

# The Sustainable Development Agenda: **The Role of Social Services**

## **SDG 16 on Ending Violence against Children**





## About this policy briefing

This policy briefing has been drafted in the framework of the 2021 meeting of the European Social Network's (ESN) Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim of ESN's Working Group on the SDGs is to explore the role of social services in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda at national, regional and local levels.

The 2021 meeting brought together representatives from social services across Europe to discuss their role in the implementation of SDG16.2 on ending the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children. Specifically, this policy briefing addresses the crucial role played by social services in preventing, reporting and responding rapidly to all cases of child harm, neglect and abuse to advance the implementation of SDG16.2.

Data for this policy briefing was collected through desk research, the input from ESN members of the SDGs Working Group and presentations at an ESN webinar on the topic on 3-4 March 2021.

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## About the European Social Network

ESN is the independent network for local public social services in Europe. It brings together organisations that plan, finance, research, manage, regulate, deliver and inspect local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

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## 1. Introduction

### Implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda: **The Role of Social Services**

*The global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides social services with an opportunity to emphasise their role related to people's empowerment, upholding human rights, social justice, promoting social inclusion, and social development and investment. The global agenda enhances this possibility as the SDGs have a series of similarities in relevance and application with social services' practice. However, we have also identified a number of challenges as social services authorities and agencies are not always part of cross-cutting initiatives adopted to implement the sustainable development agenda at national and local levels.*

As part of the European Social Network (ESN)'s 2018-2021 work programme, in 2018 ESN launched a Working Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The aim of this working group is to highlight the role of social services in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and find synergies with other social policy initiatives at European level. Each year, the Group addresses a specific goal relevant for social inclusion of population groups with whom social services work on a daily basis.

In 2018, the Group explored the role of social services in the implementation of SDG1 on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. In 2019, the Group met to discuss SDG3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. The Group's work in 2020 focused on SDG11 on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

These meetings led to the production of three policy briefings:

- European Social Network (2018), [Policy Briefing – Implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda: the Role of Social Services – SDG1](#).
- European Social Network (2019), [The Sustainable Development Agenda – The Role of Social Services – SDG3 Improving health and well-being](#).
- European Social Network (2020), [The Sustainable Development Agenda – The Role of Social Services. The Future is Local and Social! SDG11: Cities' social services' role in local inclusion and sustainable strategies](#).

The documents explore the role of local public social services in the implementation of the SDGs, showcase best practice from the local level and present challenges and recommendations in progress towards achieving the SDGs.

In 2021, the Working Group focused on SDG16.2 that aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. During the meeting, social services representatives shared their insights regarding the challenges they face in fighting child violence and their proposals for legislation, policy, strategies, and programmes that can help to achieve SDG 16.2. Contributions from ESN members were complemented by presentations from representatives of key international organisations with a mandate to combat violence against children, including World Health Organization (WHO), Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations (UN) Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children.

This policy briefing describes the background to the international work on ending violence against children. Then, it presents examples of legislation, policy and practice in three European countries, and concludes with recommendations for child protection to address the challenges identified in fighting violence against children.

## 2. Background to the international work on fighting violence against children

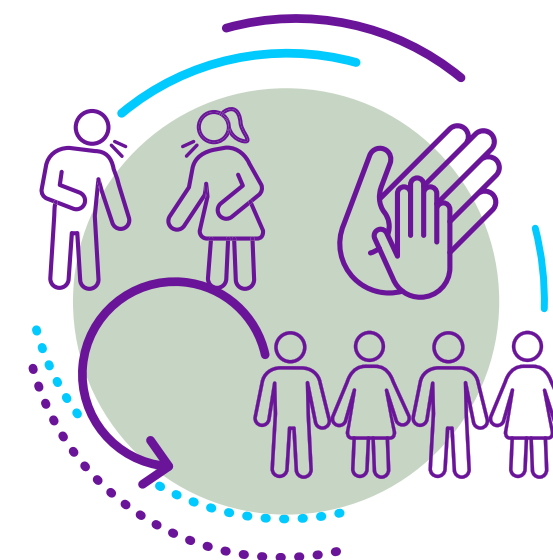
It is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged between 2 and 17 have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year<sup>1</sup>. Experiencing violence in childhood impacts lifelong health and wellbeing. It is also associated with far-reaching costs for society, including economic, legal and ethical ones. At the same time, evidence shows that child abuse can be prevented through appropriate legal and policy measures<sup>2</sup>.

