

SAFE TO LEARN PROGRESS 2019-2023 - UGANDA

Call to Action Benchmark Assessment

The Safe to Learn Call to Action is a global commitment to end violence in, around and through schools. It sets out a shared 5-point policy agenda for governments, civil society, development partners and the private sector: implement laws and policies, strengthen school-level prevention and response, promote behaviour change and shift harmful social and gender norms, invest resources effectively, and generate and use evidence.

The Call to Action is operationalised through a set of benchmarks, informed by international child rights frameworks, United Nations guidance and minimum standards, and good practice from the field of child safeguarding and child protection. The benchmarks provide guidance to implement the Call to Action, setting out the accountabilities of the education sector and providing a framework for measuring progress. By meeting these benchmarks, countries can systematically address violence as a barrier to learning and uphold children's rights to safety, protection and education.

This report reviews national progress against the Call to Action benchmarks for the period 2019 to 2023. The report was developed based on a desk review of national policies, plans and partner programme documents. Progress against each benchmark was then rated by the government, in coordination with the UNICEF Country Office. The assessment can be used by stakeholders to identify priorities for future action and to strengthen national efforts to create safe and enabling learning environments for all children.

Benchmark Met: Yes, In Progress, No.

Call to Action area 1: Implement laws and policies

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

1.1 The national government includes prevention of violence in around schools as a specific strategy in education sector policies, plans and budgets.



The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2020/2025 includes an explicit objective to prevent and reduce violence in schools with accompanying strategies budgets and key performance indicators. While there is a strategic objective on violence in school (VACiS) funding for elimination of violence against children (VAC) is minimal.

In 2020, the guidelines for preventing and managing teenage pregnancy were updated to include a strategy for the re-entry of adolescent mothers into education, offering them a second chance.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) had a National Strategy and Plan of Action for Violence Against Children in Schools (NSP VACiS) 2015-2020. MoES has commenced the review and development of the revised National Strategy on VACiS for the next five years. [1] In 2022, the Ministry conducted a Safe to Learn Symposium to reflect on the implementation of the recommendations of the Safe to Learn diagnostic study of 2019. The communique from this symposium is informing the review of the Gender and VAC strategy. [2]

The Ministry of Education and Sports has also been implementing the Guidelines for the Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response to Violence against Children (VAC).

While VAC is included in the national strategies, the monitoring arm is still weak, and indicators are not fully incorporated in school inspection tools. The Directorate of Education standards is open to incorporating the VACiS indicators in the digital inspection tools. Several engagements with the inspection departments across country are ongoing to sensitize them on violence against children and gender so that the integration of the indicators is simplified.

1.2 There is explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools, and policies are in place to support positive discipline and effective classroom management.



Corporal punishment in school is prohibited by the 2016 amendment of the Children Act. If someone breaks this rule, they can be punished with up to three years in prison, a fine, or both. However, as of March 2022, there were no final rules to enforce this law.

While corporal punishment is unlawful and a guide to alternatives to corporal punishment exists, positive mindset changes for teachers that a learner can transform without punitive versus corrective measures remain a challenge and violence against children in school persists.

Worth noting is that teachers may not 'hold the cane' but may resort to student leaders caning or parents or even giving alternative options that keep children stressed, out of class or humiliated. [3] The Ministry of Education and Sports has embarked on the process of reviewing the handbook on the alternatives to corporal punishments. Once finalized, it will be disseminated widely to all teachers across the country. Orientation on the use of alternatives and mentoring of teachers not to use a cane will also be undertaken.

Right to Play and Raising Voices during 2020-21 have provided training in positive discipline techniques for teachers. [4] The Ministry of Education and Sports will utilize these techniques during the review of the alternatives to corporal punishment handbook.

1.3 The roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education in response and referral to incidents of violence are clearly set out in the multi-sectoral national child protection policy framework.



A National Child Protection Policy (2020) exists under the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, with the Ministry of Education and Sports as critical in its implementation. [5] In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Sports are clearly spelt out in the Guidelines for Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response (RTRR). Unfortunately, case management beyond education institutions is still a challenge. The Ministry has developed case management registers which are being utilized by the schools to record cases, but these need to be adapted into a digital tool.

