



**Ending Violence Against Children During COVID-19 and
Beyond: Second Regional Conference to Strengthen
Implementation of the INSPIRE Strategies**

**East Asia and the Pacific
1-5 November 2021**

CONFERENCE OUTCOME STATEMENT



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), girls and boys have the right to be protected from all forms of violence in all settings. However, globally, almost 1 billion children suffer violence every single year¹ impacting not only the individual child in the short and long term, but also societies:

- Child maltreatment causes immediate suffering to children and can have long-term consequences, including developmental impairments and behavioural, physical and mental health problems.² Children who experience violence are also at increased risk of perpetrating or being a victim of violence, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviours, unintended pregnancy, and alcohol/drug misuse during childhood and into their adulthood.
- Childhood violence can also impact upon mental health. Globally, 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10-17 years has a mental disorder and 1 adolescent dies from suicide every 11 minutes³. In East Asia and the Pacific it is estimated that 25% of mental disorders are attributable to a child's experience of emotional abuse.⁴
- The evidence has been clear for a long time that violence in and out of school impacts attendance and completion rates. And that children not in school face higher risk of exploitation and harmful practices.⁵ But emerging important evidence also shows a correlation between violence in schools and poorer learning outcomes.⁶ Violence in school reduces educational attainment and learning resulting in economic losses estimated at \$11 trillion lost in lifetime earnings.⁷
- And there is a growing evidence base of the cycle of violence with both women and men who suffered sexual and physical abuse as children, more likely (16 times and 14 times respectively) to be involved in abusive relationships as an adult. Children in households affected by intimate partner violence are more likely than other children to experience violent discipline by both male and female caregivers.⁸
- Violence not only has a high cost for individual children, but also for the country's development. Violence against children (VAC) places a short and long-term burden on health and social services and undermines investment in other sectors, including health, early childhood development and education.
- Child maltreatment also cost countries in East Asia and the Pacific US \$209 billion per year, equivalent to 2 percent of the region's GDP. This includes emotional abuse (\$65.9 bn), physical abuse (\$39.6 bn) sexual abuse (\$39.9 bn) neglect (\$32.4 bn), witnessing domestic violence (\$31 bn) and death from maltreatment (\$0.5 bn).⁹

COVID-19 has heightened risks for children and young people. Survey data has consistently shown that prevalence of violence against children in the home has significantly increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as containment measures were imposed and schools were closed.

¹ WHO, Global Status Report on Violence Against Children, 2021

² World Health Organization. 2016. INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children. World Health Organization. Geneva Switzerland. p.17

³ United Nations Children's Fund, The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health, UNICEF, New York, October 2021

⁴ Fang et al "Estimating the Economic Burden of Violence against Children in East Asia and the Pacific". UNICEF 2015 https://www.unicef.org/eap/sites/unicef.org/eap/files/2018-03/UNICEF_Child_Maltreatment_Research_Overview_FINAL.pdf

⁵ WHO, Global Status Report on Violence Against Children, 2021

⁶ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/41068/4/S1700122_es.pdf

⁷ Wodon, Quentin; Fèvre, Chloe; Malé, Chata; Nayihouba, Ada; Nguyen, Hoa. 2021. Ending Violence in Schools : An Investment Case. World Bank, Washington, DC. World Bank, Safe to Learn, End Violence 2021 <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35969>

⁸ WHO, Global Status Report on Violence Against Children, 2021

⁹ Fang et al "Estimating the Economic Burden of Violence against Children in East Asia and the Pacific". UNICEF 2015 https://www.unicef.org/eap/sites/unicef.org/eap/files/2018-03/UNICEF_Child_Maltreatment_Research_Overview_FINAL.pdf

More than 18 months after the start of the pandemic, we know that the impact on children has been worse than initially feared... violence against children has both increased and become less visible.

Najat Maalla M'jid Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Over 375 million children in East Asia and the Pacific faced school closures for longer than 30 days and online learning became a critical component of education and social connectedness for many children across the region. However, the increased exposure to digital technology has also led to a rise in online child exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the pandemic has taken a significant toll on the mental health of children, young people and their caregivers.

As countries ease pandemic control measures, the safety of children is not guaranteed; far from it. The socio-economic fall out will continue to impact already vulnerable families and exacerbate risks of violence, abuse, harmful practices and exploitation. As shrinking budgets come under the strain of competing priorities for the recovery, cuts in public and donor financing of welfare and protection services are inevitable without urgent action, increasing risks and vulnerability.

