



# A girl's right to learn without fear:

Working to end gender-based violence at school



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
FACULTY OF LAW

INTERNATIONAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
PROGRAM



BECAUSE  
**I am a  
Girl**

**Published by Plan Limited**

Block A  
Dukes Court  
Duke Street  
Woking  
Surrey GU21 5BH  
United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Public Data: A catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.  
ISBN: 978-1-906273-34-7

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**Copy-editors:** Natalie Brender, Dena Allen

**Suggested citation:** Greene, M., Robles, O., Stout, K. and Suvilaakso, T. *A girl's right to learn without fear: Working to end gender-based violence at school*. Woking: Plan International.

**Designed by:** Profis Communications Inc.

**Printed by:** Digital Print Resolutions

**Photo credits:**

*Plan/Sigrid Spinnox:* p. 1

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## List of Acronyms

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICTs	Information and communications technologies
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States or United States of America
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

## Acknowledgments

This report is the product of collaboration between Plan Canada and the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law.

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We would also like to acknowledge the many civil society organisations who contributed expertise to the original report including Amnesty International Canada, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Canadian Global Campaign for Education, Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses, Canadian Women's Foundation, Disabled Women's Network Canada, Girl Guides of Canada, Human Rights Watch, International Bureau for Children's Rights, Kathy Vandergrift (Chair of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children), Native Women's Association of Canada, Save the Children Canada, Society for Children and Youth of BC, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, UNICEF Canada, White Ribbon Campaign, and the YWCA Canada. We would also like to thank technical advisers from Plan International around the world, who provided important feedback on working drafts.

Finally, we would like to thank the many girls and boys whose stories are included in this report. Their courage is inspiring and calls us to action to end gender-based violence in and around schools.

# Foreword

Every child has the right to education and the benefits it brings. In the developing world, an education can transform a child's life and help to break the cycle of poverty. Education is also fundamental to achieving gender equality.

A major focus of Plan's *Because I am a Girl* campaign is overcoming the barriers to girls' successful completion of a quality education. In collaboration with children, parents, teachers and partners around the world, we are working in support of this goal.

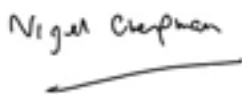
As I visit Plan's programmes around the world, I have seen how these efforts are transforming children's lives, even in the most marginalised communities. Yet, worldwide, about 66 million girls are still missing out on an education.

This report focuses on one major barrier to girls completing their education: the prevalence of gender-based violence in and around schools. It was originally commissioned by Plan Canada in 2012 and draws upon considerable expertise based in Canadian academic and civil society circles.\* Its analysis is both comprehensive and disturbing, and we in Plan International believe it merits wider dissemination. I want to thank my colleagues in Plan Canada for this excellent study.

Some of the figures you will read in this report are shocking and will speak for themselves: between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence; 150 million girls and 73 million boys have experienced sexual violence.

*A girl's right to learn without fear* puts forward a global framework to address school-related gender-based violence. We have learnt from what we at Plan, as well as our global partners, have done and identified eight principles to guide policymakers. Fulfilling these will enable girls – and all children – to learn free from fear in nurturing school environments.

For many of us the right and ability to go to school, to learn in a positive and safe space, is something we take for granted. It is time that right was extended to all children.



**Nigel Chapman**  
CEO  
*Plan International*



\*This version of the report has been edited for a global audience.

# Executive summary

Since 2000 there has been a focus on achieving universal access to primary education and gender parity as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet as we approach 2015, which was the target for achieving the MDGs, many girls are failing to undertake and complete a quality lower secondary education. Even though, in the words of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, “there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls”, 66 million girls are missing out on the education that could transform their own lives and the world around them.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescent girls in particular have much to gain from education. Those who complete primary and secondary education are likely to earn a greater income over their lifetimes, to have fewer unwanted pregnancies, to marry later, and to break cycles of poverty within families and communities. Plan’s *Because I am a Girl* campaign aims to eliminate barriers preventing girls from successfully moving beyond primary to secondary education.

Beyond merely ensuring access to schools, however, the challenge is to ensure children’s access to *quality* education. Plan believes that quality education must include learning relevant to the needs, rights and aspirations of girls—and this learning must be delivered in safe school environments that are free from gender bias and promote gender equality.



## Violence is a major barrier to girls' education

**A major barrier to the achievement of quality education is the existence of gender-based violence in and around schools.**

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence inflicted on children in and around schools because of stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them because of their sex or gendered identity. It also refers to the differences between girls' and boys' experience of and vulnerabilities to violence.

In most societies, unequal power relations between adults and children and the gender stereotypes and roles attributed to girls and boys leave schoolgirls especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers. Boys and girls who do not conform to dominant notions of heterosexual masculinity or femininity are also vulnerable to sexual violence and bullying.

### Long-term implications

While children's vulnerabilities and experiences vary across and within countries, SRGBV is a global phenomenon. No school is immune to the attitudes and beliefs within the broader community that promote harmful gender norms and condone acts of gender-based violence.

The failure to protect children from all forms of violence, including in their school lives, is a violation of their rights, compromising their development and well-being. SRGBV is correlated with lower academic achievement and economic security, as well as greater long-term health risks. It perpetuates cycles of violence across generations. Without addressing it, many countries will not only fall short of meeting their international human rights commitments, but will also compromise the world's capacity to achieve the development goals we have set for ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

### The prevalence of gender-based violence experienced by school children is unacceptable.

- Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year,<sup>3</sup> many within schools.<sup>4</sup>
- Worldwide, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys have experienced sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.<sup>6</sup> Reports indicate that children as young as six are victims of rape.<sup>7</sup>
- Bullying is also pervasive: surveys show that between one-fifth (China) and two-thirds (Zambia) of children reported being victims of verbal or physical bullying.<sup>8</sup>
- Millions more children live in fear of being physically abused under the guise of discipline; more than 80 per cent of students in some countries suffer corporal punishment at school.<sup>9</sup>

**66 million girls are missing an education at a time when it not only has the power to transform their own lives, but also the world around them.**

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Millions more children live in fear of being physically abused under the guise of discipline; **more than 80 per cent of students** in some countries suffer corporal punishment at school.



## The eight key principles for framing effective government action against SRGBV are:

### **1. Comprehensive and integrated action**

Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalised girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

### **2. Effective legislation and regulation**

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.

### **3. Safe and effective reporting and response**

Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, proportionate and consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **4. Evidence-based policy**

Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of SRGBV.

### **5. Well-supported, well-trained personnel**

Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped and supported to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in and around schools.

### **6. Partnership**

Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector and civil society organisations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.

### **7. Inclusiveness**

Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.

### **8. Participation**

Girls and boys must be recognised as key participants in developing solutions to address SRGBV.

**In adopting and applying these principles, governments can bring a strong national focus to tackling gender-based violence in schools. They can be champions of girls' rights by ensuring girls' access to the schooling that enables them to realise their full potential.**

## Working together to end gender-based violence

Government action is a fundamental part of the solution to protecting children from SRGBV. A concerted national commitment to adopt, implement and monitor an integrated framework for action can empower schools, communities, parents, and children jointly to confront the violence and discrimination limiting so many lives. Effective national laws, policies and programmes can help transform schools and communities into safer, more equitable and inclusive spaces.

Plan's report *A girl's right to learn without fear: Working to end gender-based violence in school* presents solutions aimed at preventing and responding to SRGBV against girls and boys. The solutions draw from existing policy examples, as well as global civil society campaigns, international instruments and the voices of girls themselves. Plan calls on governments to prioritise actions tied to eight key principles to ensure that all children can learn free from violence, and that girls benefit from their equal right to education.





**“I have been very much disturbed; emotionally disturbed and very much stressed. I am trying very hard to forget how it happened, but I am failing. I can’t just forget it; it’s like it’s just about to happen again, like it’s just happening. I remember every detail.”**

**Girl raped by her teacher, 15, Zambia<sup>41</sup>**

# Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every child. In schools, children can develop their critical thinking and acquire life skills that enable them to live with dignity as engaged citizens. Education also fuels the social and economic development of families and societies as a whole. In recent decades, global development efforts have focused on enrolling all children in primary school. Today, the challenge is to ensure that children can stay in school and benefit from a quality secondary education.

More than one billion children attend school every day.<sup>25</sup> However, the right to education can be fulfilled only when children are able to learn in nurturing environments free from violence.<sup>†</sup> Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year, many within school walls;<sup>26</sup> Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls annually suffer school-related violence.<sup>27</sup> For these children, the daily commute to and from school may be fraught with intimidation, aggression and harm. They may see or experience violence on school grounds, often at the hands of known and trusted people, including teachers and peers.

As governments make progress in increasing the number of children in school, increased enrolment is often not matched by increased resources, and the level of school violence has sometimes intensified.<sup>28</sup> Teachers may be more likely to resort to violent discipline under stressful conditions such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate support.<sup>29</sup> In countries affected by chronic conflict, droughts or frequent natural disasters, additional pressures such as insecurity, damage to school buildings, and displacement can exacerbate the problem. Without sufficient resources, teachers have less capacity to prevent and respond to peer-to-peer violence.<sup>30</sup>

School-related violence undermines the power of education to unlock all children's full potential. When we fail to take action to protect all schoolchildren from violence, we violate children's right to education in safe and supportive schools, and compromise their development and well-being.

Yet such violence often takes different forms for girls and boys, affecting their education and life chances differently in turn. Girls' education may be rendered precarious by the pressures of poverty and the low value parents give to their schooling. The education of girls is often undervalued because of existing patterns of discrimination, including harmful gender norms and the lower social status of women and girls. Despite large increases in primary school enrolment, girls' primary completion rates often lag behind that of boys, as does their rate of transition to secondary school.<sup>31</sup> Girls may leave school to help at home, because they get pregnant, because they are married, because school is far from home, or because parents worry about their daughters' safety and reputations.

<sup>†</sup> 'Violence' is used here as an umbrella term including physical or psychological violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, bullying, including cyber-bullying, or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

**Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year, many within school walls.**

The experience of violence at school reinforces all of these pressures. School-related violence thus has far-reaching implications, impacting girls' education, health, well-being and their ability to transform their own lives and those of their communities and nations.

### **Secondary education can have a transformative effect on a girl's life**

#### **Adolescent girls who complete both primary and secondary education are:**

- more likely to marry later and have fewer children, who in turn will be more likely to survive birth and infancy and be better nourished and educated
- better able to make free decisions about whether, when and who to marry, and to plan their families and pregnancies
- less likely to be abused as adults
- better paid in the workplace, and empowered to participate in socioeconomic and political decision-making
- more likely to break generational cycles of poverty within families.<sup>32, 33</sup>

## **What is school-related gender-based violence?**

SRGBV refers to acts:

- of sexual, physical or psychological violence
- inflicted on children in and around schools
- that are due to stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them on the basis of their sex or gendered identity.

