

THE DRAFT STRATEGY FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

(Brief for 38th Council for Human and Social Development, October 2019)

Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. The Agenda is a plan of action to “shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path” and is potentially a powerful violence prevention agenda. Of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda, two have direct targets for ending violence against children: Goal 5, for eliminating all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and children and Goal 16, for ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children. A further seven goals have targets that address risk factors for violence directly or indirectly affecting children. These range from structural factors such as injustice, inequality, economic and social disadvantage to interpersonal factors such as inadequate parenting practices, lack of education, alcohol and substance abuse, exclusion from decision-making processes affecting their lives and psychological disorders.

Developed in 2015-17 and distributed to Member States in 2017 and 2019 for consultation and feedback, the Prevention of Violence against Children (PVAC) Strategy is an important regional resource for guiding action and strengthening the Community’s abilities to utilise effective and proven practices in violence prevention.

An important regional resource for guiding action to prevent violence

The strategy is designed to *support the resolve* of Member States to prevent violence against children, by *building on existing systems*. As such, the strategy is positioned to be an important guide and reliable resource for Member States, from which actions can be selected and adapted for national implementation. It provides:

- ***Eight illuminating case examples*** from evaluations within our region as to ‘what really works’ to prevent violence against children from occurring. These examples are drawn from effective practice in health services, community organisations, education facilities, and the justice system where we have ‘lessons learned’ as to how violence can be prevented by:

1. *Influencing home environments in children's first three years of life through parenting skills and support programmes*
 2. *Training early childhood practitioners in children's self-regulation, and social and emotional learning*
 3. *Targeting life skills components for 'second chance' programmes for adolescents out of school*
 4. *Devising conditionalities in cash transfer programmes that enable families to keep children connected for longer in secondary school and tertiary training*
 5. *Engaging school communities to employ positive discipline strategies*
 6. *Strengthening school leadership to keep school communities safe*
 7. *Campaigning for public support for the rule of law and violence prevention*
 8. *Mobilising community citizen security and justice within communities*
- **Three effective strategies** which distil the learning from the case examples in the region to guide Member States in planning actions to prevent violence from occurring by:
 1. Strengthening the enabling environment for prevention of violence;
 2. Reducing risk factors for violence; and
 3. Promoting positive norms to end violence against children.
 - **Six innovatory indicators** to complement statistical analysis of progress in implementing the SDGs by measuring progress in violence prevention through reports directly from children and youth:
 1. # children reporting experience of adult use of positive discipline practices with them
 2. # children reporting learning skills in social and emotional learning in education/care settings
 3. # children reporting access to support services (type of service)(reason for access)
 4. # children reporting that they have prevented acts of violence (type of violence) (victim)
 5. # children reporting freedom of violence from peers (boys/girls)(type of violence)
 6. # children reporting freedom of violence from adults (men/women) (type of violence)

Member States making strides in prevention of violence against children

The strategy gives impetus to the direction in which Member States *are already making strides* in the prevention of violence against children. Member States have been appointing focal points for PVAC, to develop coordination mechanisms *across sectors* and to *determine the actions* needed for implementation unique to each country. *Examples of feedback* from Member States during the consultation period on the Strategy demonstrate the practical value and relevance of the Strategy:

Parenting is a learned activity: everyone needs help to do it well. St Lucia welcomed the comprehensiveness of the strategy and the information provided. In the context of the difficulties faced by children and families, economic, social, and the financial constraints of government, priority has been given to the support of parenting skills in early childhood, offered at health clinics for fathers and mothers during the prenatal period, and continued as children enter education. Parents can better support their child's development. Statistics in St. Lucia have shown that there are less social issues at the schools where the parenting sessions are offered. Antigua and Barbuda emphasized the focus on the importance of educating parents about child development, in order to better equip them for the task of child rearing, to understand and empathise with children, noting that parents need to understand that children suffer if they witness intimate partner violence or sibling aggression.

Safety is a precondition for academic success: everyone should feel safe at school. The Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI) is facilitating countries such as Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, to develop Safe School Policies to ensure children feel safe in the places where they learn. Agencies providing inputs to the physical safety of school plant are being coordinated under the policy. Beyond physical safety, recognition is given in the policies to the impact of 'unsafety' on human development, particularly through the traumatic effects of new and emerging threats such as cyber bullying, substance abuse and gang related issues which threaten the safety and security of all who work in the schools. Implementation of the policies will include the development of resilience curricula designed to help children build coping skills and prepare themselves for the changing norms in their lives driven by the climate emergency and associated disasters. In addition, in order to support schools to cope the policies include provision for psycho-social support. The broad intention therefore is to promote schools which are safe physical, social and emotional environments where teachers and students can teach, learn and develop. The policies are putting in place the key building blocks that have been shown in research studies to build capacity in the prevention of

violence: coordination of the relevant agencies and sectors; whole school approaches involving teachers and learners; the development of activities to involve the youth and keep them connected to the school; the increased number of extracurricular and community based educational projects. The guiding principle for the Safe Schools Policy is that safety is a precondition of academic success, and therefore providing a safe and respectful environment for the development of students is the shared responsibility of the school community, including government ministries and agencies and security institutions, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community partners.

Resources must be efficiently and effectively utilized: coordination and leadership are essential. Feedback from Belize, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Montserrat recognized inter-sectoral coordination as key for the efficiency of targeting violence prevention efforts, in small countries or large. Recognition of the need to sustain efforts by the critical ministries, already stretched with other areas of coordination, pointed to the need for a lead ministry supported by structured, dedicated planning and implementation arrangements with partner ministries. Jamaica has established the Inter-Sectoral Committee on Children and Violence (ISCCV) for the coordination and implementation of the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) 2018-2023. The lead Ministry is Education. Jamaica estimates that 81% of the cost of the implementation of the plan will be covered by the existing resources in ministries, departments and agencies working together. It is recognized that mobilization of internal and external resources by participating agencies and other partners is crucial to implementation.

Having received the presentation and recognizing the importance of children of the Caribbean Community to grow and be nurtured in an environment free from all forms of violence:

The COHSOD is invited to:

- a) **Endorse** the Prevention of Violence Against Children Strategy (PVACS) as a regional resource to guide good practice in the prevention of violence against children;
- b) **Urge** Member States to utilise the Regional Strategy as a guiding document in the conceptualization of the National Plans so that strategic actions are in place with regard to the prevention of all forms of violence against children;

- c) **Mandate** the CARICOM Secretariat to work with Member States for data to be collected and fully reported pertaining to Sustainable Development Goal 16.2: *End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children*; and
- d) **Express appreciation** to Development Partners, such as the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), for their work in ensuring the Caribbean Community is a Region free from all forms of violence against children.