[WHO recognises](#) as violence against children:

- **maltreatment (including neglect of infants, children and adolescents both in their own homes and in care settings);**
- **bullying;**
- **youth violence;**
- **intimate partner violence;**
- **sexual violence**
- **and other types of emotional or psychological violence (including denigration, ridicule and discrimination).**

[According to the Council of Europe](#) (CoE), violence against children constitutes a violation of the rights of the child, compromises children's social development, and affects the enjoyment of their other rights<sup>3</sup>.

Research shows that child abuse may result in child's death, severe injuries, impairment of the brain and nervous system development, a wide range of non-communicable diseases, unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and the development of negative coping and health risk behaviour. These, in turn, seriously impact opportunities for future generations<sup>4</sup>.



**“Violence against children is a multifaceted problem with causes at the individual, close relationship, community and societal levels”.**

WHO

Crucial risk factors at individual level include sex and age, lower levels of education and disability or mental health problems. At close relationship level, children lacking emotional bonding between themselves and parents, or caregivers and those witnessing violence between parents or caregivers are especially vulnerable. At community level, key risk factors include poverty, low social cohesion and populations without a permanent home. Finally, at society level the absence of or inadequate social protection alongside the lack of health, economic, educational and social policies contributes towards the prevalence of child abuse.

At the same time, the CoE highlights that progress in combating violence against children is seriously hampered by insufficient investment in violence prevention, fragmented and poorly enforced national policies, scarce data and research, as well as insufficient attention to child-sensitive mechanisms for counselling, reporting, recovery and reintegration<sup>5</sup>.

The following examples of policy frameworks against child abuse offer hope of breaking out of the vicious circle of violence against children. And they show that public social services have a key role to play in this process.

### 3. Social Services: Key in the implementation of international and European policy frameworks

#### 3.1 WHO's INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children

The [INSPIRE project](#)<sup>6</sup> includes seven strategies that violence against children in a holistic way. All the strategies are based on three key criteria: suggested model interventions must be effective, promising and prudent.

**Effectiveness** indicates that at least two quality impact studies have found favourable, statistically significant impact in one or more violence against children domains (i.e. maltreatment, bullying, youth violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence);

**Promising** adds to the previous condition the requirement for the intervention to have a positive impact for risk or protective factors related to violence against children (such as educational attainment, positive parenting skills, communication between parents and children about effective strategies for avoiding exposure to violence, increased parental supervision);

**Prudent** interventions should be consistent with the actions recommended by global treaties and resolutions.

**Public social services design, manage, fund, deliver and inspect services implementing these strategies.** The key role of social services in delivering strategies aimed at achieving the goal of ending violence against children is particularly relevant for items 6, 5 and 4 of this framework. According to the INSPIRE programme "Increasing the proportion of children that receive responsive and supporting services requires that effective child-focused services and mechanisms for children to seek help, support and care, and to report violent incidents, are put in place".

In line with ESN recommendations on a European Child Guarantee, the WHO notes that national action plans are the basis for coherent efforts by countries to address violence. Though 80% of countries report having such plans, globally only one-fifth of them are fully funded, and in low-income countries this share drops to 10%. Furthermore, nationally representative data on the prevalence of violence against children, disaggregated by age and gender, are of critical importance. While 68% of countries collect data, only one fifth of them use it for the development of child-oriented policies, explained Alexander Butchart, Head of the Violence Prevention Unit at the WHO at ESN webinar on fighting violence against children. What is even more alarming is that only one in four countries report that prevention programmes and response services reach everyone who needs them, and in low-income countries this percentage drops to just 10%.

