



IN BRIEF



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL OFFICE

Photo: UN Women/ Leovigildo Nhampule

What's the Issue?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most pervasive human rights violation globally. Decades of advocacy and other efforts by feminist and women's rights organizations and networks have elevated public attention and increased State commitments to end this shadow pandemic, working to address the immediate and long-term consequences and costs of VAWG. However, many women and girls continue to experience violence, across all stages of their lives. It occurs in various forms and takes place in all settings, both physical and increasingly, virtual spaces. The COVID-19 Pandemic has intensified this situation, escalating the urgency to act, while creating an unprecedented opportunity to draw from the significant evidence that now exists showing that VAWG can be prevented, and efforts can effectively respond and support survivors. There is potential to create a world where women and girls can enjoy their right to live free of violence.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) can manifest as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse and is most often perpetrated by a partner or someone who is known to the woman or girl affected. In sub-Saharan Africa, 33% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, compared to 20% of women globally. One in five (20%) in the region have experienced past-year violence, compared to 13% globally¹. VAWG has multiple health, economic and social consequences for individuals, families, communities, and societies. It also brings high costs to

entire countries, from greater social services and health care, security, expenses to losses in productivity to a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity, which can affect future generations.

Despite these alarming figures and the increased adoption of relevant laws and policies, tolerance for domestic violence against women and girls has not reduced. Women's acceptance of men's use of violence over their partners ranges from 5.5% in South Africa to 78% in South Sudan for women, and men's acceptance from 9.2% in South Africa to 40.5% in Uganda.²

In addition to domestic violence and non-partner sexual violence (including harassment), harmful practices such as child marriages remain high in several countries across the East and Southern Africa region. Globally, at least one in five girls are married before the age of 18. In East and Southern Africa, these figures are significantly higher for countries with prevalence data, with 50% of women aged 20-24 in Malawi married before the age of 18. Child marriage rates in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are also above the global average, ranging from 48% in Mozambique to 23% in Kenya.³

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is another harmful practice that has affected an estimated 200 million women and girls, based on 30 countries with representative data. Within East and Southern Africa, FGM practices are higher in the Horn of Africa, with 98% of Somali women between 15 and 49 being

¹ WHO, 2021. WHO AFRICAN REGION FACT SHEET VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PREVALENCE ESTIMATES, 2018. for the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (VAW-IAWGED).

² UN Women Women Count (VAW Dashboard) and Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

³ UNFPA. Child marriage | United Nations Population Fund (unfpa.org) (Accessed 14 April 2022)

12

**of the 22 countries
in East and
Southern Africa
have dedicated
national action
plans or strategies
addressing VAWG.**



cut followed by Djibouti (93%), Eritrea (89%), Sudan (80%), and Ethiopia (74%). Lower rates are recorded in Kenya (21%) and Uganda (1%)⁴. Other groups affected by harmful practices include widows, persons with albinism, and sexual minorities, but their marginalization and lack of disaggregated data limits the visibility of attention to their experiences of violence.

The increase in available prevalence data on different forms of violence against women and girls is an important element of increasing attention and investments corresponding to the scale of the problem. However, women and girls' actual experiences of violence are higher than the figures captured in the studies, due to the many challenges that prevent them from disclosing or reporting violence. These barriers include attitudes that blame survivors, the lack of accessible or quality support and referral pathways tailored to the diverse needs of women and girls, the costs and time burden that many survivors cannot afford to take.



Photo: James Ndabia

Representatives from Kenya's GBV survivor community; Kenya's State Department of Gender; Governments of Italy, Canada, Sweden, Finland and EU Mission; civil society leaders gathered to illuminate Nairobi's iconic Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), contributing to global efforts to "Orange the World" in 2021. The nation's GBV prevention and response actors stood in solidarity to kick off the campaign.

⁴ UNFPA. | United Nations Population Fund (unfpa.org) (Accessed 14 April 2022)

Our Solutions

UN Women works to accelerate efforts to end all forms of violence against women and girls in the region, drawing upon our signature interventions and triple mandate which works through normative, coordination and operational approaches.

Advancing equitable and rights-based norms and standards, UN Women works with diverse partners to ensure international, regional and national commitments uphold the right to live free of violence and that commitments made are implemented and monitored to achieve their intended results. These efforts build on the significant legal and policy foundation that exists across Africa, where all countries have constitutional provisions that call for equality and non-discrimination and nearly all have ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child & the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. More than half (38 countries) of the 54 African Union Member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and in East and Southern Africa, all countries have legal provisions to protect against violence. At the same time, only 27 countries have legislation on domestic violence, only 19 have constitutional provisions for women's rights and 13 countries have legislation criminalizing FGM.⁵ With this context in mind, UN Women's efforts focus on closing the implementation gap and ensuring accountability for commitments made.

