

# VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

## REGIONAL CONSULTATION EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



United Nations Secretary-General's Study  
on Violence against Children

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

This is one of a series of booklets reporting on the regional consultations organized to contribute to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.

In preparation for the meetings, all the regions researched the situation in their region and prepared a compilation and analysis of concluding observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to country reports submitted by States Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Governments and others also provided information on programmes and projects designed to prevent violence against children, protect them and support those who had fallen victim to it. Governments were requested to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit information on the legal frameworks in place to protect children from violence and sanction those responsible for it. Public submissions were sought and input from civil society organizations taken into account. Also, a number of countries held national consultations to prepare for the regional meeting and in many cases the national groups put in place mechanisms to continue efforts to combat violence against children as the Study process continues.

All this preparatory work allowed a clearer picture to be gained not only of what already exists in the areas of protection of children, prevention of violence and support to victims, but also where gaps and challenges remain.

In each region, the participants in the consultation – including children and young people themselves – developed an outcome document that in most cases was both a statement of intent and also a practical indication of actions that need to be taken. In some regions, countries also developed specific national action plans that they undertook to implement as a matter of priority.

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The full reports of the consultations, the background materials prepared for the meetings including government's completed questionnaires, the statements of the children and young people and the outcome documents are available on the Study website: [www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org).

This report contains highlights of the regional consultation and summarizes the background information prepared. Sources and references are to be found in the original materials. Additionally, a consultation website contains copies of speeches and submissions received from participants in the consultation: [www.europe-ca.violencestudy.org](http://www.europe-ca.violencestudy.org).

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UN Study Secretariat or the regional consultation partners concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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### The Europe and Central Asia regional consultation

More than 300 people from 52 countries met in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in July 2005 to discuss what a background paper for the meeting had called 'the pyramid of violence against children'. Why a pyramid? Because the reality of violence against children is that only a tiny part of it, like the tip of a pyramid, comes to official notice and 'the broad base of it is buried in the deep sands of adult ignorance, self-deception and apathy'.

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It is a fitting image because, just as the pyramids of the ancient world have slowly emerged from the sands of time, so the pyramid of violence against children is gradually being revealed. Through confidential interviews with children and parents, and studies carried out in some countries in Europe

and Central Asia, a picture is being built up of the scope and nature of violence against children in the region, some of the actions that have been taken to address it and what remains to be done.

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The first aim of the regional consultation, then, was to share this knowledge and expand it through discussion and networking. A series of Background Papers was prepared for the meeting on four settings in which children experience violence – in the home and family, at school, in residential facilities and in the community. By the time of the meeting, 36 governments of the region had also completed questionnaires sent out to all Member States as part of the broader process initiated by Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the Independent Expert appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General to lead the global Study on Violence against Children.

The Europe and Central Asia regional consultation was organized by a Core Planning Group comprising the Government of Slovenia, the Council of Europe, UNICEF, WHO Europe, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and an NGO Advisory Panel. The title adopted for the meeting was ‘Act Now!’, a call to all those participating to take home with them not only the recommendations that would be fed into the global Study but also a blueprint for action to be taken immediately by the countries of the region and the commitment to act.

‘Act Now!’ was also the title that the 24 children and young people participating in the meeting gave to a session they led in which they acted out a number of situations in which violence against children occurs and challenged the adults present to react. As the adults shared their ideas, the children modified the scenario for each situation they had chosen, until the risk of violence in each was reduced or eliminated all together.

The youth delegates prepared their own recommendations in a two-day meeting before the consultation itself. They noted that ‘one person can do something about violence but many people can stop violence’, and focused on the actions they believe must be taken if violence against children is to be eliminated (given here in summary):

### **Violence in schools – Act Now:**

- To prohibit every kind of violence that happens in schools in every country;
- To make schools happy places in which children are eager to learn.
- To inform children where they can report violence in schools;
- To intervene personally or alert the authorities when violence happens;
- To raise public awareness about human rights and children’s rights and ensure the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is on the curriculum;

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- To initiate campaigns to get more people involved and to make sure these are funded by governments and NGOs;
- To help school students train and talk to young pupils on how to prevent and stop violence;
- To ensure that there are professionals/specialists that children can trust who are available for help and support both inside and outside schools;
- To set up extracurricular activities that help children to interact with each other and make sure these are funded by governments and NGOs;
- To set up award systems that offer positive incentives such as praise, prizes and positive feedback;
- To involve parents in meetings at school and to help them learn other ways of practising discipline;
- To help teachers learn other ways of practising discipline;
- To set up a system of regular monitoring among school students to see if there has been positive change.

### **Violence in the community – Act now:**

- To understand that all the problems of violence are connected: that school is part of the community and that home is part of the community;
- To recognize that children have equal rights regardless of language, background or colour;
- To organize seminars ‘Let’s say no to violence’, on rage control and to prepare volunteers;
- To help young parents or young people who intend to become parents to understand the psychology and behaviour of children;
- To understand more about the causes and overall effects and consequences of violent behaviour;
- To organize spare-time activities to prevent boredom, including life skills activities that help children and young people to solve problems and resolve conflict situations;
- To provide shelters for street children and make the streets where children play safe;
- To protect children from labour exploitation by ensuring that the police check children’s age before they start work.
- To reduce violence in the media to stop trends of violence developing;
- To train people in the media to reflect the facts about violence against children so that they stop sensationalizing it;
- To make sure that media abuses are recognized and that these are better monitored and controlled.

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### **Violence in the family – Act Now:**

- To make parents understand what violence is and that it's wrong;
- To help parents learn about bringing up their children without violence and to discipline them in other ways;
- To accept their children for who they are – children – and to understand and listen to their children's problems;
- To help parents to avoid using any form of violence, argument, abusive or inappropriate behaviour against their children.
- To let children be involved in family life;
- To support children to change habits that get them into trouble.
- To organize seminars in schools and in the community for children, parents and teachers, so that everyone understands what violence is and to inform people that violence is wrong;
- To organize information and awareness-raising campaigns about violence in families;
- To prevent children who have been subjected to violence from returning to violent families and to help them integrate well into other families;
- To make sure that children who are victims of violence are not rejected by society;
- To provide social assistance, social workers and psychologists to families who are violent or are at risk of becoming violent so that checks can be made on children and their welfare;
- To reduce poverty, as poverty can cause stress within families, and give support to low-income families;

### **Violence in residential institutions – Act Now!**

- To provide training for young people so they can carry out effective peer monitoring.
- To make residential institutions become more visible and in more centralized locations;
- To help young people who have been through the system to talk to those who have not;
- To let children and adults visit residential institutions;
- To support employers to be open-minded;
- To encourage cooperation and involvement of all tiers of the community;
- To recognize that the community is everyone and needs to include children and young people and be child-friendly;

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- To have agreements between the media, community and government, to create activities that reduce stigma and help integration.
- To have outside, specialized individuals to visit and report periodically on the situation of children and young people in institutions;
- To have youth worker support;
- To provide more training on working with children with disabilities.
- To make sure that correctional institutions are not places of punishment;
- To take children out of the centres because the change of environment works for them;
- To give future support to children when they are out of the institution so they have a place to live, to work and to continue education;
- To give support to children to go in front of authorities to speak their views;
- To help more people to speak on behalf of and to support children and young people;
- To make sure that children in residential institutions are thought of as children, not criminals;
- To produce periodic reports to hear both sides of the story;
- To make sure the media respect the privacy of the child;
- To allow periodic visits to institutions by the media (including young journalists) to let people know how it is;
- To make sure the media play a part by not criminalizing and excluding people.
- To make laws that prohibit violence;
- To provide financial support for education of young people who cannot afford it;
- To provide non-residential solutions, for example placement with families;
- To create a child-friendly State with more focus on children's rights and taking care of them in all parts of the community;
- To make sure the State is responsible for finding solutions;
- To make sure that governments do not just push their own agenda but children's agenda.

Opening the regional consultation, Slovenia's Prime Minister, Janez Janša, reminded participants that "the horrible statistics on children victims of violence continue to show just how widespread one of the biggest anomalies of human society is". He underlined the importance of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study

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on Violence against Children, which is based on the right of each and every child to protection, and said that there is simply no place in children's lives for such violence. He reminded everyone that human rights do not depend on age and that the rights of children are no less important than the rights of adults. Ending violence against children, he said, is "the challenge of breaking the link between adults' problems and children's pain".

Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltics, noted that no culture, religion or society condones violence against children and yet, in the 24 hours that lay ahead, four children would die in Europe as a result of violence. Those, she added, are the cases that come to light; there are more that do not. "Violence against children," she said, "is hidden and corrosive, destroying lives and potential, and breeding societies that accept the unacceptable". She called attention in particular to the myths that surround violence. Parents who beat their children on the grounds that "it never did me any harm"; people who turn a blind eye to it because "it's none of my business"; or those who toss aside concerns because "kids get over it" – they are all reciting myths, Ms Calivis said, and all of them are dangerous.