The Ministry of Education and Sports, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, is working to enhance child well-being structures at both the National and District levels. Child well-being committees in 88 districts have undergone strengthening efforts. This initiative aims to operationalize the National Child Policy (2020) and its Implementation Plan for 2020-2025. The link between the Child well-being committees, Probation and Social Welfare workforce and school disciplinary committees needs further strengthening to ensure more effective referral and response to cases of VACiS. A mapping of service points from national, district, subcounty, parish, to school for integrated /multisectoral service point or using schools as one of the platforms of Integrated platforms for service delivery (Water Sanitation and Hygiene - WASH, Health, Child Protection, Mental Health and psychosocial support - MHPSS etc) is a great opportunity to create synergy, positive impact, coordinated and collaborative effort to enhance a safe and healthy school environment for effective and conducive learning with clear and well streamlined service referral pathways including with local council structures, police, judiciary, health centers, MHPSS services, toll free services and other. [6]

1.4 The country has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and in situations of armed conflict is implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.



Uganda has not endorsed the [Safe Schools Declaration](#).

The MRM Taskforce in Uganda engaged various stakeholders in information collection by identifying partners such as UN agencies, inter-agency humanitarian clusters, international NGOs, service providers, and community-based groups. They established [coordination mechanisms with each of these partners to improve reporting on grave violations, including school attacks](#).

Call to Action area 2: Strengthen prevention and response in education systems and schools

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

2.1 Key violence prevention strategies are embedded in curriculum-based activities for children.



Uganda's primary and secondary education curricula include violence prevention strategies. Primary education covers peace, security, child protection, safety, culture, and gender. Life skills, violence prevention, and equal relationships are introduced in upper primary through creative arts, physical education, and religious education. A Life Skills Curriculum for Primary School Teachers (2011) and a Life Education Learning Syllabus for Lower Secondary aim to develop skills and values. However, the [Safe to Learn \(STL\) diagnostic in 2020 found that implementation was uneven, with variations among district officers, headteachers, and teachers](#). The Ministry of Education and Sports, after the diagnostic study, introduced an adolescent-centered Life Skills Toolkit for children and adolescents at school level through the co-curricula space. With [UNICEF support, adolescents from 1,049 schools benefited from structured life skills sessions including on VACiS](#). The challenge remains that life skills are not assessed and as a result they are not prioritized by schools. The discussion for NCDC and UNEB to incorporate continuous /competence-based assessment for the life skills component of the curriculum and in the summative assessment for UNEB has been kick started by UNICEF and the two bodies NCDC and UNEB. [7]

During 2020-2021 Raising Voices has promoted the integration of the Good School Toolkit into school curriculum and management, applying the toolkit in 500 primary and 100 secondary schools. [8] During the same years, Right to Play organized drama sessions to increase awareness on violence against children using conflict and gender-sensitive play-based learning methods, reaching 105,802 children in schools. The initiative also included providing training to junior leaders on leadership and life skills. [9]

A training module on School related Gender based violence has been incorporated in the pre service teacher training curriculum as well as teacher training materials on sexuality education. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Sports has developed a Life Skills Toolkit to empower young people with information on a number of challenges in the 21st century. [10]

2.2 Child safeguarding principles and procedures are in place in schools, inclusive of codes of conduct, and safe recruitment standards.



The Ministry of Education and Sports has updated the Guidelines for Reporting, Tracking, Referral, and Response to violence against children (RTRR). Abridged versions of the RTRR tailored for learners, teachers, police, health, and the community have been created to guide school staff on reporting and responding to violence against children in schools, providing tools to track cases in accordance with existing laws. The condensed versions for learners and the community are now available in five languages: Aringa, Lumasaba, Kupsabinyi, Maida, and Lugbarati. The "Journeys Activity Handbook for Teachers and School Staff" supports headteachers in leading activities to prevent violence and report cases. Developed in 2017 by MoES with support from USAID, it helps in seeking appropriate assistance. However, [findings from the STL diagnostic \(2020\)](#), indicate that district

officers reported disparities in teacher training, with only 46 per cent mentioning pre-service training on child safeguarding for newly qualified teachers and 64 per cent reporting regular in-service training (on procedures as well as positive discipline). MoES with UNICEF support developed additional case management tools; school VACiS registers, RTRR, posters and charts for learners, school stakeholders and the community. Extensive dissemination is required to operationalize the tools at school and district levels for more effective case management.

While the teachers code of conduct clearly articulated zero tolerance to VACiS and disciplinary action if standards are violated, monitoring compliance is still weak. Stronger coordination between the district local government, education service commission and child protection structures is required to bring perpetrators of violence, including the teachers, to book. [11]

The revised Teacher Training Curriculum now includes a module addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence. This aims to ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped to recognize and prevent gender biases, avoiding their reinforcement in school and classroom practices. However, the module is only for primary and secondary school teachers. There is an urgent need to develop play-based materials for teachers and learners in pre-primary schools.

