping to end violence against children it is important that governments ensure:

- universal legal protections for children;
- laws meet best practice standards;
- a renewed commitment to the implementation and enforcement of laws.

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### **Use evidence to enhance the effectiveness of prevention and service programming**

.....

Governments should draw upon the evidence-based solutions presented in the INSPIRE strategies that provide a collection of proven and promising approaches. They should:

- assess the extent to which their existing support for violence prevention programming is consistent with the INSPIRE evidence-based solutions;
- use the INSPIRE technical guidance to revise their support to ensure it promotes actions aligned with those in INSPIRE.

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### **Ensure adequate funding**

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Funding for evidence-based approaches to ending violence against children must be increased and be embedded in medium-term expenditure frameworks at national and subnational levels. Governments must:

- conduct reviews where necessary to ascertain why existing national action plans are inadequately funded and address these problems;

- draft new budgets for implementation of the INSPIRE strategies and make the requisite funds available.

## **Global recommendations**

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### **Ensure full use of international support mechanisms by countries**

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Governments are encouraged to join the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children as pathfinder countries, and to participate in the closely linked INSPIRE Implementation Working Group, a technical network and community of practice dedicated to supporting INSPIRE uptake and monitoring.

- As part of the UN Decade of Action, pathfinder countries should be encouraged to submit plans for accelerated actions to end violence against children to the UN with the aim of demonstrating measurable change by the second SDG Summit in 2023.
- Countries should be encouraged and supported to agree on a set of voluntary performance targets to track the implementation, reach and impact of INSPIRE strategies and approaches.
- Further global status reports on preventing violence against children should be published in 2025 and 2030 to track changes in the uptake of and support for the INSPIRE strategies and approaches against the voluntary performance targets.
- Partnerships with actors working on other SDGs – especially health, education, social protection – should be strengthened.



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**Increase funding for evidence-based prevention**  
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Donor funding to support INSPIRE implementation in low- and middle-income countries must be increased, and mechanisms to ensure that such funds are effectively implemented must be established.

.....  
**Strengthen implementation research**  
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Support for high-quality implementation research must be increased, and more of this research must be conducted in low- and middle-income countries. Implementation research should focus on:

- how to take the INSPIRE approaches to scale, including through the identification of low-cost delivery options;
- the role of INSPIRE and subsets of INSPIRE strategies and approaches to accelerate progress towards multiple SDG goals and targets;
- building links between preventing violence against women and preventing violence against children;
- building a case for investment for each INSPIRE strategy, identifying unit costs for implementation in low-, middle-, and high-income settings, and calculating the financing gap.

## Conclusion

Many countries have started implementing plans, policies and laws required to support violence against children prevention programmes and response efforts that are consistent with the INSPIRE evidence-based solutions. But decision-makers in every country accept they need to scale up their efforts. The seven INSPIRE strategies and their approaches, coupled with the implementation support mechanisms that have grown around them, provide a framework and tools to bridge this gap. The UN Decade of Action 2020–2030 provides a timeframe for action and underlines the need to act now, and with a new sense of urgency.

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## References

Please see main report for full references cited here.







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