Professor Pinheiro told the meeting that he had met with the children and young people and been impressed by their insights and fresh perspectives. "It is absolutely clear," he said, "that we adults need to hear their voices and unique point of view because, as they have told me here, children and young people see things that adults cannot".

Professor Pinheiro reminded participants that 192 states, including all the states of Europe and Central Asia, have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). He lamented the fact that there is a gap between the promises made and the actions taken, though, and said that there is much to be done if States are to fulfil their obligations. "However," he said, "much progress has been made in the countries of Europe and Central Asia in implementing the Convention, including with respect to measures to eliminate violence against children". He noted that some of the most active ombudspersons for children have been established in the region and that, in at least 16 of the 46 Member States of the Council of Europe, children enjoy the same protection as adults under criminal laws on assault, including explicit bans on corporal punishment.

*How can we be serious about children's rights when state laws continue to authorize violence disguised as discipline, described in some states' laws as 'reasonable' punishment? How can hitting children be 'reasonable'? We should all be ashamed.*



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Professor Pinheiro also, noted, however, that legal and social acceptance of violence against children is still a reality in many countries. “How can we be serious about children’s rights,” he asked, “when state laws continue to authorize violence disguised as discipline, described in some states’ laws as ‘reasonable’ punishment? How can hitting children be ‘reasonable’? We should all be ashamed that many states grant children less legal protection from physical violence than adults”.

Expressing his confidence that the meeting would be an important contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, Professor Pinheiro told the meeting he also hoped that the ideas shared at the consultation would be translated into concrete initiatives. “Children are tired of words and declarations without implementation,” he said.

One important feature of the meeting was the political commitment to act to stop violence against children demonstrated in the involvement of an exceptional number of high-level government participants. The Prime Minister and five ministers from the Government of Slovenia attended the consultation and made presentations or participated in the proceedings. The Deputy Prime Minister of Moldova attended and four government ministers from other countries were fully involved, making statements from the floor, chairing working groups or moderating discussions.

National and regional media also turned up in force and provided coverage of the event and the issue of violence against children. A communications team with representatives of the Core Planning Group had worked to produce a well-received press kit and CD-Rom resource in advance of the meeting and to mobilize the press.

### Violence against children in Europe and Central Asia

The Europe and Central Asia region has strong human rights frameworks in place and strong legal frameworks to protect children. It also has structures, knowledge and major resources at its disposal. Importantly, within the region there is documented experience of countries where values surrounding violence against children have shifted in a generation.

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Nevertheless, a 2005 review of trends of violence in Europe suggests that children in Europe and Central Asia area are as vulnerable to violence as in any other part of the world. Children continue to be subjected to violence that ranges from physical and sexual violence to emotional and psychological violence in all spheres of life, including the home and school, in institutions and in the community. Such violence is inflicted both by individuals and by the state. Violence in the media and promulgated through on-line vehicles is growing. The evidence suggests that levels of violence are linked less to the economic affluence of the country than to the country's attitudes towards children and the political significance of children in society.

Participants at the regional consultation considered that violence against children is least visible and least acknowledged within the confines of the home and family, yet this is where it seems to be most common. Most people still want to believe that violence against children is perpetrated by strangers but the sad truth is that children suffer at the hands of those they know best: their parents, teachers and others who have responsibility to care for them.

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Although it is not possible to know the extent of violence within the family, it is clear that physical and psychological violence in the form of 'punishment' or 'discipline' is common in many countries of the region.

The working group looking at violence against children in the home and family noted that changing behaviour and attitudes is not easy and that in Western Europe today young parents especially find it increasingly difficult to set boundaries and are unsure of what they can expect of their children. Similar concerns exist in former socialist countries, where parents are also facing new experiences in their relationships with their children. The working group argued that there should be a 'new paradigm' for raising children, one that is based on relationships and communication and which does not drive a wedge between parental authority and children's rights. States can help here, supporting parents particularly in the child's earliest years – even before the child's birth, in fact – offering classes in parenting not because there is a problem but because there is a baby.

The working group also looked at sexual abuse in the family, which has been the 'poor cousin' in many ways to international and national concern about the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The exploitation of

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children in prostitution and pornography is a serious issue – and remains a challenge in this region – but sexual abuse within the family must also be acknowledged and addressed. Children are most at risk, in fact, of sexual abuse by family members, relatives or other adults known to them. A number of studies in the region have indicated that the problem is prevalent and that girls in particular are at risk. Very few cases are reported, however.

Harmful traditional practices occur in Europe and Central Asia, particularly within migrant communities where such traditions are considered part of the community's 'identity'. Female genital mutilation (FGM, also sometimes called 'cutting') is common in some communities, and girls are at risk of forced or early marriage. Honour-related violence in the countries of the Mediterranean and immigrant communities, with honour killing as its most extreme manifestation, affects mostly girls but boys also suffer forced marriage, the 'duty' of controlling female relatives, and homophobia. While the countries of the European Union have engaged in debate and action on these issues, many other countries in the region deny that such practices happen.

After their homes, school is the place where children spend most of their time. School is the place where they not only gain academic knowledge but also learn life skills, attitudes and behaviours.

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Violence in schools was one of the issues about which the youth delegates at the regional consultation felt most strongly. Their concern was not only with physical violence but also with the psychological violence that teachers and others inflict when they use humiliation or ridicule towards a student. School, the youth delegates said, should be a place where children are eager to learn. Instead, it is too often a place where adults – not only teachers but other school personnel – impose 'discipline' or just their will through physical and psychological violence.

*The traditional model of transmission of values by the school and family in Europe is collapsing, replaced by much a much stronger role for peer influence and the media.*

School is also a place where negative trends in society in general are reflected. For example, discrimination against migrant groups expressed in the wider community is echoed in bullying of children from these groups in schools. The working group noted that school and family are no longer the places where children learn the positive values of their society. Instead, peer influence and the media play a much stronger role. In the countries of Eastern Europe, a crisis in values has resulted in a lack of confidence in the usefulness of education and growing reluctance of children to go to school.

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Violence among peers is also a problem in schools and is often again a reflection of attitudes and behaviours that exist within the wider community. Children who are violent in school are generally disrespectful of other people outside school too, and find in vulnerable or younger students the opportunity to translate that disrespect into violence.

The working group on violence in school also noted that, in a number of countries in the region, children attend military schools run by the Ministry of Defence, and that these are outside the scope of protection available to other children. In some countries, military schools are set up specially for orphans and disadvantaged groups, and parents – often with the best intentions – send their children to such schools when they are as young as 12 because they think they will be fed and educated there. The children’s vulnerability to violence, however, is high.

Violence is also a problem in care and correctional institutions, whether state-run or private. This problem is of particular concern to Europe and Central Asia because it is estimated that more than one million children live in residential care in the region, and a significant number of children are housed in correctional facilities.

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It is clear that, in any institution that is closed to public scrutiny, the risk for violence is high. The unchecked abuse of power and the often poor working conditions provide a context in which staff may vent their frustrations on children and mistranslate the duty of care. Where staff inflict violence on children, of whatever kind, they regularly act with impunity because of the isolated and closed nature of the environments in which they work.

In many institutions, studies show, outdated attitudes, underpaid staff, overcrowded conditions and isolation from the community and family multiply the risks of violence. Children with disabilities, generally among the most vulnerable, are also among the first victims of such violence.

The working group considering violence in residential institutions called for more thought to be given to placing a child in residential care. Children find themselves in care institutions for a wide variety of reasons: they may be removed from a family that has neglected or abused them; they may have special needs because

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of a disability; or they may have been abandoned because the family is too poor to cope with them. Poverty has been particularly significant since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and families have had to deal not only with economic challenges but also major shifts in the structure of the family and community that have often left them unable to cope.

*Children who have been taken into police custody or are in pre-trial detention need protection not only from authorities who may treat them with the same force they use on adults, but also from adult detainees who take out their frustrations on those they see as vulnerable.*

Although the number of children in institutions is lower in Western Europe, many of the children who are in care are of non-European origin, reflecting the difficulties of integration and discrimination towards some ethnic minorities. Often institutionalization of their children is the only form of ‘state support’ these groups can access.

Children who have been deprived of their liberty also experience violence of many kinds and at different hands. Children who have been taken into police custody or are in pre-trial detention need protection not only from authorities who may treat them with the same force they use on adults, but also from adult detainees who take out their frustrations on those they see as vulnerable.

