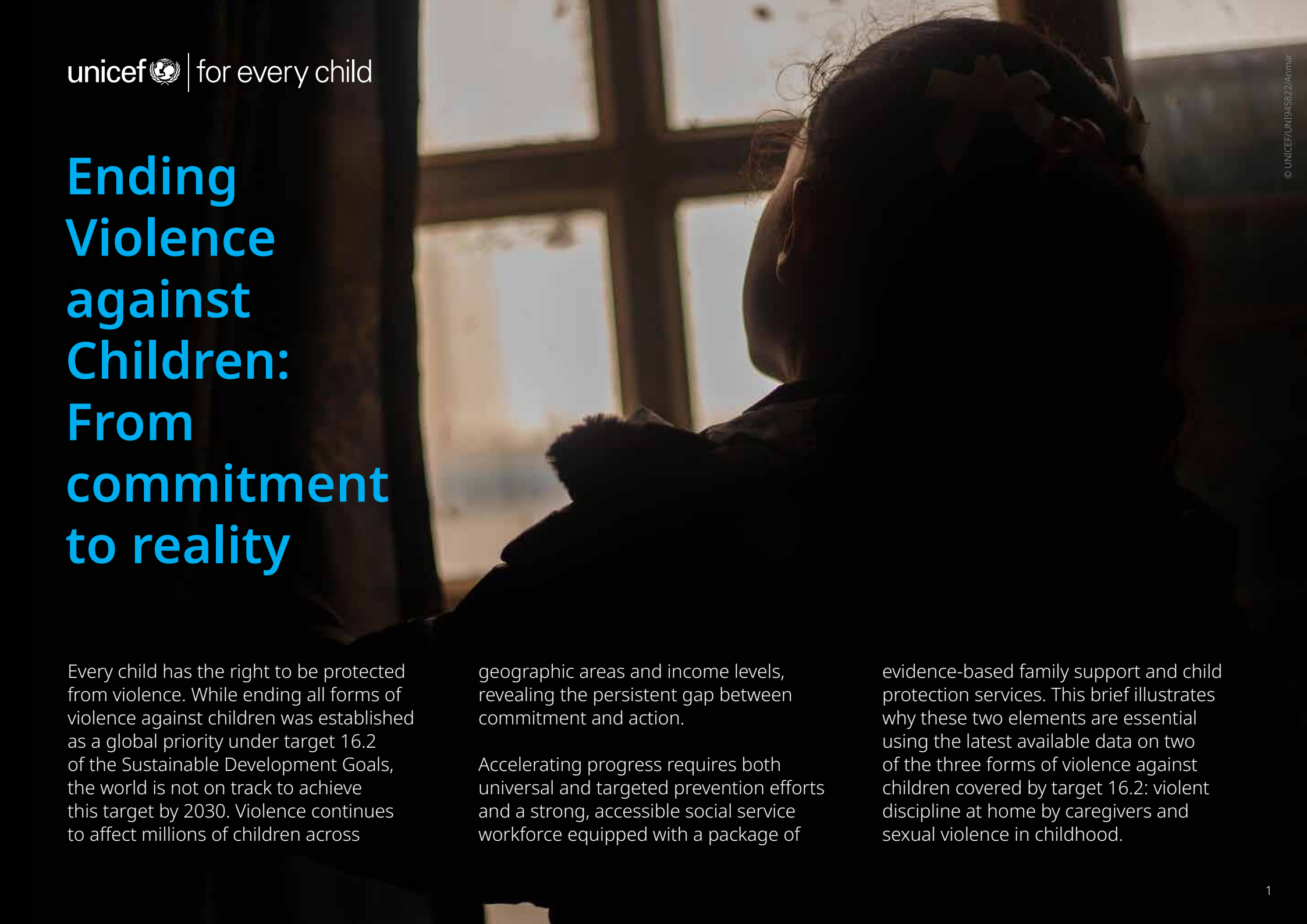
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Ending Violence against Children: From commitment to reality



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Every child has the right to be protected from violence. While ending all forms of violence against children was established as a global priority under target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is not on track to achieve this target by 2030. Violence continues to affect millions of children across geographic areas and income levels, revealing the persistent gap between commitment and action.