Key WHO recommendations include prioritising data collection and data driven national action plans, using scientific evidence for policy-making and ensuring adequate funding for the effective implementation of all planned activities.

## 7 SEVEN STRATEGIES ENDORSED BY THE WHO

### 1. Implementation and enforcement of laws:

- Banning violent punishment of children by parents, teachers or other caregivers
- Criminalising sexual abuse and exploitation of children
- That prevent alcohol misuse
- Limiting youth access to firearms and other weapons



### 2. Working on norms and values, through:

- Changing adherence to restrictive and harmful gender and social norms
- Community mobilisation programmes
- Bystander interventions



### 3. Providing safe environment, through:

- Reducing violence by addressing "hotspots"
- Interrupting the spread of violence
- Improving built environments



### 4. Supporting parents and caregivers, through:

- Home visits
- Community settings
- Comprehensive programmes



### 5. Economic strengthening, through:

- Cash transfers
- Group saving and loans combined with gender equity training
- Microfinance combined with gender norm training



### 6. Developing responsive and supporting services, through:

- Counselling and therapeutic approaches
- Screening combined with interventions
- Treatment programmes for juvenile offenders in the criminal justice system
- Foster care interventions involving social welfare services



### 7. Providing education and life skills, through:

- Increasing enrolment in pre-school, primary and secondary schools
- Establishing a safe and enabling school environment
- Improving children's knowledge about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it
- Life and social skills training
- Adolescent intimate partner violence prevention programmes





**“The role of public social services is central to most of the interventions that have been shown effective in reducing violence against children”.**

Alexander Butchart, Head of the Violence Prevention Unit – Social Determinants of Health Department, WHO

### 3.2 Council of Europe: Reporting – Integrating – Participating

The recognition of the key role of data collection and evidence-based policy planning also underpins the work done by the Council of Europe (CoE), which has developed [a Strategy for the Rights of the Child](#) (2022-2027) in response to the continuous prevalence of violence against children in European countries.

A working group on responses to violence against children is responsible for the development of non-binding instruments and tools containing guidance for Member States on systems for professionals to report violence against children, measures and interventions aimed at preventing peer violence, and sexual abusive behaviour by children. Moreover, the Group supports the review of progress made at national and European level towards the SDGs with a special focus on SDG16.2.

The CoE recommendations show that the involvement of social services is particularly crucial in the area of reporting, as violence against children includes not only blatant cases of children's rights violations such as child-trafficking, but also broader failures to provide adequate care and proper conditions for children's development. These include, for example neglect, which can be most easily identified by social workers working directly with families and children. European recommendations on reporting violence against children would only be effective if local services are able to act on

them. Thus, ESN as representative of the social services' sector and the voice of many local and regional authorities responsible for child protection, has been consulted both at the stage of development and implementation of the guidelines.

**“Even the best recommendations for effective reporting of violence against children will be ineffective if they are not widely communicated and agreed with social services. Therefore, ESN's experience of working with over 150 social services organisations brings an invaluable perspective to the ongoing discussion on adequate guidelines for professionals reporting on child abuse”.**

Alfonso Lara Montero, Chief Executive Officer, European Social Network.

The key significance of integrated social services is also envisaged in the [CoE policy guidelines](#) on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence<sup>8</sup>. According to the guidelines “the state should support families in their child-rearing role by providing for a network of accessible, flexible and quality childcare services”<sup>9</sup>. The guidelines discuss also decentralisation and privatisation of social services and their possible impact on the capacity of regional and local authorities to contribute to the effective pro-

tection of children. In addition, the CoE highlights that the strenuous physical and psychological environments, where services supporting children affected by violence work, involve the need for the workforce to be provided with supervision, counselling, complementary training and the possibility to set up professional interest groups. Finally, the guidelines stress the importance of effective services provision at local level, since this is where children receive the support they need.