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As a minimum, children should be separated from adult detainees at all times. This rarely happens, although some countries have begun to recognize that juvenile imprisonment in general is not effective and that schemes that ‘divert’ children along alternative paths are more likely to be successful. The special protection needs of children in conflict with the law – whether they have committed an offence or not – are also beginning to be acknowledged.

Children also face the risk of violence if they spend time on the streets or in public places (for example as a result of gang-related violence or linked to criminal activities), and are generally at risk when they are not under direct adult supervision. They may also risk exploitation and abuse, for example, at the hands of strangers seeking out vulnerable children or if they come into contact with the authorities or law enforcement agencies who see their situation as ‘irregular’.

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In the newly independent states of Europe and Central Asia in particular, judgmental attitudes and criminalization of vagrancy increase children's vulnerability to violence and those who inflict it do so with impunity because the 'system' often does not provide recourse. Discrimination against Roma minority children is particularly severe and often leads to their being institutionalized 'in their best interests'. Children placed in care may seek to escape and, in the absence of other opportunities, end up living and working on the streets.

The working group considering violence in the community chose to focus on some specific contexts in which children need protection from violence. They looked first at 'the worrisome side of sports' and noted that sports activities present a number of risks, from failure to respect children's developmental needs to deliberate abuse of the power inherent in the coach/student relationship.

Throughout the region, large numbers of children are involved in different forms of sport. Some 20 to 60 per cent of all children engage in some form of sports activity. In the United Kingdom alone, 4 million children take part in after-school sports and 6 million adults work voluntarily with children and young people in this field.

Many sports activities are not monitored. They are not subject to standards or non-sport-related regulations and there are often no codes regulating the behaviour of coaches, trainers or volunteer adults. As a result, children may suffer physical punishment if they do not perform up to expectations, may be subjected to punishing regimes – nutritional, physical and emotional – and

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and may be the direct victims of physical and sexual abuse.

The working group noted that it is not enough to legislate against violence in sports. There have to be effective, functioning mechanisms for regulating and monitoring staff, volunteers and sports regimes with a view to protecting children and reducing the risk of violence.

The same is true of children who are involved in faith-based activities, with the added caution that adults who work with children in, for example, church clubs or religious classes, are specifically there to shape values

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and model behaviours. This can put children at serious risk of abuse because they believe that they have no possibility to challenge the adults' behaviour.

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For this reason, faith organizations must translate their ethical principles into specific standards that are taught, implemented and monitored. The State must back these standards up with effective, confidential systems for receiving and acting on complaints.

Finally, the working group looking at violence against children in the community considered the situation of children who are at risk of or have fallen victim to exploitation and trafficking. The group considered that these are among the worst outcomes for children and arise from a chain of failures. They stressed that 'exploitation' is at the heart of the concern, regardless of how children have arrived at that situation, where it takes place of for what specific purpose.

The trafficking of children is of enormous concern in Europe and Central Asia, where a number of countries are 'source', 'transit' or 'destination' countries, or a combination of all three. Children are regularly moved within countries, too, particularly for example from cities or rural towns to the coast to work in tourist areas, or from the city to the countryside for exploitation in seasonal agriculture, often alongside their parents.

Children are exploited when they are vulnerable – because they need to earn money, want to find a better life, have been abandoned or forced to move, for example – but their exploitative situation also makes them more vulnerable to violence. Isolated from any support structures, often in an irregular situation, tired and despondent, fearful of doing something wrong or saying something they should not, children are easy prey to those who exploit both their labour and their vulnerability and for whom violence is just one form that exploitation can take.

Children are exploited and trafficked in Europe and Central Asia for their labour and also into commercial sex. Young girls in particular find themselves required to provide sex for employers who told them they were

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going to work in ‘entertainment’ or some other form of work. Boys are also exploited for sex but generally in street-based prostitution, often ‘handled’ by an older boy/man who controls them and takes a share or all the money. It is quite common for children who are exploited in one form of labour – for example selling flowers to tourists on the streets, or doing other street-based activities such as organized begging or cleaning car windows – to subsequently enter commercial sexual exploitation, often because, when they are already in a desperate situation, the promise of ‘better money’ is a strong pull.

The working group looking at violence in the community emphasized the importance of differentiating between trafficking and legal or illegal population movements such as people smuggling, migration and asylum-seeking. Too often children – and their families – think they are moving ‘legitimately’ but have in fact been fooled by those who wish to exploit their need. Opening up legal channels of migration and making sure people have access to them – and the information they need on how to use them – goes a long way in reducing the vulnerability of all people to those who make a profit from them. At the same time, it is important to remember always that children under the age of 18 are considered victims of trafficking under international law if their move results in any form of exploitation, even if they sought to move themselves.

### Violence in the home and family

Many people would hesitate to accept that violence in the family is a problem. Who would deliberately hurt their own child? The truth is, however, that violence in the family is common and widespread but often masked under other names: punishment, discipline, helping a child to learn, teaching a child right from wrong, being cruel to be kind. When the acts that parents and family members or other carers inflict upon children are spelled out, however, the violence is clear: slapping, hitting with a stick or belt or shoe, kicking, shaking, throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair, burning, scalding, force-feeding.

The full extent of violence against children in the home and family in Europe and Central Asia is not known. This is not only because in most countries governments and researchers have considered it inappropriate to ‘intrude’ on the sanctity of the family, but also because in many countries it is not seen to be a problem. And yet the statistics that do exist point to a phenomenon whose scale is significant: it is clear that most children



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– including babies and very young infants – are hit, in many cases regularly and frequently. Some 10 to 30 per cent of these children are beaten severely, including with belts, sticks and other implements.

Research undertaken in 2003 on child deaths from ill treatment in the 30 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (including 23 European member states) indicated that at least 3,500 children under 15 die as a result of assault and neglect every year in industrialized countries. Two children die every week in Germany and the United Kingdom. Three children die weekly in France. The risk of death is about three times greater for children under the age of one year than for those aged 1 to 4 who, in turn, face twice the risk of those aged 5 to 14. The younger the child, the more likely their death will be caused by a close family member.

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There is clearly a need for reliable, comprehensive and comparative data across the region. To date information exists for only a few countries and that is not comprehensive or in any way comparable. However it does give some idea of the size and nature of the problem.

In Belgium, for example, more than three-quarters of all parents interviewed by telephone said they thought it acceptable to smack children. Ninety-three per cent of university students interviewed in Croatia said they had experienced violence ranging from slapping to heavy beating and 27 per cent of them said they had suffered physical injury as a result. In the Czech Republic, a 1994 study of 800 children aged 10 and 11 showed that 90 per cent of them had suffered corporal punishment and just over 30 per cent said it had been severe. Around 16 per cent of children interviewed in Estonia in 2000 had experienced severe abuse at the hands of family members. Almost 40 per cent of children aged 6 to 17 had been physically punished at home in Georgia.

More than 60 per cent of mothers in Greece said they used corporal punishment on their children; the research indicated that 1.2 per cent of children suffered injuries so serious they required stitches or hospitalization. Telephone interviews of more than 1,000 adults in Italy indicated that almost 70 per cent thought it was acceptable for parents to smack children. Fifty-three per cent of children in Moldova said they had suffered

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punishment resulting in harm or injury. Eighty per cent of adults interviewed about their childhoods in Poland said they had been beaten at home and, in Portugal, a 2004 telephone poll found that 83 per cent of adults consider smacking children is acceptable.

A national survey in Romania in 2002 found that 47 per cent of parents admitted to using physical punishment on their children while 84 per cent of children reported experiencing it. Of these, 20 per cent had been beaten with objects and 15 per cent were afraid to go home because of the beatings. Attitudinal research in the Slovak Republic in 2002 found that almost 99 per cent of people thought parents should be able to smack their children and 42 per cent believed that occasional beating with an implement was acceptable.

In Tajikistan, 62 per cent of parents considered it is necessary and acceptable to use corporal punishment. In the United Kingdom, research showed that only 25 per cent of babies under the age of one had not been smacked by their mothers. Of these, 14 per cent had been smacked ‘with moderate severity’.

When they are given a chance to talk about the physical and psychological punishment inflicted by parents and other family members, children say loud and clear that it is distressing and hurtful. The pain is not only physical – one seven year-old girl summed up the pain as ‘hurting inside’.

This is the hidden pain that results in particular when children suffer psychological or emotional violence. The old English children’s rhyme – ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me’ – is simply and sadly not true. Children are severely affected by humiliating words, insults, threats and other psychological taunts. At the regional consultation, the youth delegates raised this repeatedly, underlining the fact that such treatment is violent and unacceptable and should always be considered in the same light as physical violence.

