

POLICY ADVOCACY PAPER

CLOSING THE FUNDING GAP TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

This paper has been developed under the ACT to end violence against women and girls programme

#ACTtoEndViolence

Photo: UN Women/Magfuzur Rahman Shana

1. The Issue

Ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a precondition to the achievement of gender equality and all of the sustainable development goals. Yet, all forms of VAWG persist at alarming rates affecting millions of women and girls around the world. Throughout their lifetime, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner – a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.¹ Women who experience multiple forms of discrimination are at heightened risk of violence, for instance women with disabilities face higher rates of violence and the risks are even higher for women with disabilities on a low income.² Adolescent girls are at greater risk of intimate-partner violence than adult women.³

Global emergencies, crises and conflict are exacerbating these already alarming figures, and rapid technological change is leading to the surge of new and evolving patterns of violence, with laws and policies failing to keep pace with developments.

There is more evidence than ever before that violence is preventable with comprehensive and well-funded actions. **UN Women analysis has found that states with comprehensive EVAWG measures have lower rates of intimate partner violence.**⁴ However, the level of funding and commitment has not matched the scale of the problem.

With the right actions and investments, ending violence against women and girls can be achieved within years, rather than lifetimes. This requires sustained political commitment from donors and national governments, and long-term investments across sectors that will catalyse transformative change across regions and countries.

VAWG persists at alarming rates across the world with **1 in 3 women** subjected to physical and sexual violence throughout their lifetimes.



Violence is preventable with comprehensive and well-funded actions.



In 52% of countries gender machineries have **inadequate resources.**



2. Stark funding gaps remain for the prevention of and response to VAWG

The 30-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action found that **only half (52 per cent) of States reported that their gender machineries are provided with adequate financial resources** and staff capacity to fulfil their mandates. Only 26 per cent of countries fully meet the criteria for systematically tracking the proportion of their budget allocated to the promotion of gender equality as defined by SDG indicator 5.c.1.

The **overall funding gap for gender equality** remains a challenge. Data from 48 developing economies shows achieving gender equality, as represented by eight sex-disaggregated SDG indicators, is projected to cost **\$6.4 trillion annually from 2023 to 2030**, equal to 20.5 per cent of their collective GDP.⁵

In 2021–2022, 42 per cent of bilateral allocable official development assistance (ODA) by members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had **gender equality as a policy objective** (\$60.4 billion out of \$143 billion screened against the marker). Although the volume increased very slightly from \$60 billion in 2019–2020, the share decreased from 45 per cent. Further, only 4 per cent of total bilateral allocable aid was dedicated to programmes with gender equality as the principal objective.⁶

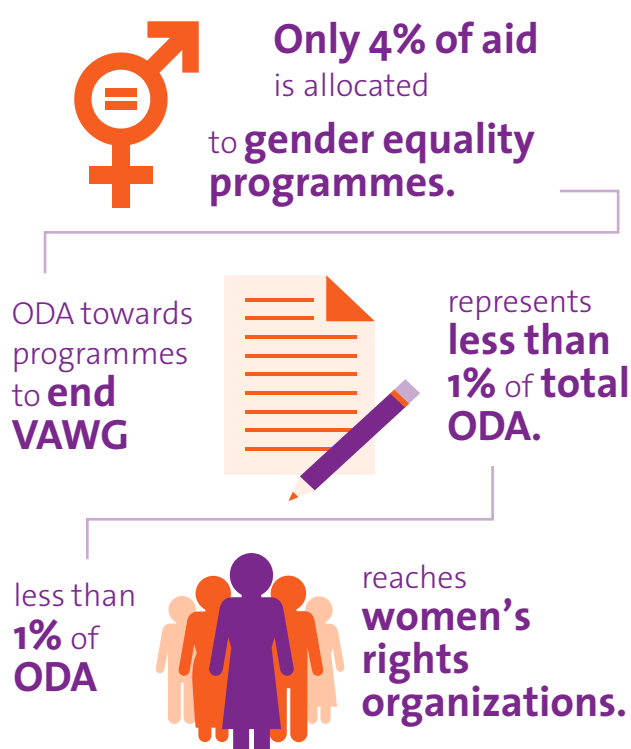
ODA towards programmes to **end violence against women and girls** reached USD 563 million on average per year in 2021–2022, an increase from USD 479 million in 2019–2020 but still representing less than 1% of total ODA.⁷

ODA to **support women's rights organizations** that are critical for ending VAWG also remains at a strikingly low volume and amounts to less than 1% of ODA for gender equality.⁸

