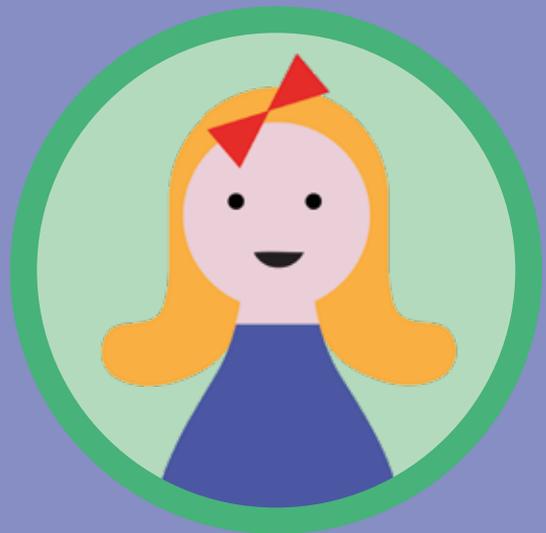


Voices

of Children
and Young People
Around the World

Child Helpline Data for 2019



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Child Helpline Data for 2019

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Disclaimer

Data presented and statements made do not capture the full scope of practices and policies of all countries and cases handled by child helplines and other child protection organisations at the national level. The exact data can be requested from Child Helpline International.

Child Helpline International's work is firmly grounded in the principles and values enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including children's right to privacy and protection from harm. To preserve the trust and confidence children and young people place in child helplines every day, any personal details cited in case summaries has been altered and anonymised.

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Foreword

For the past 17 years, Child Helpline International's members around the world have been fulfilling an essential role for children's protection, safety and wellbeing – a source of security, refuge and protection, through their counselling, listening and referral services. In 2019 the network was contacted over 13 million times, and violence was one of the top two reasons that children and young people reached out about.

This year, as we kick off to a decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Covid-19 has posed many challenges. While many of the goals to improve children's lives were still not on track, the pandemic is pushing them back even further. Child helplines across the globe have been severely burdened in living up to their mandate. Firstly, face-to-face and in-person services have decreased or even ceased as lockdowns have been endured by millions around the world, and available resources to prevent and respond to the violence suffered by children have also decreased. Secondly, many of the measures taken to combat the pandemic bring with them psychosocial and economic implications that affect children's vulnerability to violence. They have also increased the prevalence of violence, that has an inevitable effect on children's lives.

In responding to the prevalent conditions, it is essential that Child Helpline International and its members continue to expand on the provision of a more comprehensive and easier-to-access bundle of services. An effective expansion of child helplines' online availability can translate in reaching some of the most vulnerable children, as well as supplement the gap in available services created by Covid-19.

Thanks to the tireless and dedicated commitment of so many different actors at the community level, the Child Helpline International network has become an example of what collaboration of different actors can achieve. Some of the most effective investment performances come from investing in communities – today and tomorrow, we need to ensure that lifesaving and essential services such as child helplines are not just properly funded but integrated into national child protection mechanisms.



Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid is the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. She previously served on the Board of Child Helpline International.

Child helplines' strategic and low-cost services must be sustained even during pandemics, and to ensure this continuation of services without disruption, they must be included as an integral part of the "building back better" process in a post-Covid recovery period.

Child helplines around the world provide the space where children can express their views, concerns and ideas in a safe and accessible manner. Every child has a voice and they are capable and willing to share their experiences, knowledge and views. They are actively engaging to be part of the solutions, even during the time of the Covid-19 crisis.

Listening to and working with children is not an option. It is a must.

Executive Summary

Child Helpline International is a collective impact organisation with **168 child helpline members from 139 countries and territories around the world**. We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our members, partners and external sources. This **exceptional resource** is used to help and support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices.

Child helplines play a **crucial role in protecting children**. They actively listen to and help children and young people. They prevent violence and other forms of harm against children. **Ultimately, they empower children to help themselves**. Child helplines also stand as crucial players in system transformation; whether they are in countries where child protection systems are weak or non-existent, or in countries where those systems are stronger and more sophisticated.

This report describes the contacts our child helpline members received in 2019. The data presented here was obtained through Child Helpline International's annual data survey and is reported as collected by our child helpline members. We received data from 82 child helplines in 72 countries and territories around the world.

Key findings

Our 2019 data collection sadly confirms **violence** as a main issue for concern. **Violence is either the first or second most frequent reason for contacting a child helpline** in each of the five regions. This means that, around the world, one out of every four times a child or young person contacts a child helpline, it is because of a concern related to violence. Globally, 19.5% of contacts in this category related to physical violence, and 11.2% to sexual violence.

Another large issue for concern in 2019 was **mental health**. This issue was the **main reason for contact globally** and was among the top four main reasons for contact in each of the five regions. **More than a quarter of the contacts made to child helplines globally in 2019 concerned a mental health issue**.

Issues of **accessibility** of various services, for example education or essential needs, were also among the top five reasons for children and young people making contact with the child helplines in most of our regions.

A final key finding from our 2019 data collection relates to **children at home**. According to the data, the majority of the issues that children and young people wanted to bring up during their contact with a child helpline concerned something that was **happening inside their own homes** (more than half of the contacts, globally). The vast majority of children and young people who contacted a child helpline appear to currently be **living with their parent or primary caregiver** (almost 9 out of 10 children and young people). The data also revealed that **the majority of issues that children and young people wanted to bring up was also in some way connected to their parent or primary caregiver** (two out of three contacts globally).

In the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures implemented in many countries around the world, this finding emphasises even more strongly the crucial role played by child helplines. **Child helplines are by their very nature able to provide remote and easily accessible services for children and young people in need of support or protection**.

Key recommendations

We outline **four key recommendations** stemming from the data and from our experience as a global network. These recommendations are designed to ensure that children's rights and well-being are protected across the world through the work of child helplines.

Our first recommendation is that **every child should have free and unrestricted access to child helpline services**. This is truer now than ever before. The Covid-19 pandemic has particularly highlighted the need for child-friendly, remotely accessible services. Child helplines should be strengthened through investments in infrastructure and new functionalities, offsetting service costs, and evidence-based inclusive practice. Furthermore, funding and support should be made available to raise awareness of child helplines in a child-friendly manner to ensure children and young people know how to use child helpline services and what they can expect.

Our second recommendation is to **enhance the quality and sustainability of child helplines, so that they can do their crucial work to ensure children's rights**. Child helplines should receive funding and support towards, among others: the implementation of good governance practices; effective data collection and analysis; comprehensive training programmes for staff and volunteers interacting with children and young people; and contingency plans to help keep child helplines operational during technological or infrastructural failure, and during national and global emergencies, as the Covid-19 pandemic harshly brought to light.

Our third recommendation is to **enhance structured partnerships, as they have a crucial role in eradicating violence against all children**. Governments, child protection agencies and thematic expert organisations should work with child helplines to promote their services as a low-threshold entry point into national child protection systems. Structured partnerships are needed to establish clear referral pathways and interventions to protect children, and to create effective knowledge exchange on topics relevant to children's lives.

Finally, our fourth recommendation is that the **voices of children**, gathered through child helpline data and youth participation, **should inform the policies and decision-making that affect children's lives**. Children's voices should not only play a role in shaping child helpline services, but should inform decision-making at the highest levels.

The **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** were adopted by world leaders at a historic UN summit in September 2015 to fight inequalities across the globe, end all forms of poverty, and tackle climate change as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 16 urges countries to promote **just, peaceful and inclusive societies**. SDG 16.2 specifically seeks to **end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children**. Around the world, the members of Child Helpline International are playing a crucial role in addressing this.

Child helplines have a **unique insight** into the gap between policy and reality, making them a key actor in **advocating for children's rights**. They support millions of children every year. They respond to issues ranging from serious children's rights violations, to children who just want someone to chat to on the way home from school. What brings child helplines together is the provision of an easily accessible, confidential system that allows children themselves to tell a counsellor what is going on in their lives. Child helplines also have an insight into the direct experiences of children and young people on a larger scale than any other organisations. Therefore, the value of child helplines' data on contacts cannot be overstated in informing and guiding policy, learning and practice.



Patrick Krens
Executive Director
Child Helpline International

Why children and young people contact child helplines

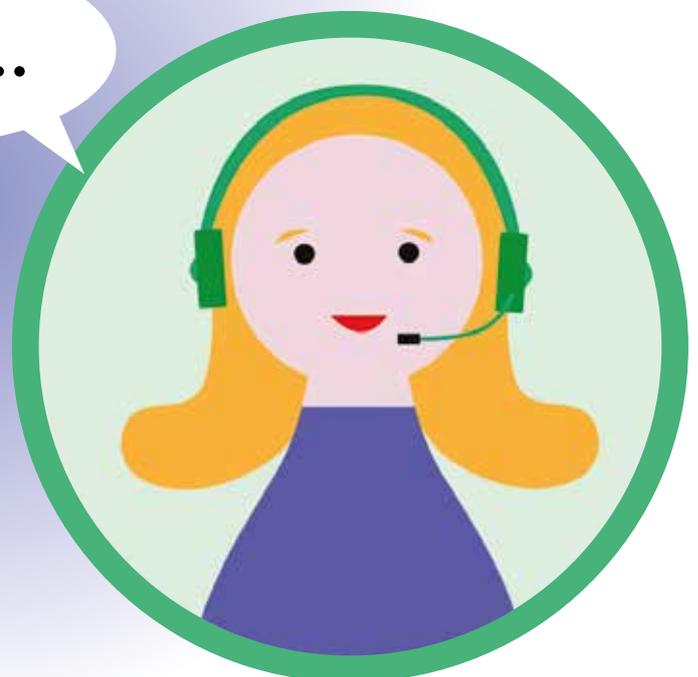
In order to understand the issues faced by the children and young people who get in touch with child helplines, we **survey our members around the world every year to gather information about the contacts they receive**. This report presents the compilation and analysis of the data pertaining to the year 2019.

