



# Ending violence against children in Lao PDR

A multi-sectoral response to the national Violence against Children Survey

Priority actions

2018





## FOREWORD

In 2014, the Government of Lao PDR endorsed and promulgated the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children in Lao PDR 2014-2020, with the aim of implementing policies, the constitution and various laws, as well as Lao PDR's obligations under international conventions related to the protection of women and children from all forms of violence in all settings. In parallel, the Lao Statistics Bureau and the National Commission for Mothers and Children (now the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children) conducted the first national Violence against Children Survey in Lao PDR.

In follow up to the recommendations of the survey, the Lao Government is committed to addressing the issue of violence against children and has developed this multi-sectoral response containing a set of priority actions for implementation. The priority areas to be addressed are still broad, however, and it is not possible to address all the priorities at once. The Lao government has therefore initiated the development of an operational plan to provide a framework for accountability by which progress and achievements towards implementation of the priority actions can be measured and reviewed over the short, medium and long-term. In addition to these priority actions, efforts will continue to implement other activities related to the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020.

Effective implementation of the proposed priority actions will require cooperation and coordination between key Government stakeholders, development partners and civil society. Promoting convergence and complementarity between stakeholders' activities will be critical for the achievement of the actions and in fostering a spirit of united cohesive leadership to end all forms of violence against children in Lao PDR.

On behalf of the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children and other agencies working to prevent and respond to violence against children, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Government agencies, international organizations, especially UNICEF, and individuals who have contributed to developing this multi-sectoral response plan and priority actions to effectively address violence against children in Lao PDR.

Vientiane Capital, dated...<sup>30</sup>...April 2018

**National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children**



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## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Lao Statistics Bureau and the National Commission for Mothers and Children (now the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children) led the implementation of Lao PDR's first national Violence against Children Survey. The research was undertaken in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Lao Women's Union, with technical and financial support from UNICEF and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey provides reliable estimates of the prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual violence against children and information about the circumstances in which childhood violence occurs. The findings are an essential first step towards preventing violence against children and making the institutions that provide protection and services to children accountable.

The obligation for all States to work toward the elimination of violence against children is recognized, first and foremost, by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Lao PDR in 1991. It is also a global priority of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children. Efforts to prevent violence, therefore, form an integral part of the government's international commitments to uphold the right of each child to his or her human dignity and physical integrity. This commitment is strongly reflected at the national level in the 8th National Socio-economic Development Plan (2016-2020), the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2015), the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020, and a number of other key child protection laws and policies.

The survey and its findings highlight that more can and should be done in Lao PDR to prevent violence against children, to ensure that all children who experience violence receive coordinated and timely referral and access to high quality services, and to reduce the risk that violence is repeated or escalates. The report provides a number of wide-ranging and interlocking recommendations to help Lao PDR to effectively address violence against children over the short-, medium- and long-term.

In follow up to these recommendations, the Government of Lao PDR is strongly committed to pursuing priority actions that it believes are most relevant and important for tackling violence against children in the Lao context. These priority actions are outlined in this document. The actions build on efforts that have been implemented to date as well as focus attention on some new areas. While they reflect and incorporate many of the survey report's recommendations for priority attention over the coming years, the recommendations are much broader than can be achieved solely through these actions. Other opportunities to address the recommendations will continue in alignment with the National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020.

## KEY FINDINGS OF THE VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN SURVEY IN LAO PDR

The results of the Lao PDR Violence against Children Survey reveal that violence against children is a common reality in Lao PDR. Nearly 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 6 boys are physically abused before they turn 18, making physical violence the most common form of violence experienced by children. Roughly a quarter of girls and 1 in 6 boys experience emotional violence at home. Furthermore, 1 in 14 girls and 1 in 8 boys are sexually abused as a child. The most common form of sexual abuse is unwanted sexual touching. For all three types of violence, the vast majority of children experience more than one incident. Witnessing violence is also common for children growing up in Lao PDR. A quarter of girls and boys witness physical violence at home, while almost a third of boys and a quarter of girls witness physical violence in the community.