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Mental violence is a serious health problem in Europe but to date has not been adequately addressed. A 2004 initiative to explore this issue concluded that prevention and measures to increase understanding of the seriousness of the problem are sorely needed and that healthcare and other professionals need training to be

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able to identify symptoms in all family members. Much more is needed, also, to understand and document the incidence and impact of ‘indirect violence’ on children in the home and family, variously considered under the terms abuse or neglect: these include restricting a child’s movement, making them a scapegoat, scaring them or making them go without food or other necessities. While these acts do not involve direct physical violence, they are certainly psychologically damaging and may also have a physical impact.

The regional consultation also considered the impact on children of witnessing violence on other members of their family. This is particularly the case of children who experience domestic violence, usually against their mother. Children report how harrowing it is just to hear their parents arguing, for example, and it is known that in many cases this has a serious impact on the child: affecting their concentration and achievement at school, leading them to avoid social contact and abandon friends, causing eating disorders or socially deviant behaviour and, in extreme causes, leading them to harm themselves. Although it often is gender-related, domestic violence is not always inflicted by the man of the house on his spouse (often known as ‘conjugal violence’). Women also inflict violence on male partners; older children may inflict violence on a parent or on siblings, and there are indications that children may ‘mimic’ the violent relationships they experience between their parents or adult members of the family.

The complex inter-play of adult/child relationships is also important in the case of sexual abuse in the family. Where a father or another adult member of the family – older brother, uncle, cousin or close family friend – abuses a child, it is not uncommon for family members to be aware of this but to reject the possibility that it can be true. Sexual violence, in comparison to physical and psychological violence, is universally condemned and yet, perhaps even more than non-sexual physical violence, it remains hidden behind a wall of silence. This silence results from disbelief, anger, fear or shame that can be so overwhelming that the person who should speak out comes to believe that the abuse is not, in fact, happening.

And yet sexual violence against children in the family occurs much more often than has been previously recognized. An analysis of prevalence studies of sexual abuse within and outside the family in 14 European countries suggests rates varying from nine to 33 per cent for females and from three to 15 per cent for males. In a national prevalence study in Romania, 9.1 per cent of the children questioned said they had experienced sexual violence, 5.7 per cent by a parent.

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Confidential retrospective interview studies with young adults carried out across the region reveal a high prevalence of sexual abuse and suggest that official figures far underestimate the problem. Most data collected relate to reported cases and those that lead to a conviction, but it is clear that most incidences in fact are never brought to the attention of the authorities. Definitions used are also inconsistent and result not only in data that are not comparable but also some cases ‘disappearing’, hidden behind classifications such as ‘indecent exposure’ or unspecified assault.

The few cases that do come to official notice reveal the lack of trust children have in the services available to them. They are scared, above all, of the abuser being taken away from the family and of hurting others in their family. Sometimes children only reveal that they have been sexually abused when a crisis occurs, for example when they realize that a younger sister or brother is at risk of sexual violence from the same person.

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Children most of all seem to want to talk to someone on a confidential basis. The 34 telephone helplines in the region have had considerable success in building the trust of children and in linking children with the services they need. Helpline services also give a good idea of the significant numbers of children who seek help because of sexual violence at home: in the one year between April 2003 and March 2004, for example, ChildLine in the UK received several thousand calls. Of the children reporting sexual abuse and receiving substantive counselling, 2,393 identified their father as the abuser and 984 reported that a male acquaintance had abused them. Although the majority of the children were girls, a significant number were boys (620 out of 3,377).

Girls are also generally more vulnerable to violence inflicted through traditional or customary practices. Some European states suggest that harmful traditional practices do not happen on their territory. In reality, the influx of many different ethnic groups and the movement of people into and through Europe and Central Asia make it most unlikely that such practices have not been ‘imported’ to all European countries.

At European level, FGM has been the subject of numerous initiatives not only for banning of the practice but also for more research on the scope of the problem and grassroots campaigns to influence the beliefs and structures that perpetuate it. Some female members of the communities where FGM occurs have themselves

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been active in campaigning to stop it, working within the communities to help women, in particular, to understand how damaging FGM is to a child's physical and psychological health.

Honour-related violence including honour killing also occurs in the region, with girls and women the primary victims. Girls are also forced into early marriage and boys are sometimes obliged to participate in enforcing this, so that they too suffer coercion and control.

Boys are sometimes expected to participate in violence against female members of their families who resist forced marriage or other custom-related impositions. In many migrant communities, also, homosexual boys and girls risk both physical and psychological violence from conservative members of the community, including their families. The 2002 killing of a young Turkish woman in Sweden brought to light the family violence that occurs when a young girl or boy chooses to live a different life from that expected by the family.

Responses to the government questionnaires received identify child marriage as an age-old tradition that is re-emerging in some parts of the region. Both Albania and Slovakia, for example, report that children in Roma communities are married off very young and a number of countries report honour-related violence, often linked to forced or early marriage. The UK reports some 200 cases of forced marriage every year, although there are undoubtedly more that go unreported. In most countries in the region, the minimum age for marriage is 18 or, in some, 16 with consent of the parents. There have been calls for a minimum age of 18 to be set for all marriages.

### Violence in schools

Materials prepared for the regional consultation took a broad view of violence at school, arguing that there are many non-violent acts that, repeated over time, have a serious impact on children akin to the impact of direct violence. Rudeness, taunts, insults, spreading of rumours, exclusion, destruction of property, racketeering and even premeditated crime at school can become a form of psychological violence because of the fear that they instil in their victims. Moreover, it is evident that 'minor' aggression, if not dealt with speedily, can escalate into much more direct physical violence as the target of the aggression becomes more vulnerable and the perpetrator emboldened. Violence, then can be both an incident and a progression of acts.

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Given the continuing debate over the definition of ‘violence’ in the school context, it is not surprising that very few data are available. Moreover, while definitions vary, reporting of violence will also be inconsistent and so the cycle of violence will continue. What is clear is that, across the region, children experience violence at school both from other students and, in some countries, from teachers and authority figures. They also witness violence among other students and between teachers and students, with the teachers quite often the victim.

Violence in school is often a reflection of social attitudes and behaviours outside the school context. Where a certain ethnic or minority group is discriminated against in the wider social context – for example gypsy or Roma people, or certain migrant communities – it is not unusual for the children of these communities to be the targets of violence at school too. They are targeted both by students in the form of bullying and by teachers in the form of poor grades or humiliating taunts or sometimes corporal punishment. Disabled children are also at risk from such discrimination and violent treatment.

Research in the region suggests that the level of physical violence at school is stationary but that ‘minor violence’ is increasing. The risk is therefore great that a ‘context’ of violence is present and can erupt. A 1999 study, for example, suggested that ‘verbal violence forms part of the everyday experience of pupils and teachers’.

The numbers of children excluded from British schools for various violent acts – physical violence, destruction of equipment, for example – shows a steadily increasing trend since 1990, from 2,910 to 10,400, with a slight dip in 1998/9. Data, however, are not necessarily reliable not only because of differing definitions but because they do not always take into account growth or retraction of the school population. Clearly there is much more work to be done on gathering clear indications of the scope and nature of violence in school in the region, particularly in the countries of Central/Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where the issue is fairly new on the political and civil society agenda.

Certain characteristics of violence in schools are, however, broadly agreed on by most researchers. There is general agreement that 80 per cent of acts of violence are committed by pupils between the ages of 12 and 16, and 85 per cent are committed

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by boys. Eighty-seven per cent of violence is between pupils. Additionally, it appears that physical violence decreases with age but moves to adults (teachers and supervisors).

In this region there is very little reliable data on violence inflicted on students by teachers. This may be because in theory corporal punishment is largely prohibited in most countries of the region or at the very least subject to strict regulation. This does not mean that it does not occur but it does mean that it is not supposed to occur and this may explain why data are not officially collected.

There have been quite high profile reports on sexual violence by teachers on pupils, notably in France, but this may reflect more the interest of the media in covering this form of violence than a reflection of the situation regarding violence in general. Conversely, sexual violence is often not addressed adequately within the education system itself, perhaps because it is more controversial but also perhaps because it is to many adults unthinkable. It has a serious impact, however, not only on the victim but also on the morale of other pupils in the school and indeed within the families of children who attend the school in question.

Analysis prepared for the regional consultation also looked at the situation in military schools, which are often not addressed in studies nor indeed in regional and international guidelines. Military schools do accept children under the age of 18. Concern has been raised about whether it is appropriate for such schools to look upon their young recruits as ‘armed forces’ and to teach them within a military environment. The content of their lessons (including for example the use of weapons), the type of discipline meted out and the punishment inflicted on students who are still children in international law have all been brought into question. Very little data exist, however, on military schools and incidence or approaches to violence in them.