Depending on the requirements of their counselling and research activities, our child helpline members record various information for every contact they receive. In order to understand why children and young people are contacting child helplines, Child Helpline International works closely with them to create a common categorisation of those contacts. This categorisation includes **ten broad reasons for making contact with child helplines** as well as nine types of **contextual information**. The child helplines indicate to us, on a yearly basis, the number of contacts received for each of these reasons, which are further sub-divided, and the contextual information, all of which is further sub-divided.

It should be noted that the content and level of detail of information recorded for each contact is the prerogative of the child helplines themselves and is not directed by Child Helpline International. Therefore, these categories might differ from the categories used by some child helplines when they originally collected their data. It should also be noted that child helplines have differing practices relating to the information recorded. Whereas some indicate the reason given for calling by the child or young person, others indicate the reason identified by the counsellor, which in some cases might not be the same. Finally, the absence of contacts in a particular category could mean that the child helpline did not receive any contacts pertaining to that category, or that the child helpline does not collect this information.

For the present report, we added up the number of contacts received by each child helpline in each category of contact across 2019. We then aggregated the data at the regional and global levels to present the proportion of contacts received using our categorisation.

Hello...



In 2019, our child helpline members received a total of **13,269,622 contacts** – both counselling and non-counselling contacts - across five regions. This is the number of *all* contacts received. Non-counselling contacts include questions, information requests, missed contacts, silent contacts and testing contacts.

Specifically, our child helpline members received **2,076,933 counselling contacts** in 2019. That means, somewhere in the world, **a child or young person has actively reached out to a child helpline for advice, help or support more than 2 million times**. This represents 15.7% of all global contacts and it is also the number of times a child helpline has been able to provide support, advice or another form of counselling to a child or young person, often offering direct interventions.

Total number of **total contacts** received in 2019 across all regions:

13,269,622

Counselling contacts	2,076,933
Non-counselling contacts	11,192,689

Region (number of child helplines who submitted 2019 data)	Type of contact	Number of contacts	Percentage of counselling contacts
Africa (16 child helplines)	Counselling contacts	238,074	13.9%
	Non-counselling contacts	1,479,585	
Americas & The Caribbean (9 child helplines)	Counselling contacts	180,454	71.2%
	Non-counselling contacts	73,140	
Asia-Pacific (13 child helplines)	Counselling contacts	561,102	7.6%*
	Non-counselling contacts	6,803,546	
Europe (38 child helplines)	Counselling contacts	1,078,564	29.3%
	Non-counselling contacts	2,607,842	
Middle East & North Africa (6 child helplines)	Counselling contacts	18,739	7.6%
	Non-counselling contacts	228,576	

* Please note that excluding India's data from this calculation brings this number up to 60.5%

The following pages focus on these **counselling contacts**, and break them down into various issues and each of our five regions.

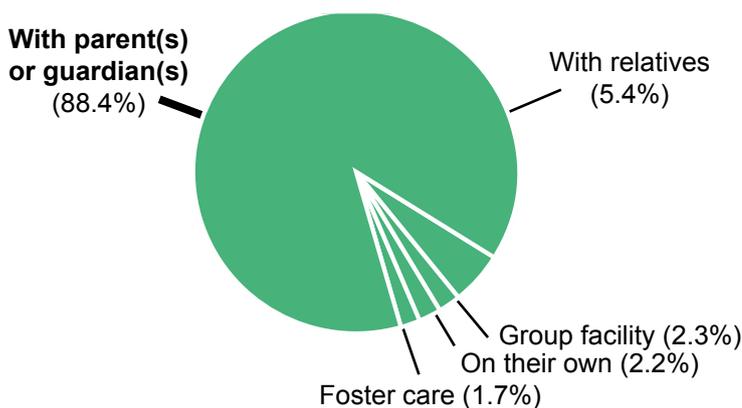


Children at home

We obtained data on background information about the children and young people who contacted our child helpline members in 2019. From this information, a complementary picture emerges about the context surrounding these contacts and in which these children and young people live.

Living situation

A majority of children and young people who contacted the child helplines were living **with parent(s) or guardian(s)**, or **with relatives**. A smaller portion of contacts came from children and young people living in a **group facility**, **on their own** or in **foster care**. This shows that an overwhelming majority of children and young people were living at home **with family members** when they contacted a child helpline.



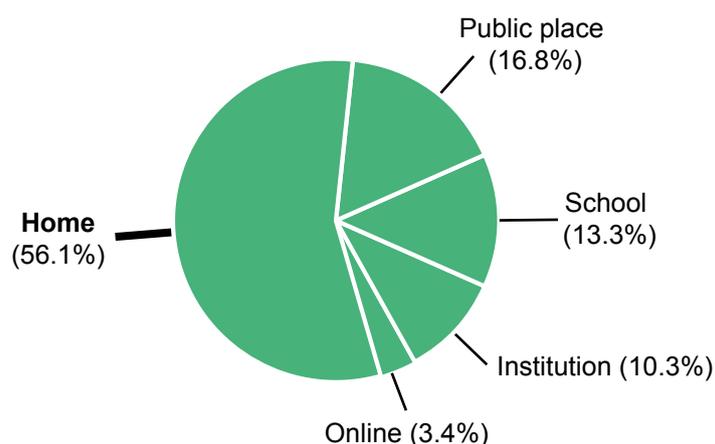
Per region: Living with parent(s) or guardian(s)	%
Africa	74.1%
Americas & Caribbean	86.0%
Asia-Pacific	87.2%
Europe	91.0%
MENA	97.6%

This trend is highly consistent across all five regions. A large majority of children and young people who contacted the child helplines in 2019 are living **with parent(s) or guardian(s)**. The highest percentage of children and young people living with parent(s) or guardian(s) is observed in the MENA region, followed by Europe, Asia-Pacific, the Americas & Caribbean and Africa.

Location of the issue

The issues faced by children and young people can occur in a multiplicity of settings. We captured information about the location of the issue that was the object of the contact. More than half of the children and young people contacted child helplines globally because they were concerned about something that was happening in their **home**.

Public places were identified as the next most frequent location where issues arise, with **schools** and **institutions** also being frequently mentioned. The **online** environment concerned just over 3% of children and young people globally.

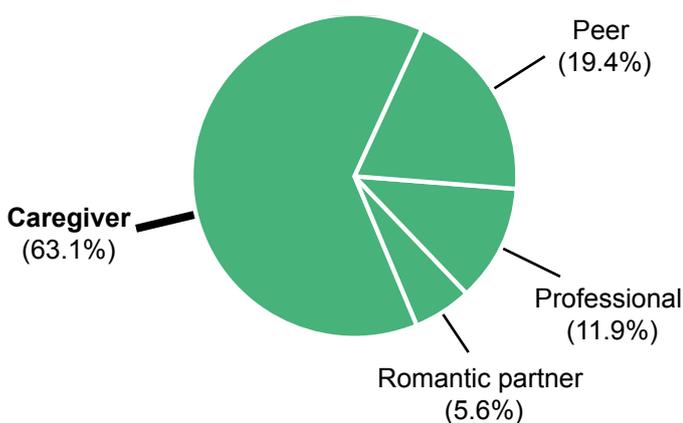


Per region: Issues occurring at home	%
Africa	64.3%
Americas & Caribbean	79.8%
Asia-Pacific	54.2%
Europe	57.2%
MENA	71.4%

Again, we can observe this trend across all five regions. The home is the **main location of the issue in each and every region**. The percentages of children and young people who contacted the child helplines while they were having issues in the home vary from 80% in the Americas & Caribbean, to 54.2% in Asia-Pacific. In between these, we find MENA, Africa and Europe.

Relationship

In addition, we gathered information about the person that the child or young person’s reasons for making contact potentially related to. Depending on the nature of the contact this could be a perpetrator or a recipient, or somebody involved in another way. In the majority of contacts, the other person involved was a **caregiver**. This finding is consistent with the information already presented here: most children and young people live with their parents or guardians, and most of them live at home. Almost a fifth of contacts involved a **peer**, followed by a **professional**, such as a teacher or sports coach, etc. The smallest amount of contacts was related to a **romantic partner**.



Per region: Relationship with caregiver	%
Africa	76.4%
Americas & Caribbean	67.8%
Asia-Pacific	57.9%
Europe	63.9%
MENA	74.2%

This trend is confirmed yet again across all five regions: the greater majority of children and young people who contact the child helplines are concerned about the **relationship with their caregiver**. In all regions, this ranks first out of all “relationship” sub-categories. The region with the highest proportion of contacts in this group was Africa, followed by MENA, the Americas & Caribbean, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

From the data collected globally and regionally, we can gather that the vast majority of children and young people who contacted our child helpline members were living with their **parent(s) or guardian(s)**. The main area for concern for children and young people who contacted child helplines in 2019 was about something happening **in their own home**. We can also see that, again for the majority, the person that the child or young person’s reason for making contact potentially related to was a **caregiver**.

We cannot directly connect this information to the actual reason for contact, which means that these contacts could be related to any of the ten reasons. However, considering that the top reasons for contact in most regions include mental health, violence, accessibility, family relationships and peer relationships, it is reasonable to suggest that these *might* indeed be the issues arising at home for the majority of children and young people making contact.