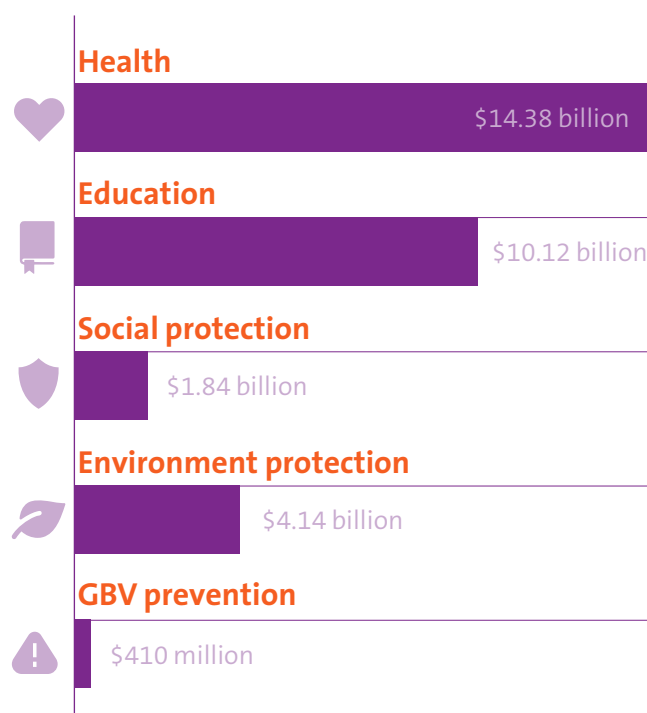
A 2023 study on the state of funding for the prevention⁹ of **gender-based violence (GBV)**, found that investment in GBV prevention was a mere 0.2% of overall ODA in 2021–2022. When compared to other critical areas of ODA spending, prevention of GBV sits low on the list of priorities for donors. In 2021, \$14.38 billion was spent on health, \$10.12 billion on education, \$1.84 billion on social protection and \$4.14 billion on environment protection. Only \$410 million was spent on GBV prevention.¹⁰ Yet eliminating VAWG is crucial for accelerating progress on education, health and all sustainable development goals¹¹.

The baseline investment in GBV prevention by **private philanthropy** is broadly estimated to be within the range of \$USD 100–\$150 million per year.¹²

In 2023, the Generation Equality gender-based violence commitments amounted to at least \$5.1 billion, of which almost 11% had been secured, and half of the secured amount had been spent.



ODA 2021–2022



3. The cost of inaction is significant

Violence against women and girls bears a significant cost to victim-survivors, families, communities, society at large and the economy. First and foremost are the human costs, largely born by victim-survivors including physical injury, reproductive harms, long-term chronic injury and long-term mental health impacts.¹³

There are also direct costs to the health system, counselling and other related services, the justice system and social services, as well as indirect costs, such as lost wages, productivity and potential. The negative impact on women's participation in education, employment and civic life also undermines poverty reduction.¹⁴

Several studies have sought to estimate the economic costs of VAWG:

- Conservative estimates indicate that **governments can lose up to 4% per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** due to violence against women¹⁵, with violence against children costing up to 5% of GDP.¹⁶
- A 2020 study in Ghana found that the **national loss in productivity** in Ghana through missing work and/or being less productive at work due to VAWG was approximately 64 million days annually, equivalent to 4.5% of all employed women in effect not working.¹⁷
- A 2022 study of the costs of intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, including costs for women and households, as well as the potential cost of service provision, comes to **USD 1,312,652,927**, equivalent to **1.21% of 2020 GDP**.¹⁸
- A 2023 study of the costs of intimate partner violence in the Solomon Islands found that **\$536,801 USD** is spent per year by adult women who access services for **intimate partner violence**, and the annual productivity loss of women in the formal sector due to intimate partner violence is estimated to be \$15.09 million USD and the equivalent of 1,415,997 lost work days.¹⁹
- A 2021 study found that across the European Union the **cost of gender-based violence** was estimated at **366 billion Euros** a year.²⁰

VAWG has significant costs to **victim-survivors**



including **physical** and **mental health impacts**.

Cost of VAWG
estimated as



equivalent of 4% GDP.

GBV costs estimated at **366 billion Euros a year** across **the EU**.



Photo: UN Women | Bruno Swpada

4. Investing in VAWG prevention and response yields significant savings and returns

Global evidence indicates that investments in sustained multi-year, evidence-driven prevention strategies can drive down prevalence of GBV against women and girls within programme time frames.

