

# Mainstreaming VAWG Prevention into the Education Sector



Violence in schools remains a daily reality for millions of children, impacting their learning and wellbeing. At the same time, schools are uniquely placed to teach respect, equality and non-violence. Mainstreaming VAWG prevention across education systems can strengthen learning outcomes and help stop violence before it starts.

**115 MILLION**  
children 

Current estimates indicate that over **115 million children experience school-related gender-based violence** in the form of physical, emotional and/or sexual violence every year.<sup>1</sup>

## Why mainstream VAWG prevention?

- **Creates safer, more respectful schools.** Well-designed and implemented school-based prevention, including age-appropriate curricula on gender equality, respect and non-violence, can reduce bullying and peer violence that disrupts teaching and learning.
- **Improves attendance and retention.** Violence keeps many children out of schools, especially girls and those from marginalised groups. Research from Ethiopia finds that over 40% of parents said fear of violence discourages them from sending daughters to school.<sup>2</sup>
- **Strengthens learning outcomes.** Children learn better when they feel safe. In Rwanda, students who felt unsafe at school scored 36% lower in maths than peers who felt safe.<sup>3</sup>
- **Delivers strong economic and social returns:** Preventing violence in and around schools reduces long-term costs linked to poor learning and lost productivity. The World Bank estimates that school violence results in US\$11 trillion in lost lifetime earnings globally.<sup>4</sup> Violence also harms mental health, and sexual violence can lead to early and unintended pregnancies, further undermining girls' ability to stay in school and reach their potential.

<sup>1</sup> UNGEI (2024) [End School-related Gender-based Violence: A Whole School Approach](#)

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children Denmark, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women's Affairs (2008) [A Study on Violence against Girls in Primary Schools and Its Impacts on Girls' Education in Ethiopia](#). Addis Ababa: Save the Children Denmark

<sup>3</sup> Kibriya, S., Zhou, S., Zhang, Y. and Fatema, N. (2018) The Effects of School Safety on Academic Achievement: Evidence from Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia, Washington D.C.: USAID

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2021) [Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case - Selected Findings](#), Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

## Key actions to mainstream effectively

- 1. Use education systems to prevent violence at scale.** Lasting change happens when prevention is built into education policies, plans and budgets. However, as awareness and reporting increase, systems must also be ready to respond with clear safeguarding standards and referral pathways linking schools to child protection, health and justice services.
- 2. Integrate prevention within curriculum and classroom practice** to shape norms across an entire generation. Evidence shows that embedding life skills and healthy relationships into curricula is an effective way to reduce violence.<sup>5</sup> Approaches should be context-appropriate and inclusive for students at higher risk, including children with disabilities who are over twice as likely to face violence than their peers.<sup>6</sup> In Madagascar, What Works II funds Projet Jeune Leader to address violence through a “life skills” curriculum, which the National Ministry of Education has committed to institutionalise into the education system to reach all schools.<sup>7</sup>

In Pakistan, Right to Play is using play-based learning to build students’ empathy, confidence and critical thinking around gender norms and violence. Funded by the UK’s [What Works to Prevent VAWG](#) (What Works I), an [evaluation](#) found large reductions in peer violence in programme schools - 33% for boys and 58% for girls, compared with 28% and 21% in control schools. The programme is now being scaled up through [What Works to Prevent VAWG: Impact at Scale](#) (What Works II).

- 3. Invest in teachers as the frontline of prevention.** Supporting teachers to prevent violence starts with including it in pre- and in-service teacher training and professional standards, helping equip them with the skills to create safe, respectful classrooms. Innovative examples of including violence prevention in training modules can be found in Benin<sup>8</sup> and Belize.<sup>9</sup>
- 4. Engage families and communities in violence prevention.** In Somalia, What Works II is funding a school-based prevention intervention that uses an adapted Communities Care model (developed by UNICEF and partners) to link schools and communities. The programme aims to shift harmful norms and strengthen survivor-centred care systems.
- 5. Generate and use evidence to drive action.** Better data helps governments target resources and design more effective programmes. This includes collecting disaggregated data on violence and integrating it into education management information systems. Where prevention is mainstreamed into an education programme, it also involves tracking violence outcomes.

## Further resources

- The Safe to Learn Coalition's [Global Programmatic Framework](#) provides a practical roadmap, with 24 benchmarks for governments to assess where they are and what to prioritise.
- Safe to Learn and What Works (2024) [Policy brief on violence in and around schools and its direct and indirect impacts on educational outcomes of children](#)
- What Works (2025) [Integrating violence against children and gender-based violence prevention into national education systems](#)

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation (2016) *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*

<sup>6</sup> Fang, Z et al. (2022) ‘Global estimates of violence against children with disabilities: an updated systematic review and meta-analysis’, *The Lancet*, 6(5)

<sup>7</sup> What Works II (2025) [Integrating violence against children and gender based violence prevention into national education systems](#). What Works II.

<sup>8</sup> The [Graines de Paix teaching training initiative](#) won the UNESCO-Hamdan Prize for Teacher Development in 2022.

<sup>9</sup> UN Belize (2022) [‘In Belize, teacher training makes schools safer for children’](#).