Both girls and boys are most likely to face violence by people they know. Parents, caregivers and other relatives are the most common perpetrators of physical violence, although boys in particular also experience physical violence by their peers. Likewise, emotional violence is mainly perpetrated by parents and relatives. Mothers and stepmothers are the most likely perpetrators of emotional violence against girls, while boys most commonly experience emotional abuse by fathers and stepfathers.

Unlike physical and emotional violence, a far greater number of children experience sexual abuse by adults who are not in a caregiving role. However, children are still most often sexually abused by people they know and trust. Among girls, spouses and partners are overwhelmingly the main perpetrators of sexual abuse, followed by friends and classmates. Among boys, family members are the most common perpetrators, followed closely by friends. Sexual abuse of girls and boys is only rarely carried out by strangers.

Males constitute the majority of perpetrators of sexual abuse of girls in Lao PDR. Sexual abuse of boys, however, is perpetrated by females and males alike. Boys are much more likely than girls to be sexually abused by multiple perpetrators. These findings may be partially explained by the higher prevalence of sexual touching experienced by male children, which can be carried out by (multiple) females and males alike.

### Violence against children in Lao PDR: 10 facts

1. More than a third of girls and boys are subjected to some form of violence.
2. About 1 in 6 children experience at least one form of physical violence before the age of 18.
3. Roughly a fifth of children are subjected to emotional violence at home by their parents, caregivers or adult relatives.
4. Around 1 in 10 children experience some form of sexual abuse.
5. A fifth of girls and over a third of boys who are sexually abused experience their first incident when they are 13 years old or younger.
6. Most incidents of sexual abuse take place in a home setting – someone else's home, the child's home or the perpetrator's home.
7. Only 5.2 per cent of girls know where to get help if they are sexually abused, compared to 57.8 per cent of boys.
8. A quarter of boys subjected to sexual abuse in childhood receive help for their experiences, however no girls report receiving help.
9. More than half of girls and almost two fifths of boys aged 13 to 17 think a husband is sometimes justified in hitting or beating his wife.
10. Three quarters of girls and boys aged 13 to 17 think a woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

Source: National Commission for Mothers and Children, Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF Lao PDR. National Violence against Children Survey in Lao PDR. Preliminary Report. Lao PDR: NCMC, 2016.

Around half of girls and boys who are sexually abused are 16 or 17 years old when it first happens. A fifth of girls and over a third of boys who are sexually abused experience their first incident when they are 13 years old or younger. For physical violence, the first incident most often takes place between the ages of 6 and 11, while 1 in 8 females and 1 in 13 males first experience physical violence under the age of 5. Around 40 per cent of girls and boys first experience emotional violence between the ages of 6 and 11.

Sexual abuse most often occurs in a home setting – someone else’s home, the child’s home or the perpetrator’s home, places where the risk of detection is low. Other locations in which sexual abuse frequently takes place include bars, restaurants or discos, and schools. The majority of incidents of sexual abuse take place in the evening or afternoon.

The survey revealed very limited knowledge and utilization of services for experiences of violence. Girls who experience physical violence or sexual abuse occasionally tell someone about their experience, but never seek or receive services. Only a small minority of girls who experience violence know of a place to seek help. In comparison, around half of boys who are physically or sexually abused know where to access support. Only a quarter of boys receive the support they need to recover from sexual abuse.

In Lao PDR, childhood violence is associated with a number of negative health outcomes in females, but not in males. For example, past-year exposure to physical violence is associated with a higher likelihood of contemplating suicide in girls aged 13 to 17. Similarly, past-year exposure to emotional violence is associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing mental distress. For both girls and boys, there is no significant association between sexual risk-taking behaviours and childhood violence. However, multiple sexual partners and infrequent condom use are substantially higher among 19 to 24-year-old men who have had sexual intercourse in the past 12 months than among females, regardless of their experiences of violence.