The Ministry of Education has structures to support the management and wellbeing of children in the school settings, including the school management Committees at Primary level and Board of Governors at secondary level. With support from UNESCO, management committees selected districts have been empowered with leadership skills to respond to issues of VAC in their schools. In addition, the Ministry is implementing the early warning system as a measure to identify learners who are likely to drop out of school due to violence. [12]

The NGOs Right to Play and Raising Voices, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and funding from Safe to Learn, have worked during 2020-21 to improve safety in 30 primary and 3 secondary schools within Uganda's Adjumani District, benefiting 9,000 girls and boys. [13]

A Child Helpline (Sauti) was established prior to endorsing the Call to Action - it operates a toll-free service at 116, available on all networks 24/7. [14] The teachers' code of conduct (2012) outlines obligations related to child safeguarding.

2.3 Each school has at least one focal point who is capacitated to provide front-line mental health/psychosocial support to children experiencing violence.



The MoES set up a Department of Guidance and Counselling in 2008 and established an accrediting body for the counseling profession in 2010. Despite these initiatives, there are significant gaps in the training and preparation of school counselors.

MoES has ensured that every school has an improvement plan which includes a safe learning environment, building teacher's capacity for psychosocial support and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework.

The MoES has guidelines outlining the roles and responsibilities of senior women and men teachers. These teachers are designated as violence against children focal points. Monitoring and school inspection for cases of VACiS remains a gap. The Ministry of Education has started conversations with the Directorate of Education Standards on the review of the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS) to include violence against children.

There are long judicial processes to prove one guilty and long processes and costs involved for victim to be declared abused, especially sexual abuse. [15]

2.4 The physical environment in and around schools is safe and designed with the well-being of children in mind.

In progress 

The BRMS has minimum standards for educational infrastructure, hygiene, sanitation, and equipment (BRMS Indicators for Education Institutions, 2010). The Education Standards Agency ensures that these standards are followed operating through national, regional, and district inspectorates. The BRMS aims to maintain the quality of educational services, inform school owners about essential facility requirements, and provide safety guidelines for educational institutions. Specific criteria include government-approved buildings, compliance with safety laws, and consideration for children with special needs and gender issues in design, separate pit latrines for girls and boys, secure school compounds, and classrooms with sufficient seating space for students in each group.

The Ministry has just reviewed its construction designs to take into consideration the unique needs of learners including girls and learners with disabilities. [16]

New Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards will be developed that are specific for Early Childhood Development Centers and pre-primary learning classes/spaces that will be developmentally and age appropriate and designed to support the youngest children's safety, wellbeing, and conducive learning environment. While the existing BRMS for primary and secondary is due for review to incorporate new trends.

Call to Action area 3: Shift social and gender norms and promote behaviour change

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

3.1 There is wide dissemination and engagement with stakeholders to build knowledge and appreciation of child rights and laws prohibiting violence.

In progress 

The National Strategy and Plan of Action for Violence Against Children in Schools (NSP VACiS) 2015-2020 developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), emphasizes disseminating information about child rights related to school violence. It focuses on specific goals, including a national campaign for violence-free schools in primary, secondary, and technical schools. This campaign educates the public about children's rights, consequences of violence in schools, and stakeholders' roles in prevention. The plan includes a national training program for key stakeholders to enhance their capacity in addressing school violence. Another objective is to empower student-led school clubs to raise awareness. The National Campaign on ending defilement and Teenage Pregnancy championed by the Minister of Education and Sports facilitated information dissemination to various stakeholders on child rights and prevention of teenage pregnancy, defilement and child marriage, and the promotion of positive parenting. Relatedly, the Adolescent led Peer to Peer GBS facilitated the dissemination of the Re-entry guidelines for child mothers to re-enroll in school and other alternative skilling programmes. Persistent deep rooted social norms harmful to child rights require more sustained engagement.

With support from UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and CISP, UNICEF Uganda has received technical support by training 63 pertinent UN staff, ministries staff, districts staff, and implementing partners staff, on programming for Social Norms Change interventions, especially for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Ending child marriage.

