Prevention programmes for school and college populations (SV) and create environments that are safe for all citizens. Protecting people from violence, holding perpetrators accountable is likely to lead to significant violence prevention gains.

Figure 15: The proportion of countries with laws to prevent violence and the extent to which countries report these laws as being fully enforced (n = 133 reporting countries)

For all laws, levels of reported enforcement were usually much lower than the enactment of legislation

Overall, the average proportion of countries in which each of the laws was reported to have been enacted was 80%, while the average proportion of countries in which each of the laws was reportedly enacted and fully enforced was 57%. The biggest gaps between the reported existence and enforcement of laws – a difference of 46 and 43 percentage points respectively – related to bans on corporal punishment and to domestic/family violence legislation. Focusing on better enforcement of existing laws is likely to lead to significant violence prevention gains. This should include attending to institutional mechanisms and resources, and increasing human capacity to ensure that enacted legislation is doing what it is intended to do – protect people from violence, hold perpetrators accountable and create environments that are safe for all citizens.

With the exception of countries in the European Region, less than half of countries reported that bans on corporal punishment were fully enforced. There is some evidence to suggest that enactment of a ban may be sufficient to change attitudes and behaviour around the use of corporal punishment. For instance, findings from a multi-country study conducted in five European countries (three with bans on corporal punishment and two without) found that nearly all forms of corporal punishment were used less in countries with bans than in those in which corporal punishment was lawful (97). Parents in countries with bans in place were also less accepting of corporal punishment and stated that their knowledge of the ban was one of four factors that most affected whether or not they used corporal punishment. Other factors influencing them included the parent’s definition of physical violence, personal approval of corporal punishment, and their own experience of childhood violence.