Experiences of childhood sexual abuse are unrelated to knowledge of where to get an HIV test and being tested for HIV. However, sexually-abused girls are far less likely than boys to know where to get an HIV test. Most girls and boys who are sexually abused are never tested for HIV. Lack of knowledge about the HIV test is a barrier for both girls and boys. Improving access to information about HIV and related services, especially for women and girls, is needed.

The use of violence by husbands against their wives is socially accepted in Lao PDR. More than half of girls and almost two fifths of boys aged 13 to 17 believe it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife under certain circumstances. For both girls and boys, the most commonly accepted justification for a husband to beat his wife is if she does not take care of the children, followed by arguing with him. In addition, three quarters of girls and boys aged 13 to 17 believe a woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together. These data suggest that traditional beliefs about gender roles are still firmly engrained in Lao society, particularly among women themselves. These norms can create and reinforce an acceptable climate for violence.

## LAO PDR'S APPROACH TO ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

### A long-term vision

The Government of Lao PDR's overall vision is for all children in Lao PDR to live free from violence. The vision is a future where parents know how to positively discipline their children, a future where high-quality support is available and accessible to those who need it, and a future where perpetrators of violence against children are brought to justice and held accountable for their actions. All children in Lao PDR should be able to realise their potential and participate fully in all aspects of their lives. To achieve this, children must feel safe – in their homes, schools and communities. Given the extent and complex nature of violence against children, this long-term vision is underpinned not just by actions over the next few years, but by directions for the future. The priority actions are an important foundation in a longer journey to realise this vision.

### A multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach

Violence against children cannot be addressed through the actions of any one sector alone. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of violence against children, cross-sectoral programs are more effective than programs operating in isolation. Therefore, while the social welfare, police and justice sectors are integral to preventing and responding to violence against children, other sectors such as health, education, finance, planning and investment, home affairs, and information, culture and tourism have important roles to play in building awareness, preventing violence from occurring and assisting children who have experienced violence to rebuild their lives.

To make timely progress with the priority actions, all sectors are encouraged to:

- Work towards the same goals in reducing violence against children
- Work together in areas of shared responsibility
- Improve links between the areas of support and services provided in order to avoid duplication, coordinate planning and implementation, and better share information and innovation

An important foundation for collaboration around the results of this survey was borne through the multi-sectoral Steering Committee that steered the survey process forward and the broader consultations that debated and contextualized the findings. This has set the stage for future collaboration across all key sectors to ensure concrete follow up interventions and initiatives to address violence against children in an integrated manner. Given the scarcity of resources allocated for child protection, it is critical to build on existing prevention and response initiatives, including those across more recognized structures such as public health and education, making a planned multi-sectoral response all the more important.

### A shared responsibility

The Government of Lao PDR cannot end violence against children on its own. Change also needs to happen across communities, which will come first and foremost by supporting communities to talk about the issue and demonstrating their commitment to stop violence against children. Men and boys will be critical for leading and challenging other men and boys about the issue, so that everyone takes a stand in rejecting violence against children in communities.

Realising the long-term vision of all children in Lao PDR living free from violence involves everybody, including governments, civil society, the private sector, media, communities, families and individuals.

Working together, the prevalence of violence against children and its negative impact on children, families and communities can be reduced.

### A child rights-based and gender-sensitive approach

Through the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments, the Government of Lao PDR has committed itself to combating all forms of violence against all children without discrimination and ensuring that the rights of children are respected. The priority actions are aligned with Government efforts to translate these international commitments into national action.

Gender-based norms that deny women and girls equal rights have an important influence in sustaining patterns of violence against women and girls. Gender equality will therefore be integrated into all priority actions to address violence against children. Furthermore, the Government of Lao PDR will continue to work with UN agencies, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to enhance skills and sensitivity to address the different concerns for gender equality of boys and girls.