SRGBV also refers to the ways in which experiences of and vulnerabilities to violence may be gendered. In most societies, unequal power relations between adults and children, as well as deeply rooted gender stereotypes and roles, leave girls especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers. Boys, by contrast, are more vulnerable to physical violence at the hands of adults and other children. Boys and girls who do not conform to dominant social, cultural and religious norms, including dominant norms of masculinity or femininity, are also vulnerable to sexual violence and bullying.

Both boys and girls are perpetrators of violence in schools, although the form it takes may differ. Gender norms often dictate that boys should address disputes with peers through physical violence, and may reproduce GBV experienced in their own households on female peers at school. Girls are more likely to engage in verbal or psychological forms of aggression.

SRGBV can occur in any school area or during travel to or from school. Latrines, empty classrooms and corridors are all potential spaces where violence can occur. Boarding schools, which may offer additional access to school for girls and harder-to-reach children, may also put students at higher risk of abuse.<sup>34</sup> Isolation and lack of sufficient oversight and management can exacerbate the problem. Outside school walls, millions of girls and boys are at risk of bullying, rape, unwanted touching, and unprovoked sexual advances in transit to and from school, along walking routes, at bus stops and at taxi stands.<sup>35, 36</sup>

Punishment in schools often manifests itself in gendered ways. Boys generally experience more frequent and severe physical punishment, while girls are more likely forced to submit to unwanted sexual advances and are more vulnerable to psychological forms of punishment.<sup>37</sup>

### Conflict-affected students are at heightened risk

Conflicts exacerbate the risk that children, particularly girls, will lose the benefit of a quality education and will suffer SRGBV within their school lives.

- One-third of children in conflict-affected countries do not go to school (compared to one in eleven in other low-income countries).
- Secondary school enrolment rates in conflict-affected countries are nearly a third lower than in other developing countries, and far lower still for girls.
- In many conflict-affected areas, schoolchildren are more likely to be subject to violent attacks. Boys, in particular, are often targeted for recruitment by armed groups in schools. For girls, the likelihood of sexual violence creates insecurity about going to school.
- The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has been widespread, and many victims are young girls. The impact extends far beyond individual survivors. It can have a serious effect on girls' rights, with fear and the breakdown of family and community life becoming barriers to girls' access to education.<sup>38</sup>

## Why focus now on SRGBV?

Plan's *Learn Without Fear* campaign has already documented the devastating impact of violence against children in school. With the launch of the *Because I am a Girl* initiative, we are now applying a gender lens to the challenges facing both boys and girls. Doing so deepens our understanding of root causes and power relations, is essential for making smart investments, and illuminates solutions to these problems.

Girls and boys learn that society expects them to behave differently and to fulfil socially constructed gender roles. Gender and age affect how people are valued and how their rights are realised. For instance, girls and women face barriers to rights because they are valued less and have less power than boys and men. Further, gender stereotypes affect the realisation of rights. They lead us to mistake learned behaviours and attitudes for biological traits, and they can lock girls and boys into behaviours that prevent them from developing to their full potential. By dictating power relations and influencing boys' and girls' vulnerabilities, gender norms can also drive violence against children.<sup>39</sup>

In the school setting, gender norms can become further entrenched. Explicitly and implicitly, messages about what girls and boys can and should do are relayed in curriculum, physical spaces, classroom management, teacher conduct and schoolyard dynamics.

"We are beaten mercilessly in school. As a result we are unable to sit properly."

*Boy, 12, India<sup>40</sup>*

“When you go to school and do well, the world forgets what you cannot do and starts seeing what you can.”

*Female, 19, India<sup>44</sup>*

## Why focus on girls?

Plan recognises that systemic discrimination against girls and women is one of the critical underlying conditions and causes of poverty. Girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but face different challenges in accessing them. Though girls’ circumstances vary greatly, in many places they are less likely than boys to be enrolled in and complete school; have less access to medical care; and are more likely to be deprived of food.<sup>42</sup>

The poorer and more marginalised the population, the greater the differences likely to exist between boys and girls. These multiple pressures may result in girls engaging in violent behaviour. Although much attention has been paid to boys as perpetrators, it is important to acknowledge the role that girls play as well.

In many developing countries, girls experience more violence and sexual harassment; and they are expected to work long hours on domestic chores, limiting their ability to study. This is not only unfair and unjust but counterproductive to societal well-being: educating girls and young women brings exponential benefits to girls, their families, their communities and their countries.<sup>43</sup> Everyone benefits, including boys and men.

Social justice, equality of opportunity, and developmental impact are three reasons that Plan has made the *Because I am a Girl* initiative one of its flagship priorities. And in light of the potentially transformative power of education for girls in particular, Plan has chosen to focus this campaign on a crucial period in girls’ lives: the transition to, and completion of, secondary education. SRGBV is a key barrier to this achievement, undermining adolescent girls’ sense of themselves and their ability to succeed as students. For that reason, Plan has identified the elimination of SRGBV as a key focus of its efforts.

### Men and boys: integral partners in supporting girls’ education

Men and boys – in their roles as grandfathers, fathers, brothers, peers, mentors, teachers, principals, coaches, religious leaders, law enforcement personnel and policymakers – can support efforts to cultivate a school culture and community environment that condemns violence and promotes the value of girls and women.

Plan not only involves young men and boys in GBV prevention within schools, but also engages them in initiatives that address their own unique needs and vulnerabilities. Boys from marginalised groups, or those who do not conform to the social norm of ‘real men’, are especially vulnerable. Research shows that boys who witness violence as children are more likely as adults to justify the use of violence as a means of resolving conflict within their relationships. Plan creates spaces for men and women of all ages within a community to reflect on their attitudes and biases – part of a strategy enabling them to adopt beliefs and behaviours that support gender equality, non-violence and girls’ empowerment.



## Putting solutions into action

Proven policies and programmes can transform schools and communities into safer places. Teachers have been and can be engaged as allies in stopping violence against children. Schools can become catalysts for non-violence, tolerance and gender equality – not only within their walls but within families and across the broader community. Attitudes and behaviours justifying the use

of violence can be transformed. Facilities whose weak institutional capacity and poor infrastructure make boys and girls vulnerable to violence can be reformed. Existing programmes and policies that offer support for victims and establish accountability for perpetrators can be strengthened, and made a standard part of education systems and community-based child protection mechanisms.

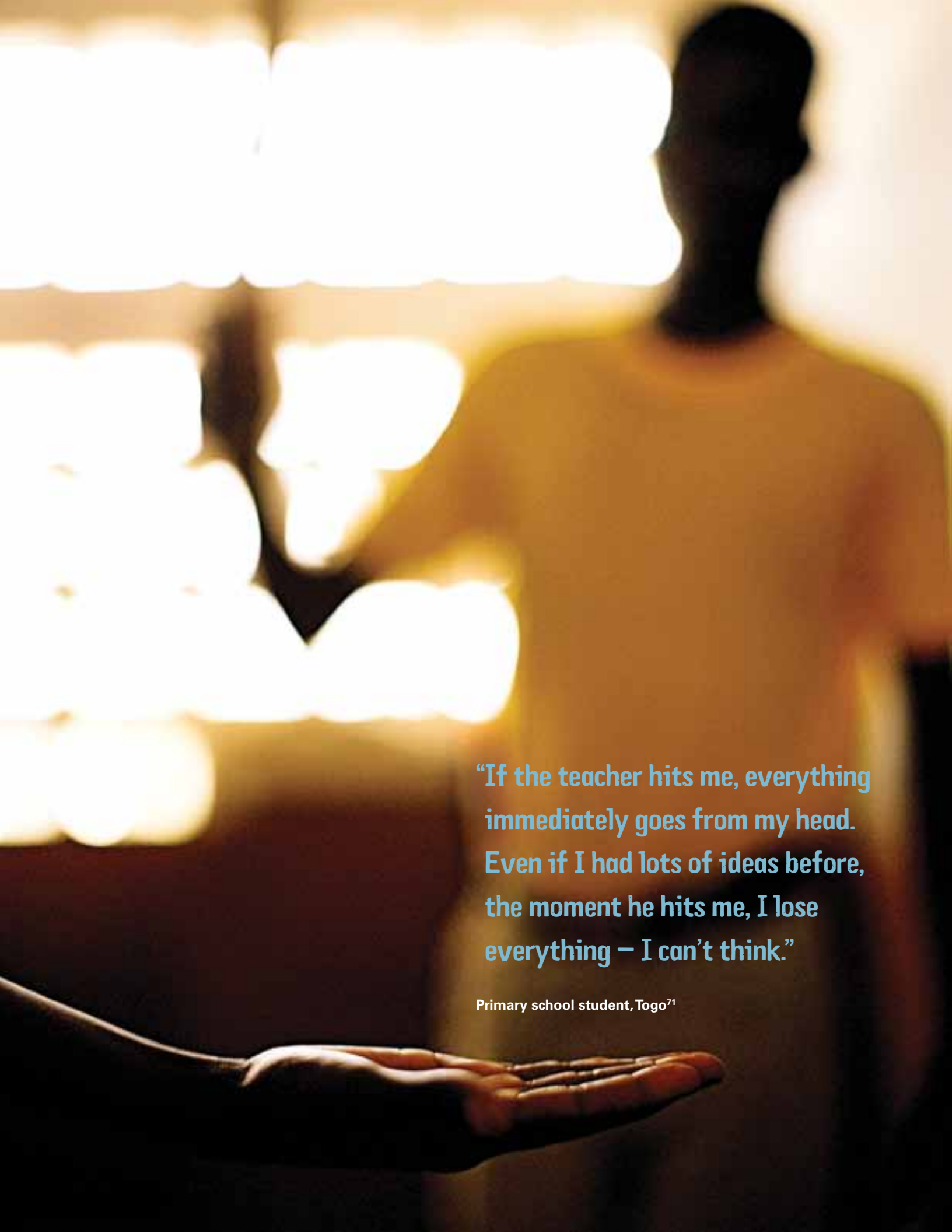
This report outlines such solutions, drawing on examples from countries showing promise in tackling SRGBV, as well as on global civil society campaigns, international legal instruments and the voices of girls themselves. It recommends specific policy foundations governments should establish as catalysts for change. While governments are by no means the entire solution, they are an important part of it. When appropriate legislative frameworks, policies, systems and services are in place at the national and local level – and when there is a strong commitment to acting on them – change is fostered in further spheres. Institutions, communities, parents and children become empowered to join together in confronting the violence and discrimination that limit so many lives.

“Both the governments and the civil societies should initiate awareness raising campaigns at every community on gender equity.”