### Violence in institutions

The ‘group’ situation and the closed nature of residential facilities increase the risk of violence. Lack of privacy, frustration, inadequate supervision and the unchecked abuse of power, compounded by discrimination, the inability of staff to cope and inappropriate disciplinary measures are all contributing factors either to children’s vulnerability or to the opportunity for violence. It is known, also, that violence in institutions is not only inflicted by supervisors and other adult figures but also by children, on others and on themselves.

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Violence in residential institutions occurs across the region but is an acute problem in some countries just because of the numbers of children who are institutionalized in those countries. There are many different kinds of institution: care homes for children, emergency shelters, medical and socio-medical establishments, boarding schools and re-education units, detention centres, correctional institutions and placement or transit centres.

The children who find themselves in these institutions are also a diverse group: they may need care because one or more parents has died or because there is a temporary crisis in the family; they may have been removed from their home for their own protection in response to abuse or neglect. The children may have a disability or illness that requires special care or education; they may have been placed by parents into a residential school or special school; they may have entered the country as a migrant or asylum seeker and be temporarily housed; and they may have been accused or found guilty of a criminal act.

Because of the broad nature of ‘institutionalization’, there is no accurate data on how many children are, at any given time, ‘institutionalized’. In recent years the numbers of children in some forms of institution have been decreasing. However conservative estimates based on what information is available suggest that some one million children in the region are in residential placements at any one time.

Children in these institutions are in fact in ‘mini-communities’, and in these mini-communities hierarchies are established, too often through violence. Older children may bully younger children. Children who are ‘different’ – by virtue of their ethnic background, a disability or some physical feature, for example – are vulnerable to bullying and indeed to discrimination by supervisors. Where adults are not properly trained or supervised and where there are no systems of redress for children, ‘punishment’ or ‘discipline’ may include physical and psychological violence.

In some countries in the region there is no explicit and total ban on corporal punishment in institutions. There are across the region very few systems or mechanisms to receive complaints from children who are experiencing violence while institutionalized.

In recent years media reports of violence inflicted on children in institutions has alerted people to a problem that has still not been adequately investigated and addressed. Cases in Portugal and North Wales have received extensive media coverage in recent years. A Government Commission looking into allegations of child abuse in



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children's residential facilities in Ireland received so many requests to testify that its 2002 reporting deadline has been extended to mid-2008. More than 3,000 witnesses have come forward to date.

Romania, Kyrgyzstan and Albania have also reported that there have been documented cases of physical violence in institutions in these countries. NGOs in Kazakhstan report that more than 80 per cent of children in boarding schools are regularly or sometimes subjected to cruel treatment and that 28 per cent of children in children's homes are regularly subjected to violence.

*Interviews with children in residential care in the UK revealed that half of the children surveyed had experienced physical violence ranging from knife attacks to kicks and punches.*

Since the early 1990s attention is also being paid to child-to-child abuse in residential facilities. Some commentators claim that children may be more at risk of physical and sexual violence at the hands of other children than from staff. Interviews with children in residential care in the UK revealed that

half of the children surveyed had experienced physical violence ranging from knife attacks to kicks and punches. Emerging research indicates that children may also be most at risk of sexual abuse from other children rather than supervisors.

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For children deprived of their liberty when they are accused, charged or convicted of a criminal offence, the interrogation period and the first 24 hours of detention are the most high-risk in relation to psychological and physical violence by officials. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed concern at the sometimes violent treatment inflicted by law enforcement officials during interrogation, while children are in custody awaiting the outcome of investigations and in penal and correctional facilities.

Children in conflict with the law are also at risk of child-to-child violence and self-harm. In the UK, 27 juveniles died in custody between 1990 and 2004, most by suicide. Both boys and girls are at risk of violence when in conflict with the law. Girls face the added problem that, because there are generally fewer facilities for girls and women in most countries, they are more likely to be held in facilities far away from their families and home communities, so will be less likely to have the family support they need and the chance to report violent incidents to someone they trust.

### Violence in the community

The regional consultation considered ‘the community’ as ‘situations, spaces and times that a child spends outside his/her home, school or residential institution’. The community is a very important environment because it is here that the child plays after school, and interacts with friends and strangers. The community is a place of informal learning, with its own structures and hierarchies and its own risks. Because children are essentially unsupervised when ‘in the community’, they are vulnerable to violence at the hands of people they know and strangers, and of witnessing violence inflicted on others.

‘Street violence’ has become an issue of concern in many countries of Europe and Central Asia, including gang-related violence, organized crowd violence in the context for example of national and regional sports competitions, and inter-personal violence associated with alcohol, drugs and criminal behaviours. Although the media report regularly on such violence, very little research has been carried out and there are very few programmes, outside legislation and law enforcement initiatives, to reduce or eliminate it.

Children who live and work on the streets are also at risk of violence at the hands of law enforcement officers and just random violence from adults and other children ‘looking for a fight’. Girls in particular are at risk of being propositioned or coerced into sexual relations, but boys are not immune from sexual violence either. The racial, ethnic or religious identity of children living or working on the streets is a factor in their vulnerability to violence. Roma children, for example, are frequently detained for loitering, vagrancy or petty theft and police may round up children on suspicion that they are ‘up to no good’, sometimes in an attempt to see if there are runaways among them. Such actions are usually undertaken with impunity.

Figures relating to youth non-fatal attacks and homicide give some indication of the extent of street-based violence. Between 1985 and 1994, youth homicide rates increased across Europe and Central Asia but to varying degrees. In the Russian Federation, for example, rates for 10-24 year-olds increased 150 per cent, while in Latvia there was an increase of 125 per cent. There was a steep increase in deaths from shotgun wounds. In the same period, youth homicide rates in Western Europe remained generally low and stable although in the UK homicide rates for 10-24 year-olds still grew by 37.5 per cent and in France by 28.6 per cent.

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*In general the victims of violent crime committed by juveniles were other young people. For example, in the Netherlands in 1995, 15-17 year-olds were four times more likely than adults to be victims of assault.*

There was however a much sharper rate of increase in juvenile violence in the same period in the 15 Member States of the European Union. Juvenile violent crime (robbery, assault, rape, homicide) rose in some countries between 50 and 100 per cent. In general the victims of violent crime committed by juveniles were other young people. For example, in the Netherlands in 1995, 15-17 year-olds were four times more likely than adults to be victims of assault.

Rising unemployment, poverty and depressed socio-economic conditions particularly in urban areas are among the factors that are believed to contribute to community violence. An increase in the use of alcohol and drugs, and the rise in availability and use of firearms have also been implicated. Research suggests that young people from homes where domestic violence occurs are also more likely to repeat the violence they have experienced. When young people join gangs – typically made up of boys and young men in their teens and early twenties – they often become more violent.

Participants at the regional meeting chose to focus on two specific contexts in which violence occurs in the community, since these have received very little attention.

The regional meeting considered the risks inherent in organized leisure activities and lamented the fact that very few countries have put in place measures to protect children engaging in these activities both from the excesses of the activity itself and from the people involved in them. Clearly organized leisure activities – sports, performance arts, hobby clubs and more – are potentially very positive additions to a child's life. Children both learn and enjoy such activities but, if standards and checks are not in place, children can be vulnerable to violence, particularly because they enter wholeheartedly into the activity.

Sports, for example, can become violent when the child is expected to perform beyond his or her ability or is subjected to punishing regimes – for example, being obliged to train long hours before going to school, eat only certain foods or lose weight beyond normal limits. Some children are introduced to drugs to enhance their performance. These excesses can have serious physical and mental health impacts on children. Research

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suggests that some 20 per cent of children engaging in competitive sports are potentially at risk of abuse, violence or exploitation and 10 per cent are victims of some form of violation of their human rights.

There are also risks, however, of direct violence, including sexual violence. Where adults are in a position of power over the child, they may abuse that power if systems are not in place to check and monitor their behaviour. Physical and psychological punishment are sometimes used to ‘encourage’ a child or punish her/him for under-performing.

There have also been cases of extreme violence: in a number of countries, children have been sexually abused by coaches, trainers and others supervising sports activities. Additionally in high-level competitive sport, there are reports that children have been sold/traded among clubs and even trafficked in illegal transfers, for example between clubs in Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands.

Clubs and activities organized around a religious or faith-based grouping may also subject children to violence, in many ways for the same reasons as sports activities do: the imbalance of power between the children and those responsible for them, the desire of the child to succeed and please adults in a position of authority, and the lack of systems to monitor those involved and their actions.

Very little research has been done in this area. There have been high-profile cases of sexual abuse of both boys and girls by clergy of the Catholic faith. Since 1995 such cases have been reported by the media in a number of countries in Western Europe including Austria, France, Ireland, Poland and the UK. Data on violence – sexual or otherwise – connected to other faiths is not available.

In the wake of the offences by Catholic clergy, some important steps have been taken. Perhaps the most important is that the offences have been recognized and condemned by congregations within the Catholic Church in several countries. The Holy See has issued a change in the law setting up compulsory reporting of allegations of child sexual abuse by a cleric.