**“We believe that public social services are key in helping us prepare European instruments that reflect the real needs of children and professionals working on the ground”.**

Maren Lambrecht-Feigl, Programme Officer in the Children's Rights Division of the Directorate-General of Democracy, Council of Europe.

Social services are in a unique position to answer the CoE's call for increased participation of children in all policy and decision-making processes, including those concerning violence against children. Many frontline social workers are in direct contact with vulnerable children and can serve as a primary contact point to collect their opinions and concerns regarding the development of adequate responses to child abuse. This has been acknowledged in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on participation of children and young people, according to which all Member States should ensure that providers of services for families and children support children and young people to participate in service development, delivery and evaluation.

## Impact on Covid-19 on child protection

*Covid-19 has impacted the lives of children from vulnerable backgrounds, but even before the pandemic, the effectiveness of dealing with child abuse needed improvement. The Covid-19 crisis has however highlighted the systemic problems with which child protection services have had to deal for years. In [ESN's publication on the impact of Covid-19 on social services](#), we underlined the problem of under-reporting of violence against children, especially during lockdown, in line with the WHO and the CoE. Without knowing the exact extent of child abuse, it is very difficult to estimate the impact of the pandemic on young generations, but this does not relieve the relevant authorities of their responsibility to counteract the negative consequences as effectively as possible.*



## 4. Social Services: Key in the implementation of national policy frameworks

### 4.1 France: New paradigm of child-centered services

Marie-Paule Martin Blachais from ESN member, the École de la Protection de l'Enfance, presented at the webinar the paradigm shift in child protection that has taken place in France over the last decades. The child protection system was set up in France in the 1950s and was based on a decisive division of powers between social services on the one hand and the judiciary, responsible for making the final decision on the welfare of children, on the other. At the same time, all policy choices were made centrally, at national level. This situation began to change gradually in the 1980s, when some responsibility for social policy planning was transferred to regional authorities. In addition, the approach of those in power to family policy in general begun to change. Before, the view in French society was that parental problems should be solved within the family and that the state should not interfere in the upbringing of children.

France's adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child led to a change in many long-held beliefs and led as well to passing in 2007 the law on 'the protection of children at risk in France'.

The law provides for

- systematic psychosocial interviews from the fourth month of pregnancy to identify problems that may create future difficulties in the mother to child bond;
- systematic contact between parents and child protection services (PMI) in hospital;
- evaluation of the wellbeing of all children aged 3 to 4 in nursery schools and children aged 6 in primary schools;
- regular screening for physical, psychological, sensory and learning disorders;
- help for adolescents in distress through

the development of listening centres, day centres and mediation centres between parents and children;

- creation in each local authority of a unit for the collection, processing and evaluation of information of concern regarding children;
- creation of an observatory in each local authority to gather statistics transferred to local government, national and judicial authorities;
- clarification of the division of roles: child social welfare services intervene in the first place and the judiciary only 'in cases of clear danger' or if the parents cannot or will not accept the support proposed by child social welfare;
- expansion of the range of care options: day care in a place close to home, or temporary care, for example at weekends;
- support for children and adolescents suffering from serious behavioural disorders in therapeutic family reception units;
- creation of a national fund for the financing of child protection.

The law was then updated in 2016 with the introduction of the National Council for Child Protection, with responsibility for:

- proposing the Government the national policy guidelines for child protection to build a national strategy;
- promoting convergence of local policies by drawing on other experiences;
- formulating recommendations on training for child protection professionals.

The Council consists of 82 members representing national and local authorities, third sector, professionals, training bodies and independent experts, and works based on five thematic committees on:

- adoption and foster care;
- prevention and early identification;
- adapting interventions to the needs of children;
- improving knowledge of child protection and developing research;
- improving training in child protection.

The new strategy on child protection includes also the adoption of additional legislation focusing on specific issues such as sexual violence, domestic violence or support for young people leaving care.