Although we observed this trend during 2019, it seems important to put these findings into the current **2020 context of the Covid-19 pandemic**. As a result of the pandemic, lockdowns have come into place in many countries, keeping children and their families at home together. Furthermore, in many places schools have been closed, resulting in children taking classes from home. We can therefore expect a continuation of this trend. Because they are more easily and directly accessible to children and young people than other services, child helplines are of even greater importance at this time when children and young people have to spend more time at home than ever before.

Looking ahead to 2020: The Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 case studies

To shed light on the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the work of our child helplines throughout 2020, we developed **specific surveys ahead of our regular annual data collection**. We will publish these findings in March 2021, when we will have an entire year's worth of data to analyse, but in the meantime these case studies provide a first glance of our preliminary findings from these surveys.

The 2019 data illustrates that **the majority of contacts with child helplines by children and young people has been related to issues that have happened in their own homes**. It is logical to assume that the additional amount of time children have been spending at home as the result of national lockdowns and/or temporary school closures might lead to a significant increase in contacts in 2020, which our preliminary analyses would seem to suggest.

The responding child helplines reported a shift in the type of contacts between the first and second quarters of 2020. At the beginning of the pandemic, the recurring reasons for children and young people to make contact was to obtain information and express general concerns about Covid-19 measures. As the pandemic intensified, child helplines were experiencing more cases related to the influence and effect that local Covid-19 measures were having for children and young people. The cases from the second quarter focused particularly on violence, mental health, family relationships and peer relationships, as a result of children and young people spending more time at home because of social distancing and stay-at-home orders.



"Can I please get the cure for corona...?"

An 11-year-old boy contacted the child helpline, sounding worried. He wanted more information on Covid-19. He was anxious because of all the deaths he had been seeing in the media. "Can I please get the cure for corona? Because I saw that many people are dying."

The child helpline counsellor tried to reassure him that, although there isn't a cure yet, he can protect himself from getting the virus by practicing good hygiene such as washing his hands with soap and clean, running water, by not shaking hands with others, and by staying away from crowded places. She explained that this meant he would have to stay away from playgrounds, for now, to protect himself and others. She also explained that he should avoid touching his face, especially his nose, mouth and eyes. The boy thanked the counsellor for her advice, saying that he would try and keep safe.

"Because of the lockdown, old memories are coming back to me..."

An 18-year-old student, who is a high school senior, called to share that she was unable to concentrate on studying. Her grades were being affected because old traumatic memories were resurfacing during the Covid-19 lockdown. She revealed that she had been continuously raped by her cousin from the age of 7 until the age of 12. Her cousin now wanted to marry her, and because her parents do not know about the rape she didn't know how she could refuse the marriage. She was struggling with low self-esteem, blaming herself for not being able to stop the rape.

The child helpline worked with her on how to avoid blaming herself, and explained to her that her reactions at the time were completely normal. The child helpline staff worked with her on how she could explain her refusal to marry her cousin to her parents. The girl had never told anyone about this before and the conversation made it more possible for her to talk about her feelings regarding the situation and get the support she needed. She is now performing very well in her final exams, and her teachers – who have noticed this – are supporting and encouraging her.



"Tensions are running high at home, everybody's stressed out..."

A non-binary teenager texted, reporting concerns that they were worried their parents were going to kick them out of the house and they would have nowhere to go. Normally, the teenager would leave the house when things were getting heated, but they were currently unable to do so, because of shelter-in-place restrictions as a consequence of Covid-19. The teen reported: "Tensions are running high at home, everybody's stressed out about the virus and we don't have enough space from each other." The teen reported that they had been kicked out of the house before, as well as physically assaulted and threatened with knives. The teen was concerned nothing could be done to help, as they would be turning 18 in a few weeks' time.

The counsellor and the teen discussed options that the teen could explore, as well as options that might be available once they turned 18. In the post-chat survey, the teen reported they felt a little more hopeful, got a lot of the information they needed, and felt better prepared to deal with the situation.

"I find it really difficult to breathe when I have to wear a mask..."

An 11-year-old child contacted the child helpline to talk about their unhappiness adjusting between home-based learning and going back to school. They missed their home and their bed when going to school, and they missed going out when doing home-based learning. They shared that they did not enjoy some of the safety measures that had been imposed. "At school, I have to keep a safe distance from all of my friends. And I find it really difficult to breathe when I have to wear a mask." They also shared their disappointment missing things such as public events and co-curricular activities.

The child helpline empathised with the child, normalised the child's difficulty adjusting to changes, and reminded the child that they might need some time to adapt. The child helpline also explored future opportunities to make up for missed activities and explored what the child could do to feel better, for example talking with friends and engaging in hobbies.



"I just want to get out of the house when my parents are arguing..."

A 13-year-old boy called the child helpline, frustrated with his parents because they told him he would not be able to go out any more to meet up with his friends. He felt really angry and annoyed about this, and didn't understand why he wasn't allowed. At first the child helpline counsellor talked to him about his anger and how it is normal to feel angry when a person cannot do things. The conversation then continued about his plans and why he wanted to leave so badly: "I just want to get out of the house when my parents are always arguing."

The child helpline counsellor helped him build a plan, identifying the things he could do when his parents argued, such as taking the dog for a walk. He also was advised to talk with his parents and explain to them that, although he understands they are also under a great deal of stress, it makes him feel bad when they argue so much.

Child helplines: An essential service for children in distress

Last year, a child or young person actively reached out to a child helpline more than 13 million times. Child helplines serve as a confidential entry point for many children and adolescents to reach out for help when faced with adversity. They are a mechanism through which children can speak out, have their voices and concerns heard, and receive frontline counselling and psychosocial support. They can guide children in accessing the services they need, and they can support referrals of children exposed to abuse and neglect to child protection authorities for investigation and response. In addition, the data collected from national child helplines can be used to better understand the demand for child protection services and to assess and inform service capacity, resource allocation and service costs.

Since the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic, many child helplines around the world have shown a significant increase in demand for their services. New pressures arising from school closures, disruption of livelihoods, family confinement and isolation can be triggers for violence or psychological distress. These pressures are occurring at a time when children may be cut off from social supports in the extended family, in school and in the community that they rely upon when they are troubled; and at a time when children are less visible to the professionals who are normally engaged with them. Child helplines have emerged as one of the few safe and confidential means for children to reach out and seek help.

Indeed, in the context of widespread service disruptions due to Covid-19, UNICEF surveys have found child helplines to be the most resilient, least affected components of the system. They are, nevertheless, under pressure to scale up their services to address the additional demands associated with the pandemic.

Child Helpline International took immediate measures to support national child helplines in responding to the crisis, and UNICEF is pleased to have provided support in these efforts. UNICEF and Child Helpline International have collaborated to advocate for the recognition of the vital service that child helplines provide within the public health response, and jointly produced technical guidance to help child helplines adapt and strengthen their services. Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNICEF has supported over 50 national child helplines to strengthen their capacities and operations.

Moving forward, efforts should be made at all levels to ensure that child helplines have strengthened capacities to provide services at scale, that they are fully integrated in national child protection systems, and that public and private investments are made to ensure the sustainability of helpline services over time. UNICEF remains committed to a vision where every child has free and unrestricted access to quality child helpline services.

Now, more than ever, the vital role that child helplines play in the child protection system can be recognised.

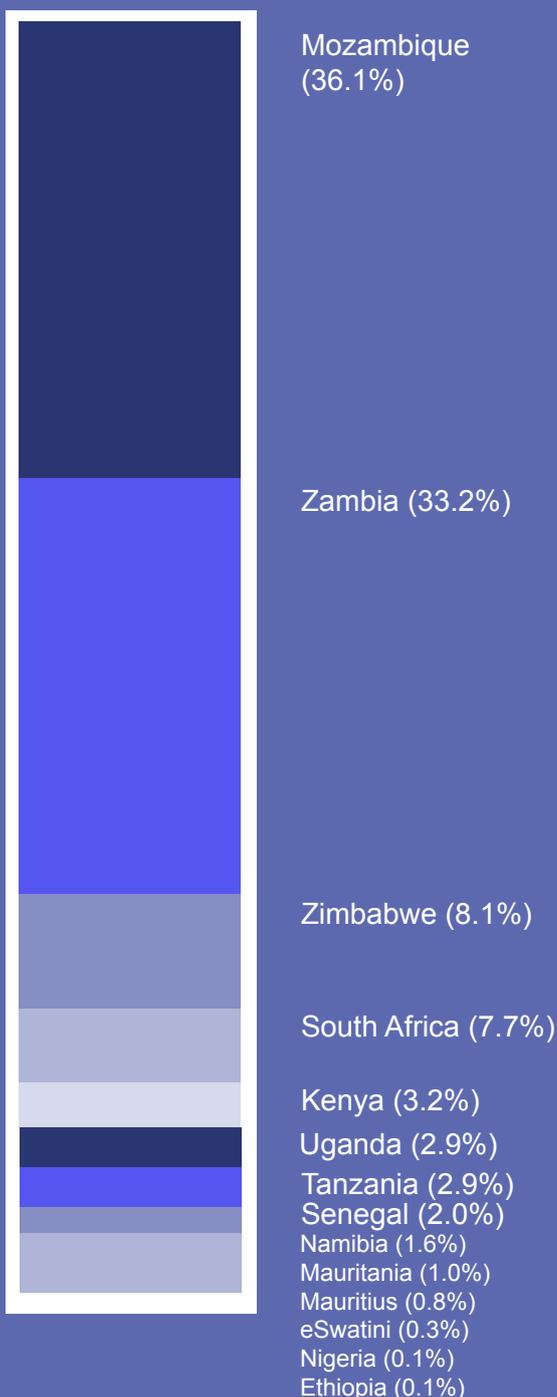
unicef  | for every child

Cornelius Williams
*Associate Director
& Global Chief of
Child Protection,
Programme Division,
UNICEF*