### Alignment with existing Government strategies

The priority actions complement and strengthen existing government strategies, policies and legal instruments, in particular:

- Trafficking in Persons Law (2016)
- The Strategic Plan for Mothers and Children 2016-2020
- The National Plan of Action for Mothers and Children 2016-2020
- Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Children (2015)
- The National Plan of Action to Prevent and Eliminate Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020
- Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures (2013)
- The Strategic Plan for Social Welfare Development 2010-2020
- The Strategic Framework for 'Justice for Children' 2010-2020
- Family Law (2008)
- Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children (2007)

The actions also support the Government's commitments at the regional level relating to violence against children, including:

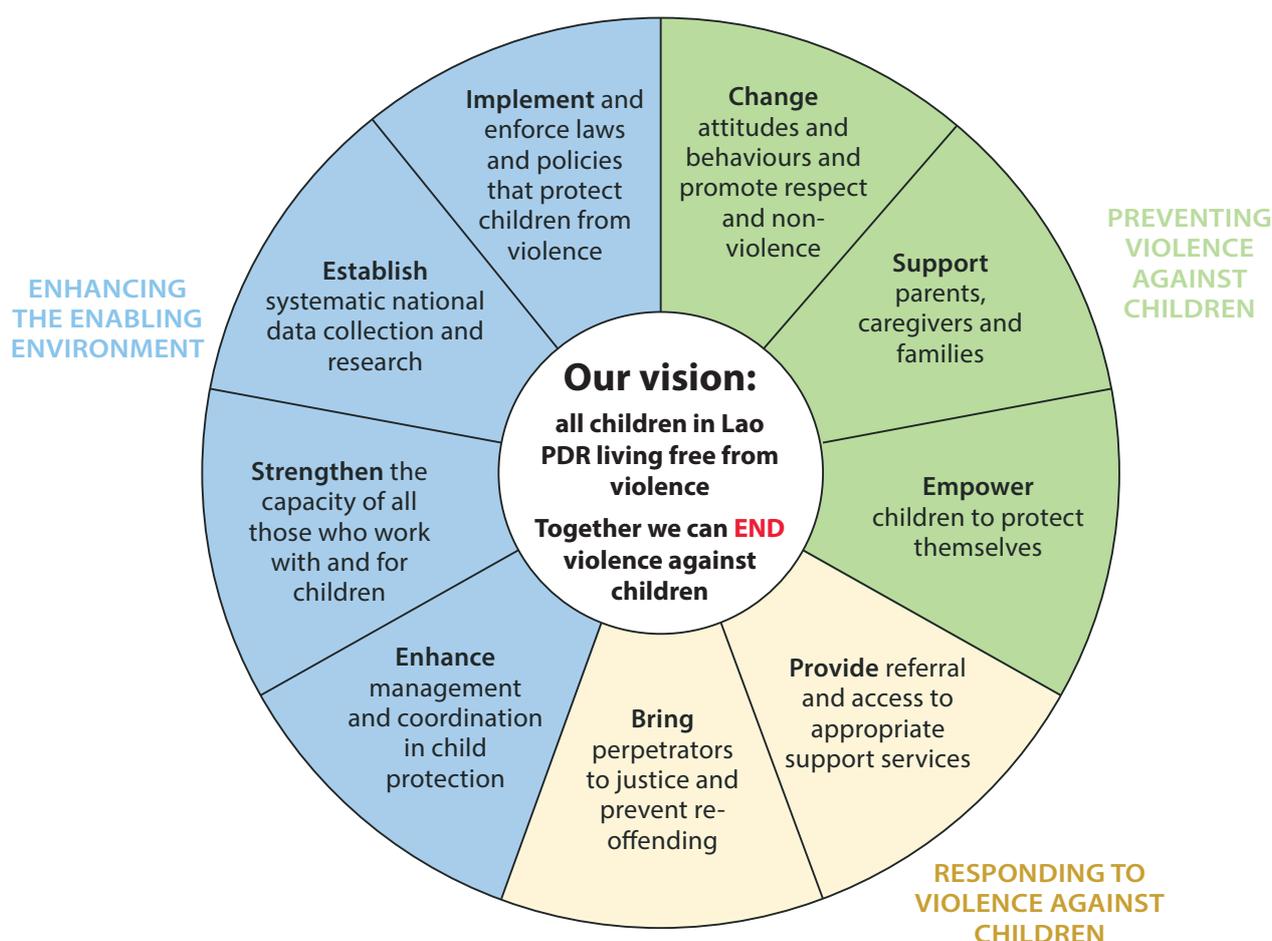
- The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2015
- The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children, 2014
- The New Delhi Declaration on South-South Cooperation on the Rights of the Child, 2013
- The ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children, 2013
- The ASEAN Declaration against Human Trafficking, particularly Women and Children, 2004

