

# A Childhood Free From Violence: The Foundation of Stable Societies, Economic Growth and the Post 2015 Agenda

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, peaceful, nurturing and enabling environment. Ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential is the foundation of stable societies and a critical element for future sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

But today, too many children do not have that opportunity.

Violence against children is an urgent and universal problem affecting millions of children worldwide. It occurs in homes, schools and communities, in rich and poor countries alike, and it impacts children of all ages, races, and of different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds.



Recent research shows that violence can have devastating long-term impacts on the wellbeing of girls and boys. Abuse and maltreatment can lead to life-long physical and mental health problems, lower educational achievement, and even affect a child's brain development.<sup>1</sup> Victims of violence are more likely to become future perpetrators, feeding a cycle that consumes lives.<sup>2</sup>

Countries that fail to address violence against children lose significant amounts of money. Physical, psychological and sexual violence against children worldwide may cost governments up to US\$ 7 trillion per year (8% of global GDP).<sup>3</sup>

All countries want to ensure that children are healthy, enter school ready to learn, and grow up into responsible

and productive adults. Because violence against children has such a pervasive impact, countries must prevent it if they want to accelerate progress on important goals for education, health, and child survival.

Adults and children in countries across the globe recognize the urgency of preventing violence against children. A recent report shows that people from lower- and upper-middle-income countries, like Brazil, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Guatemala, and Indonesia, perceive violence against children as a present reality in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

While everyone in society has a responsibility to help address this urgent problem, 80% of those from lower- and upper-middle-income countries believe that government has a responsibility to address violence against children.<sup>5</sup> More than 300,000 people in more than 150 countries have signed ChildFund Alliance's Free from Violence and Exploitation petition calling on world governments to use the Sustainable Development Goals to end violence in the lives of children.

Living a life free from violence is the right of all children, and no form of violence against children is justifiable. Protecting children from violence is an explicit obligation set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols. Other international and regional human rights instruments provide similar and complementary safeguards and call upon all states to take all appropriate measures to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children.

A growing evidence base of effective strategies shows that ending violence against children is possible. The Post 2015 Development Agenda presents an opportunity for Member States to build on the unprecedented progress made under the Millennium Development Goals and protect children around the world from violence, exploitation and abuse.

Increasingly, leaders are recognizing that preventing violence is not only the right thing, but also the smart thing to do. Some 70 countries have joined the #ENDviolence Initiative, strengthening efforts to identify, track and report violence against children in all its forms at home, in school and in the communities at large.

<sup>1</sup> WHO, UNODC, UNDP, Global Status Report on Violence Prevention, (2014)

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Child Fund & ODI: The costs and economic impact of violence against children, (2014)

<sup>4</sup> WVI & IPSOS Reid: Fearing Wrong – global views on violence against children, (2014)

<sup>5</sup> ibid

# Taking Action

These leaders understand that children who have been cared for from an early start, who have been given the means to develop socially, cognitively and emotionally, and who have been protected from harm have a better chance to thrive and to start a healthy, productive adulthood.

The Millennium Development Goals have inspired unprecedented global efforts that have benefited millions of children, but the job will not be done until children are living free from fear, protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is a critical component of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

We call on governments to strongly and actively support the inclusion of these targets and corresponding indicators to prevent violence against children in the Post 2015 negotiations:

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## Target 4.a

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

**Indicator:** Proposed indicators need to be adjusted to capture the non-violent environment in school.

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## Target 5.2

End all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

**Indicators:** Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls (aged 15-49) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months. Proportion of women and girls (aged 15-49) subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner, since age 15.

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## Target 5.3

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations.

**Indicators:** Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were first married or in union by age 18.

Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting.

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## Target 8.7

Take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, eradicate forced labor, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms including recruitment and use of child soldiers.

**Indicator:** Percentage of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labor.

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## Target 11.7

By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

**Indicator:** Include an indicator that measures perception of safety by users of the public spaces, disaggregated by age and sex.

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## Target 16.1

Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere.

**Indicator:** Ensure that proposed indicator on homicide and conflict-related death per 100'000 people is disaggregated by age and sex.

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## Target 16.2

End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

**Indicators:** Percentage of young women and men aged 18-24 who experienced sexual violence by age 18.

Percentage of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment by caregivers in the past month.

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## Target 16.9

By 2030 provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

**Indicator:** Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered with civil authorities.

To deliver on the violence against children targets, we need to harness the power of governments, the private sector, civil society, communities of faith and academia to combine and build on their efforts, provide leadership and demonstrate results for children and families.

Governments must make the necessary resources available to prevent and address violence against children in a manner that is sustainable and supports progress in intersecting efforts.

## The Extent of the Problem<sup>6</sup>

Most violence against children is never reported or investigated, and few perpetrators are held to account. This happens because children lack the capacity to report or fear reprisals from perpetrators; many countries lack adequate reporting mechanisms; and authorities do not know how to effectively respond.

While tremendous progress has been made in measuring the prevalence and incidence of violence against children, because of its nature, we are far from knowing the full extent of the problem. What we do know, however, is deeply troubling:



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In 2012 alone, almost 1 in 5 of all homicide victims were children.

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Around **120 million girls** under the age of 20 (about 1 in 10) have been **subjected to forced sexual intercourse** or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. Boys are also at risk, although a global estimate is unavailable due to the lack of comparable data in most countries.

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Around **6 in 10 children** between the ages of 2 and 14 worldwide **are subject to physical punishment** by their caregivers on a regular basis.

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More than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday.<sup>7</sup>

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Slightly more than **1 in 3 students** between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide **experience bullying** on a regular basis.

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**1 in 3 adolescent girls** aged 15 to 19 worldwide (84 million) have been the **victims of any emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners** at some point in their lives.

## Ending Violence is Possible: Solutions and Stories of Success

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### Supporting parents, caregivers and families

The Parents Make the Difference program (Liberia) reduced the use of physical and psychological punishment by 25.4%. The Nurse & Family Partnership home-visit program (Australia, Canada, Netherlands, the UK, and the US) showed long-term positive outcomes including improved prenatal health and fewer childhood injuries.

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### Helping children and adolescents manage risks and challenges

The Projeto Uerê model school (Brazil) improved impulse control, attention span, learning capacity, concentration, social skills and behavior in students.

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### Changing attitudes and social norms that encourage violence and discrimination

The Ma'An – Towards a Safe School campaign (Jordan) showed an average decline of 28% in physical violence and 15% in verbal violence in schools.

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### Promoting and providing support services for children

A home visit program in the United States of America helped reduce child abuse and neglect by 48% over 15 years.

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### Implementing laws and policies that protect children

In Sweden, where an anti-corporal punishment law and campaign has effectively given children the same rights as adults, the number of children being hit drop from 90% to about 10% over a 35 year period.

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### Making schools safe from violence

A school-based workshop program in Croatia led to a reduction in violence (verbal and physical, with a special focus on peer violence, aggression and bullying) in schools by 50% over eight years.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, Hidden in Plain Sight, (2014)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, Ending Violence Against Children: Six Strategies for Action (2014)