Of equal importance are the steps taken by the French High Authority of Health ('HAS') at the beginning of 2021. The office has drawn up the first national framework for the overall assessment of the situation of children at risk. The objective is to harmonise practices throughout the country to allow the best care for every child.

### HAS: Reference framework for the overall evaluation of a child at risk

*The HAS stresses that the process of evaluating information related to situations of concern must be centered on the child or adolescent and relate to all their areas of life like their development, physical and mental health, schooling and social life, relationships with the family, and support provided by their parents for basic needs.*

*At local level, the process must be multidisciplinary ; for example, through a team of social workers, health professionals and psychologists.*

*Depending on the context, whether disability, neurodevelopmental disorders, addiction, or others, additional skills should be mobilised.*

*Finally, the process must also be participatory: it is carried out with the child or adolescent, their parents and other members of their social network, like professionals working with the child but also, depending on the situation and the issues raised, members of the immediate and enlarged family, friends etc<sup>10</sup>.*



The École de la Protection de l'Enfance underlines that the real challenge is to have the legislation principles going down through all the system in form of clear procedures and good practice examples for practitioners. Yet local authorities should be allowed some discretion in shaping their policies, while ensuring that this does not result in differences in protection and quality of life between localities.

**“ It is written in our framework that the aim of the child care policy is to guarantee the respect of the child's best interest, taking care of their psychological, physical, social and emotional needs”.**

Dr. Marie-Paule Martin-Blachais, Scientific and Pedagogic Director, École de la Protection de l'Enfance, France.



## 4.2 Scotland: National strategy for child protection

ESN member, the Directorate General for Health and Social Care at the Scottish government, presented the main challenges faced by the country in protecting children. The most alarming figures concern domestic violence and the increase in drug use among minors. Already high, these indicators reached dramatic levels as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The high percentage of children with at least one parent in prison is also a cause for concern. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that many children experience abuse and neglect not in their families but in care settings, which have a particular duty to protect them.

To counteract the above, the Scottish Government started in 2016 the implementation of a comprehensive Child Protection Improvement Programme (CPIP). The strategy includes:

- implementing the recommendations of an independent child protection systems review to identify and address weaknesses in the system;
- taking action to tackle and prevent child neglect;
- taking action to tackle and prevent child sexual exploitation;
- working with partners to implement the children's actions outlined in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy;
- supporting children affected by parental substance misuse;
- working with partners to keep children safe online;
- providing national guidance for child protection in Scotland to help professionals to understand and agree processes for safeguarding children's wellbeing<sup>11</sup>.

[The guidance](#), mentioned in the last point, provides a framework for all social services' practitioners at local level to agree processes to work together to safeguard and promote children's wellbeing. The document stresses that everyone working with children and their families, including social workers, health professionals, police, educational staff, voluntary organisations and the third sector, as well as members of the community, need to appreciate the important role they can play in remaining vigilant and providing robust support for child protection<sup>12</sup>.

It is highlighted that social services can improve outcomes for all children by adopting common frameworks for assessment, planning and action that help them to identify needs and risks of the most vulnerable populations<sup>13</sup>. The guidance sets out expectations for strategic planning of services to protect children and young people and highlights key responsibilities for services and organisations, both individual and shared. It also serves as a resource for practitioners on specific areas of practice and key issues in child protection<sup>14</sup>.



The creation of new guidance was informed by 'The Promise' report published by the Independent Care Review, established by Scotland's First Minister. The Care Review heard from more than 5,500 people including children, adults, and families who have personal experience of care, as well as the unpaid and paid workforce<sup>15</sup>. The report brought about five main recommendations:

- Actively listening to children must be at the heart of the system ;
- The system must protect and uphold children's rights, decriminalise children and destigmatise care ;
- The care system must protect relationships important to children ;
- Every participant in the children's hearing system must be trauma informed and aware ;
- Help must be delivered much earlier and the hearing system must plan to shrink and specialise.