Well designed and implemented projects can reduce intimate partner violence by over 50%, as demonstrated by the 'What Works to Prevent VAWG' research programme.²¹

Investing in the prevention and response to violence against women and girls (VAWG) not only promotes safer and more productive communities but also results in substantial economic savings. Effective laws, policies, and programs reduce the long-term costs on healthcare, justice systems, and social services while also improving well-being and sustained economic growth.²²

Early prevention is far more cost-effective than addressing the consequences of violence

- A 2024 report by Women's Aid in the UK estimated that for **every £1 invested in domestic abuse support services, the UK government could save at least £9 in costs to public services.** These savings stem from avoided expenditures in areas such as healthcare, housing, and legal services.²³
- Although cost-benefit analyses remain limited, evidence shows that **investments in VAWG prevention yield high returns,** given the extensive personal, social, and economic costs of violence and the relatively low funding currently allocated. For example, **Uganda's SASA! program highlights the impact of shifting harmful social norms, reducing physical intimate partner violence (IPV) by 52% at just \$5 per person reached and \$460 per case of violence averted.**

Similarly, the Good School Toolkit—costing only \$15 per pupil—has significantly reduced violence against children, with an overall cost of \$244 per case of violence averted, demonstrating the value of early intervention.²⁴

- Recent research by Dalberg for the Spotlight Initiative found that **investments in comprehensive approaches could prevent an estimated 21 million women and girls from experiencing violence by 2025.** Further, preventing violence for 21 million women and girls by 2025 could result in 2,500 fewer cases of urgent medical attention and 320 fewer women experiencing depression per day. It was also estimated that this could keep 5 million more girls in school by 2050, safeguard survivors from losing 30% of their annual earning potential, and add back 43 million productive days a year.²⁵



Every **£1** invested in **VAWG support services** can save at least **£9** in the UK.

Investments in comprehensive approaches **could prevent**



an estimated 21 million women and girls from experiencing violence by 2025.

5. The need to scale up funding to end violence against women and girls is more urgent than ever

With just five years until 2030, **ending violence against women and girls** holds the key



to accelerating much needed **progress** on the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

Action to prevent and respond to VAWG is also central to the **response**



to the **climate, conflict** and **humanitarian crises**.

At least **14** of the **17 SDGs** will **not be achieved** without the global eradication of **VAWG**.²⁷



6. PRIORITY ACTIONS

1

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT, FULLY-COSTED, MULTI-SECTORAL NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

on ending violence against women and girls, unlocking financing from different sectors (child protection, health, education, social protection etc.) to ensure the whole of society prevention and response strategies.



INCREASE THE QUALITY OF FUNDING ON EVAW THROUGH

a commitment to long-term funding cycles of up to 10 years to support sustained, systemic change; survivor-centred services and a multi-sectoral approach to prevention across sectors like health, education, climate, and livelihoods, rather than isolating efforts only within VAWG-specific budgets.

2

3

INCREASE QUALITY, LONG-TERM, CORE, SUSTAINABLE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

and feminist movements including those working in crisis and conflict and post-conflict areas.



INCREASE INVESTMENTS IN VAWG DATA AND RESEARCH

to fill data gaps and knowledge on what works to prevent VAWG at scale and across different contexts including on new and emerging forms of violence such as the different forms of technology facilitated violence against women and girls.

4

5

INCORPORATE FUNDING FOR ENDING VAWG ACROSS DIFFERENT THEMATIC AREAS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIOS.

If donors consistently ear-marked an additional 0.1% of health and education budgets for GBV prevention work, it could radically transform the funding landscape.²⁸



REPORT AND TRACK FUNDING towards ending violence against women and girls consistently and comprehensively, broken down by interventions and across sectors.

6

ACT TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROGRAMME

This paper was developed under the [ACT](#) to end violence against women and girls programme funded by the EU. ACT is a new game-changing commitment between the European Commission and UN Women as co-leaders of the Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence (GBV), in collaboration with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The ACT shared advocacy agenda is elevating the priorities and amplifying the voices of feminist women's rights movements and provides a collaborative framework focused on common priorities, strategies and actions. To accelerate efforts in eliminating VAWG, ACT is calling for: **1. Bold investments in prevention and responses to end violence against women and girls (VAWG); 2. Strengthened financing, protection and support to women's rights organizations; 3. Enhanced accountability, access to justice and the full and effective implementation of laws to prevent and respond to VAWG.**

ENDNOTES

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- 9 Prevention strategies include work to effectively challenge unequal social norms, attitudes, behaviours, and dismantle the systemic structures that reinforce gender inequality. See: The Equality Institute & The Accelerator for GBV Prevention. (2023). *What Counts? The State of Funding for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence Against Women and Girls*.
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