Although countries in East Asia and Pacific had made progress towards ending violence against children prior to COVID-19, they were not on track to meet SDG Target 16.2. The impact of pandemic threatens to not only slow, but also reverse progress made. With over one quarter of the world's children in this region, failure to tackle violence against children here will impact whether the world achieves the SDG target 16.2 on ending violence against children by 2030. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Over 1,700 delegates representing governments, youth networks, donors, INGOs, NGOs, faith based organisations, and the private sector, gathered virtually from 25 countries from 1-5 November 2021 to identify the action needed to ensure effective prevention and response to violence against children during COVID-19 and the recovery, utilizing the [INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children](#).



The INSPIRE package was launched in 2016 by 10 agencies. It is an evidence-based resource of seven strategies to help countries and communities intensify their focus on the prevention programmes and services with greatest potential to reduce violence against children.¹⁰

¹⁰ World Health Organization (WHO) led the development of the INSPIRE package in collaboration with: United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (GPEVAC), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Together for Girls, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Bank. The [INSPIRE Technical Package](#) comprises: INSPIRE Handbook: action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children; INSPIRE Indicator Guidance and Results Framework; and INSPIRE Guide to Adaptation and Scale up.

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

The Second Regional INSPIRE Conference concluded that:

Girls and boys have the right to be protected from all forms of violence in all settings.

The containment measures brought in to slow the spread of COVID-19 increased risks of violence for children and disrupted support services. The ongoing socio-economic impact of the pandemic further exacerbates risks of violence, abuse, exploitation and harmful practices.

Action MUST NOT wait. Ending violence against children MUST be central to the COVID-19 recovery agenda.

Ending violence against children is not just the right thing to do, it is also a smart investment; an investment to prevent the devastating intergenerational, social and economic impact of violence both on children and on societies.

Violence against children is preventable. We are equipped with the INSPIRE strategies for evidence-based action. But there is a need for commitment at the highest level and multi sectoral engagement.

Ending violence against children cannot wait – children all over the world have waited long enough while other issues have taken priority over their safety and well-being.

Najat Maalla M'jid Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

As we move forward, children and young people must be central – our perspectives, our views and our recommendations. You have heard from us – we are not only the future – we are the present.

Anaseini Takipo Ulakai, Tonga, youth activist and MC of the Closing Session

Utilising the INSPIRE Strategies, conference participants identified the following key actions:

IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS – we must plug the data and evidence gap on violence against children

Data and evidence on violence are critical to design, target, monitor and implement the interventions that can improve the lives of children. However, there are big gaps in data. For example, 61% of countries in East Asia and Pacific do not have internationally comparable data on SDG 16.2.1 related to violent discipline and 82% do not have data on SDG indicator 16.2.3 related to girls' experience of sexual violence in childhood.

Evidence on what works to prevent and respond to violence against children in the region is also limited. For example, the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti and Campbell Collaboration [evidence and gap map on interventions to prevent and respond to violence against children](#) identified only 18 impact evaluations from East Asia and the Pacific. These studies focused primarily on the INSPIRE strategy on Education and life skills, followed by Parent and caregiver support. Interventions related to Implementation and enforcement of laws and Safe environments were the least represented.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- **Generate data** on violence against children at regular intervals.

- **Integrate data** collection on violence against children into **national data collection plans** and systems. This must be governed by a solid regulatory framework, alongside procedures for coordination and cooperation, political commitment, and dedicated resources.
- Review and **address gaps in the evidence base** by theme, type of violence, different population sub-groups and by country to improve the effectiveness of policies and programmes.
- Strengthen investment in **high-quality research**, undertake impact evaluations of interventions, and document adaptation of promising VAC interventions in different settings.
- **Share results** cross regionally and beyond to strengthen collective learning on what works.

NORMS AND VALUES – we must challenge the cultural beliefs that justify corporal punishment, as well as adopt laws that prohibit its use in all settings

Corporal punishment is a form of violence against children. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs and norms are a major factor hindering ending the practice of corporal punishment, together with the slow movement of law reform in the region (only 18% of countries in the region have full prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings) and lack of sustained awareness and education programmes on “alternative” non-violent/non-punitive ways of disciplining children.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- **Adopt laws that prohibit violence** against children in all settings.
- Create a sustained public and **community discourse** on ending the use of corporal punishment through cultural-based and creative initiatives.
- **Engage young people to identify solutions** required to end corporal punishment, as well as parents, teachers, and policy makers.