*Girl, 14, India<sup>45</sup>*

Effective national child protection systems and community-based child protection mechanisms are vital to prevent and respond to GBV in and around schools. Effective child protection mechanisms require multiple stakeholders – the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, health professionals, welfare and education services, teachers and school staff, as well as pupils and parents – to work together using a coordinated and integrated approach to address the issue holistically.





**“If the teacher hits me, everything immediately goes from my head. Even if I had lots of ideas before, the moment he hits me, I lose everything – I can’t think.”**

**Primary school student, Togo<sup>71</sup>**

# Forms of school-related gender-based violence

## Sexual violence: harming the lives of millions

Sexual violence – including harassment, rape, abuse, coercion, and exploitation – has affected an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18.<sup>46</sup> Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.<sup>47</sup> Of women who had their first sexual experience before their sixteenth birthdays, 45 per cent reported being victims of sexual coercion.<sup>48</sup>

Most cases of sexual violence are perpetrated by people a child knows including teachers, peers and members of the community. While teachers are often key allies in preventing SRGBV, they can also exploit their authority and power to engage in ‘sex for grades’ or the waiving of school fees.<sup>49</sup>

During conflict, when institutions, accountability structures and social networks are weakened, girls and boys are at greater risk of being sexually violated.<sup>50</sup> Teenage girls may be particularly exposed to sexual violence and harassment when parts of their schools are used as barracks or bases by armed forces, armed groups, or police. Fears of such abuse can cause girls to drop out, be pulled out, or not enrol in higher years of studies.<sup>51</sup> In countries where sexual violence is used as a weapon of war, the outcome is severe: for girls, the consequences of rape (which include psychological trauma and stigmatisation) put their right to education at risk for the rest of their lives.<sup>52</sup>

## Bullying in schools: extended aggression in diverse forms

Bullying, often the most common form of violence in schools, reflects an imbalance of power and is carried out through repeated verbal or physical acts whose purpose is to inflict suffering over a period of time.<sup>54, 55</sup> It remains largely unchecked on most school grounds. Surveys in several countries found that between one-fifth (China) and two-thirds (Zambia) of children reported being verbally or physically bullied in the past 30 days.<sup>56</sup>

Though bullying may not always target a child based on his or her sex or gendered identity, the way it is expressed is often gendered. Boys are more likely to engage in and be victims of physical bullying, while girls are more likely to engage in verbal and psychological bullying.<sup>57</sup> Students from marginalised groups are at greater risk of being bullied; such students may be targeted because of their race, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

“Our teachers should be there to teach us and not to touch us.”

*Girl, 15, Uganda<sup>53</sup>*

“It’s always against the weaker children that can’t defend themselves. The bullies want to execute power, because they can’t do it in other ways. Violence in schools is often underestimated, especially psychological violence.”

*Female, 19, Germany<sup>63</sup>*

"She turned on me, and not only did she turn on me, but she got other people involved and also got them to turn on me and it just got out of hand ... I posted one status [on Facebook], within about one minute I had 63 comments on there, telling how people were going to kill me and to kill myself and if I don't kill myself they'll do it ... at the time, it was like death was my only option for getting out. I hated everything about me because I had been put down so much."

*Girl, 12, UK<sup>64</sup>*

Bullying is sometimes inappropriately considered an adolescent rite of passage. The use of fear, intimidation and physical force has been seen as part of boys growing up. Girls tend to use verbal harassment; and, in developed nations at least, girls may be more likely to engage in indirect forms of peer aggression (a subtle form of violence that uses relationships to harm or manipulate others and to injure a girl's sense of social acceptance).<sup>58</sup> Girls bully one another through rumours, gossip and social exclusion.<sup>59</sup> This relational violence, which specifically targets a girl's critical social relationships, can increase her risk of long-term socio-psychological distress.<sup>60</sup> It is often overlooked by educators and policy-makers as a mere expression of 'girls being girls', despite the long-term consequences.

Teachers themselves may engage in psychological bullying when they speak in a derogatory way to students based on the student's sex, race or class. Girls may be made to feel worthless, unteachable or stupid if they are viewed as behaving in a manner inconsistent with their assigned role in society.<sup>61</sup>

## Cyber-bullying: raising the stakes online

In recent years, information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the use of text messages, email, and social media have permitted new manifestations of violence among schoolchildren. So-called 'cyber-bullying' extends fear, intimidation and in some instances sexual violence well beyond school grounds. While the digital world can provide positive opportunities for girls, it also presents new dangers – particularly during adolescence, when girls are developing into sexual beings without necessarily having developed the skills or the knowledge to protect themselves. Girls are often subject to online harm from friends, classmates, or boyfriends. While cyber-bullying is an extension of 'offline' bullying, there is an important distinction: online bullying follows children home, and victims may experience it every time they turn on their mobile phone or computer.<sup>62</sup>

"You cannot go home from the internet ... It is like being haunted."

*Boy, 17, Brazil<sup>65</sup>*





## Physical and psychological violence as ‘discipline’

Students in many parts of the world are routinely subjected to corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Millions of boys and girls in school live in daily fear of being spanked, slapped, hit, smacked, shaken, kicked, pinched, punched, caned, flogged, belted, beaten and battered by teachers, school administrators, or security personnel – people whom students often know and may trust. In some countries, more than 80 per cent of students suffer corporal punishment at school.<sup>66</sup> In 2006, half of the world’s children lived in countries where corporal punishment is not yet banned. As of June 2011, corporal punishment in schools was unlawful in 117 countries, although 80 states have yet to fully implement relevant reforms. Gender discrimination in this respect is sometimes reflected in law: in Singapore, for example, corporal punishment of boys (but not girls) is legal.<sup>67</sup>

In some circumstances, the use of physical force with the intention of inflicting pain reflects teachers’ impulsive reaction to behaviour they dislike. Teachers may be more likely to resort to punitive discipline under stressful teaching and classroom conditions, such as overcrowding, insufficient resources, and increased emphasis on student achievement.<sup>68</sup>

There is near total impunity for this violence, since it can be justified under the guise of discipline. Impunity for corporal punishment reflects deeply entrenched beliefs about acceptable forms of discipline, and often stems from a lack of institutional accountability.

In addition to physical violence, psychosocial punishment is also inflicted on children through actions designed to belittle, humiliate, threaten, scare or ridicule.<sup>69</sup>

“Our school principal punishes very hard. She makes us go down on our knees over small stones or bottle screw tops for over 20 minutes and also she often pulls our ears.”

*Girl, 8, Paraguay<sup>70</sup>*



# Causes and consequences of SRGBV

SRGBV is a complex social problem that results from more than just school-related issues.<sup>72</sup> Violence against children in educational settings reflects – and sometimes intensifies – deeply embedded social and cultural norms regarding authority, hierarchy, discipline and gender and other forms of discrimination.<sup>73</sup>

Social and cultural norms condone violence and reinforce gender inequalities in many of the schools attended by the world's one billion schoolchildren.<sup>74</sup> Patterns of GBV in schools are influenced by discrimination against specific groups: women and girls, ethnic minorities, people living with disabilities, those from lower castes, students living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ), indigenous, and older students enrolled below their grade level.

The prevention of and response to SRGBV are slowed by weak institutional capacity to implement child protection policies, as well as by limited enforcement of laws in education settings. This is particularly relevant in conflict-affected countries, where pervasive unrest weakens the functioning and accountability of justice and policing systems.

Consequences of SRGBV include lower academic achievement and health risks that may affect children for years to come.<sup>75</sup> School-related acts of physical and sexual violence also impede children's access to a key human capital investment, and contribute to reinforcing cycles of violence and poverty across generations.<sup>76</sup>

## Harmful social, cultural and religious norms

Children are influenced by others' attitudes and behaviours, imitating what they see and behaving in a certain way if people they respect validate those actions. These underlying norms, where supported by broader patterns of inequality, teach children lessons about what their roles are and about consequences for those who do not conform. Children who suffer from family violence, for example, are more likely to be bullies or to be bullied.<sup>77</sup> Adult men who experienced or witnessed violence as children are more likely to justify violence as a means of resolving conflict.<sup>78</sup> Women who witness or experience violence are more likely to justify acts of violence perpetrated against them by male partners or adult males they know.<sup>79</sup>

Violence in schools is a manifestation of underlying gender and age inequalities and power dynamics. Through the reinforcement of values in family, school, community, media and society, children can learn to view violence as socially acceptable.<sup>80</sup> Children internalise concepts of so-called family honour, which they may feel responsible for upholding. Dominant versions of manhood may call for expressions of aggression, violence, competitive sexuality, sexual power over women, and homophobia.<sup>81</sup> Conversely, social expectations of girls can include deference to men and boys, sexual submissiveness, passivity and virginity.

Through the reinforcement of values in family, school, community, media and society, children can learn to view violence as socially acceptable.

"They all think that girls are supposed to be their doormat. I think boys must be taught to look at girls as people."

*Girl, 15, South Africa<sup>85</sup>*

"If they hit me, I learn to hit."

*Girl, 12, Spain<sup>86</sup>*

Harmful gender norms, and the lower social status of women and girls relative to men and boys due to patriarchy, restrict the roles girls are able to assume.<sup>82</sup> Adolescent girls in countries where child marriage is socially acceptable are often pressured to stop their schooling and prematurely assume roles as child brides, thereby limiting their educational and earning potential, and exposing them to additional risk of GBV.<sup>83</sup>

In schools, unequal gender and power relations can undermine the prevention, reporting or sanction of violence.<sup>84</sup> School administrators and teachers may dismiss boys' disrespectful attitudes or harassment of girls, considering them 'normal' male behaviour. Girls themselves may learn to tolerate a certain amount of GBV and coercion as an unavoidable part of their experience.

## Discrimination and social marginalisation

Children's vulnerability to violence increases if they are part of already marginalised groups. Disability, sexual orientation, HIV status and membership in a minority group, Indigenous community, or caste render children even more at risk.<sup>87</sup> In Europe, for example, children with disabilities are nearly four times more likely to experience violence than their peers without disabilities (a figure likely to be much higher in poor and middle-income countries).<sup>88</sup> Girls with disabilities experience discrimination and heightened vulnerability on account of their gender as well as their disability.<sup>89</sup> Membership in a marginalised group may influence the severity of violence as well: children from groups experiencing social stigma and discrimination may experience more intense corporal punishment.<sup>90</sup>

Many government ministries and institutions have begun to address bullying based on race, religion, or disability; but few are taking steps to address bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>91</sup> The problem is often ignored or invisible, even though LGBTQ youth are increasingly victims of violence in school.<sup>92</sup> Efforts are needed to understand the vulnerability of LGBTQ youth to violence, and to develop methods of response and prevention. The challenge is heightened by social attitudes toward homosexuality and atypical gender identity, which are often discriminatory and permit homophobic bullying.<sup>93</sup>

As economic inequality has grown between and within countries, poverty has become more concentrated among socially marginalised groups.<sup>94</sup> Poverty makes children – especially girls – vulnerable to pressure and manipulation from adults and other children. Children who live in rural areas and attend school in resource-poor communities (which generally have entrenched patriarchal values and lower levels of awareness about children's rights) may be more vulnerable to violence than their urban peers.<sup>95</sup> Poor girls may engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff, or other adults to obtain school fees or to support their families.<sup>96</sup> Teachers may even demand sexual favours in return for better grades or waiving of school fees.<sup>97</sup> Parents may ignore their children's sexual relations with teachers or other adults because they need the money or do not wish to confront other members of the community.