## PRIORITY ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY FINDINGS

In line with the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020, the Government of Lao PDR sets out to address the findings of the national Violence against Children Survey through a number of priority actions across three main areas that together provide an overarching framework for ending violence against children:

- **Enhancing the enabling environment** by implementing and enforcing laws and policies that protect children from violence, establishing systematic national data collection and research, strengthening the capacity of all those who work with and for children, and enhancing management and coordination in child protection.
- **Preventing violence against children** by changing attitudes and behaviours and promoting respect and non-violence, supporting parents, caregivers and families, and empowering children to protect themselves.
- **Responding to violence against children** by providing timely referral and access to appropriate support services, and bringing perpetrators to justice and preventing re-offending.

### THE ACTIONS



## Priority area 1: Enhancing the enabling environment

### 1.1 Implementing and enforcing laws and policies that protect children from violence

Implementing and enforcing laws and policies that protect children sends a strong message to society that violence is unacceptable and will be punished. Without a supportive policy and legislative environment, programmes put in place to address violence against children are unlikely to be effective. In Lao PDR, the legal and policy framework to protect children from violence has been considerably strengthened in recent years, most notably with the passing of the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Violence against Children in 2015. The priority is now to ensure that existing and newly approved laws and policies that protect children from violence are widely disseminated and effectively enforced and implemented by child protection actors at all levels. This requires enhanced political commitment, adequate budgeting, awareness raising and dissemination, capacity building of justice and other child protection professionals, and effective monitoring.

- Widely disseminate laws that protect children from violence across all sectors and at all levels, in particular the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Violence against Children, the Law on Juvenile Justice, and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children.
- Develop communication materials to assist in understanding and implementation of new and existing laws and policies that protect children from violence among the justice, social welfare, health, education and civil society sectors, as well as village heads, Village Mediation Units, Child Protection Networks, communities and parents.
- Develop implementation guidelines for the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Violence against Children to further clarify roles and responsibilities of different sectors and actors in its implementation.
- Train investigation officers, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, social workers, village Child Mediation Units and other child protection actors on the Implementation Guidelines for the Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedures and the Law on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Violence against Children.
- Develop and integrate child rights and child justice training into the professional teaching curriculum for law enforcement, judges, prosecutors and lawyers.
- Develop an Alternative Care Policy and Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children, which clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of government actors at all levels in oversight, management, inspection, placement, review and permanency planning and follow up of children in alternative care.
- Develop procedures for reintegration and permanency planning of children currently living in residential care, in close collaboration with residential care facilities and partners.
- Develop a comprehensive national policy and plan of action on child protection systems development that clarifies institutional roles and responsibilities as well as coordination structures and mechanisms across sectors.

## 1.2 Establishing systematic national data collection and research

Increasing the knowledge base on violence against children – where it occurs, in what forms, and which age groups and communities are most affected – is essential for effective advocacy and programming and setting targets to monitor progress over time. Likewise, collection and sharing of data between agencies is vital to achieving good outcomes for children experiencing violence. In Lao PDR, significant research in the area of violence against children, and child protection more broadly, has been conducted in recent years, increasing the base of available knowledge on different forms of violence against children. However, there are still several important gaps, including data on specific vulnerable groups of children, such as children with disabilities. Moreover, there is a need to establish routine administrative data on violence against children at local and national levels to track and monitor violence over time.