### Violence in workplaces

The Europe and Central Asia regional consultation considered violence against children who work under the heading of ‘community’ and it is true that the workplace is in many ways a mini-community with all the risks that that entails: hierarchies and abuse of power, tough regimes of discipline and punishment and excessive expectations of the child/young person. For ease of exposition, however, since the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children will consider violence in workplaces as a specific area of enquiry, the deliberations of the regional meeting have been separated out here.

International instruments governing the world of work and relating to children make a clear difference between working children – who have reached the minimum working age and are in ‘legitimate’ employment – and children in a situation of child labour. Those in child labour have not reached the minimum working age or are of legal age but are experiencing various forms of exploitation or hazard. Children who face some defined extreme forms of hazard – for example because they are in forced or bonded labour, have been trafficked or are exploited in prostitution, pornography or as child soldiers – are considered to be in a ‘worst form of child labour’.

Many commentators say that all child labour, worst form or not, is by its very nature violent. It robs children of their childhood and education; it puts adult responsibilities on their shoulders and it invariably puts their health and well-being at risk.

Children working on the streets are easy prey for criminals who use them to carry and sell drugs, and engage in petty crime such as selling stolen goods. These criminals use violence as a way of keeping the child under control and often also introduce the child to drugs or exploit an existing habit to keep the child compliant. They look upon the children as expendable and know that, if they are caught by the police, there will be other children to replace them.

In St Petersburg alone, for example, recent research estimates that there are between 10,000 and 16,000 children working on the streets, mostly collecting bottles and refuse. Between 50 and 70 per cent of these are under the age of 13 and some 10-30 per cent of them are involved in illicit activities. Some 20-35 per cent of street children under the age of 18 are involved in prostitution.

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Rapid assessments undertaken by the International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) in Turkey looked at children between the ages of seven and 17. Most of them were boys who had migrated to the cities from poor rural areas with their families. When adult family members could not find work, the children are often sent onto the streets to earn money. Some children return to their families at night; others stay on the streets and contribute to the family by removing themselves as a 'burden'.

Most of the children working on the streets in Turkey go home to their families when they are not working. They earn money cleaning shoes, selling chewing gum and paper tissues, water, sunflower seeds and lottery tickets. Other children interviewed were involved in garbage collection and sorting. These children were more likely to be involved in drug abuse, street gangs and violence.

In other parts of the region, it is frequently the children of minority groups such as Roma or recent migrants that start work before they have reached the legal age for employment. However in Portugal, some 47,000 children were reported to be working making shoes instead of going to school. There remain significant gaps in the data related to other countries in the region.

Filling gaps in the data is becoming urgent as more and more children are trafficked within the region into various forms of labour exploitation. Often travelling alone or organized in gangs, they are particularly vulnerable to violence at the hands of the traffickers, 'employers' and those who see their labour as profitable but not worth the risk if a child rebels or falls sick.

Albanian children are trafficked to beg in Greece. Moroccan children are to be found on Italian streets in a number of exploitative situations including prostitution. Young girls from Africa and South-East Asia are to be found in domestic service in France and the UK.

Even children who are legitimately working, though, may be subject to violence in their place of work, whether that is on a shop floor, in the fields, on the streets or in someone's home. Many children in this region work alongside family members in the family business, on the family farm or in other places, and contribute to the family income. In the transition countries, especially, there are many children working on the streets,

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generally in informal work where they are often organized by an adult and frequently kept under close control. If they do not perform as expected, they may be beaten or burned or suffer the indirect violence of starvation or confinement. Because they are younger and inexperienced, working children are subjected to physical violence and psychological taunts at the hands of supervisors and co-workers.

Plunged into what is considered the 'adult world', they are considered somehow inferior and a legitimate target for those who wish to take out their frustrations or anger.

In countries where trade unions have a strong presence, young workers have equal protection in relation to labour standards and practices. However trade unions are only now beginning to realize that they also have a duty of protection towards young workers in other areas too. In some countries, for example Spain and the UK, unions have been active in developing workplace-based awareness campaigns accompanied by reporting mechanisms for those who experience violence or suspect co-workers are victims of it.

### What is being done to end violence and protect children?

Across the Europe and Central Asia region, there has been significant progress in reviewing and revising legislative frameworks to enhance the protection of children, including from violence. The progress made, however, has been patchy and not always comprehensive. Where gaps and anomalies in the law exist, children remain at risk. In almost all of the working group discussions, differences in definitions and terminologies were highlighted. Although this is a challenge, it is clear that until working definitions and parameters are agreed for the collection of data and establishment of protection frameworks, research will remain incomplete and initiatives will risk not hitting the right targets.

In relation to violence in the family, 16 countries in the region have put in place laws explicitly prohibiting physical violence and corporal punishment. This, however, is less than one-third of the countries making

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up the region. There was a strong call at the regional meeting for all states to outlaw corporal punishment and fully enforce these laws. Laws also need to be accompanied by information campaigns to help people to understand and accept the law. Only then will there be any significant change. In 2004 the Council of Europe issued a handbook on *Protecting children against corporal punishment: Awareness-raising campaigns*. Importantly, within the region there are examples of countries where such change has taken place.

Sweden is one example. Corporal punishment was banned there in 1979 and provoked a sharp fall in public support for physical punishment. In 1960, smacking children was common; by 1970, 50 per cent of parents reported using corporal punishment. By 1990, just over a decade after the ban, the figure had fallen to 20 per cent, and by 2000 only 8 per cent of parents said they smacked their children.

Sweden was also the first country to legislate specifically against FGM, followed by the UK and Norway. Since 1994 FGM can be prosecuted as assault under the Penal Code of France. The European Commission has promoted an EU-wide ban on FGM and, though the Daphne Programme on Violence against Children, Young People and Women, has supported EU-wide information campaigns, research and NGO networking. In 2005 UNICEF organized a conference on FGM in Europe and there is a general belief that the issue is now firmly on the political agenda. There have however been very few prosecutions under existing laws and there are fears that the practice will be driven underground in some communities.

In relation to sexual abuse within the family, the countries of Europe and Central Asia have adopted a regional action plan as part of the Stockholm-Yokohama World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children process. A periodic review of government actions taken in implementing the action plan in mid-2005 showed some progress on a number of fronts in all countries, in particular in relation to revision of legal frameworks, research and awareness raising. Challenges remain, however, in the areas of data collection and victim support in particular.

Programmes to support good parenting are increasingly common in Europe. Moldova, for example, has initiated a programme to mainstream parent education in the primary healthcare system. Health workers are being trained to provide parents with the knowledge and skills they need to care for their young children. The initiative began in 2002 and is being evaluated. It is clear already that family doctors and nurses who participated in the training programme are more likely to engage in parent education.



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Most countries in the region have prohibited or strictly regulated corporal punishment in schools, including private schools and other educational institutions. The European Court of Human Rights has played a decisive role in promoting this, taking the view that all forms of corporal punishment at school run counter to Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (amended 1998).

The European Social Charter, which came into force in 1961 and was revised in 1996, complements the Convention. Thirty-seven states in the region are signatories. Article 7(10) of the Charter concerns measures designed to protect children and young people against physical or moral dangers in the family, at school and in society in general, as well as in the world of work.

In specific relation to bullying at school, there have been numerous campaigns and programmes across the region, with varying degrees of success. Programmes piloted in Belgium and Norway have been scaled-up across the region and the DFE Sheffield Project which ran from 1991 to 1994 developed violence-reduction projects for individual schools across the UK. In Italy, school mediation programmes run by volunteers have been successful in promoting peaceful resolution of conflict in schools and have been shared across other EU Member States.

Efforts to reduce the number of children entering residential or other institutions in the region have continued for some time and with some success. However there remains much to be done to reduce the vulnerability and improve the situation of those children who are institutionalized. In 1997 the International Federation of Educative Communities, which brings together national associations of residential care workers, approved an international Code of Ethics. The process of developing the Code considerably improved the understanding of residential care staff on issues relating to violence against children and child protection.

Much more needs to be done to understand the several forms that violence against children takes in various community settings, to be able to address these effectively. Little has been done to date on identifying and making concerted efforts to resolve the underlying causes of such violence: unemployment, disenfranchisement, family poverty, youth rebelliousness, increasing drug and alcohol abuse and so forth. Outreach programmes in many countries of the region are of enormous value to individual children, taking to them on the streets the support and advice they need. However programmes that aim to eliminate the factors that see children move onto the streets in the first place are few and far between.