"They do discriminate.  
There are some guys  
who say ... you are poor,  
I have money[.]"

*Schoolboy, Paraguay<sup>98</sup>*

"Teachers use [girls']  
weakness to exploit them.  
If she fails, the teacher  
usually uses the word:  
'See me', which means:  
'Come, let's negotiate',  
and usually this ends into  
having sex for grades."

*Male teacher, Liberia<sup>99</sup>*



## Missing legal safeguards and weak institutional capacity

As part of their legal obligations under international treaties such as the CRC and the CEDAW, many countries have enacted laws and established policies aimed at eliminating violence in schools. They may also have enacted laws related to protecting girls from abuse, violence, and discrimination in their communities. However, many other countries lack such laws – and even in places where they do exist, they are often not implemented or enforced.<sup>100</sup> Too few education systems specifically adopt and disseminate gender-sensitive child-protection guidelines. Reporting and accountability mechanisms are often weak, if they exist at all, and do not protect victims' privacy and rights. This is a particular problem for girls, whose education and rights are often undervalued and under-protected.

The poor management of violence in schools, and the lack of community-based child protection mechanisms, can result in impunity for the perpetrators of SRGBV. Country studies show that teachers or security personnel may not report violations due to fear of retribution or the desire to protect the reputations of colleagues, students, or the school.<sup>101</sup> In some cases where staff or students are found guilty of SRGBV, administrators have responded by simply transferring them to another school. Such a response casts the problem as an issue specific to the individuals involved, thereby implicitly condoning the violence (and often continuing to expose children to abuse).

Weak institutional capacity means that the broad range of people who shoulder the responsibility for creating a protective school environment for children often do not know how to support gender equality and create a violence-free school culture. It also contributes to the creation of unsafe school spaces. For instance, poorly designed or managed physical infrastructure increases the vulnerability of students (especially girls) to sexual violence and abuse. Sexual violence is most likely to occur in or near latrines, in empty classrooms or dormitories, on the perimeter of the school grounds, or en route to and from school.<sup>102</sup> The risk of abuse is heightened when these areas are inadequately maintained (for example, having dim lighting or broken locks). Other institutional weaknesses, such as a lack of school rules or limited supervision of children's interaction on and around school grounds, also increase children's vulnerability to violence.



"I have a friend who reported what a teacher had done. She told the principal, but nothing ever happened."

*Student, Benin<sup>103</sup>*

"In 1998, I was at a school near Vilakazi High School. When I arrived, there were no students. They had left because two teachers had been fighting. One of the teachers wanted to take a standard six girl for himself. Another teacher had said that it was wrong, and they were fighting. I couldn't believe it. I then had to go to another school nearby and I told them what had happened, saying that it was wrong for teachers to behave like this. One of the teachers there said to me: 'No. The department is not paying us enough money. So this is a fringe benefit. But standard six is too young: standard nine and ten is where we play.'"

*Social worker who visited schools in Johannesburg's townships<sup>104</sup>*

“My grades are horrible. I’m not doing well because I missed so much school.”

*Girl sexually assaulted by her teacher, 15, South Africa<sup>112</sup>*

“After the war, when I was 14 years old, my mother decided to send me back to school in Kolahan town. I had to drop out one year later. The 45-year-old teacher approached me and I became pregnant. I have a baby now but apart from my mother no one helps me take care of it. The teacher denies what happened and refuses to pay for the child.”

*Girl, 17, Liberia<sup>113</sup>*

## Lower academic achievement and higher health risks

Girls and boys who witness or experience SRGBV are less likely to do well in school.<sup>105</sup> Experiencing and fearing violence, or feeling disempowered to condemn it, can prevent girls and boys from attending school. More research is needed on the relationships between violence and poor educational outcomes, dropping out, and school completion in developing countries.<sup>106</sup> However, the available evidence shows that sexual harassment and violence are major factors in school dropout rates for adolescent girls, and partly explain girls’ lower enrolment rates at the secondary level.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond the psychological suffering and trauma they experience, young female victims of sexual violence face unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.<sup>108</sup> These health risks compromise girls’ schooling and their broader development. Many schools do not permit pregnant girls to attend school, or allow girls to bring their babies or return to school following childbirth.<sup>109</sup> Young mothers often experience delays in progression to higher school grades and periods of withdrawal from school. In some regions, girls are significantly less likely to return to school after the birth of their child.<sup>110</sup> The young victims are also commonly stigmatised, undermining their status within the community and their ability to access health and social services.<sup>111</sup>

## Reduced economic opportunities

By contributing to poor performance, lower enrolment, absenteeism and high dropout rates, SRGBV reduces the chances for young people (particularly rural girls) to find decent jobs, and lowers their lifetime earning capacity.<sup>114</sup> Disparities in school attendance between wealthier boys and girls are generally small; but girls from poor, rural, or ethnic minority communities face some of the greatest disparities in relation to boys.<sup>115</sup>

## Failure to meet international development goals

Without making a more concerted effort to eliminate barriers to development, many countries will fall short of meeting several MDGs by 2015. GBV against children in schools is limiting progress toward MDGs such as universal primary education, gender equality and reductions in global poverty. MDG #2 acknowledges the critical role education plays in eliminating poverty and giving children the chance to improve their lives. It will not be achieved unless governments, international organisations, local communities, teachers, parents and children work together to uphold children’s right to a violence-free education. Strengthening child protection systems and community-based child protection mechanisms is also crucial. The billions of dollars spent on education are a poor investment if children are too scared to attend school and to concentrate on their lessons.

## Plan's advocacy for a common vision beyond the Millennium Development Goals

Plan is working to make girls' education central to the global development agenda. Through this work, we emphasise the urgent need for action to end all forms of GBV in and around schools, in order to overcome barriers to the achievement of, in particular, universal primary education (MDG 2) and gender equality (MDG 3).

As 2015 approaches, Plan is advocating for a more comprehensive global framework that includes the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence in the context of poverty. With respect to MDGs 2 and 3, in particular, any post-MDG framework must aim to ensure that adolescent girls successfully transition to, and complete, quality secondary education.

This can be promoted by the following:

- Building on the recent achievements at primary education enrolment levels.
- Redefining basic education to include the successful completion of at least nine years of quality education, with an emphasis on gender equality.
- Taking an equity approach and including gender equality indicators, both quantitative and qualitative.
- Emphasising quality of learning in addition to enrolment and access.
- Recognising that a quality education requires freedom from gender bias.
- Supporting gender reviews of education sector plans, and action to address identified gaps.
- Empowering girls and boys to participate in global and national initiatives aimed at developing policies and actions to remove barriers to girls' education.





# A global overview of SRGBV

## Global data on SRGBV



**1.** In Canada, over 50 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual learners and 75 per cent of transgender learners report verbal harassment; 10 per cent report regularly hearing homophobic comments from teachers.<sup>117</sup>

**2.** In the United States, 4,000 incidents of sexual battery and over 800 reported rapes and attempted rapes against girls and boys were reported in public high schools in 2010.<sup>118</sup>

**3.** In Colombia, there were 337 reported incidents of sexual violence in schools just in 2007.<sup>119</sup>

**4.** In Bolivia, 12 children and adolescents are raped every day on average, with some rapes occurring during school hours.<sup>120</sup>

**5.** In Ghana, more than half of schoolchildren age 13-15 years (59.6 per cent of boys and 57.3 per cent of girls) report having been bullied at least once within the last 30 days.<sup>121</sup>

**6.** In Uganda, more than a third of schoolchildren age 13-15 report having been in a physical fight during the school year.<sup>122</sup>

**7.** In Kenya, UNICEF has documented rape of children as young as six.<sup>123</sup>

**8.** In Zambia, a school-based survey found that 10.8 per cent of boys and 4.3 per cent of girls experienced sexual comments from teachers. 4.4 per cent of boys and 1.4 per cent of girls experienced teachers touching them in a sexual way. Triple the proportion of boys (6.2 per cent) compared to girls (2.5 per cent) reported having had sex with a teacher.<sup>124</sup>

**9.** In Mozambique, a study by the Ministry of Education found that 70 per cent of girl respondents reported knowing that some teachers use sexual intercourse as a condition for promotion between grades; 80 per cent recognised that sexual abuse and harassment occur not only in the schools, but also in the communities.<sup>125</sup>

**10.** In India, 50 per cent of homosexual men had experienced harassment from learners or teachers when in school.<sup>126</sup>

**11.** In Australia, one-third of students report being bullied on school grounds.<sup>127</sup>



Collecting data on children's experience of violence is controversial and challenging. Comparable national data does not exist for many countries. There is also much diversity within and between countries with regard to socioeconomic development, cultural background, political stability and colonial history, all of which affect the extent and nature of documented SRGBV.<sup>116</sup> The available data, however, paints an alarming image of the extent to which violence affects millions of children around the world. Statistics likely underestimate the prevalence of SRGBV, in fact, since children are often hesitant to report violations because of a desire to protect so-called 'family honour', or for fear of being shamed, stigmatised, or retaliated against. Weak reporting mechanisms and inconsistent enforcement of national legislation also undermine data accuracy.

## Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, national surveys of male and female students find that GBV is common at school. In several countries, sexual violence against schoolgirls appears to be an institutional norm.<sup>128</sup> Patriarchal values and attitudes that encourage male aggression, female passivity, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage are drivers for SRGBV across Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>129, 130, 131</sup>

In countries affected by armed conflict and ethnic violence (including the Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sudan), insecurity and fear prevent millions of girls from attending school.<sup>132</sup> WHO surveys find that 73 per cent of students surveyed in three provinces in Zimbabwe had been physically abused within the last year.<sup>133</sup> In Zambia, 63 per cent of students reported being bullied at least once during the previous month, and nearly a third of students (32.8 per cent of girls and 31.7 per cent of boys) had been forced to have sexual intercourse by fellow students or teachers.<sup>134</sup>

Field studies by Plan's West Africa Regional Office in seven African countries (Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Liberia and Uganda) reveal that violence in primary and secondary schools, while varying across the individual countries, is prevalent. It can be manifested as inappropriate sexual relations between male teachers and female students, transactional sex to cover school fees and the cost of school materials, sex for grades, and excessive use of corporal punishment.<sup>135</sup> When asked about early pregnancy, 16 per cent of children in Togo named a teacher as responsible for the pregnancy of a classmate; this figure was 15 per cent in Mali and 11 per cent in Senegal. In Ghana, 75 per cent of children cited teachers as the main perpetrators of violence in school; in Senegal, the figure was 80 per cent.<sup>136</sup>



## Asia and the Pacific

In 2002 and 2003, Pakistan's Minister of State for Religious Affairs recorded more than 2,500 complaints of sexual abuse by clerics in religious schools, none of which led to successful prosecutions.<sup>137</sup> Outside the classroom, particularly in parts of Southeast Asia, notions of so-called 'family honour' and women's virginity until marriage make girls less likely to report sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>138</sup>

Girl students and teachers of girls have been killed, violently attacked and intimidated by armed groups who ideologically oppose the education of girls, the education of girls of a certain age, or the education of girls alongside boys. Schools where girls study have also been burned and bombed.<sup>139</sup> Pakistan and Afghanistan are two countries in which girls' schooling – and schools – have themselves been attacked.<sup>140</sup>

In India and other parts of South Asia, caste systems and discrimination against ethnic minorities make some students more vulnerable to bullying.<sup>141</sup> In India, two-thirds of schoolchildren were victims of peer-to-peer physical abuse on and near school grounds in 2007.<sup>142</sup> Teachers from higher castes frequently humiliate children from lower castes.<sup>143</sup>

Compared to other regions, peer bullying is less pervasive in East Asia and the Pacific, but it is on the rise. At the lower end, school-based studies find that 19.4 per cent of students in Myanmar have been bullied within the last 30 days; this figure reaches 50 per cent in Indonesia.<sup>144</sup>

GBV has also been largely normalised in parts of the Pacific. In the Solomon Islands, for example, 73 per cent of women in a population-based household survey reported believing that violence against women is justifiable, particularly where women do not conform to specific gender roles.<sup>145</sup> Of women aged 15-49, 37 per cent had been sexually abused before the age of 15.<sup>146</sup>

In more developed countries such as New Zealand, Japan and Australia, the expanding access to online technologies is driving new forms of SRGBV violence, such as cyber-bullying based on sexual orientation.<sup>147</sup> In Australia, where approximately a third of children report being bullied by peers on school grounds, cyber-bullying affects one in ten students.<sup>148</sup>





## Middle East and North Africa

In the Middle East and North Africa, violence against children is a common occurrence, most often hidden and not publicly discussed.<sup>149</sup> In recent years, conflict and migration have further compromised children's schooling and protection.<sup>150</sup> For example, almost 60 per cent of Palestinian and Lebanese students who study in refugee camps directly associate 'getting hurt' with being victims of physical violence in school.<sup>151</sup>

In countries where data was collected between 2006 and 2011, at least 51 per cent of boys aged 13-15 reported having been physically attacked or involved in a physical fight on or near school grounds.<sup>152</sup> Among boys, physical violence is reported more often than bullying. WHO surveys find that bullying affects girls and boys to a similar degree in the Middle East and North Africa region. Due to limited political and institutional accountability, data on sexual violence in schools is scarce.<sup>153</sup>

## Latin America and the Caribbean

The UN Regional Consultation in Latin America in 2005 noted that the region is characterised by a high level of social tolerance towards acts of violence in general, and alarming levels of impunity for perpetrators of GBV.<sup>154</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, violence is often justified as a means of resolving conflicts between adults and children, as well as conflicts between young people themselves.<sup>155</sup> Socioeconomic inequality in urban and rural communities has also been linked to children's vulnerability to violence.

In Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Peru, school-based surveys have found between 5 per cent and 40 per cent of adolescent girls reporting experience of sexual abuse.<sup>156</sup> Girls in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Nicaragua report being victims of sexual coercion from teachers, sometimes under the threat of their grades suffering if they do not accept sexual advances.<sup>157</sup> Approximately 60 per cent of children in the Caribbean have witnessed violence in their schools, an experience associated with high levels of fear, absenteeism and school dropout.<sup>158</sup> Bullying is the main driver of peer-to-peer male violence in the region. The number of students having engaged in or been victims of bullying is 40 per cent in Brazil, 36.7 per cent in Ecuador, and 28 per cent in Uruguay.<sup>159</sup>





## Europe and Central Asia

Most European countries have adopted legislation to protect schoolchildren from GBV, and have drafted guidelines for promoting accountability. In recent years, heightened media coverage of school-related violence has raised awareness of its pervasiveness and its impact. Much of this media attention has focused on the phenomenon of bullying in person and online, especially against already-marginalised schoolchildren. For example, 65 per cent of LGBTQ children report experiencing homophobic bullying in Britain's schools.<sup>160, 161</sup>

Data affirms the need for a greater focus on preventing peer-to-peer GBV in schools. Peer violence accounts for up to 87 per cent of SRGBV in Europe and Central Asia, and young adolescents (age 12-16) are responsible for 80 per cent of reported incidents of violence on school grounds.<sup>162</sup> Students' experiences vary considerably across Europe: at the low end of the scale, 15 per cent of Swedish students report being bullied within the last two months, as compared to 65 per cent of Lithuanian students.<sup>163</sup>

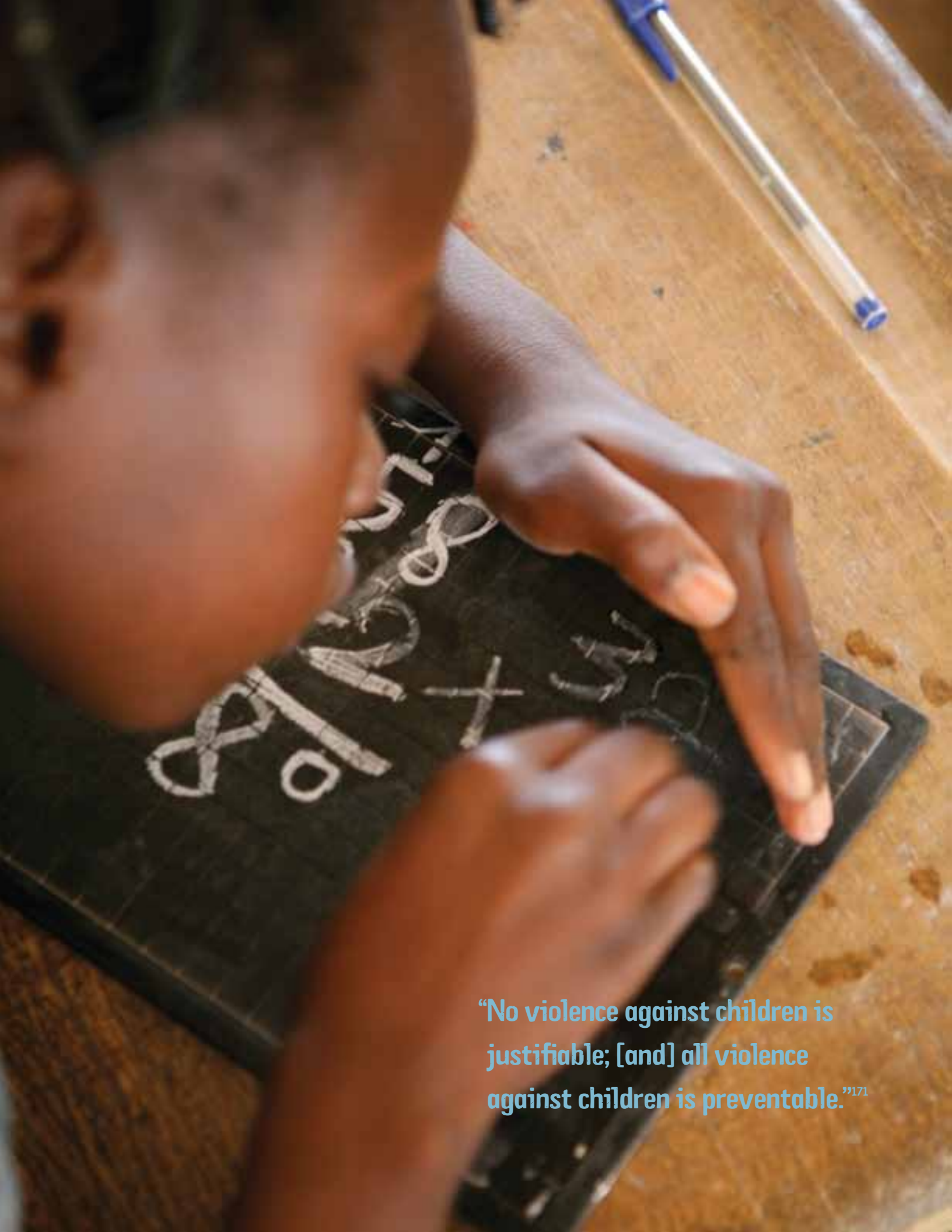
Throughout Europe, girls are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment, and boys report higher rates of physical fighting. Boys carry out approximately 85 per cent of reported incidents of bullying in the region.<sup>164</sup> In the Czech Republic, 69 per cent of boys and 27 per cent of girls reported having been in a physical fight in the past 12 months.<sup>165</sup> By contrast, students report much lower levels of physical violence and bullying in Tajikistan and Macedonia.<sup>166</sup>

## North America

In North America, numerous high-profile tragedies have elevated the subject of school violence in public discourse. Even though school shootings are in large part responsible for the increased attention, a far more common form of violence within schools is peer bullying, both in person and online.<sup>167</sup>

In some instances, bullying and cyber-bullying have escalated to violent 'hate crimes': violence intended to hurt and intimidate someone because of race, ethnicity, national origin, religious, sexual orientation, or disability.<sup>168</sup> In the United States, schools are the third most common location where hate crimes occur.<sup>169</sup> In Canada, most bullying occurs in person on school grounds; however, the situation is reversed for girls who report sexual harassment: 70 per cent of these incidents occur over the internet.<sup>170</sup>





“No violence against children is justifiable; [and] all violence against children is preventable.”<sup>171</sup>

# International human rights standards and SRGBV

At the global level, international and regional human rights treaties articulate legally binding standards that States parties must respect when developing effective laws, action plans, and policies to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of all children.