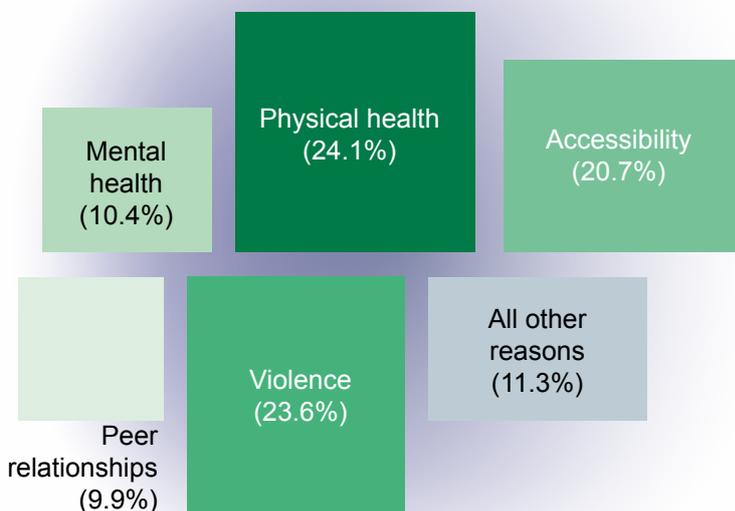


Africa

We received data from 16 child helplines in 14 countries in Africa related to 2019. The three countries receiving the largest number of counselling contacts in the region were **Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe**.

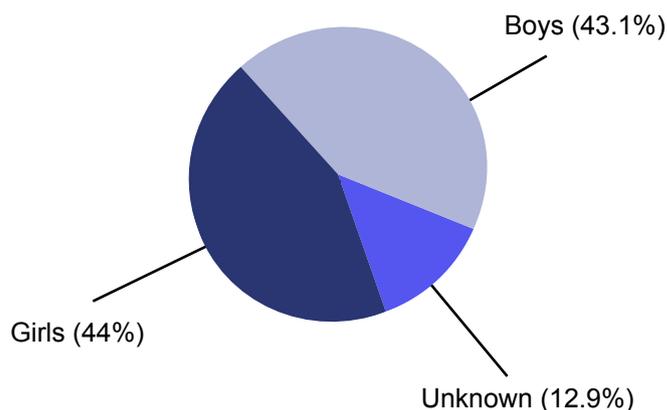


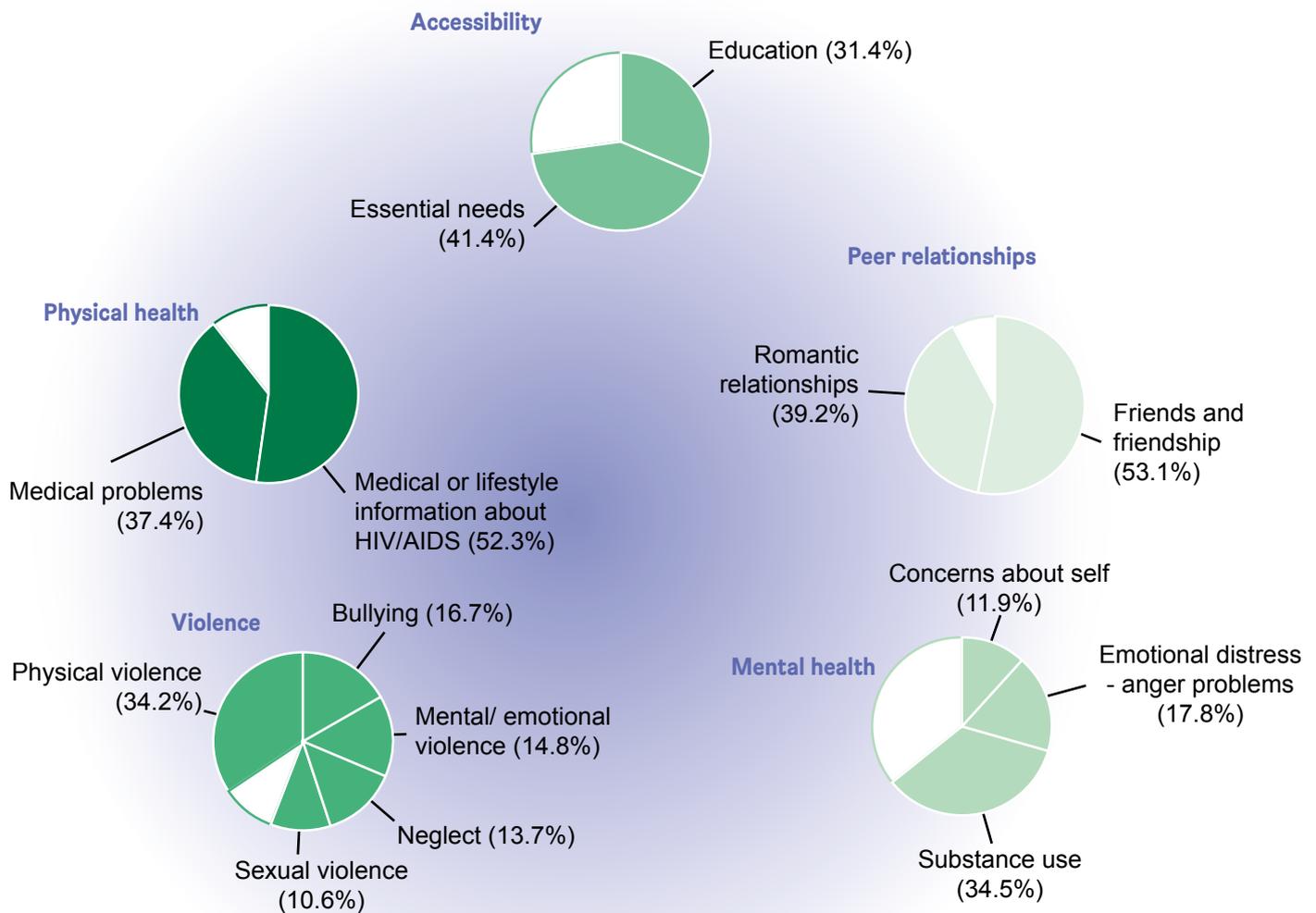
Physical health and **violence** are the two largest reasons for contact reported by child helplines in the African region in 2019, together accounting for almost half of all the contacts received. Child helplines also reported a number of contacts related to **accessibility, mental health** and **peer relationships**. These top five reasons for contact account for 88.7% of the total contacts received.



Contacts by gender

A more or less equal amount of girls and boys contacted child helplines in the region. The remaining counselling contacts were from children of unknown gender. No data was shared by the child helplines for contacts from children who identify as non-binary.





- Over a third of the contacts received by child helplines in Africa related to violence – including issues about **bullying, neglect, mental/emotional violence** and **sexual violence**.
- Contacts looking for **medical or lifestyle information about HIV/AIDS** accounted for the largest number of contacts – more than half – made about physical health.
- Almost three quarters of the contacts made about accessibility issues concerned access to **essential needs** or **education**.
- Over a third of the contacts made about mental health concerned **substance use**.
- Almost all contacts about peer relationships concerned either **friends and friendship** or **romantic relationships**.

Vulnerable children

Of the groups of particularly vulnerable children who contacted a child helpline in Africa, 74.4% were children with a disability, and 15.8% of this group were children in conflict with the law.

Groups	%
Children with disabilities	74.4%
Children in conflict with the law	15.8%
Children on the move/in migration	5.9%
Children in detention	2.5%
LGBTQI+/SOGIESC children	1.2%
Member of ethnic/racial minority	0.1%

"I still have some problems in school, but I'm determined to overcome them..."

A woman called the child helpline to report that a 17-year-old girl had never attended school. She had difficulties telling the time, counting up to 10, and much more besides. The child helpline reached out to the girl's aunt, with whom she lived, to help enrol her into a school. The aunt agreed, and the girl started to attend literacy classes that would help bring her up to the academic level commensurate with her age.

However, her father tried to take her out of school again, to marry her off. The child helpline intervened and explained to him why her education was important. He allowed her to stay in school, and after some time the child helpline called the girl and her aunt to check on her progress. They both reported being very happy. "I have passed my tests! I still have some problems in school, but I'm determined to overcome them," the girl told them. Today, she is one more child who enjoys her right to education and to be part of society.



"My teacher doesn't do anything about it..."

An 8-year-old boy was brought into the child helpline by his father, regarding the boy's anger issues at school. The boy explained that he becomes angry when his classmates take his book and throw it into the storeroom even though he is not done with writing. "My teacher doesn't do anything about it, even when I explain what's happened." He also said that he gets on okay with his siblings apart from when they accuse him of doing something that he hasn't done.

The child helpline's social worker asked the father to monitor his son's behaviour that week. The father was advised to speak with the teacher himself regarding the classmates of the child, and the issue of taking away his books before he has finished with them.

"I only have one pair of boxer shorts... I thought that wasn't a big deal..."

A 14-year-old boy called the child helpline, seeking assistance. He explained that he was frequently experiencing fungal growth on and around his genitals. He had tried different medications, but none had helped. Too shy to go to the hospital, and with nobody to talk with about his situation, he decided to call the child helpline.

