

Media Update

10 October 2024

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD “Girls’ Vision for the Future” 11 October 2024

The potential of the world’s more than 1.1 billion girls is limitless. But as we creep closer to the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals, the world continues to fail girls.

Girls account for more than 70 percent of new adolescent HIV infections. They are almost twice as likely as boys to miss out on education or training. And child marriage remains widespread, with approximately one in five girls globally married before the age of 18. Across the world, hard-won gains for gender equality are being erased by a war on the fundamental rights of women and girls, endangering their lives, restricting their choices, and limiting girls’ futures.

The theme of this year’s International Day of the Girl Child is ‘Girls’ Vision for the Future’.

Girls already have a vision of a world where they can thrive. They are working to turn that vision into action, and demanding their voices be heard. It is high time we listened. We must provide girls with a seat at the table, through education, and by giving them the resources they need and opportunities to participate and lead.

The courage, hope and determination of girls are a force to be reckoned with. It is time for the world to step up and help transform their vision and aspirations into reality.

UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

Over 370 million girls and women globally subjected to rape or sexual assault as children – UNICEF

First-ever estimates on sexual violence in childhood reveal alarming prevalence, with devastating impact on children

NEW YORK, 10 October 2024 – More than 370 million girls and women alive today – or 1 in 8 – experienced rape or sexual assault before the age of 18, according to new UNICEF estimates released today.

The first-ever global and regional estimates on sexual violence against children – published ahead of the International Day of the Girl – reveal the scale of the violation worldwide, especially for adolescent girls, often with lifelong implications.

When ‘non-contact’ forms of sexual violence, such as online or verbal abuse are included, the number of girls and women affected rises to 650 million globally – or 1 in 5, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive prevention and support strategies to effectively address all forms of violence and abuse.

“Sexual violence against children is a stain on our moral conscience,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. “It inflicts deep and lasting trauma, often by someone the child knows and trusts, in places where they should feel safe.”

Sexual violence against children is pervasive, cutting across geographical, cultural, and economic boundaries, the data show. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of victims, with 79 million girls and women affected (22 per cent), followed by 75 million in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (8 per cent), 73 million in Central and Southern Asia (9 per cent), 68 million in Europe and Northern America (14 per cent), 45 million in Latin America and the Caribbean

(18 per cent), 29 million in Northern Africa and Western Asia (15 per cent), and 6 million in Oceania (34 per cent).

In fragile settings such as those with weak institutions, UN peacekeeping forces, or large numbers of refugees fleeing due to political or security crises, girls face an even greater risk, with the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in childhood slightly more than 1 in 4.

“Children in fragile settings are especially vulnerable to sexual violence,” said Russell. “We are witnessing horrific sexual violence in conflict zones, where rape and gender-based violence are often used as weapons of war.”

According to the data, most childhood sexual violence occurs during adolescence, with a significant spike between ages 14 and 17. Studies show that children who experience sexual violence are more likely to suffer repeated abuse. Implementing targeted interventions during adolescence is crucial to breaking this cycle and mitigating the long-term impacts of such trauma.

Survivors often carry the trauma of sexual violence into adulthood, facing higher risks of sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, social isolation, and mental health issues like anxiety and depression, as well as challenges in forming healthy relationships. Evidence shows that the impact is further compounded when children delay disclosing their experiences, sometimes for long periods, or keep the abuse secret altogether.

Although more girls and women are affected, and their experiences are better documented, boys and men are also impacted, the data show. An estimated 240 to 310 million boys and men – or around 1 in 11 – have experienced rape or sexual assault during childhood. This estimate rises to between 410 and 530 million when non-contact forms are included.

Persistent data gaps, particularly on boys’ experiences and non-contact forms of sexual violence, highlight the need for increased investment in data collection to capture the full scale of sexual violence against children.

As government leaders and civil society, including activists, survivors, and young people, prepare to meet at the inaugural [Global Ministerial Conference on Violence Against Children](#) in Colombia next month, the data highlight the urgent need for intensified global action to combat childhood sexual violence and build a safer future for children worldwide by:

- **Challenging and changing social and cultural norms** that allow sexual violence to occur and discourage children from seeking help.
- **Equipping every child with accurate, accessible, and age-appropriate information** that empowers them to recognize and report sexual violence.
- **Ensuring that every child victim and survivor has access to services** that support justice and healing and reduce the risk of further harm.
- **Strengthening laws and regulations to protect children from all forms of sexual violence**, including in organizations that work with children, and investing in the people, resources, and systems needed to implement them.
- **Building better national data systems** to monitor progress and ensure accountability by implementing international standards like the International Classification of Violence against Children.

Notes for editors:

Estimates are based on data from a subset of countries, varying by indicator. The most comprehensive data coverage is on girls' and women's experiences of contact sexual violence from nationally representative surveys conducted between 2010 and 2022 in 120 countries and areas. As a result of existing data gaps, limited coverage, and the varying scope and quality of the available information, global estimates on non-contact sexual violence and sexual violence against boys and men were informed by a broader range of data sources and applied some indirect methods.

The list of fragile and conflict-affected situations is released annually by the World Bank Group. See the classification and country list [here](#).

Read the data brief [here](#).

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For more information, please contact:

Sara Alhattab, UNICEF New York, Tel: +1 917-957-6536,
salhattab@unicef.org