### Priority actions

- Establish an Information Management System across the social welfare, education, health, police and legal sectors to collect disaggregated data on violence against children, linking information on all cases handled at the community level with the national level.
- Strengthen the capacity of professionals working with children to identify and report cases of violence.
- Integrate key violence against children indicators into ongoing national surveys such as the Lao Social Indicator Survey to strengthen the focus on child protection within routine national surveys.
- Conduct in-depth qualitative research into the barriers faced by girls and boys in accessing services for experiences of childhood violence.
- Conduct research on violence against specific groups of children, including children living in institutions, children in detention, children in boarding schools and children with disabilities.

## 1.3 Strengthening the capacity of all those who work with and for children

Identifying and responding to violence against children requires an effective workforce of professionals and non-professionals across the social welfare, justice, health and education sectors. In Lao PDR, the capacity of key line ministries to develop and manage the child protection system is steadily improving as demonstrated through the adoption of highly technical and progressive legal and policy documents bringing the regulatory and policy framework into greater compliance with international standards. Capacity development, however, needs to be sustained and further enhanced, with special attention and support to the labour and social welfare sector, which is critical to the future development of the child protection system.

### Priority actions

- Develop a national strategy to progressively establish and resource the social work profession across sectors to respond to violence against children and other child protection concerns.
- Strengthen the para-professional and professional social work capacity in order to better provide prevention and response services in relation to violence against children.
- Establish a dedicated child protection staff position at the district level, with specific responsibilities for strengthening linkages and improving communication between village, district and provincial levels, as well as data collection, support to Child Protection Networks and capacity building of local actors.

- Establish and strengthen Child Protection Networks at village level and conduct training and monitoring on how to identify children at risk of violence and provide early interventions through the national social welfare system at central, provincial, district and community levels.
- Build the capacity of health care providers to respond to child sexual abuse as well as physical and emotional violence through pre-service and in-service training and as a standard part of paediatric and child health care.
- Build capacity among law enforcement agencies on the risks children face from violence, train them in the interpretation and enforcement of existing national legislation protecting children from violence, and teach them how to gather evidence in criminal cases.
- Establish safe and enabling environments in schools by promoting the use of non-violent teaching and learning methods among education staff to eliminate and prevent physical punishment in schools.
- Develop national guidelines to strengthen the basic skills of professionals at all levels to undertake interviews with child victims and witnesses of violence as part of an investigation process.

#### 1.4 Enhancing management and coordination in child protection

Multi-sector coordination on child protection remains a challenge in Lao PDR as responsibility for child protection is currently spread across a number of government sectors at both the national and sub-national levels. The majority of coordination forums are issue-focused, such as the Juvenile Justice Coordination Committees, the Anti-Trafficking Committee, the National Committee for Disabled People and the Elderly, and Committees for the Protection and Assistance of Children. While it can be useful to have thematic coordination mechanisms or working groups, it is equally necessary to have a lead national coordination body to ensure that important linkages between thematic areas are made and addressed in a more systematic manner.

##### Priority actions

- Strengthen the Committee for the Protection and Assistance of Children at national level to operate as a national level coordination body on child protection responsible for overseeing the development of the child protection system across all sectors and levels.
- Establish and operationalize Committees for the Protection and Assistance of Children at provincial and district level to coordinate and advise on local child protection and assistance-related issues and to feed best practices and trends up to national level to inform policies and programming.
- Develop standard operating procedures to establish clear reporting and referral protocols and for managing cases of violence against children in each sector.
- Strengthen collaboration of Child Protection Networks with other actors in providing protection and assistance to child victims of violence focusing on temporary shelter and vocational training.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Juvenile Justice Coordination Committee and its Secretariat at central and local level to lead, coordinate and manage justice for children-related activities.

## Priority area 2: Preventing violence against children

### 2.1 Changing attitudes and behaviours and promoting respect and non-violence

Rules or expectations of behaviour—norms—within a cultural or social group can encourage violent behaviour. Norms that may lead to violence against children include the belief that female children are less vulnerable than male children, that physical punishment is an acceptable part of raising a child, that women should tolerate violence to keep the family together, and that physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts. Interventions that challenge and help to change such norms by improving attitudes towards women (including attitudes of women themselves), promoting respectful and non-violent relationships and ensuring that all people living in Lao PDR reject the use of violence in all circumstances can help prevent and reduce violence in children's lives.