The counsellor advised him to work on his personal hygiene, because wearing the same pair of boxer shorts all the time might be the cause of the problem. Apart from clean underwear, the counsellor suggested he took a bath every day – but advised against bathing directly in the river because the water there might be contaminated. If no other water supply was available, then he should make sure he boils the water he washes in beforehand. The counsellor also advised him to complete his course of medicine. He was encouraged to visit a health facility and to see a doctor, rather than keep silent when in pain. At the end of conversation, he was very grateful with the talk he had had with the counsellor. "I only have one pair of boxer shorts. I thought that wasn't a big deal," he said. "But now I know I need to ask my parents for more pairs!"



"Please give me food..."

A concerned community member called the child helpline to report a case of physical abuse concerning an orphaned 7-year-old girl. Her guardians were beating her, denying her food and education, and she was in a bad way, sometimes asking for food from the neighbours.

Child helpline staff and social welfare officers found the girl huddled outside in the rain, cold and soaked. Her guardians claimed she had been naughty, and that they were teaching her some manners. The social welfare officers refused to leave. The police arrested the guardians for child mistreatment and neglect. The girl was taken to an orphanage, where the child helpline continued to monitor her and provide counselling. Seven months later, an aunt claimed her and took her into her care. Continued monitoring by both the child helpline and social welfare revealed that the girl was now happy and was attending school.

"I will go to the hospital and take my medicine..."

A 14-year-old girl contacted the child helpline in tears. She told the counsellor she had been beaten, and locked up in her house by her siblings and the grandfather they were all living with because her mother lived abroad.

Her grandfather reported that the girl had some mental health issues that had started a few years ago. He added that she was rebellious, did not listen to anyone, and was always getting into fights at home. The counsellor referred her to a psychiatric hospital where the girl could get help with her mental health. Her father was also contacted, as he was in a much better position to be able to take her to the hospital. The girl was very happy with the idea of living with her father and his new family: "Now that I am going to be living with daddy, I will go to the hospital with him and take my medicine."

"I feel very uncomfortable and I am in pain..."

A girl called the child helpline with concerns about her menstrual cycle. She was frustrated about how she was feeling: "I don't understand myself anymore. It feels very uncomfortable and I am in pain."

The counsellor took time to explain to her what was happening to her body that was causing her such pain and suggested some remedies to help her feel better. The counsellor also explained that every woman is different, and everyone has her own difficulties and issues, but the most important thing is to make sure the challenges are manageable. If she experienced severe pain and an unstable menstrual cycle, she was told that it was very important to visit a doctor. At the end of the call, the girl was reassured and very grateful for the advice and assistance provided.





There has been a growing awareness of the importance of mental health as a key component in a child's development over the past decades. However, mental health issues are usually given very low priority in health services policies. Mental health always seems to come last on the list of priorities, especially when it comes to policy making. Subsequently, in many countries in Africa, there are no mental health policies, programmes or even action plans.

Factors such as poor mental health literacy, high level of stigma and the weak capacity of the community on tackling mental health issues make the situation even worse. These challenges are significant barriers to accessing mental health care for depression, which is predicted to soon become the largest single contributor to the regional and global burden of disease and morbidity rate, and mortality¹.

It's heartbreaking to see that mental disorders such as depression are often not recognised as an illness and remain largely untreated, especially when the problem could be remedied earlier. Mental health disorders are possible to diagnose before the age of 25².

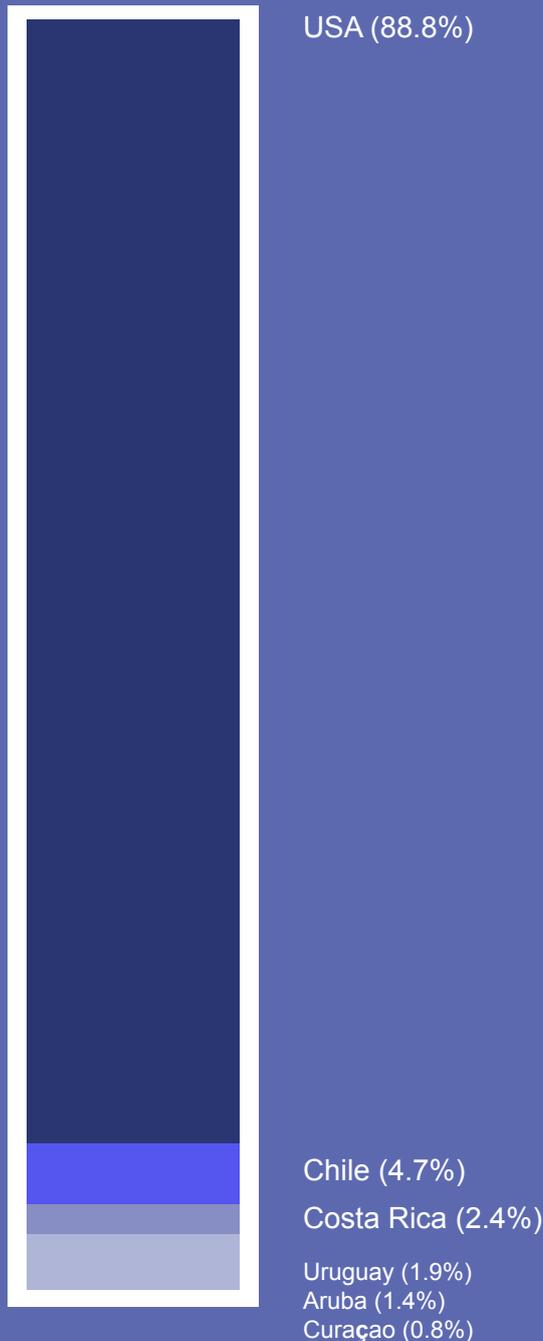
In case there is to be a mental health policy for Africa it should concern itself with maximising scarce public resources and support families in provision of best services for mental illness. The policy should aim at changing the negative perception of mental disorders or the whole notion of mental health.

*By Winnifrida Nicholaus Msekeni
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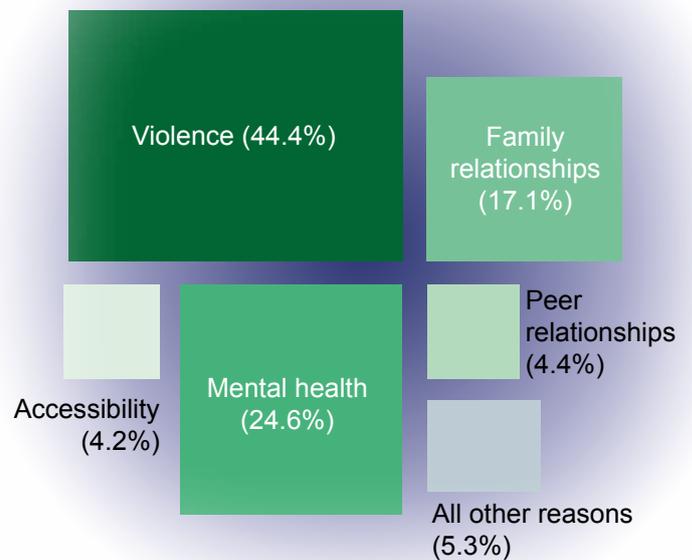
1. Prevalence of Child Mental Health Problems in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Systematic Review
Melissa A. Cortina, DPhil; Anisha Sodha, MBBCh; Mina Fazel, DM; et al
2. Ibid

Americas & Caribbean

We received data from 9 child helplines in 6 countries in the Americas & Caribbean region related to 2019. The three countries that received the largest number of counselling contacts were the **USA**, **Chile** and **Costa Rica**.