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The first serious responses at national level to violence against children in sport emerged during the second half of the 1990s. From 1997 to 2002, the French authorities were active in protecting child athletes from economic exploitation and in monitoring the conditions under which they practised their sports. The most sustained and significant child protection initiatives in sport took place in the UK between 1993 and 2000, primarily as a reaction to publicity around cases of sexual abuse of teenagers. These efforts focused on adopting child protection policies and ethical codes, checking the criminal records of trainers and coaches, running awareness-raising actions targeting athletes, parents, coaches and other officials, appointing child protection officers in sports clubs and federations, establishing telephone helplines and encouraging research on child protection issues.

Since 1997, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Development of Sport has taken steps to prevent and combat sexual harassment and abuse in sport, resulting in a 2000 resolution calling for, among other things, national policies in Member States to protect children, young people and women in sport. In 1999, the British Government established a National Child Protection in Sport Task Force and in 2001 a Child Protection in Sport Unit, the first of its kind in the world. Among other things, the unit establishes systems for dealing with allegations of abuse, develops standards, and provides education and training.

Working children are better protected in law since countries across the region began to adapt labour legislation to regulate the employment of young people. The informal nature of much child work and labour, however, means that many children continue to fall outside the scope of labour law and inspections.

Portugal has been successful in reaching street-based child workers through multidisciplinary mobile teams that include psychologists, teachers and social workers. The team makes a personal and individual evaluation of each child they identify as having dropped out of school or being in a situation of labour exploitation, and design a programme for that child that includes schooling or professional training. Almost 2,000 children have been involved in some 115 programmes to date.

The trafficking of children into, out of and through the region for labour and sexual exploitation continues to be a challenge. A process of law reform has begun, largely as a follow-up to ratification of the United Nations Trafficking Convention, also known as the Palermo Protocol. There are concerns, however, that there is still confusion between trafficking, legal and irregular migration, and people smuggling and that many children and families who have fallen victim to traffickers are treated as illegal migrants.

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Despite two Framework Decisions developed by the EU on trafficking in human beings and commercial sexual exploitation of children, there is still no coordinated European policy on preventing child trafficking. Work on this continues, however, in particular through data collection and networking efforts of the Brussels-based Child Focus, the European Centre for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children. A major step was taken in mid-2005 with the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings. It is hoped that this will become a practical tool of international cooperation focusing particularly on victim protection.

### Gaps and challenges

There was consensus among all the working groups at the regional consultation that the role of the State in combating violence is of the utmost importance and that states must redouble their efforts. The State in particular has a responsibility to protect children from violence in state institutions, including schools and residential institutions.

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It was underlined that the State is the only actor that can effectively break the silence surrounding violence against children and that governments must send out a clear message, through laws and implementation of those laws, that violence will not be tolerated.

Recognition of the problem of violence against children – both by society in general and also explicitly in law – was highlighted as a key issue. It was acknowledged that Europe and Central Asia have in place many of the structures needed to bring about shifts in the factors that make children vulnerable to violence, and in most countries the resources to do this. The question, however, is whether Europe and Central Asia will choose to play the leading role it has the potential to take in efforts to end violence against children.

A priority is to ensure that all forms of violence, including corporal punishment, are explicitly prohibited in law. While violence in the family is perhaps the greatest challenge facing law makers and those implementing programmes, it is of important strategic significance since if violence in the family is outlawed then it can effectively be forbidden everywhere.

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The meeting concluded that each country must have a ‘strategy’ to combat violence against children, based on a careful assessment of the local situation and opportunities for action. How governments translate the legal framework into action was a key theme of the meeting. Participants at the meeting noted that there are important experiences in implementation in the region to draw on and that these should be built on and used to speed up actions. It was also underlined, however, that many countries in the region do not have a coordinated and cohesive strategy to translate commitment and frameworks into concrete action.

The critical role of professionals and others in contact with children was stressed throughout the consultation. As a minimum, it was noted that States must ensure that all violence by state agents stops. There was a call for the capacities of all professionals who are in direct contact with children – care providers, teachers, health professionals, social workers, police and others – to be improved and for monitoring systems to be put in place to ensure oversight.

The meeting recognized the need for a new ‘paradigm’ for treating and bringing up children. Certain behaviours, everyone agreed, are ‘just not right’. There need to be new approaches to relationships, communication, discipline, power and authority. The challenge is to identify how this can happen and who can contribute to it.

Clearly children themselves must be seen as active agents in this and in other actions to end violence. Are adults willing and able to make this a reality?

The specific gaps and challenges that remain were translated into specific recommendations (see below).

### Recommendations and next steps

In drawing together the conclusions of the regional consultation, participants commented on the unique opportunity they had had to cross national and subregional boundaries and engage in real sharing between Western and Eastern Europe. Although material conditions vary considerably across the region, and institutional structures are very different, there was a striking convergence of conclusions across the working groups and very much a sense that participants were ‘speaking with one voice’.

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The working groups each formulated a set of recommendations relating to the ‘settings’ in which violence occurs: in the family, at school, in institutions and in the community. They highlighted the need for a clear understanding of the issue in each context. They underlined the need to evaluate initiatives and, where their effectiveness could be demonstrated, to share the lessons promptly so that their impact might spread further. The participants at the consultation agreed that it was clear that an alliance was emerging – of organizations, individuals and children’s groups – committed to pursuing the common agenda and taking action nationally and as a region. The blueprint for action, in the form of recommendations from the working groups (given in an edited version here) and from the children and young people’s meeting, will serve as a good basis for such action. These will also feed into the global Study on Violence against Children.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL’S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

#### **Violence in the family**

##### ***Parenting and preventing physical violence***

- Every State in the region should ban corporal punishment and other humiliating treatment towards children and fully enforce these laws.
- Laws are not sufficient in themselves; it is necessary to change attitudes and mentalities of parents, professionals and public authorities.
- Tools to change attitudes should include: awareness and information campaigns; informing children of their rights; equipping parents with information; supporting parents with alternative ways of bringing up children.
- States need to provide confidential, coordinated child-sensitive services.
- States need to make it an obligation to formally report violence against children.
- The State should sensitize all professionals on how to detect violence and provide help, with detailed guidelines and professional codes of conduct.
- Ensure treatment and rehabilitation for both victims and perpetrators.

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- Evaluate interventions that are effective and identify what works.
- Children’s education should provide non-violent ways of conflict resolution and responsible behaviour.

### ***Sexual abuse and harmful traditional practices***

- Ensure media as long-term partners.
- Reinforce early intervention. Include child rights and protection training, services and referrals in universal primary health care.
- Use schools for both prevention and intervention purposes. Training and funding for health or social workers should be provided in all schools.
- Schools should provide adapted support to children to enable them to make informed choices on disclosure or on peer support and to receive adequate support.
- Harmful traditional practices should be addressed through prevention of early marriage, forced marriages, and polygamy, and FGM should be prevented through direct collaboration with migrant groups.
- Socio-economically disadvantaged groups should be supported through adequate budgetary priority and long-term planning.
- All forms of violence against children should be included into existing bans on domestic violence. Improve implementation of laws and monitoring of offenders and develop child-friendly judicial procedures.

### **Violence in institutions**

#### ***The care system and children with disabilities***

- The principles of the CRC – residential care as a last resort and for the shortest possible time – should be at the centre of care policy for children without parental care.
- To reduce unwarranted placements, implement ‘gate-keeping’ mechanisms and a continuum of services.
- Set up special protection measures for children under five.
- Establish binding standards for residential care at national level, for public and private residential placement and make efforts to reduce the size of residential institutions.

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- Periodically review care placement and set up complaint and monitoring mechanisms, involving independent visitors in monitoring.
- Give special attention to staff screening, ongoing training, financial and non-financial motivation and supervision.
- Take account of children's rights and views in care policies and regulations.
- Give special consideration to prevent discrimination based on ethnicity.
- Eliminate all forms of conduct leading to episodes of violence against children with disabilities.
- Promote exchange of experience at regional level.

### ***Correctional institutions and reception centres***

All the recommendations above also apply to correctional institutions and reception centres. Additionally:

- All States need to have laws in place that are consistent with or better than international standards and should ensure urgent implementation of these. Those perpetrating violence should not have impunity.
- Holistic assessments of violence are needed, including not only the child but other environmental aspects.
- Preparedness to address violence is important, including trained staff etc.
- Launch awareness-raising programmes for staff, children, on child rights and good practices.
- Control better contact with visitors from 'the outside world' (eg media) and put in place safeguards for safety and privacy, ensuring the best interests of the child.
- Provide structured, constructive, predictable and appropriate activities for children, with the possibility of choice.

### **Violence in schools**

#### ***Responsibility of teachers and other staff***

- Ban all humiliating or degrading treatment and punishment in schools; train teachers and others in alternative measures of discipline.
- Equip teachers with the capacity to intervene at an early stage.
- Provide an independent and confidential system of complaints and consultation in all schools, and set up hotlines with the authority to engage with school authorities.