#### Priority actions

- Disseminate the findings of the Violence against Children Survey widely, including in user-friendly formats, among government officials and key stakeholders at national and sub-national levels to increase knowledge about the problem and impact of violence against children.
- As part of Lao PDR's #ENDviolence against children initiative, continue implementing a public information campaign to raise awareness about violence against children and to sensitize the public about the harmful effects that violence has on children at all levels of society and across all sectors, including through TV, radio, social media and outreach activities.
- Integrate prevention messages on violence against children and gender equality into the school curriculum.
- Develop a behaviour change communication strategy to challenge the belief that violence is normal and in some cases justified.
- Work with the media to promote non-violent values and positive media representation of women and girls and implement guidelines to ensure full respect for the rights of the child in all media coverage.

### 2.2 Supporting parents, caregivers and families

Providing parents and caregivers with child-rearing strategies and techniques that promote children's wellbeing can help to address a range of individual and family risk factors associated with childhood violence. This has been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of violence against children in the home and the manifestation of aggressive behaviours in children as they grow into adolescence. Programmes can be implemented at the community level as well as among at-risk populations. Such initiatives also have the potential to prevent the life-long negative consequences of violence for mental and physical health, education and, ultimately, for broader social and economic development.

#### Priority actions

- Develop and implement a parenting education package with key messages on Integrated Early Childhood Development, nutrition and child protection concerns, including violence against children.
- Implement community-based outreach activities through Child Protection Networks to increase parents' and caregivers' knowledge about child development, educate them about the impact of violence against children, and promote positive parent-child interactions, including the use of non-violent forms of child discipline.

- Pilot an intensive parenting support programme (such as home visitation) for families where children are at high risk of violence.

### 2.3 Empowering children to protect themselves through education and life skills

Many factors can contribute to violence against children, including poverty, struggles with academic achievement, low self-esteem and self-discipline, and a lack of information on risks, vulnerabilities and where to seek help. Higher education attainment protects children against a range of violence, including sexual abuse, partner violence and child marriage. School-based programmes can enable children to learn and adopt pro-social behaviours and to develop in a safe environment. Life skills training gives children and adolescents the skills to cope and manage risks and challenges without the use of violence and to seek appropriate support when violence does occur. These essential skills are crucial for preventing physical, emotional and sexual violence against children in schools, homes and communities.

#### Priority actions

- Continue efforts to increase enrolment in pre-school, primary and secondary education, particularly for vulnerable children such as orphans and those living in residential care, and children living in hard-to-reach areas.
- Develop and integrate an educational package on the prevention of violence against children into the Lao teaching curriculum to strengthen life skills education in schools so that children will be armed with knowledge and practical skills in how to keep safe and where to find help if needed.
- Engage children and young people to actively participate in designing these educational resources, empowering them to make informed choices and take the necessary actions to prevent exposure to harm.
- Implement child participation activities in schools and communities to encourage and empower children to share their experiences and express their views on matters that affect them.
- Actively engage children in all aspects of prevention, response and monitoring of violence against children to ensure their experiences are taken into account and their voices are listened to, heard and respected.

## Priority area 3: Responding to violence against children

### 3.1 Providing timely identification, referral and access to appropriate support services

Violence against children can lead to a range of serious health and social outcomes costly to both individuals and society. Minimizing these consequences requires a variety of treatment and support services, including counselling, psycho-social, legal and medical services. The findings from this survey indicate that there is a lack of knowledge and availability of, as well as access to, family-support and community-based child protection services for victims of violence. The majority of services that do exist are concentrated in the Capital and a few provincial centres and largely focus on provision of support to trafficking victims or other specific categories of children.