Through the inter-sectoral committee on violence against children, there are efforts to ensure dissemination and dialogues on child protection issues. In addition, through the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social development, parenting sessions and programs for male engagement are held within communities. [17]

The Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development has strengthened the social work force at the community level to sensitize the communities and detect and report cases of violence against children to respective service points.

3.2 Specific, evidence-informed interventions are researched and implemented, addressing social norms that drive key forms of violence and/or helping children manage risks.



Despite the gains made by the sector in developing and disseminating policy guidelines relating to VACiS including capacity building for teachers, the bigger bottleneck of positive social norm and mindset change in this area is not yet fully addressed. This is the area where collaboration with Social and Behavioural change unit is critical to map out key strategies that can tackle the issue of negative social norms around VACiS. [18]

Raising Voices is implementing and scaling up the Good School Toolkit (GST), a multifaceted school intervention designed to transform the culture of the school community. This whole school initiative involves active participation from teachers, students, and school-affiliated community members, addressing key areas such as teacher-student relationships, peer-to-peer interactions, student- and teacher-to-school connections, as well as parent- and community-to-school governance relationships. Through funding from STL between 2020-21, the GST was scaled up to reach nearly 1000 primary schools and 100 new secondary schools. This initiative has been evaluated showing positive results and it is now being scaled up to 23 districts, with the government distributing GST materials to over 5,000 schools. It was evaluated using a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design, showing reduction in violence against students in just 18 months.

An impact assessment on the EU- UN Spotlight Initiative programme in Uganda was conducted, and its findings informed the planning and budgeting for the new Spotlight Initiative Programme phase, for the elimination of violence against women and children in Uganda. They also informed the development of the National campaign “Protect the Girl, Save the nation” for ending Teenage Pregnancy, Defilement, Child marriage, and promotion of positive parenting, spearheaded by the First Lady of Uganda.

A baseline assessment of social norms and behavioral drivers in relation to Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation in Uganda is commencing, to inform planning, implementation, and monitoring of related programmes in the country.

3.3 Young people, parents, teachers, and community members in and around schools are engaged and active on school violence.



The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has adopted a Communication for Development strategy to address issues related to violence, aligning with the strategic objectives of the National Strategy and Plan of Action for Violence Against Children in Schools (NSP VACiS). The NSP VACiS focuses on using communication, arts, and media to increase awareness of violence in schools. Its objectives include empowering children to engage with the media to raise concerns about violence in schools, advocate for violence-free learning environments, and promote existing prevention, reporting, tracking, referral, response mechanisms, and services.

The plan emphasizes child participation and empowerment to prevent and report school violence, ensuring appropriate support for recovery and successful reintegration into the school system. The Peer-to-Peer approach as part of the UNICEF Adolescent Volunteer initiative was successfully used to disseminate the MoES Re-entry guidelines, resulting in the re-enrolment of at least 3000 child mothers back into school and skilling opportunities. School Clubs are other avenues to eliminate violence against children, where they are empowered with life skills. The Ministry has also included clubs within the school calendar with patrons assigned and developed a school club guideline to that effective Guidelines for formation and strengthening school guidelines 2018.

The National Child Participation Strategy (2017-2022) developed under the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development with support from UNICEF and Save the Children aims to empower children and use their voices in decision-making processes that impact their lives. This strategy is currently under review.

The Ministry of Education and Sports is implementing the Journey's Approach with programs targeting the community/parents, learners and the school staff. [19]

Save the Children implements The Commitments approach to end violence in schools, comprising 2 strands: 1. 8 weekly school-based reflection workshops and 2. online 6-month intervention to end violence in schools. This includes '[Everyday Heroes](#)' - an innovative school-based socio-behavioral communication change intervention which uses social media to engage teachers to challenge norms and behaviours related to corporal punishment of children and school related gender-based violence.

Call to Action area 4: Invest resources effectively

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

4.1 Domestic resources allocated to support interventions and capacity building activities to prevent and respond to violence in schools.

No 

VACiS work at MoES is largely donor funded and remains an unfunded priority in MoES budgets. [20] The country has a national coordination mechanism on violence in school led by the government and involving many stakeholders: Inter-sectoral Committee on ending Violence against Children in Schools (ISC-VACiS), co-chaired by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD). UNICEF, Raising Voices and other partners have been supporting it.

4.2 Development partners provide resources targeting national or subnational level to end violence in schools, investing in effective approaches.

Yes 

There is heavy reliance on partners to support VACiS interventions with limited government investment. DFID's (now UK FCDO) education programme, "Strengthening Education Systems for Improved Learning" (SESIL), initiated in 2018, aims to reduce violence in schools.