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- Involve children in elaborating and agreeing rules and disciplinary measures.
- Include violence prevention in the school curriculum.
- Adopt and disseminate widely interactive and engaging teaching methods.
- Establish mechanisms for school-to-home cooperation.
- Apply the same child protection policy and standards in residential schools, all military schools and other special schools.
- Establish a monitoring system to evaluate and assess change.

### ***Peer-to-peer violence***

- Define violence in school and devise a common strategy for collecting comparative data.
- Collect and make accessible examples of good practice, methodological tools etc. and promote collaboration and cooperation among researches and practitioners.
- Support schools staff (not only teachers) with training, including in peaceful conflict resolution.
- Advocate for serious research on the legal frameworks.
- Ensure that policy against violence is a permanent preoccupation and not a one-shot action.
- Support campaigns made and conducted by students.
- Promote a supportive framework for children in schools, working towards a pupils' charter.
- Take into greater account the damaging influence of the media and encourage responsible journalism.

### **Violence in the community**

#### ***Organized free-time activities***

- Integrate sports activities into the child protection framework and establish quality standards for sports activities and adults working in them.
- Encourage sports organizations and clubs to adopt child protection policies and procedures.
- With respect to peer violence and bullying, develop standards for children and young people involved in sports, in collaboration with children themselves.
- Minimize opportunities for inappropriate individuals to enter or operate in sport.
- Establish mechanisms and procedures to deal with allegations of child abuse.



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- Enhance research on violence against children in sports activities.
- Promote early intervention by educating the personnel of sports organizations and clubs, parents, teachers and others professionals.

### *Street children*

- Take effective measures to eradicate poverty; restructure budgets and allocate resources to respond to the root causes of the street child phenomenon.
- Build new approaches to institutionalization.
- Establish more leisure activities etc to encourage children not to want escape from State care; strengthen Roma children's minority identity by involving Roma fosters, nurses and teachers in the institutions.
- Enhance research on street children and develop and implement effective policies and programmes for them
- Raise awareness about street children and different opportunities, about minority and migrant cultures.
- Adopt a children-helping-children approach by involving young people and youth groups in designing and implementing programmes and working with street children.
- Promote social responsibility and active involvement of the whole civil society.
- Establish child welfare centres in all municipalities/at local level.
- Establish a child-sensitive complaint system and non-stop toll-free helplines.
- Ensure minority representation within the police working with/for children.

### *Youth gangs*

- Take effective measures to address the root causes that push children to join gangs.
- Reform the juvenile justice system to bring it into line with the principles of the CRC.
- Promote bridges between children and their reference people (parent, social worker etc)
- Train law enforcement officials on the CRC and child-sensitive practical methods.
- Take effective measures, including legal measures, to address the availability of small arms and the so-called 'drug and gun culture'.

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### *Faith-based activities*

- Acknowledge violence in faith-based institutions and communities.
- Prevent any form of forced recruitment of children in religious groups or institutions.
- Ensure that children are never deprived of their rights in the context of their faith.
- Provide resources to enhance research on violence within religious communities and institutions in order to raise awareness and prompt appropriate action to protect children.
- Involve all stakeholders, including religious and spiritual leaders and children, in activities designed to reinforce respect of children's rights.

### *Exploitation and trafficking*

- All States should ratify relevant international and regional legal instruments relevant to exploitation and trafficking.
- Recognize that issues related to exploitation and trafficking are cross-regional and inter-country. Promote regional cooperation.
- Address issues from an economic, criminal and human rights perspective.
- Be better informed and better allied; look at past and existing anti-trafficking efforts to learn.
- Develop understanding in a more sophisticated way of what 'demand' is.
- Treat all victims of trafficking as victims (child victims up to 18 years of age).
- Provide specific training and information programmes for all those dealing with victims of exploitation and trafficking, including the media.
- Find ways to ensure recruitment of appropriate people into positions dealing with children.
- Continue comprehensive efforts to address the root causes, while investing effort in harmonizing legislation and practice at the national level with international standards.
- Highlight the importance of peer-to-peer education.
- Counter web-based violence; create equally attractive 'opposites' on the web and mobile phone services.

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Before leaving for their homes, participants fine-tuned and accepted by acclamation a clear statement of determination to ACT NOW to end violence against children in Europe and Central Asia:

### The Ljubljana Final Conclusions

**Aware** of all forms of violence against children taking place across different settings, including the home and family, schools and residential institutions, in the workplace and in the community, including as a consequence of acts of terrorism, conflicts and war,

**Emphasizing** the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as its Optional Protocols as the standard for the protection of children from all forms of violence and that its provisions as well as other relevant international human rights instruments, including the Convention against Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, must constitute the minimum framework for addressing all forms of violence against children,

**Recalling** the importance of effectively implementing regional treaties for the prevention of all forms of violence against children, including the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Protocol, as well as of ratifying and implementing without delay the European Convention on Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes, the Revised European Social Charter and its Additional Protocol and the Convention on Contact concerning children, the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention of terrorism and particularly its provisions concerning victims,

**Bearing in mind** the final recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its 2000 and 2001 Days of General Discussion on respectively ‘State violence against children’ and ‘Violence against children within the family and in school’, the general body of jurisprudence of the Committee on all forms of violence as well as of other relevant human rights treaty bodies, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights,

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*Recognizing* the diversity of settings in which violence against children takes place across the Europe and Central Asia region and that factors such as gender, ethnic or social origin and disability put some children at greater risk than others; recognizing that the wall of silence around violence in the family including corporal punishment, remains to be broken; recognizing that violence in schools and out-of-school settings, public and private institutions and workplaces needs to be better monitored and that prevention efforts need to be prioritized; recognizing equally the diversity of opportunities to prevent violence and protect victims through different socio-economic structures and programmes,

*Being aware* that violence poses a large burden on the physical and mental health of children, with long lasting consequences on their holistic development, often only manifested later in life,

We, the participants, recognize the importance of a child rights approach in order to bridge the gap between standards and reality, and the challenge of changing perceptions in society, in structures of governance and at an individual level, of what are acceptable ways of behaving towards children. We agree to take the following actions as a matter of priority:

- 1. Develop and put into action, with the active assistance of civil society organizations, measures at all levels** to prevent violence against children through interdisciplinary and participatory approaches that include professionals from different sectors and backgrounds, parents and children, and which are supported at the highest possible political level;
- 2. Ratify relevant international treaties, enact, amend or repeal all domestic legislation as necessary** in order to prohibit all forms of violence against children including corporal punishment and humiliating treatment, and take all necessary measures to prevent and sanction such offences against children; also pay special attention to the development of juvenile justice procedures to prevent violence against children in all stages of the process;
- 3. Give the highest visibility and political importance to the prevention of violence against girls and boys**, including, for example, the launching of public information campaigns to raise awareness about the

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scope and negative consequences of all forms of violence; and to do this by means of developing sustainable partnerships with children, parents, civil society, the private sector, new information technology industries and mass media;

**4. Upgrade technical, legal, procedural and institutional capacity across relevant sectors**, such as education, health, justice, protection services and labour inspections to identify violence and put in place appropriate evidence-based strategies and explicit family and child policies to prevent violence, support child victims and strengthen reporting, referral and response;

**5. Seek to establish, analyse and regularly monitor, the extent of different forms of violence against children**, collect disaggregated data by sex, age and other relevant factors, including the sources of discrimination that make some groups of children particularly vulnerable to violence, and systematically evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions to protect children from violence, as well as efforts to provide timely assistance and address the consequences of abuse, including its social and economic cost for society;

**6. Intervene in an early, effective, gender-sensitive and child-friendly manner** to prevent victimization and re-victimization, through development of sensitive procedures and mechanisms, including provision of confidential advice; child-friendly judicial proceedings, and supportive health and protection services to ensure the physical and psychosocial recovery of affected children and young offenders;

**7. Develop systematic and integrated education on child protection**, encourage training for parents, all relevant professional groups and the mass media, that include information on human rights standards, on non-violent methods of conflict resolution and discipline, as well as on child development and the rights of children with special needs;

**8. Strengthen and develop further all forms of international and cross-border cooperation**, including prevention of criminal activities, in order to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children and to ensure that perpetrators of such violence do not escape justice and receive appropriate treatment;

**9. Create opportunities for children and young people to play a more active role in addressing violence,** equipping children with the knowledge and skills to be better able to recognize violence, and establishing mechanisms to ensure their participation in situation analysis, research and monitoring, and in the design of laws and policies that affect them;

We, participants from all the countries of the European and Central Asian Region, agree that these nine steps will be the first important steps that we will take at domestic and regional level to address violence against children.



Notes

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