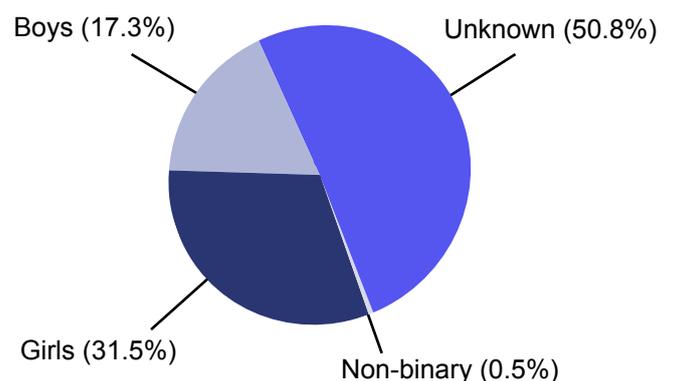


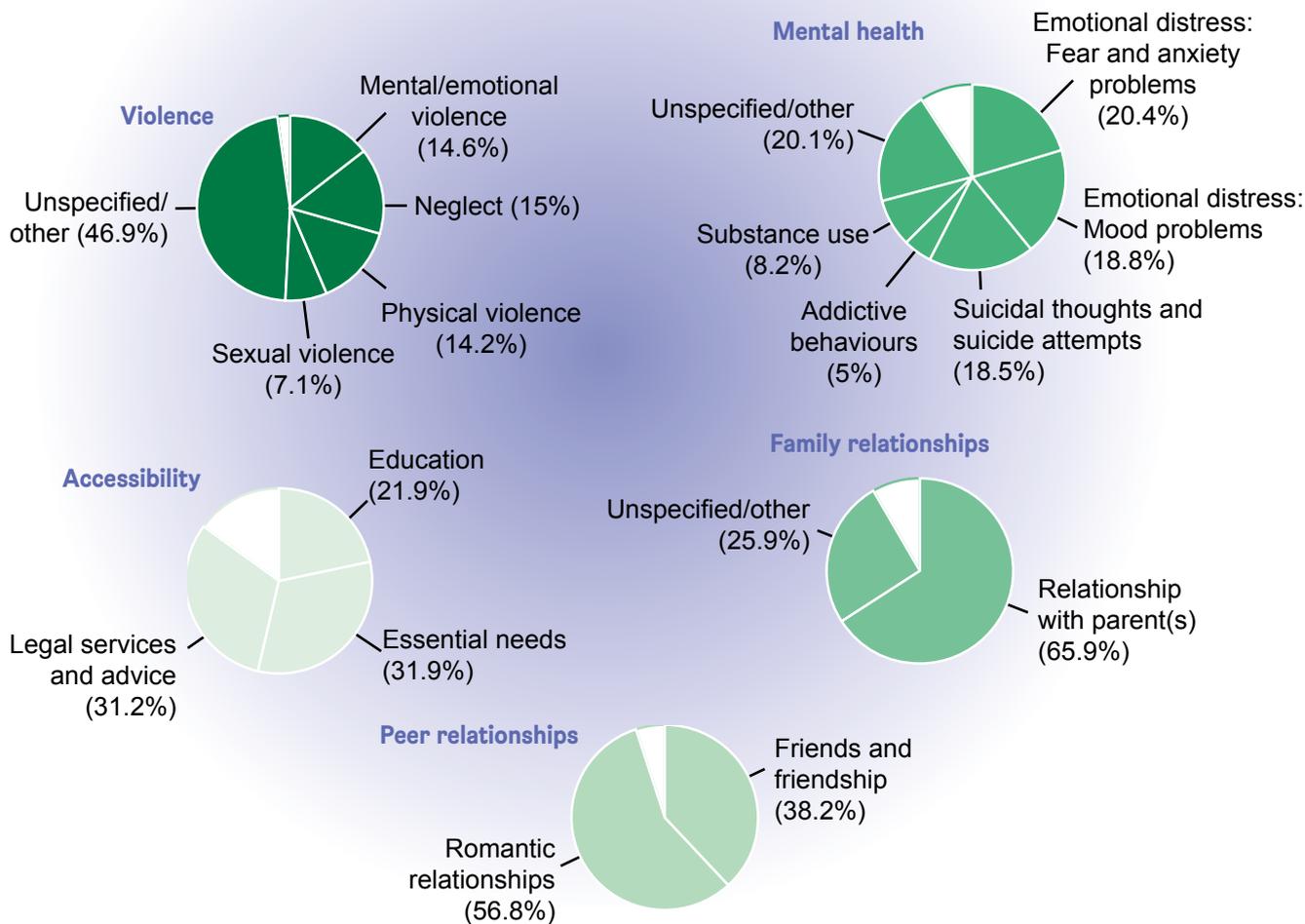
Violence and **mental health** are the main two reasons for contact reported by child helplines in the Americas & Caribbean region in 2019, accounting for more than two thirds of the contacts received. Other significant reasons for contact are **family relationships**, **peer relationships** and **accessibility**.



Contacts by gender

Again in 2019 it has been difficult to draw any conclusions relating to the gender of the children and young people making contact with child helplines in this region, as the gender of over half of the counselling contacts remained unknown. When the gender is known, girls appear to be contacting child helplines more often than boys. Finally, a small percentage of contacts identified as non-binary.





- **Unspecified/other** contacts account for nearly half of all contacts relating to violence, which would indicate that child helplines in the Americas & Caribbean region have difficulty mapping into the specific categories of our data framework. When a specific reason is reported, the contacts received relate to **neglect**, **mental/emotional violence**, **physical violence** and **sexual violence**.
- Mental health contacts mostly concerned **emotional distress (fear and anxiety issues, and mood problems)** and **suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts**. Together with unspecified/other reasons, these account for more than three quarters of the mental health contacts received in the region.

Vulnerable children

The majority of vulnerable children who contacted a child helpline in the Americas and Caribbean were members of an ethnic or racial minority (76.6%) in the country where they were located when making contact.

Groups	%
Member of ethnic/racial minority	76.6%
LGBTQI+/SOGIESC children	22.4%
Children with disabilities	0.9%
Children on the move/in migration	0.02%
Children in detention	0.01%

"My dad's been doing stuff to me..."

A 16-year-old boy called the child helpline in great distress. The counsellor told him to take his time and breathe deeply until he was ready to talk. The boy said: "My dad's been doing stuff to me..." The counsellor was able to clarify that the boy was being sexually abused but did not want to say it. The boy had decided to reach out to the helpline because he was getting close to the point of speaking up but was still scared even though he wanted to bring the abuse to an end.

He had never spoken to anyone about this before. His mother did not live with him and was not very involved in his life. He felt way too embarrassed to reach out to any other relative to talk about what was happening to him. The counsellor worked on empowering the boy, encouraging him to take the power away from his father and to create a future for himself in which he would have much more control. The counsellor offered him a safe space to seek information about the services available to him, and to discuss his experience.



"What she's saying to me really hurts..."

A 14-year-old girl called the child helpline for support because she was being emotionally abused by her mother. Her mother frequently said offensive things to her, such as saying that it would have been "better to have aborted you, you're a nuisance". She expressed the emotional distress of being treated in this way by her mother, and the lack of affection she received. "I have never even received a hug from her. She's my mother, but what she's saying to me really hurts."

The child helpline counsellor provided her with emotional support, discussed her right to live in an environment free of violence, and made a report to the corresponding office for intervention. The child helpline continues to provide the girl with support in the daily situations she faces at home.

“I’m thinking about killing myself...”

A young person identifying as non-binary entered the child helpline chat, feeling emotionally abused and neglected by their parents. They had recently been raped. They had also been self-harming. “I’m thinking about killing myself.”

The child helpline counsellor thanked the young person for being brave and honest about the situation they were in, and for sharing their feelings. The counsellor checked their mental state and assessed the situation for imminent risk, providing them with some suicide and mental health resources. They shared coping mechanisms and reassured the young person that none of these situations was their fault, and that their feelings were all valid. The young person and the counsellor discussed next steps and found a shelter nearby that could provide shelter and transportation resources to help the young person stay safe.





"I just want to give up and leave..."

A girl reached out to the child helpline through chat, saying that she wanted to run away. She had been in a fight with her mother, and this had ended with her mother hitting her. While these fights did not always become physical, it happened frequently enough that the girl said: "I just want to give up and leave". Her mother had been cutting off her communication with friends and family, and she was having difficulty finding new outlets and ways of dealing with her situation.

The counsellor discussed new coping strategies and how she could identify common triggers for arguments, so as to try to avoid and de-escalate them. Together with the counsellor, she made plans for reaching out to a teacher at school, for emotional support and to have another safe space where she could talk about the issues she was facing. The girl finished the chat feeling more hopeful, and confident that she had the skills and support to cope with her challenging family relationships.



Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US was experiencing an unprecedented surge in the number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving to the country (primarily from Central America), and being detained at the southern border. In 2019, immigration authorities apprehended over 76,000 unaccompanied children at or near the border; this represents an increase of over 52% compared to 2018.

Under US law, the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services are responsible for the wellbeing of any detained child. However, the increase in apprehensions threatens to overwhelm systems set up to care for them. On paper there are strict rules on the fundamental rights of migrant children, but in reality policies like the zero-tolerance policy (April 2018) result in high-risk situations and human rights violations for many. Under the zero-tolerance policy, all adults entering the US without authorisation were able to be detained while they awaited their court date. Because minors could not be detained with their guardians, over 4,300 families were separated between July 2017 and June 2018, with children being recategorised as “unaccompanied”.

Despite the fact that the policy was revoked, the practice of separating children from their guardians continues. When children are in detention, they are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress (not knowing why they have been separated, or what the future holds), in addition to the physical vulnerabilities related to living in detention without a parent. Establishing contact with their guardians or other family members can prove nearly impossible, and there is little accountability at the level of each individual child.

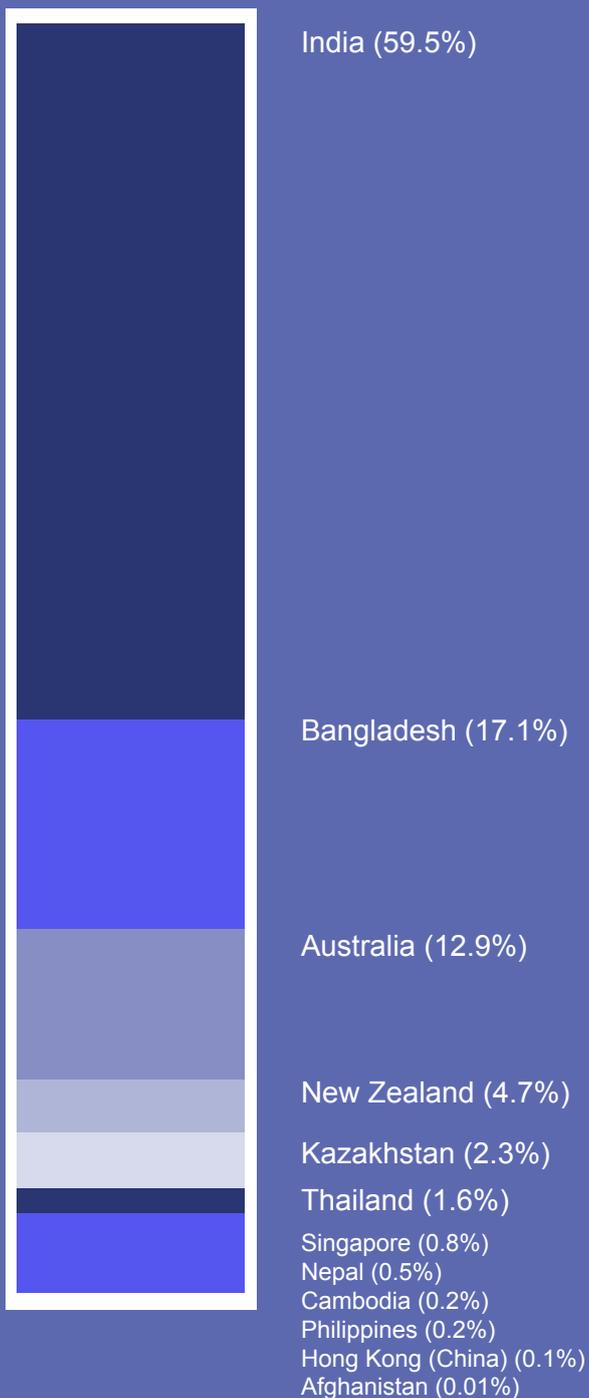
By Ana Alanis

Ana is based in Mexico and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council