Accelerating progress requires both universal and targeted prevention efforts and a strong, accessible social service workforce equipped with a package of evidence-based family support and child protection services. This brief illustrates why these two elements are essential using the latest available data on two of the three forms of violence against children covered by target 16.2: violent discipline at home by caregivers and sexual violence in childhood.

Violence against children is widespread



Universal and targeted prevention efforts must continue and expand to prevent all forms of violence against children before they occur, and to prevent recurrence and escalation – both in development and humanitarian contexts.

2 in 3
children
experience any form of violent discipline at home

About
half
of children
experience psychological aggression and less severe forms of physical punishment at home

1 in 5
girls and women
and around
1 in 7
boys and men
have experienced any form of sexual violence in childhood

About
1 in 12
girls and women
have experienced only non-contact sexual violence in childhood

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Strong child protection systems are critical to preventing and responding to severe violence

Children who experience severe forms of violence require immediate access to qualified social workers, child protection case management, child-friendly justice and specialized family support services to ensure their safety and prevent further harm – both in development and humanitarian contexts. Effective child protection systems require strong coordination and collaboration with health, education, justice and other allied sectors to deliver integrated services for children and families.

1 in 8
children
experience severe physical punishment at home

1 in 8
girls and women

and around

1 in 11
boys and men
have experienced contact sexual violence in childhood

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In humanitarian contexts, violence against children is even more common, especially the most severe forms

Child protection systems must be well prepared for crises and an integral part of the humanitarian response. The Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) equip humanitarians seeking to protect children effectively with the most comprehensive and up-to-date best practices.

20%
of children
in conflict-affected countries experience severe physical punishment compared with 9% in other countries

20% **of women**
aged 18 and older in conflict-affected countries experienced contact sexual violence in childhood compared with 12% in other countries

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National income only does not determine a child's risk of violence

Substantial differences in the prevalence of violence against children across countries, even among those with comparable levels of national income, highlight that economic development alone does not determine children's risk of violence. These variations call for country-specific violence prevention strategies and child protection systems that respond to distinct national contexts and needs.

16%
of children
in low-income countries experience severe physical punishment compared with 3% of those in high-income countries

26%
of women
aged 18 and older in low-income countries experienced contact sexual violence in childhood compared with 15% of those in high-income contexts

Although levels of severe physical punishment and contact sexual violence tend to be higher, on average, in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, these averages mask considerable variation within income groups. For example, the prevalence of severe physical punishment in low-income countries ranges from below 5 per cent to nearly 60 per cent, while prevalence of contact sexual violence among girls ranges from around 1 per cent to more than 40 per cent among lower-middle-income countries.

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Given the persistently high prevalence of different forms of violence against children worldwide, accelerating progress towards SDG target 16.2 remains an urgent priority. This requires renewed political commitment, sustained investment, stronger child protection systems capable of delivering evidence-based services at scale, and the large-scale implementation of proven universal and targeted prevention interventions.

UNICEF calls on governments and development partners, alongside child victims and survivors, to align national targets and investments with the best available evidence on what works, for whom, in which contexts, at what cost and with what lasting impact. Future targets should be backed by concrete commitments on legislation, policy reform, workforce development and financing to scale effective and country-specific packages of prevention and response services and to sustain impact.



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Data sources and notes

UNICEF global databases, 2026, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, 2006–2025.

Violent discipline includes any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression. Severe physical punishment includes hitting or slapping a child in the face, on the head or ears, or hitting or beating a child hard and repeatedly. Contact sexual violence includes rape and sexual assault while non-contact sexual violence includes forms such as verbal or online abuse.

For details on data coverage and methods for the estimates on pages 2 and 3, refer to: United Nations Children's Fund, *Data Brief on Violence against Children at Home*, UNICEF, 2025 and United Nations Children's Fund, *When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

The estimates on pages 4 and 5 are based on the World Bank's classification of economies by income groups and FY2026 classification of conflict-affected situations. In the analyses by income groups and by conflict classification, population coverage for contact sexual violence is above 50 per cent and for severe physical punishment is above 40 per cent.

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