Comprehensive national laws and policies, where implemented, provide a foundation for protecting children from discrimination and violence in all settings, including in and around schools. Yet across borders and within countries, the development, implementation, coordination and enforcement of SRGBV policy varies considerably. In most jurisdictions, more can be done to protect children's right to freedom from violence in schools, and the right to inclusive schools.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which all countries save the US and Somalia are signatories, requires governments to adopt all appropriate measures to protect children's right to be free from all forms of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, bullying and cyber-bullying.<sup>172</sup> This right requires immediate implementation, and governments must use all available resources to ensure its fulfilment.<sup>173</sup> The CRC Committee, a body of experts that monitors states parties' compliance with the CRC, stresses that proactive prevention of violence is in the best interests of the child.<sup>174</sup> Where violence does occur, it mandates that governments must take all appropriate measures to support child victims in their physical and psychological recovery.<sup>175</sup>

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) condemns all forms of violence against girls. The UN General Assembly and the CEDAW Committee have explicitly recognised that GBV is a form of discrimination that violates women's and girls' human rights.<sup>176</sup> Governments must take positive measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish any incidents.<sup>177</sup> The European Committee on Social Rights likewise holds that compliance with the European Social Charter<sup>178</sup> and Revised Social Charter<sup>179</sup> requires legislative prohibition against any form of violence against children, whether at school, in other institutions, in their home, or elsewhere.<sup>180</sup> Educators have specific obligations as well. Teachers and staff are responsible for protecting children from violence while they are at school and in transit to and from school.<sup>181</sup>

Governments who have taken comprehensive and integrated action on violence prevention have been recognised for their efforts. The CRC Committee, for example, welcomes Australia's adoption of a series of institutional and policy measures aimed at reducing violence against women, protecting children, empowering youth and addressing the specific needs of the Aboriginal population.<sup>182</sup>

## Corporal punishment

The CRC requires school discipline to be consistent with a child's human rights and dignity.<sup>183</sup> The CRC Committee has established that all forms of corporal punishment (including non-physical acts that belittle or humiliate the child) are invariably degrading.<sup>184</sup> Governments have an immediate and unqualified obligation to prohibit and eliminate its use in the family, school and other settings.<sup>185</sup> Governments should also develop codes of ethics for teachers and school charters that stress the illegality of corporal punishment.<sup>186</sup> The Human Rights Committee, which oversees implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),<sup>187</sup> states that corporal punishment and excessive chastisement in schools are forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.<sup>188</sup> The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has also recognised that corporal punishment and other degrading types of discipline (such as public humiliation) are inconsistent with the right to education, and welcomes national initiatives that promote positive, non-violent approaches to school discipline.<sup>189</sup> The African Commission on Human and People's Rights found that a sentence of lashes imposed on students violated the students' rights.<sup>190</sup> The European Court of Human Rights has progressively condemned corporal punishment of children in all settings, including schools.<sup>191</sup>

## Sexual violence

Both the CRC and the CEDAW condemn all forms of violence against girls, including sexual violence. States parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography are specifically obligated to prohibit the sexual exploitation of children, including transactional sex.<sup>192</sup>



The Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse adopts a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating sexual exploitation and abuse of children.<sup>193</sup> Beyond requiring governments to adopt legislative measures, it also promotes positive tools that governments can use to prevent violence, including training, violence prevention education, and awareness-raising campaigns.<sup>194</sup> Measures to protect victims include strengthened reporting and support systems and services, and national telephone or internet helplines.<sup>195</sup>

The African human rights system also condemns violence against women and girls. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) requires states parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights<sup>196</sup> to adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's and girl's right to respect and dignity. They must, in particular, protect her from all forms of violence, including forced sex in both public and private.<sup>197</sup> The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child likewise obligates states parties to take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of violence, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.<sup>198, 199</sup>

## The right to inclusive schools

The right to education is a fundamental right of all children.<sup>200</sup> The CRC mandates that governments recognise this right on the basis of equal opportunity. The CRC Committee requires that the educational process itself enables and fosters respect for human rights, and be based on the principles enshrined in the CRC. It emphasises the promotion of non-violence in schools and of non-discrimination (including on the basis of gender), as well as peace, tolerance and human rights education.<sup>201</sup>

In designing effective violence prevention policies to combat SRGBV, governments must pay particular attention to traditionally marginalised groups, including girls, racial and ethnic minority children, indigenous children and children with disabilities.<sup>202</sup> Discrimination, whether overt or hidden, offends the human dignity of the child and undermines his or her capacity to benefit from educational opportunities. It also encourages negative stereotypes that perpetuate violence.<sup>203</sup> The CRC Committee requires governments to revise curricula, textbooks and other teaching resources and technologies in order to ensure they reflect the educational principles of non-violence, tolerance, equality and respect for diversity and difference.<sup>204</sup> The CEDAW Committee also stresses that governments must eliminate stereotypes in school materials, programmes and teaching methods, and must adopt effective education and public information programmes to eliminate prejudices and practices that undermine the social equality of women and girls.<sup>205</sup> Quality pre-service and in-service training of teachers and educators to promote these principles is also crucial.<sup>206</sup>

**The right to education is a fundamental right of all children. The CRC mandates that governments recognise this right on the basis of equal opportunity.**



$$9 + 6$$

# A global framework for government action on SRGBV

For millions of children, school attendance is compulsory. While many children benefit from an education in a safe environment, far too many students are regularly exposed to violence that compromises their human rights.

By signing and ratifying the CRC, nearly all governments committed to ensuring that every child enjoys the right to an education – one directed at the “development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”<sup>207</sup> The CRC Committee has provided explicit guidance on what governments are required to do in order to prevent violence against all children and to protect child victims. It has also specified what governments must do to develop and enforce an effective framework for action. Bridging the gap between international obligations and country-level practices, however, is a pressing challenge for policymakers.

Several governments have taken concerted action to support effective strategies against SRGBV. Drawing from these promising practices, from recommendations by the CRC Committee, and from research initiatives around the globe, this section outlines eight key principles framing effective government action to end SRGBV.<sup>208</sup> Each principle is followed by high-level recommendations for implementation, with a view to providing legislators and government officials with practicable evidence-based approaches they can champion in their own national contexts. In order to address the complex nature of SRGBV effectively, all eight principles should inform the development and implementation of an action plan.

## Call to action

**Eight principles for government action to prevent and reduce school-related gender-based violence.**

### **1. Comprehensive and integrated action**

Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated, and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalised girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

### **2. Effective legislation and regulation**

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.

### **3. Safe and effective reporting and response**

Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, confidential, proportionate, and consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### 4. Evidence-based policy

Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of school-related gender-based violence.

#### 5. Well-trained, well-supported personnel

Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped and supported to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in and around schools.

#### 6. Partnership

Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector, and civil society organisations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.

#### 7. Inclusiveness

Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.

#### 8. Participation

Girls and boys must be recognised as key participants in developing solutions to address school-related gender-based violence.

*Note: Annex 1 outlines further details on recommendations elaborating these principles.*

## Principle 1: Comprehensive and integrated action

*Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalised girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.*

**Recommendation:** *Develop and implement an integrated action plan focused on SRGBV prevention and response, and the provision of appropriate services. The action plan should aim to ensure that schools are safe, child-friendly and free from gender-based discrimination. It should particularly emphasise measures to address SRGBV experienced by marginalised groups, including Indigenous communities.*

The prevention of GBV in and around schools requires a systematic approach by different levels of government and civil society. It also requires the involvement of communities, school administrators, teachers, parents and students themselves. Integrated systems-wide strategies are more likely to reduce incidents of SRGBV, improve gender parity in academic achievement, minimise risks of school dropout, and enhance students' well-being. A report by the UN Special Representative on Violence Against Children notes that governments should adopt child-friendly school violence prevention programmes that address the whole school environment – a crucial component of a systematic national violence prevention framework that works across sectors and engages whole communities.<sup>209</sup>

Many countries have adopted the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)



Framework for Rights-Based, Child-Friendly Education Systems and Schools, which outlines global standards for children's education.<sup>210</sup> It sets clear normative goals for all policies and programmes, and provides guidance for a multi-sectoral strategy that fulfils the rights of children and provides girls and boys equally with a quality education in a safe environment. At the district level, the framework can serve as both a goal and a tool for quality implementation of a comprehensive approach.

The process of developing an action plan is as important as the plan itself, since an effective development process must include society as a whole. Depending on the country context, integrated strategies to reduce SRGBV may form important components of broader frameworks to eliminate violence against women, implement CEDAW, strengthen child protection systems, or realise the goals of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Education for All initiative. In all cases, the process of consultation must be multi-sectoral and inclusive of civil society, with particular attention paid to the accessible and meaningful inclusion of individuals from, and organisations serving, marginalised communities. Governments should inform policy development and implementation by drawing on the expertise of organisations working to end violence against women and children. It is also particularly important to ensure that the diverse voices of children and youth are heard.

In many settings, school curricula and textbooks reinforce harmful norms, and school infrastructure compromises students' safety. Multi-sectoral strategies should apply a gender lens to the full range of issues: the infrastructure of school latrines and the presence of adult monitors in the hallways; pre-service and in-service gender training; support structures for teachers; effective systems of reporting violence; and the implementation of appropriate follow-up measures.

## Principle 2: Effective legislation and regulation

*Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability and treat all children equally.*

**Recommendation:** *Governments should strengthen legislative frameworks to ensure that they explicitly protect all children from violence, including SRGBV. Legislative frameworks should be supported by effective regulations and policies that include binding codes of conduct and appropriate proportionate sanctions.*

**Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.**



A legislative framework that explicitly protects children from adult-to-child and peer-to-peer SRGBV and promotes accountability is an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to address SRGBV, and is necessary to its effectiveness.<sup>211</sup> In addition to criminal laws of general application (assault, rape, sexual assault, criminal harassment and hate speech) and specific youth criminal laws, there must be binding codes of conduct that prohibit SRGBV and specifically address the unique position of teachers, staff, students, parents, and volunteers. Teachers should be subject to professional regulation that clearly outlines appropriate and proportionate sanction for SRGBV (including and up to a loss of licence to teach or a ban on hiring within the public service). In relation to peer-to-peer violence, criminalisation should be a last resort reserved for the most egregious violations or repeat offenders; accountability should otherwise focus on rehabilitation and education.

To protect students and teachers better during times of conflict, governments should enact domestic legislation in line with international humanitarian and human rights law protecting schools and learners.<sup>212</sup>

Governments should also ensure adequate funding to implement legislation as well as related policies and procedures aligned to a child protection systems approach, and to monitor and assess their effectiveness. Governments should adopt budget line-item investments to reflect their commitment.