1. In 2019, immigration authorities apprehended over 76,000 unaccompanied children at or near the border. This represented an increase of over 52% compared to 2018.
2. <https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/ms-l-v-ice-memo-support-motion-enforce-pi>

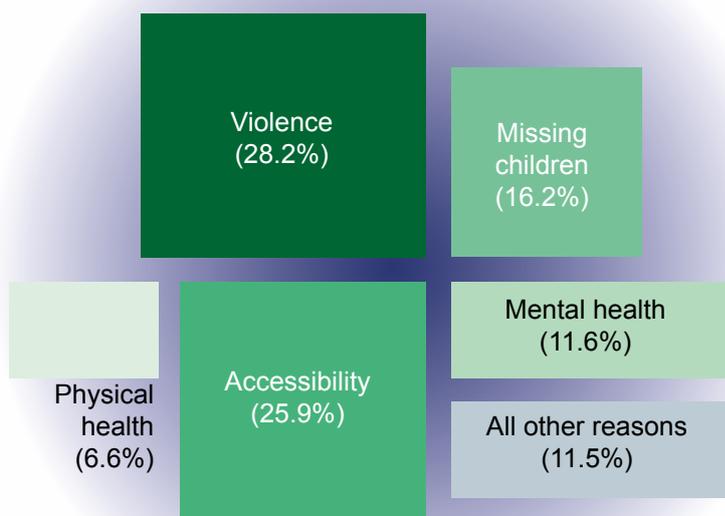
Asia-Pacific

We received data from 13 child helplines in 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific region related to 2019. **India** received most counselling contacts, followed by **Bangladesh** and **Australia**.



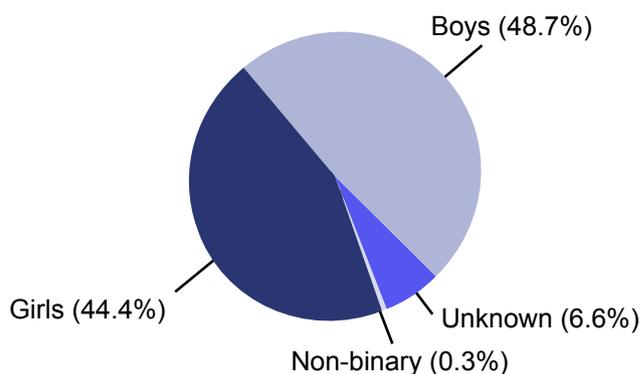
Violence and **accessibility** are the main reasons for contact reported by child helplines in the Asia-Pacific region. Child helplines in the region also observed a high number of contacts concerning **missing children**, **mental health** and **physical health**. These five largest reasons for contact account for roughly nine out of every ten counselling contacts received.

India's contribution to the data for this region has a huge impact. Without the Indian data, contacts about missing children drops to 1.8% across the rest of the region, while mental health becomes the main reason for contact, at 35%.

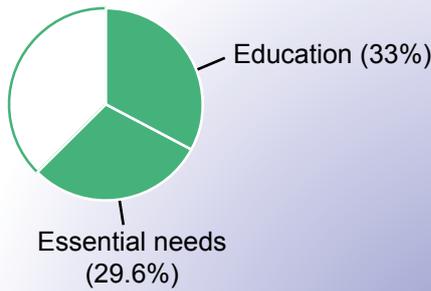


Contacts by gender

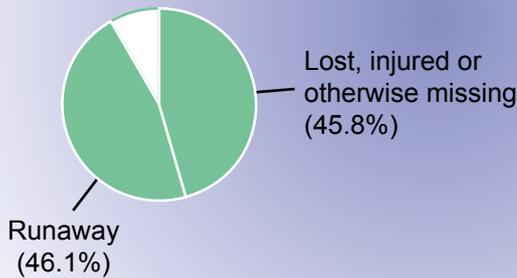
The distribution of counselling contacts by gender in the region was almost equal between girls and boys. A small percentage of contacts identified as non-binary.



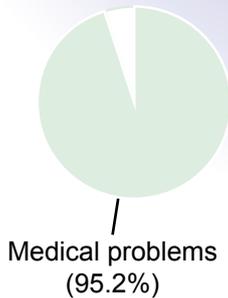
Accessibility



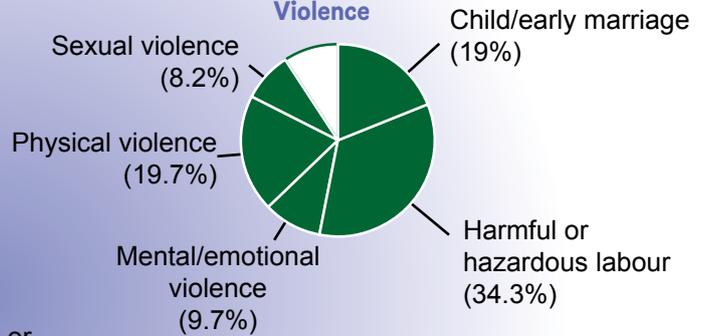
Missing children



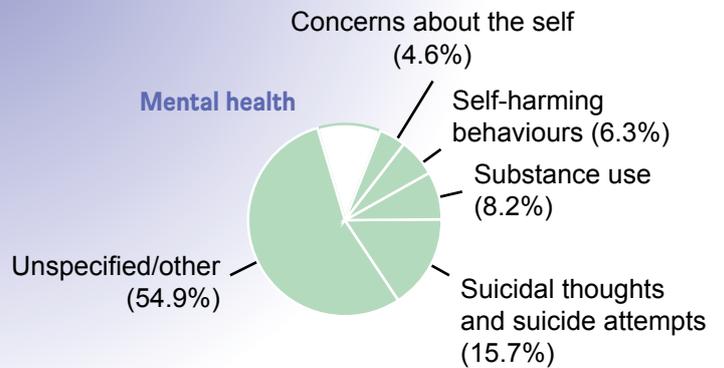
Physical health



Violence



Mental health



- **Harmful or hazardous labour, physical violence** and **child/early marriage** are the three most frequent types of violence reported in the region.
- Concerns about **education** and **essential needs** account for almost two-thirds of the total accessibility contacts.
- **Unspecified/other** is the largest reason for contacts concerning mental health. This indicates that the child helplines in the region find it difficult to match their contacts with our mental health categories.
- **Medical problems** are the largest reason for physical health contacts reported by the child helplines in the region. They account for almost all of the total physical health contacts received.

Vulnerable children

Over two-thirds of the vulnerable children who contacted a child helpline in the Asia-Pacific region were members of an ethnic or racial minority in the country where they were located when they made contact.

Groups	%
Member of ethnic/racial minority	67.5%
Children in conflict with the law	12.7%
Children on the move/in migration	9.2%
Children with disabilities	7.3%
Children in detention	2%
LGBTQI+/SOGIESC children	1.3%

"She hits me when she says I'm not listening to her..."

An 8-year-old girl called the child helpline for help. She described her mother as very manipulative and physically abusive. "She hits me when she says I'm not listening to her". The girl just wanted her mother to know that she could not go on hitting her like this, and that this behaviour had to come to an end.

The child helpline counsellor suggested that a social worker could come and visit her at home, to talk to her parents about the girl's situation, and the girl agreed. The social worker discovered that the girl's mother was also hit by her parents, and her own childhood experiences were having an effect on her own treatment of her daughter. The child helpline counsellor and the social worker were able to provide counselling services and positive parenting skills to the family, to help everybody improve their relationships with one another.



"I didn't like being told off, so I ran away..."

A 16-year-old girl arrived at a railway station, where child helpline workers identified her as a runaway, and took her back to the child helpline to talk with her and try to find out more about her situation. During her discussion with a counsellor, she revealed that her family lived in an entirely different region, but she had taken some money and decided to leave home.

She explained that her mother had scolded her severely because she had been using her mother's phone too much. "I didn't like being told off, so I ran away." After talking with the counsellor, the girl felt much calmer. She told the child helpline where her mother lived, and she was safely taken back home.



"I now know about 'safe spaces'..."

A 17-year-old girl contacted the child helpline for support after being triggered by something that had happened at school. The girl had a history of mental health issues since she was a child and she had been feeling hopeless and worthless, with multiple cases of self-harm. She had been advised by both her counsellor and therapist to call the child helpline for support.