At the operational level, UN Women works to support regional and national institutions to implement their commitments to end VAWG by advancing capacities, promoting increased investments on the issue, and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration toward the delivery of evidence-based, context-specific interventions across East and Southern Africa. This leverages UN Women's presence in 13 countries under the oversight of the Regional Office, which covers support to 22 countries. UN Women is uniquely positioned with 58 personnel dedicated to ending violence against women and girls across East and Southern Africa and decades of policy and programmatic experience which has generated analysis, evidence and lessons on key elements for EAW. This holistic approach comprises:

1) An enabling legislative and policy environment. UN Women has supported most of the 12 countries⁶ with dedicated EAW Plans or Strategies in the East and Southern Africa region with tailored guidance and financial assistance to develop

⁵ UN Women- Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database: <https://constitutions.unwomen.org/en/dashboard>

⁶ Countries with National Action Plans or Strategies include: **(Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa, Somalia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Eswatini and Lesotho)**. Countries highlighted in bold were supported by UN Women for their Plans.

comprehensive costed national action plans and strategies for EAWG. UN Women also supports the planning, budgeting and monitoring of existing frameworks and improving the collection and use of administrative and prevalence data on VAW by different actors to ensure interventions and investments are grounded in the realities of women and girls in diverse contexts.

2) Comprehensive and coordinated evidence-based prevention efforts. UN Women has worked with partners to design and implement prevention interventions tailored to specific settings, using the proven strategies outlined in the UN RESPECT Framework as part of a comprehensive approach to preventing violence before it begins. Examples of strategies employed in the region include relationship-strengthening interventions, women's social and economic empowerment, Safe Cities and Public Spaces, school-based programming, engaging parents and mobilizing communities through SASA! and other interventions to transform attitudes and practices (including related to harmful masculinities) and working with traditional and faith-based authorities, and other social influencers.

3) Quality, multi-sectoral essential services for survivors of violence, recognizing their diversity of experiences and needs. Drawing from the Joint UN Essential Services Package for Women and Girl Survivors of Violence, UN Women has focused on strengthening institutional capacities, standards and service delivery in justice (including legal assistance), security and social services (shelters, helplines, counselling), as well as economic recovery and ensuring governance and coordination mechanisms are in place and operational at national and sub-national levels.

4) Within civil society, women's rights and feminist organizations, networks and movements are a key constituency and leader in EAW historically, and UN Women continues to provide support to these groups to amplify their voices in various spaces, contribute to their efforts to enhance institutional capacities and programming on EAW, as well as strengthen solidarity between and among groups.

Through its coordination mandate, UN Women works to deepen partnerships with State actors, civil society organizations, as well as development partners (including within the UN System). UN Women regularly convenes platforms and spaces for dialogue, exchange of knowledge and promising practices, coordinates joint initiatives for EAWG and encourages collaborative advocacy efforts to raise attention and visibility of the issues. UN Women also convenes regional processes in support of multi-stakeholder Generation Equality GBV Action Coalition and the inter-agency UN Trust Fund to End VAWG.



How We Make a Difference: Illustrative Examples

Recent UN Women successes from around the region include:

EU- UN Spotlight Initiative: As the largest single global investment in EAW, the comprehensive, joint UN approach to eliminating VAWG, including harmful practices and to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Spotlight Initiative has enhanced existing efforts and catalyzed new action at country and continental levels. Working in collaboration with sister UN agencies, the African Union Commission, AU Member States, the European Union and civil society partners across the continent and in specific countries, UN Women has contributed to improving the enabling environment, prevention and responses to VAWG, improving availability and quality of VAW data and support to strengthened women's rights and civil society movements. In **Malawi** and **Mozambique**, models of mobile courts and justice mechanisms were exchanged to increase women and girls' access to justice in more remote areas. In **Zimbabwe**, Youth Innovators against Violence conducted research and in **Uganda**, a toolkit for women human rights defenders was developed to protect against the backlash and resistance they often face.

Increased commitments by diverse actors for EAW, supported partnerships, funding and technical support to over 100 CSOs in ESA implementing EAW interventions around one of the Initiative's six pillars of action, and improved joint and streamlined collaboration for EAW within the UN system, and with governments. The Initiative has dedicated programming in 4 ESA countries (Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe). In addition, over 30 CSOs have received funding through two inter-agency funding mechanisms, the UN Trust Fund to End VAWG and the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund. A continental-wide Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme focuses on increased awareness and implementation of laws by AU Member States, strengthening VAW data availability and use, as well as evidence generation/sharing on EAWG, harmful practices (including FGM and child marriage), SRHR and strengthening women's movements and CSOs working on EAW across the continent.