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS – we must ensure safety and empowerment online

While during the pandemic the online world provided a lifeline for many children to connect, learn, play and seek help, children also experienced increased time online and at a younger age heightening risks of abuse, exploitation and exposure to harmful content. Without doubt, the internet provides unparalleled opportunities for children and young people, and therefore, instead of restricting access, children and young people need to be supported to be safe online.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- Ensure that children are protected from all forms of online abuse, harassment and exploitation through **comprehensive laws, policies and practices**, and strengthened law enforcement, while recognizing the nexus between online and offline harms.
- **Ensure children and young people**, including girls and children from marginalized and at-risk groups, **are consulted** in the design of laws, policies and programmes.
- ICT companies, including social media companies, ensure availability of **effective and accessible reporting mechanisms** for online abuse and harm.
- Equip children and young people with awareness, information and **digital skills to stay safe online**.
- Equip parents, caregivers and teachers with information and digital skills to support children/students to stay safe online, including through **integration in positive parenting programmes and school curricula**.

- Not all children and young people have access to the internet. This needs to change. **Bridge the digital divide** by investing in accessible and independent digital infrastructure, with a view to providing access to free internet, technologies and digital literacy skills to all under-18-year-olds.
- Open up communication and decision-making channels for **children and young people** to meaningfully participate in **designing the future of the digital world**.

PARENT AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT – we must reduce violence through positive parenting programs at scale

Evidence clearly shows children and adolescents can only thrive and develop resilience against adversity when they feel safe and protected. The return on investment of parenting programmes for government budgets and societal well-being and other developmental outcomes across the life course is substantial, with research suggesting that every dollar spent on early childhood interventions delivers a 13% per annum return on investment, through better education, economic, health, and social outcomes

The socio-economic and health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a major strain on families throughout the region, which has exacerbated the risk of neglect, abuse and violence. The pandemic underscored the pivotal role of parents and caregivers in supporting and promoting the well-being of children and adolescents when other services have been disrupted, and it highlighted the strain of and risks created by added responsibilities parents face.

Parenting interventions offer a cost-effective, scalable mechanism to equip parents with the support, confidence and skills they need to provide nurturing, violent free care during the most critical years of child development, improving relationships, reducing conflict, relieving parenting stress and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and parents themselves. Evidence shows that positive parenting programmes can contribute to the reduction of physical and emotional violence, neglect and toxic stress.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- **Expand investment** in positive parenting programmes as a key strategy for primary prevention.
- Ensure a **minimum package of positive parenting** and caregiver programmes is universally available, as well as delivering additional support for high-risk families - not all caregivers require the same level or intensity of intervention, and needs may fluctuate and evolve over time.
- Design programmes to be **inclusive of both male and female** parents/caregivers, and parents of children of different ages across the lifecycle: infants, school-aged children and adolescents.
- Develop and adapt tools to **different target groups, including high risk and marginalized groups**, such as adolescent parents, children with disabilities, children affected by migration and children in conflict with the law.
- Consider **gender dynamics, well-being and mental health** of parents and caregivers and parent/caregiver relationships, including intimate partner violence, in the design of parenting programmes.
- Ensure parenting programmes are **embedded in public policies, institutions and budgets** across a range of sectors, including linking social protection and family support (cash and care), to achieve scalable and sustainable parenting programmes,
- Utilise **innovative digital parenting** initiatives for sustainable and scalable opportunities and rapid roll out of parenting programmes, as a complementary approach to face-to-face support, including for higher risk families.

RESPONSE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

While prevention is key to ending violence, millions of children in this region currently suffer violence. There must be an effective response to keep them safe from future harm and to help them to recover.

We must strengthen the social service workforce

An effective response to violence, abuse and exploitation requires a well-functioning and well-resourced child protection system with a strong social service workforce at its heart. The pandemic has shown us the critical role that social workers and the wider social service workforce, including informal community volunteers, play in reaching marginalised children and families in the region. The social service workforce will continue to play a critical role in mitigating the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- **Expand, professionalise, train and fund the workforce to be able to deliver effectively to tackle violence against children.** This includes: reforming legislation to professionalise social work; building the capacity of the workforce across sectors, including social welfare, health, justice, education and disaster management, through pre-service and in-service training and education, quality supervision, and coaching; and improving recruitment and retention of social workers by increasing job satisfaction, expanding opportunities for career development, and tackling negative public perceptions.
- Clearly **define the social service workforce** in a way that suits each country's specific needs and context. Such definitions should be inclusive to include a broad range of governmental and nongovernmental professionals and paraprofessionals who work with children, youth, adults, older persons, families and communities to ensure their healthy development and well-being
- Social workers play a key role in linking cash (social protection) and care for the vulnerable families and children. **Include strengthening the social service workforce in investment in social protection systems.**
- Establish a **secure digital case management solution** for social services (such as Primero¹¹) to support frontline workers to efficiently deliver integrated services for children, families and women, while ensuring confidentiality.
- Strengthen social service **information management for administrative data** to support data-driven decisions for programmes and policies on child protection and violence against children and women.