Alongside, the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act was adopted in 2019 making all physical punishment of a child unlawful.

Additionally, the Upstream Project was launched, helping adults and communities in Scotland to prevent child sexual abuse. It consists of an online database divided into seven sections: Know; Learn; Identify; Prevent; Act; Engage Community; Get Help. The project aims to equip adults and children with knowledge and concrete tools to respond to child abuse. Each chapter is enriched by a FAQ section to find answers to frequently asked questions, e.g. What if I don't like the way my uncle is playing with my daughter? Or what are the warning signs of child abuse? Or how do I make my church group safer? Last year saw 8,270 people in Scotland using a 'Get Help' link to find out about support options.

***“ The biggest challenge we face is supporting families earlier and supporting them in a way that makes sense for them. There is a great need for more flexibility in reaching out to those families that we find most difficult to engage with. This is where collaboration between the social services' third sector, local government and national government is essential”.***

James Cox, Children and Families Lead, Social Work Scotland & Professional Adviser, Scottish Government Child Protection, Scotland, United Kingdom



### 4.3 Integrated Care Unit for Child Victims of Sexual Abuse – implementation of the Barnahus model in Catalonia, Spain

**Barnahus**<sup>16</sup> (which literally means Children's house) is a child-friendly, interdisciplinary and multiagency centre, first established in Iceland, whereby different professionals work under one roof in investigating suspected child sexual abuse cases and providing appropriate support for child victims. The activities are based on a partnership between the police, the prosecutor, health and child protection services and national agency.

The basic concept of Barnahus is to avoid subjecting the child to repeated interviews by many agencies in different locations. Research has shown that when this happens, it can be very traumatic for the child. This 're-victimization' can even have more harmful effects on the child than the abuse itself. Furthermore research has shown that repeated interviews carried out by people that are not specifically trained in forensic interviewing are likely to distort the child accounts of events by suggestive questioning with detrimental effect on the criminal investigation. Another aim of the Children's house is to provide a child friendly environment for investigative interviews which reduces the level of anxiety of the child and in turn is crucial for successfully eliciting the child's disclosure.

The Children's House is located in a residential area and its interior is designed to maximise the child's comfort e.g. with toys, pictures and selection of colours. The child is interviewed in a special room by a trained investigative interviewer according to an

evidence-based protocol. The interview is observed in a different room by a judge, who is formally in charge of the procedure, a social worker from child protection authorities, the police, the prosecution, the defence attorney and the child's advocate. The interview is videotaped and is used in court if an indictment is made.

This arrangement makes it possible to do with only one interview with the child as the child does not need to appear in court. The House also provides treatment services for child victims of sexual abuse and their families. The child is assessed for therapeutic purposes and an individual treatment plan is designed and executed either at the facilities or as near as possible to their home<sup>17</sup>.

Inspired by the Nordic Barnahaus model, the General Directorate for Social Affairs at the regional government of Catalonia, Spain, opened in July 2020 an Integrated Care Unit for children who are victims of sexual abuse. The Unit was set up to become the effective coordination point of the administrative and judicial services responsible for the care and protection of children and adolescents who are victims of sexual abuse in a single centre designed to be friendly and welcoming.

The aim of the service is to be integrated, comprehensive and to provide effective care for children and adolescents who may be victims of sexual abuse. The professionals in the Unit do not only participate in prevention and identification of situations of sexual abuse, but they also promote research and specialist training on sexual abuse.

***“ We started to work on the idea three years ago and it finally became a reality in 2019. We started with a pilot model to then see as to whether we would transfer to the whole region and we are now supporting 130 children”.***

Ester Cabanes, General Director for Childhood, Regional Government of Catalonia, Spain

The service consists of 7 professionals, including a service coordinator and a team of social workers and psychologists, who are located in the integrated unit, and others from home affairs, health, education, or justice who travel there to carry out specific tasks. The facilities are located in a welcoming, accessible environment that ensures that the privacy of children and adolescents is preserved. The Unit promotes, facilitates and guarantees the coordination and cooperation of the different professionals within and outside the team, and the administrative and judicial services, so that this care is comprehensive, integrated, and effective.