### Principle 3: Safe and effective reporting and response

*Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, proportionate, and consistent with the CRC.*

**Recommendation:** *Governments should develop and strengthen reporting mechanisms at all levels in order to ensure culturally appropriate and confidential means of reporting, as well as effective follow-up services. Responses should include strengthening child protection mechanisms and the provision of child-friendly health care, assistance and psychosocial support services.*



The best legislative framework will not reduce violence unless children, teachers, staff and parents are able to report SRGBV without fear or shame, and government officials are empowered and have the resources to investigate and prosecute offenders. As a first step, governments must put in place mandatory reporting requirements to law enforcement and child protection authorities for serious allegations of SRGBV.

Governments should also ensure culturally appropriate and age-appropriate means of reporting. Reporting mechanisms must not only instil confidence among students and school staff who report violence, but also assure victims' confidentiality.<sup>213</sup> Students who witness or experience violence in school should be taken seriously and be able to report violations without fear of ridicule, discrimination, or retaliation. Even in school communities with established reporting mechanisms, field experience has found school-wide perceptions that administrators are complicit in or dismissive of teachers' behaviour (thereby condoning it).<sup>214</sup> Young female students are often particularly afraid to report abuse because of a reasonable fear of further violence; boys and girls are more likely to assume their bullying is acceptable; and adults may continue violating children's rights with impunity.

Governments must also provide appropriate health and social services to victims of such violence at school. Without the guarantee of adequate support, many victims will not come forward at the outset. Reporting mechanisms and counselling services often lack the resources and skills to support victims' healing and reintegration adequately.<sup>215</sup>

## Principle 4: Evidence-based policy

*Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of SRGBV.*

**Recommendation:** *Gather and consolidate comprehensive disaggregated national data in order to address research gaps, with particular emphasis on marginalised communities, including indigenous communities.*

Effective national action plans must be grounded in solid data. Addressing GBV in schools requires further action to collect and consolidate national data on the causes, nature and scale of SRGBV. Reliable data (disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, Indigenous status or identity, disability, sexual orientation/gender identity, income, rural/urban location and other relevant statuses) improves prevention programmes, informs effective policymaking, and helps assess national progress in violence prevention and response. Research can also be used to strengthen school reporting mechanisms and prevention plans, and to identify gaps in child protection systems.

Governments should support research examining the context-specific dynamics of SRGBV. Ministries of education should support this action by conducting baseline assessments and school safety audits. Such audits provide school leaders with a clearer understanding about the nature and extent of SRGBV, placing them in a better position to recognise their role in preventing and mitigating violence.<sup>216</sup> Efforts to strengthen data collection systems should be implemented as part of a comprehensive plan to collect data on girls' education and to report progress to relevant UN bodies.

## Principle 5: Well-supported, well-trained personnel

*Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped and supported to prevent and respond to GBV in and around schools.*

**Recommendation:** *Require and fund high-quality pre-service and in-service training on all forms of GBV, effective violence prevention strategies, and positive discipline methods for all teachers and school administrators.*

Teachers, school administrators and teachers' unions are key partners in tackling SRGBV. Appropriate training and support should be provided to improve teachers' capacities to understand the links among harmful gender norms, power inequalities between adults and children, and violence. Training should equip teachers and school staff with strategies to reduce students' risks to GBV; cover staffs' responsibility to report GBV; and detail the consequences of taking part in SRGBV, either by directly perpetrating it or by being complicit and failing to report all forms of GBV against students.

The attitudes, skill sets and strategies that teachers use in the classroom matter. Teachers who reinforce norms of non-violent communication, champion equality and rely on constructive, positive discipline are more likely to create safe spaces for learning in which both girls and boys can excel.<sup>217</sup> Female teachers, where adequately supported, can act as powerful role models for girls. In place of punitive approaches to classroom discipline, teachers should learn techniques aimed at positive reinforcement, constructive criticism and clear guidance and instruction.<sup>218</sup>

## Principle 6: Partnership

*Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector, and civil society organisations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.*

**Recommendation:** *Invest in increased capacity for law enforcement and the transportation sectors to address the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds. Partner with women's and youth organisations that are developing innovative approaches on the ground.*

Governments must also provide appropriate training to all relevant service providers and agencies, including mandatory training for law enforcement and relevant personnel in the judicial system.

GBV often occurs during students' daily journeys between their homes and the classroom.<sup>219</sup> Field research affirms that both students and adults classify the route to and from school as unsafe 'hot spots'.<sup>220</sup> In some countries, GBV occurs on publicly funded transportation, in which case states are particularly liable for negligent oversight of schoolchildren. In many more communities, young children often walk great distances along poorly lit paths, unaccompanied by parents and unmonitored by officials trained to identify and respond to GBV.<sup>221</sup> To reduce students' vulnerabilities to GBV during their commutes, governments must form strategic partnerships with multiple sectors (particularly security and transportation) where viable.



Effective programmes developed by civil society organisations should be supported and scaled up to broaden the reach of national efforts to address GBV on and around school grounds.



## Principle 7: Inclusiveness

*Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.*

**Recommendation:** *Support community-based approaches to engaging community members, including men and boys, to raise awareness and develop local strategies for addressing GBV in and around schools. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.*

Governments can support efforts to raise awareness and support for a violence-free childhood – not only at school, but also at home and in communities. In many settings, policies should aim to redefine deeply embedded norms and behaviours that are harmful for children’s education and well-being. Policy actions aimed at preventing and responding to violence in schools must therefore support broader civil society efforts to change attitudes and transform the values of whole communities – including among parents and religious leaders.

Because what it means to be a man or a woman is socially constructed, public policies have a critical role to play in changing learned attitudes and behaviours that increase boys’ risks of perpetuating SRGBV and being victims of it.<sup>222</sup> Governments should support evidence-based primary prevention strategies that work with men and boys in order to make schools and other public spaces free of violence. They can also strengthen the effectiveness of school-based strategies to introduce or improve sexual and reproductive health education by opening dialogue and conducting awareness-raising activities amongst men and boys. The focus should be on discouraging negative sexual practices, education about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, and awareness of the long-term consequences of unhealthy sexual behaviour.

Experiences across diverse settings worldwide confirm that programmes can greatly influence how men and boys perceive themselves and their roles in society. Attitudes can change toward more equitable ways of thinking

and being in relation to others.<sup>223</sup> Acceptance of gender equality by parents, brothers, male peers, religious leaders, teachers, principals, and mentors can promote non-violent positive communication within households, and increase support for girls' education. Men and boys should be empowered to be integral partners in combating violence against girls and young women.

## Principle 8: Participation

*Girls and boys must be recognised as key participants in developing solutions to address SRGBV.*

**Recommendation:** *Governments should ensure that girls and boys are included in the design, implementation and monitoring of national and local policies such as action plans, school codes of conduct, curricula, school governance policies and programmes.*

Governments can comprehensively address SRGBV and the underlying norms that promote it only by involving students meaningfully in the policy process. Girls and boys can both shed light on their uniquely lived experience; and better solutions result when girls, particularly the most marginalised, actively identify their own educational, social and cultural needs. Field experiences show that children possess the capacity to protect each other, to identify and support their peers who may be victims of violence, and to transform norms governing their interactions. Involving children as agents for change requires setting up safe mechanisms through which they can express their opinions, enabling them to participate in school governance and to experience first-hand the social benefits of tolerance and non-violence.

## Recommendations to bilateral and multilateral donors

Progress on eliminating SRGBV will take place largely at the national and local levels. Donor governments and multilateral agencies can do much, however, to support country-level efforts. They can also work to address violence within the development discourse. These ends can be achieved by:

- Making the issue of GBV (and particularly the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence in the context of poverty) central to global consultations on a post-2015 development framework.
- Supporting gender reviews of education sector plans and action to address identified gaps.
- Championing and supporting integrated national and sectoral action plans that seek to eradicate violence, including GBV in and around schools.
- Strengthening investment in the effective implementation of integrated action plans focused on creating safe, child-friendly and gender-sensitive schools.
- Supporting partnerships with civil society organisations to implement complementary community-based approaches to prevention, response and provision of appropriate support services.
- Supporting the development of effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to inform policy development and implementation.

Grade

Science

May 15, 2009

A B C D E F





# Global action against SRGBV

Although the factors linked to GBV in and around schools are complex, field research and programmes across diverse settings have drawn attention to promising solutions. A number of governments have made important strides in adopting action plans building on policy principles that promote violence-free schools.

This section offers country-level examples of government-led efforts to reduce girls' vulnerabilities to SRGBV. While many countries have made important progress to increase the safety and security of girls at school, there is still much room for improvement, particularly in translating good policies into practice. The country examples point to the need for integrating strategies across multiple sectors and for engaging whole communities to implement the policies at all levels. Adoption of these policies is a critical first step. However, sustained political commitment, continued policy development and support, and effective application are also required to ensure that all children (particularly girls) benefit from a quality education in safe and inclusive schools.

## Swaziland

### **A comprehensive and integrated response, from national data collection to policy implementation and legislative reform**

#### **Building the national evidence base for action**

Swaziland has the highest national prevalence of HIV in the world, currently at 25.9 per cent.<sup>224</sup> Among adolescents 15-19 years old, the prevalence is just over 20 per cent. Acknowledging the strong association between GBV and the risk of HIV infection, as well as the lack of data on children's exposure to violence in schools, in 2007 the Swazi government launched a national survey to investigate the causes and scale of sexual violence. The study revealed that more than a third of Swazi girls had been victims of sexual violence before age 18.<sup>225</sup>

#### **Designing programmes that facilitate visible change within communities in alignment with international human rights commitments**

Policymakers used the nationally representative information in diverse ways: to publicise the issue of sexual violence; to create safe schools initiatives, including the development of confidential school reporting mechanisms; to increase police officials' capacity to ensure children's rights; and to establish a government unit whose responsibilities include investigating acts of violence against children. Swaziland has also established child-friendly courts that protect children's rights in accordance with international conventions.

**A number of governments have made important strides in adopting action plans building on policy principles that promote violence-free schools.**

### **Strengthening national legislation**

The government has recently strengthened its national legislative framework. The Education Sector Policy (2011) incorporates formal guidance and counselling curricula that equip teachers and school administrators with tools to address students' age-specific vulnerabilities to GBV and HIV infection.<sup>226</sup> Additionally, in 2011, the lower house of Parliament passed the Children's Protection and Welfare Bill and the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill. These laws extended the definition of rape to include young men and boys, established a public register of sexual offenders, and prevented previous offenders from becoming teachers.<sup>227</sup>

### **Exchanging lessons learned**

The Swazi experience has inspired further coordinated community action in other countries in the region. The Together for Girls initiative – which aims to eliminate violence against children at school, at home and in the broader community – is now supporting national surveys on the causes and scale of violence in Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.<sup>228</sup>

### **Next steps**

While Swaziland has made progress on the policy side, a key challenge remains implementation. For example, the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill has not yet been enacted, more than five years after it was initially drafted.<sup>229</sup> Teachers have also called for more tools to provide psychosocial support to children who have suffered abuse.<sup>230</sup>



## Penal approaches are not enough, primary prevention is critical

### Strong legislative and penal responses

Australia has a longstanding political commitment to pursue justice against those who perpetrate violence against children, and to provide services to child survivors. National surveys establish that 14 per cent of adolescent girls aged 12-19 have experienced rape or sexual assault.<sup>231</sup> Each of Australia's states and territories has ratified legislation in accordance with international commitments. Local departments of education have taken steps to strengthen reporting mechanisms, and justice systems work to hold perpetrators accountable. These actions responding to violence against children are necessary, but do not constitute a comprehensive response to GBV in schools.