We must strengthen health sector capacity

In 2021 the World Health Organisation adopted a [resolution on ending violence against children through health systems strengthening and multisectoral approaches](#). The resolution emphasizes that the health sector is key to identifying, preventing and responding to violence against children across the world.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- Primary health care services and community-based healthcare workers play a critical role in ending violence against children, including during health emergencies such as COVID-19. It is necessary to **upskill and empower the health workforce** to identify children experiencing

¹¹ <https://www.primero.org/>

violence and to provide effective first line response, which cannot be replaced by any other sector, as well as to ensure effective referral from health to other key sectors including justice and social welfare.

- Health facilities and health workers provide an important entry point to addressing violence against children with parents and caregivers. We must **strengthen the capacity of health facilities** and health workers to address violence against children with parents and caregivers. This includes through home visitation programmes, early childhood care programs and risk screening.
- Preparedness and response initiatives for COVID-19 led by the health sector have given rise to **innovative modalities** of providing healthcare to vulnerable populations. We must utilize these modalities to **expand the reach and impact of interventions** to end violence against children – particularly for children who have been placed at higher risk of experiencing violence due to COVID-19.

We must transform mental health support and services for children and young people

Violence is a key driver of mental health issues amongst children and young people, while mental health issues contribute to violence, including amongst parents and caregivers. With 1 in 7 adolescents diagnosed with a mental health disorder and 1 adolescent dying from suicide every 11 minutes, urgent action on mental health is needed to prevent and respond to violence.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- The conference calls for a **transformation of mental health services** to effectively deliver quality mental health care and psychosocial support for children and young people.
- There needs to be a collective shift from mental illness to the value of ensuring mental health and wellbeing to society and communities. Efforts must be expanded to create an enabling environment that enhances protective factors and reduces risk factors across the life cycle of a child.
- **Multi-tiered services** need to be developed or strengthened for children and adolescents that can respond to the range of mental health issues facing children, as well as promotive and preventive interventions.
- **Services must be affordable and tailored** for children and young people, including the most marginalised. They must be made accessible to them in the environments and on platforms where they are and where they feel comfortable, including online, and be gender-responsive and adolescent friendly. Families should also be supported to facilitate access to services for their children.
- The **digital sphere** offers significant opportunities for increasing access and scaling up reach of mental health services. This includes information, awareness raising and professional support. But face to face professional support is needed as well and, therefore, the number of professional mental health workers must be increased.
- Responsibility for delivery of mental health support and services falls beyond only the health sector - **education, social welfare and justice have critical roles to play**. As Governments increase overall investment in mental health, social welfare, education and justice sectors must be included in planning, budgeting and resource allocation for mental health. Human resources for mental health must also be strengthened across sectors, including through upskilling and introducing new ways of working for specialists and non-specialists.
- **Stigma on mental health must be addressed** to ensure young people can speak out and reach out for support and services.

- Online and offline **peer to peer programmes provide critical support** - during COVID-19 we have seen the power of peer led mental health initiatives. Such initiatives should be encouraged, supported and facilitated.
- **Meaningful participation** of children and young people must be central to this strategic shift on mental health.

Sectors must collaborate and coordinate to effectively tackle violence against both children and women

Violence against women (VAW) and children are linked sharing risk factors. Intimate partner violence (IPV) and VAC often co-occur in the home. Adolescent girls are at heightened risk of violence. Violence against children and women has an intergenerational impact – adults who experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse as children are far more likely to be involved in interpersonal violence. It is not possible to end violence against women without ending violence against children and vice-versa.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- **VAC and VAW actors must collaborate to tackle violence** - effective collaboration is **possible, urgent and essential**. More brings the sectors working on violence against children and violence against women together than divides them.
- **Invest in prevention programmes which jointly address VAC and VAW** - these programmes offer significant opportunities for integrative and collaborative approaches to address the specific and shared underlying risk factors and harmful social norms leading to violence, including: integrating IPV prevention through positive parenting programmes, and strengthening school-based violence prevention programmes
- **Strengthen integration and coordination at front-line service points**, especially social welfare, police and health workers/centres, to ensure an effective and holistic response for children and women.
- **Increase public allocation of resources and donor funding to address both violence against children and violence against women** as mutually reinforcing systems, services and programmes.

EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS – We must end violence in, around and through schools

While we want to go back to school, many of us are also worried. Worried about COVID, about catching up on learning and about our safety and well-being in schools. So please support us.
Eula Genrill Dela Cruz, the Philippines (17 years old)

Violence in and around schools disrupts learning, school attendance and completion. Ending violence against children is critical to achieving education goals and for the COVID-19 learning recovery agenda. Without addressing mental wellbeing and violence, investment in the learning recovery will be undermined.

Key areas of action identified through the conference:

- Addressing violence against children and mental health and wellbeing must be a **central pillar in preparing to and reopening schools post-COVID 19**.
- Governments and schools must **ensure safety and well-being for students**.
- Schools have a critical role to play in reducing violence in and around schools and in communities. Schools must be a place of safety for children and a platform for **promoting zero tolerance** for

violence and abuse. Teachers and schools must be equipped to promote a **violence free school environment**, promote positive social norms and **mental wellbeing**.

- Schools must have **child protection policies and procedures** in place and teachers and school management must be ready and supported to **identify and refer students** needing child protection and mental health support.
- **Multi sectoral collaboration** between education, social welfare and health must be strengthened to integrate EVAC and mental health into the Back to School agenda.

ENDING VAC IN FUTURE EMERGENCIES - We must ensure we can effectively prevent and respond to violence against children in future crises

To ensure that child protection services (as well as social protection and mental health services) are recognized as essential and continue to be accessible and available to all children at all times, in all types of humanitarian settings including infectious disease outbreaks:

- The child protection system and workforce need to be **prepared, trained and equipped** to respond in times of emergency.
- Ensure the **centrality of children and their protection** in national disaster preparedness and response management system by prioritising actions to prevent and address risks and harmful practices that exacerbate and emerge in humanitarian settings and impact well-being and development of children of all genders, abilities and backgrounds.
- Countries **must designate social workers and the wider workforce** (Government and NGO) as an **essential workforce** during future emergencies to ensure continuity of critical child protection services.
- **Prevention** of violence against must be a **core component of child protection emergency** preparedness and response, promoting multisectoral collaboration to address the holistic needs of children.
- As a sector we must understand and prepare for the **impact of climate change** on child protection risks and vulnerabilities. Governments and disaster agencies must recognise the consequences of disasters and climate change on children and invest in anticipatory actions to mitigate risks and prevent child protection violations from occurring.

We know what to do and how to do it. So let's do it for and with children. And let's do it today and not tomorrow because, as you reminded us, children are not just the future they are the present and part of the solution!

Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

CLOSING SESSION



Ending Violence Against Children During COVID-19 and Beyond

Virtual Regional Conference to Strengthen Implementation of the INSPIRE Strategies

East Asia and the Pacific
1-5 November 2021



unicef
for every child



SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

WE MUST ENSURE SAFETY & EMPOWERMENT ONLINE

EFFECTIVE & ACCESSIBLE REPORTING MECHANISMS
LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

NORMS & VALUES

WE MUST CHALLENGE the CULTURAL BELIEFS THAT JUSTIFY CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

IMPLEMENTATION

WE MUST PLUG the DATA & EVIDENCE GAP ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



WE MUST ENSURE WE CAN EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN FUTURE CRISES/EMERGENCIES

PARENT & CAREGIVER SUPPORT

WE MUST REDUCE VIOLENCE through POSITIVE PARENTING PROGRAMS AT SCALE

KEY STRATEGY for PRIMARY PREVENTION

VIEWS of CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE CENTRAL

RESPONSE

WE MUST STRENGTHEN...

SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE
HEALTH SECTOR CAPACITY

WE MUST TRANSFORM MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT for CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

VIOLENCE & MENTAL HEALTH ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED

EDUCATION & LIFE SKILLS

WE MUST ENSURE SAFETY & WELL BEING IN SCHOOLS, INCLUDING AS SCHOOLS REOPEN

PROMOTE ZERO TOLERANCE for VIOLENCE & ABUSE
POSITIVE SOCIAL NORMS & MENTAL WELL BEING

ENDING VIOLENCE MUST BE PART of the COVID-19 RECOVERY AGENDA

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IS PREVENTABLE AND WE HAVE THE TOOLS TO PREVENT IT

SECTORS MUST COLLABORATE & COORDINATE to EFFECTIVELY TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST BOTH CHILDREN & WOMEN



INSPIRE



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terre des hommes
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End Corporal Punishment

Love Does Not Hurt
PROTECT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
Prevention, Protection and Justice



UN WOMEN



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