Through this service, the authorities wish to reduce assessments and interviews with children and adolescents who are victims of sexual abuse, especially those prior to the reporting and judicial process, through an integrated inter-professional and inter-agency coordination and cooperation mechanism. Another aim of the Unit is to encourage collaborative work and expertise in care for children who are victims of sexual abuse to provide them with specialist care and support. Finally, the Unit promotes abuse prevention, research and specialist training for professionals working with children in these situations.





# WAY FORWARD

## Breaking the cycle of violence against children

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, violence against children and the need to act has become even more pronounced, due to disruptions in prevention and response services.

Across Europe, there are children vulnerable to abuse, which can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological. Despite increasing condemnation by international and national institutions, and a growing body of legislation, policy, and child-centred practice to protect them, violence remains a harsh daily reality in many children's lives.

Public social services have a statutory duty to protect all children from violence, but this duty transcends social services and applies to all public services working with children. Members of the European Social Network (ESN) in public child protection services highlight that their primary practice guidance is led by principle three on children's best interest of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). Yet there are several questions to make sure that children's best interest are effectively implemented.

## Key themes to address violence against children

There are **three overarching questions** that should be addressed at local, national and international levels if we are to tackle violence against children in line with the international goals for sustainable development (SDGs) that include a commitment to end all forms of violence against children.



The interrelated and co-dependent nature of the goals for sustainable development (SDGs), particularly when we discuss violence against children. Within the context of the SDGs, we cannot hope to adequately address and end violence against children without addressing poverty, health, education, gender, social exclusion or peaceful societies.



Fighting violence against children, like the SDGs themselves, cannot be seen as an international agenda that is relevant only for countries outside Europe's borders. Fifty-five million children a year are victims of violence in Europe, a figure that the Covid-19 pandemic will have further exacerbated. This demonstrates the need for national and local integrated and coordinated strategies to respond to children's violence in European countries.



Shifting the approach towards integrated and holistic systems anchored in the UN CRC that place children at the centre of service design and delivery to respond to the needs of the child.

## Key steps in ending violence against children

There are two key steps that must be undertaken to ensure that violence against all children stops of which public social services are an integral part.



Create a paradigm shift towards legislative and policy frameworks anchored to the UN CRC.



Invest in social services and its workforce so that they can be reinforced to improve the way in which they meet the needs of children, work towards changing attitudes to prevent violence, and be able to respond more effectively to incidents as they occur.

Within this paradigm shift, it is crucial to highlight the **key role of public social services both in prevention towards societal and family attitudes, and the right form of timely interventions**. As the statutory body responsible for the protection of children from violence, social services should receive the necessary investment to be equipped with the tools to ensure that the fight against children's violence is a reality.

## Understanding the role of social services in protecting children against violence

To understand the role of social services in safeguarding children, it is essential to comprehend the current status of children exposed to violence. Social services are crucial in protecting children from violence. However, they cannot work alone. Indeed, social work is about building relationships with people to work collaboratively with them.

Best practice from local child protection services are moving forward towards a new legal and policy paradigm to put **children at the centre**, but there should be clear and easily understood national guidelines for local authorities to implement. Dialogue and cross-sectoral partnerships are crucial to protect children.



During the discussion of the working group, participants shared their opinions on the various challenges involved in safeguarding children from violence, including:



difficulties associated with these cross-sectoral partnerships ;



the importance of having **a common language across** all sectors to achieve a large impact from the local to the European level ;



the need to **listen to the voice of children and putting them at the centre** when designing local strategies to end violence against children. Indeed, child protection and child social welfare policy is vital as it offers opportunities for children to flourish, children who otherwise would be neglected and subject to violence.



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