Generating Evidence to accelerate progress for EAWG: UN Women ESARO invests in knowledge generation and exchange to contribute to closing evidence gaps and amplifying promising practices across the region. From 2022-2024, research initiatives include:

Collaboration with the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) to develop an African Shared Research Agenda for EAWG. UN Women ESARO and UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office are collaborating with the SVRI to support the development of a regional priority setting exercise that will identify the major gaps and questions which need to be addressed for making progress towards ending VAWG. This works to ensure that research undertaken is both priority-driven and carried out in such a way that it provides a sound practical and empirical basis for interventions/programmes, policy and advocacy on VAWG. The exercise builds from the [Global Shared Research Agenda for research on VAW \(GSRA\)](#) launched by the SVRI and The Equality Institute in 2021.

Programmatic analysis on Strengthening Solidarity and Movements through Joint EAWG Initiatives. UN Women is working to contribute evidence on the relevance and impact of joint EAWG initiatives to improve multi-stakeholder collaboration and solidarity for accelerated achievement of national and regional commitments. This is in line with the existing EAWG commitments in East and Southern Africa, including as part of the GBV Action Coalition and will fill a gap in knowledge on how partnerships can be leveraged to have a greater impact in both preventing and responding to violence against women and girls. Through research and subsequent exchange, UN Women aims to generate evidence of what works and how programmes can connect movements and strengthen solidarity between actors, building on existing lessons, such as from the Spotlight Initiative in Africa.

Financing Violence-Free Futures in East and Southern Africa: Making Investments that Accelerate Progress and Accountability for Women and Girls: In support of regional women's movements, networks, and organizations' efforts to use their voice, leadership and agency to hold duty-bearers accountable for their commitments to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, UN Women, is conducting research to analyze the trends in financial investments in ending VAWG in the region and how these investments facilitate State accountability for the prevention and response to violence against women and girls. This will contribute to evidence on how ending VAWG investments can most effectively strengthen State accountability for upholding the rights of women and girls.

How we work

UN Women ESARO works at continental, regional, national and sub-national levels to advance women and girls right to live free of violence.

We:

- Provide technical assistance as requested to regional entities, the United Nations system, country offices and partners related to evidence-based practices to end violence against women and girls. For example, UN Women, in collaboration with UNFPA and WHO Regional Offices convened the first cohort of countries to participate in a ten-week workshop series on the [UN RESPECT Framework](#) to equip government, civil society and UN agency partners from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe with the knowledge and skills to advance comprehensive evidence-based prevention efforts in East and Southern Africa. The workshops were facilitated by the Prevention Collaborative and enabled cross-country exchange among the 51 participants reached to enhance ongoing prevention efforts and improve coordination for greater impact.
- In May 2022, UN Women collaborated with UN sister agencies to conduct a series of virtual learning sessions on the [inter-agency Essential Services Package](#) for Women and Girl Survivors of Violence, for deepening government and civil society knowledge and planning capacities for improving quality support services in their countries.
- Generate evidence and contribute thought leadership on priority areas and knowledge gaps related to EVAW in the region and facilitate knowledge exchange to make evidence more accessible and available to individuals and institutions. Between 2018 and 2021, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office published 13 knowledge products related to ending violence against women, including videos and presentations to complement reports, such as the [Multi-Country Analytical Study on Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Violence against Women and Girls in East and Southern Africa](#) and [Regional Analysis on Trends and Emerging Issues Related to Women with disabilities in East and Southern Africa focusing on COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- Convene dialogues and hold platforms for collaboration and coordination of efforts, recognizing the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships,



Photo: UN Women/Eva Sibanda

Fortunate holds toll free line call cards that she gives the community to report incidences of violence. Fortunate is a Community Activist operating in Kambizi South Division Moroto Municipality, Uganda.

the intersectional issues that shape women and girls' experiences of violence and growing solidarity for successfully ending VAWG. Dialogues convened included [Leveraging Positive Masculinities for Green, Inclusive and Resilient Communities in the post COVID-19 Recovery Agenda](#) as a side event for the 2022 Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development; the 2021 Regional Policy Dialogue: on Adopting the Social Institutions and Gender Index Data to Address Barriers To Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health in Humanitarian Settings); the [Virtual High-Level Dialogue: Accelerating Progress and Accountability for Ending GBV in East and Southern Africa, among others](#).

- Lead strategic advocacy efforts to amplify attention, awareness and accelerate accountability for EVAWG, engaging diverse stakeholders from government, civil society, including media, traditional and religious leaders, feminist activists and artists, among others. This includes UN Women's support to the [Council of Traditional Leaders](#), which has mobilized traditional leaders across the continent and is a commitment maker in support of the GBV Action Coalition, as well as support to diverse artists and advocates as influencers and change makers. Building from our programmatic experience across the region, UN Women is also consolidating an approach to engaging men and boys and promoting positive masculinities to help set new norms and transform practices toward an Africa and world free of violence.