There is in Uganda the Secondary Education Expansion Programme of the World Bank (July 2020-December 2025), which includes a safe and inclusive school component of 5,000,000 USD.

Plan International, World Vision, and Save the Children (CSO Forum members) work on Safe Schools programming and advocacy, with government and local CSO partners. Save the Children in Uganda promotes alternative positive discipline methods, works with children's councils, and monitors and addresses various forms of violence in schools. Right to Play and Raising Voices have been implementing key initiatives to end violence in school, including thanks to STL funding. Safe to Learn supported safe learning interventions implemented by Raising Voices and Right to Play between 2020-2021, with financial contributions from UK FCDO. Raising Voices is implementing and scaling up the Good School Toolkit (GST), a multifaceted whole school intervention designed to transform the culture of the entire school community.

Forum for education NGOs in Uganda (FENU) – is a network of over 100 civil society organizations and community-based organizations working together to improve education in Uganda. Another key group is the EIE (Education in Emergency) working group chaired by Finn Church Aid and the MoE.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) supports a multi-year response programme (2023-2026) to increase access to quality education for refugee and host community children aligning with the Government's Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities.

UNESCO, in collaboration with the MoES, focuses on fostering collaboration against violence, developing and implementing policies for safe learning environments, building capacities of leaders and teachers, and supporting monitoring and evaluation processes.

4.3 There is private sector engagement in the provision of financial and non-financial resources including technical support, expertise and advocacy towards ending violence in schools.

In progress 

The Government of Uganda is working through partners with the private media houses to sensitize communities on violence against children.

Generate and use evidence

Benchmark

Benchmark Met

5.1 Information and reporting of incidents allow for disaggregated baseline information and monitoring of trends and that reflect needs and gaps in the system.

In progress 

Real time reporting on VACiS is through National Child Helpline 116, which needs further popularization in schools and through the UNICEF U-report platform. [21]

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has implemented a digital Education Management Information System (EMIS) to collect, process, and manage data for informed decision-making across all levels. This system covers key performance indicators for the education sector, including information on institutions, teachers, pupils, infrastructure, finances, and school inspections. Currently, the EMIS is not operational, and it lacks specific indicators related to preventing violence against children in schools. However, positive developments are ongoing with regard to EMIS, with the system being revived, and expected to be operational by 2024. MoES Gender Unit is strongly advocating for integration of Gender and VACiS indicators into EMIS as appropriate. [22]

EduTrac is no longer functional. As of January 2020, EduTrac was operational in 37 districts across Uganda, involving over 10,000 registered reporters in more than 3,800 schools. This system was introduced in 2011, by UNICEF and the MoES. It was a mobile phone-based data collection system that school administrators and headteachers use to send real-time data on various aspects, including child abuse reports, but also pupil attendance and other.

5.2 There is regular data collection on prevalence and forms of violence in schools using methods that follow high ethical standards.

In progress 

The National Statistics Office and MoES do not regularly collect or monitor data on prevalence and forms of violence through regular participation in international or national school-based surveys. However, there have been several one-off research studies. Uganda participated in the Global School-Based Student Health Survey in 2003. The last DHS was conducted in 2016. Uganda also conducted a national survey on violence against children, published in 2018.

5.3 Decisions on replication and scale-up of violence prevention initiatives are based on evaluations of trialled models and approaches.

In progress 

These are not often conducted because of the costs involved. [23]

In the baseline report of the impact evaluation of interventions to prevent violence in school in Uganda supported by UNICEF in 2019, 90 per cent of teachers knew what to do on encountering a case of violence, and 80 percent of students responded that they were willing to report another student beating or touching a person inappropriately.

With thanks to past trainings and sensitizations by MoES, UNICEF and partners, there is awareness of the fact that VACiS is prohibited, the challenge remains about translating the awareness into action. [24]

The Good Schools Toolkit (GST) by Raising Voices, was evaluated using a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design, showing reduction in violence against students in just 18 months. It has then been adapted and it is being scaled up based on findings.

In 2020, Uganda undertook a Safe to Learn diagnostic. The diagnostic assessed where the country stands in relation to the implementation of the Call to Action and identified what is in place under each Call-to-Action component at national, local and school level as well as good practices and gaps. It also provided evidence-based recommendations for every benchmark under the five Call to Action areas.

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This report is updated as of December 2023.

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