Australia has unified its largely autonomous states and territories around two national documents that channel more resources towards 'primary prevention' and 'respectful relationships': The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

### Primary prevention in schools

Instead of merely responding after the fact to acts of GBV in schools, Australia is scaling up GBV prevention programmes across the country in order to empower students and teachers to make changes before violence strikes the school community.<sup>232</sup> These promising programmes, such as the Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools, engage male and female students in discussion on attitudes that perpetuate sexual violence. They also promote peer empathy, including towards Aboriginal children, who are relatively more vulnerable to violence. As part of its commitment to make non-violence and gender equality a reality within schools, Australia has also invested in implementing school-based counselling services and in developing curricula to provide teachers with specialised training on positive teaching methods.

### Meeting the needs of most-at-risk groups

Australia has recognised that indigenous girls and boys from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are uniquely vulnerable to violence and abuse.<sup>233</sup> It has taken steps to link its school-based violence prevention plan with Closing the Gap, a national plan of action to combat the socioeconomic disadvantages of Aboriginal people.<sup>234</sup> Strategies include targeted Local Community Action Grants that focus on building intercultural dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among youth.<sup>235</sup>

### Next steps

Civil society organisations have urged Australia to strengthen its prevention strategies by engaging men to work towards reducing GBV<sup>236</sup> and by working with indigenous communities to implement local solutions.<sup>237</sup> At the international level, the CRC Committee has expressed concern that no commissioner exists devoted specifically to child rights. The CRC Committee further recommends that Australia strengthen its efforts to protect children from exposure to violence through ICTs.<sup>238</sup>

# Philippines

## Changing a key barrier to policy implementation: social norms

### **Banning all forms of violence against children**

Children's right to be free from the threat of violence in school is recognised in the Philippines. Since 1991, laws have prohibited all forms of violence and discrimination against children,<sup>239</sup> and have prohibited the use of schools "for military purposes such as command posts, barracks, detachments and supply depots."<sup>240</sup> The government has also explicitly banned sexual harassment and corporal punishment in schools.<sup>241</sup> To complement this legislative approach, the Department of Education spearheaded efforts to develop implementation guidelines, teacher training and a national child protection system.<sup>242</sup>

Despite these legislative and policy measures, the CRC Committee reported in 2007 that teachers were responsible for 50 per cent of the cases of child abuse, and that children (particularly girls) remain vulnerable to abuse by janitors, bus drivers and administrators.<sup>243</sup> Another baseline study of school-related violence found that at least 40 per cent of children in grades 1-3 and 70 per cent in grades 4-6 have experienced some form of violence in school.<sup>244</sup>

### **Engaging whole communities to change individual biases and institutional norms**

In 2009, following a review of school practices, the government publicly acknowledged that deeply engrained social norms justifying teachers' punitive authority over students fostered a disregard for national policies.<sup>245</sup> In response, the government committed itself to adopt the UNICEF Child-Friendly School model, with a focus on promoting non-discrimination, gender equality and non-violence; on supporting children to help develop a child-centred curriculum; on providing safe and healthy school environments; and on involving families and communities in projects and activities beneficial to schoolchildren.

According to a recent evaluation of a pilot programme, the model is working: almost all (92 per cent) of children report feeling that their school is 'child friendly'.<sup>246</sup> The Filipino experience affirms the need to complement a policy environment with a long-term commitment to engaging whole communities in adopting new belief systems that encourage learning in violence-free spaces.

### **Next steps**

Although the Philippines has enacted strong legislation to protect women and children from violence, challenges remain for its full implementation. These include gaps in the justice system and the failure of national agencies and local government units to exercise due diligence in fulfilling their legal and international human rights obligations.<sup>247</sup>



## Jamaica

### **Complementing national policies with adequate resources to implement a multi-sectoral approach to GBV prevention and response in schools**

#### **Denouncing community violence and its harmful impact**

The Jamaican Government has publicly affirmed the pervasive nature of community violence as one of the main barriers to its socioeconomic development. In its 2009 National Report, the Jamaican Government declared:

Gender-based violence is profoundly disempowering for women's well-being and their levels of economic productivity. Violence affects education as schools have to close down or attendance is negatively affected. Trauma affects educational performance, mental and physical health and productivity.<sup>248</sup>

#### **Continuing to build the evidence base**

The government noted that GBV in and around schools is a serious problem, with 57 per cent of victims of sexual violence being younger than 19 years of age. However, due to the lack of specific national indicators tracking violence affecting children on school grounds or elsewhere, the true extent of the problem is unknown. In response, Jamaica has developed a plan to monitor the prevalence of violence by sex, age and type of crime.<sup>249</sup>

### **Adopting strong national legislation in alignment with international human rights commitments**

In line with its international legal commitments, Jamaica has passed several laws to address violence in early childhood and to enhance mandatory reporting of child abuse, including the development of a Children's Registry.<sup>250</sup> To support these measures, the government has focused on restructuring and reforming its police and judicial system in order to provide support services to victims and to eliminate impunity for perpetrators.

Establishing and funding structures that support training and accountability, Jamaica has also demonstrated a serious commitment to preventing violence and to providing support to vulnerable youth. It has earmarked increased funds for policy implementation to the Ministry of Education,<sup>251, 252</sup> and has established the Task Force on Educational Reform and the Education Transformation Program. These bodies focus on training teachers and school leadership to respond to violence and identify anti-social behaviour.<sup>253</sup>

### **Next steps**

Although Jamaica has strong political commitment to a multi-sectoral approach, an effective legislative framework is lacking. Despite stated intentions, the government has yet to ban corporal punishment for those over six years old. Civil society organisations and the Office of the UN Human Rights Council have also highlighted the lack of legal implementation (particularly of the Sexual Offences Act of 2009), and the need for effective investigation and prosecution of all cases of GBV.<sup>254</sup>

## **United Kingdom**

### **Addressing GBV in schools as part of a national strategy to end violence against women**

Bullying is especially widespread in the United Kingdom (UK). According to the 2006 National Bullying Survey, 69 per cent of children in the UK report being bullied; 20 per cent of children admit to bullying others; and 85 per cent have witnessed others being bullied.<sup>255</sup> Bullying among schoolchildren is increasingly taking place through the use of mobile technologies and online media, leading some to contemplate suicide.<sup>256</sup>

### **Primary prevention in schools**

The UK Government has developed a coordinated approach to preventing GBV in schools. The primary focus is to work with teachers and schools to reduce sexual and gender-based bullying in schools; to identify children at risk of violence;<sup>257</sup> and to ensure that educators and governments are legally responsive to victims. The Department of Education is developing gender-sensitive curricula, requiring schools to teach about sexual consent,<sup>258</sup> and working with youth to transform attitudes and behaviours that justify bullying based on gender, sexual orientation and/or ethnicity.<sup>259</sup>

### **An integrated national approach to ending school violence and violence against women and girls**

The UK has explicitly recognised the need to address GBV in and around schools as part of a larger comprehensive strategy to end violence against women and girls within its communities.

By incorporating school-based anti-violence goals into its national action plan for eliminating violence against women, the UK has avoided a piecemeal response to gender-based violence in its various forms.

The UK Government is committed to tackling violence against women and girls through a coordinated, inter-agency, national approach. It also committed to meaningful early and ongoing consultation, policy review and response. In March 2012 it launched an updated national action plan on violence against women and girls that contains specific targeted strategies in the areas of violence prevention, attitude transformation, services for victims and accountability for perpetrators.<sup>260</sup>

This national and inter-agency approach to violence against women is complemented by strong laws and policies prohibiting all forms of GBV and protecting victims. For example, the Home Office, in coordination with other government sectors, has committed to strengthening prosecution and investigation of sexual offences, supporting victims of sexual violence, and preventing its occurrence by tackling pervasive harmful stereotypes about rape.<sup>261</sup>

#### **Partnering across sectors**

Recognising that effective prevention models require cooperation across multiple sectors, the Association of Chief Police Officers, in partnership with the UK Government, has established Operation Encompass, which promotes effective partnerships between the police and schools, including support for children who are victims of abuse.<sup>262</sup>

#### **Next steps**

The UK has made a strong policy commitment to integrated policy action. However, civil society organisations have recommended that the UK Government strengthens policy implementation at the local level by earmarking sufficient funding to support and ensure delivery of policy commitments.<sup>263</sup> There have also been calls for enhanced victim support services within schools.<sup>264</sup>



## **Global conclusion**

GBV in and around schools affects millions of children around the world every year. No government is immune from the challenges posed by its prevalence and its repercussions for the fulfilment of girls' right to education and access to quality learning. Governments must do more to unlock the potential of girls to the benefit of all, and to ensure that all children are free to learn without fear.





- 1 This number is Plan's best estimate based on the available data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Available from [www.uis.unesco.org](http://www.uis.unesco.org)
- 2 In 2000, 189 nations made a promise to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge turned into the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG 2 is to achieve universal primary education and MDG 3 is to promote gender equality and to empower women. A target date of 2015 has been set to meet these goals. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/> Accessed 26 July 2012.
- 3 UNICEF (2009). *Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse*. Available from [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_45451.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45451.html) Accessed 27 June 2012.
- 4 Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from school-related violence every year. Plan's estimate is based on the following calculation: the 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children reported that 20-65% of schoolchildren are affected by verbal bullying—the most prevalent form of violence in schools. Based on UNESCO's 2011 *Global Education Digest* report, 1.23 billion children are in primary or secondary school on any given day, and Plan estimates that 20% of the global student population is 246 million children. Therefore, Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from SRGBV every year. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011). *Global Education Digest 2011: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*. Montreal, UNESCO Institute of Statistics.
- 5 World Health Organization (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, WHO. / United Nations Secretary General (2006). *Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children*, p. 12. New York, United Nations.
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**Published by Plan Limited**

Block A  
Dukes Court  
Duke Street  
Woking  
Surrey GU21 5BH  
United Kingdom

First published 2013. Text and photos  
© Plan International 2013, unless  
otherwise stated.

plan-international.org



**ISBN: 978-1-906273-35-4**



**Mixed Sources**

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BECAUSE **I am a  
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