#### Priority actions

- Strengthen and expand family support and community-based child protection services to provide emergency short, medium and long-term support to child victims of violence and their families.
- Model fixed site and mobile/outreach services in selected provinces with clear linkages across the child welfare, child justice, health and education systems to ensure early identification and timely referral to appropriate and confidential counselling and support services.
- Establish One-Stop Crisis Centres at the central and provincial levels to provide free emergency services and long-term physical and emotional care for all women and children exposed to violence.
- Develop and implement standard operating procedures for effective referral and case management, clearly outlining when an intervention is required, who is responsible for taking action and the specific steps to be taken.
- Ensure clear and simple guidelines for the identification, treatment, care, follow-up and prevention of violence against children within the health sector.
- Strengthen the capacity of child protection service providers, justice professionals, social workers and health care workers to identify, refer and assist children at risk of or experiencing violence, including through individual case management, counselling, and psychosocial support.
- Establish a national legal aid system for children in contact with the law, including child victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence, including referral and intake mechanisms, standardization forms and a centralized system of data collection on legal aid provision.
- Strengthen the national Child Hotline for safe and confidential responses to threats of or actual emotional, physical or sexual violence against children.

### 3.2 Bringing perpetrators to justice and preventing re-offending

Concrete actions to stop perpetrators from committing violence in the first place, to effectively bring them to justice when they have committed violence, and to change their behaviours to prevent re-offending will build confidence in the Lao justice system and deter others from committing acts of violence against children in the future.

## Priority actions

- Ensure that all perpetrators of violence against children are brought to justice and held accountable through appropriate criminal, civil and administrative proceedings and sanctions.
- Establish community-based pre-trial and post-trial diversion programmes for children in conflict with the law as alternatives for deprivation of liberty. Special attention will be given to the family circumstances of the child in order to address the root causes of the offending behaviour or situations that put children at risk.

## Monitoring and reporting

The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children will be responsible for monitoring implementation of the priority actions in coordination with the leading line ministries or mass organizations. A separate implementation plan with a monitoring and evaluation framework will be put in place to specifically monitor implementation of the priority actions.

All responsible line ministries and mass organizations (as outlined in the implementation plan) will submit progress reports, including lessons learned, on a six-monthly basis to the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children will then prepare a summary progress report on the priority actions. Progress reports will be available to all stakeholders, including Government, UN agencies and civil society organizations.

An annual consultative meeting with all stakeholders will be held at national level to review and discuss the annual progress reports and achievements made towards the indicators of all priority actions. The progress reports and minutes of the consultative meetings will feed into progress reporting on the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020.

## Annex 1. SDG targets related to each priority action

The priority actions in response to the national Violence against Children Survey contribute to Lao PDR's achievement of SDG target 16.2 'End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children', as well as a number of other SDG targets, as shown in the table below.

Priority action	Related SDG targets
1.1 Implementing and enforcing laws and policies that protect children from violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.</li> <li>• 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.</li> <li>• 16.3 Promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.</li> </ul>
1.2 Establishing systematic national data collection and research	Only 16.2.
1.3 Strengthening the capacity of all those who work with and for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.</li> <li>• 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive; and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.</li> </ul>
1.4 Enhancing management and coordination in child protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.</li> <li>• 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.</li> </ul>
2.1 Changing attitudes and behaviours and promoting respect and non-violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.</li> <li>• 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.</li> <li>• 5.3 eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.</li> <li>• 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.</li> </ul>

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2.2 Supporting parents, caregivers and families

- 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable.
- 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

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2.3 Empowering children to protect themselves

- 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
- 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive; and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

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3.1 Providing timely identification, referral and access to appropriate support services

- 3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

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3.2 Bringing perpetrators to justice and preventing re-offending

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
  - 16.3 Promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
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## Annex 2. Relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to violence against children

### Article 2 – Protection from discrimination or punishment

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

### Article 3 – Protection and care

States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

### Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development

States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

### Article 19 – Protection from abuse and neglect

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

### Article 24 – Right to health

States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

### Article 28 – School discipline

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

### Article 32 – Child labour

States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

### Article 34 – Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

### Article 35 – Sale, trafficking and abduction

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

### Article 36 – Other forms of exploitation

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

### Article 37 – Torture and deprivation of liberty

States Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

### Article 39 – Rehabilitative care

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.



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