After talking with the child helpline counsellor the girl felt calmer. "I now know about 'safe spaces' where I can talk about my feelings". She was also given coping strategies such as going out for a walk, reaching out for help, and writing about what she was feeling. The counsellor supported the girl and validated her feelings, while also acknowledging her ability to use her support network and coping strategies to feel better.



"If anything happened to me, it wouldn't matter..."

A 14-year-old boy told the child helpline he had been feeling sad and angry for a few weeks but didn't really know why. "If anything happened to me, it wouldn't matter," he said. "I'm not really doing anything with my life". He had not thought about suicide but had thought about harming himself and had done so on one occasion. He explained how he was usually a "joyful person" but found it difficult to talk to people about how he was feeling for fear they would "see it as a joke". When his sister had noticed he was not as upbeat as usual, for example, he just told her it was because of school.

Through discussion with the counsellor, the caller realised that his feelings could indeed be a result of a sudden overload in schoolwork, which had stressed him out and stopped him from doing things he enjoyed, such as hockey, tennis and PS4. He was angry with himself for harming himself and talked with the counsellor about how he could be kinder to himself when he felt this way in future.





The Asia-Pacific region has made great strides in the decline of child marriages, but the region remains home to the largest total number of child brides, carrying more than 40% of the global struggle.¹ Child marriage has been reported to be the third highest cause of contact under the category of violence that child helplines receive in the Asia-Pacific region. The calls received were 10 times more frequently from, or on behalf of, girls.

Although the data available has limitations in determining the exact point of contact, it is highly likely that most of these calls stem especially from children in rural areas. This brings about a cause for even greater concern: do these children have access to other sources of help and support than just the child helplines?

Though child marriage may only be 1 in 5 calls pertaining to violence that is received, that is one child more who is robbed of their childhood and all sense of rights and will likely result in a never ending cycle of violence. And as it currently stands, it is 12 million girls (a year).²

As we continue to inch closer to 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, it's important that we ensure the number of child marriages continues to decline even further. As members of an international community, we play an important role in ensuring that children are no longer at risk of poverty or harmful cultural practices. What greater time to put an end to these, than right at this moment?

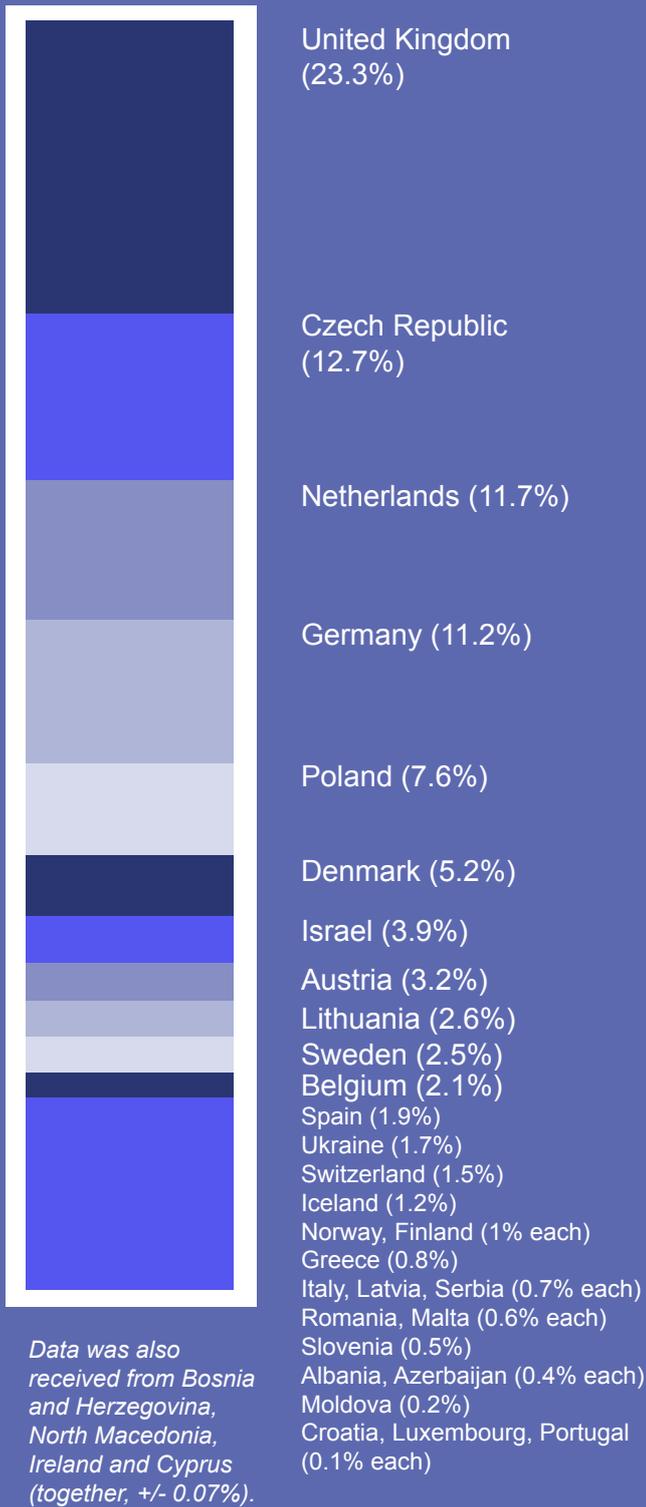
By Fila Magnus

Fila is based in Malaysia and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council

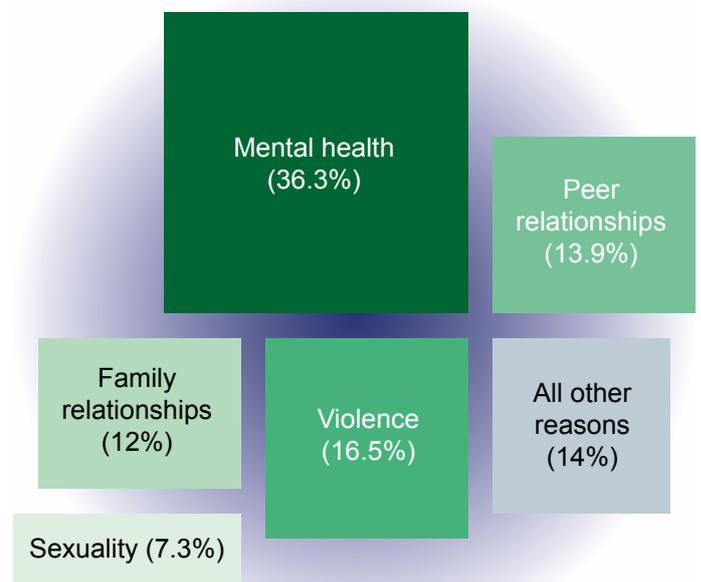
1. UNICEF Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects, July 2018
2. Girls Not Brides

Europe

We received data from 38 child helplines in 34 countries in Europe region related to 2019. Receiving the most contacts in the region were the **United Kingdom**, the **Czech Republic**, the **Netherlands**, **Germany** and **Poland**.

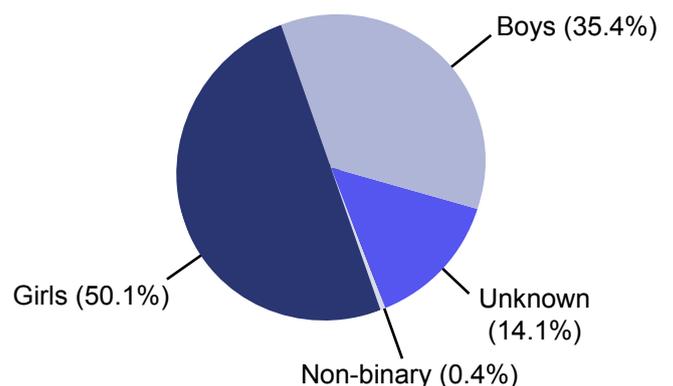


Mental health and **violence** are the main reasons for contact reported by child helplines in Europe in 2019. Child helplines also received large numbers of contacts related to **peer relationships**, **family relationships** and **sexuality**. Almost three out of four times when a child or a young person makes contact it concerns one of these five reasons.

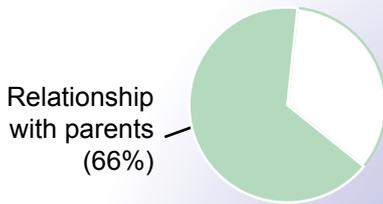


Contacts by gender

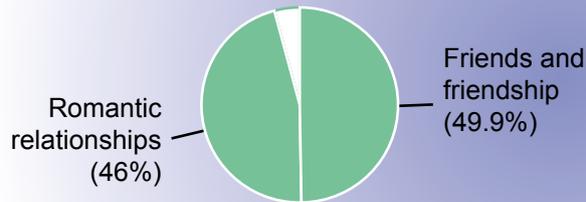
Girls account for half of all contacts, whereas boys for approximately only a third. The remaining contacts were from children of unknown gender and children who identify as non-binary.



Family relationships



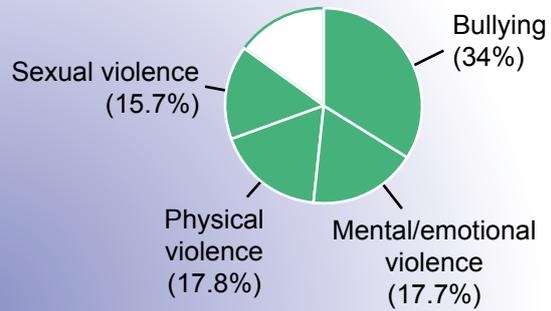
Peer relationships



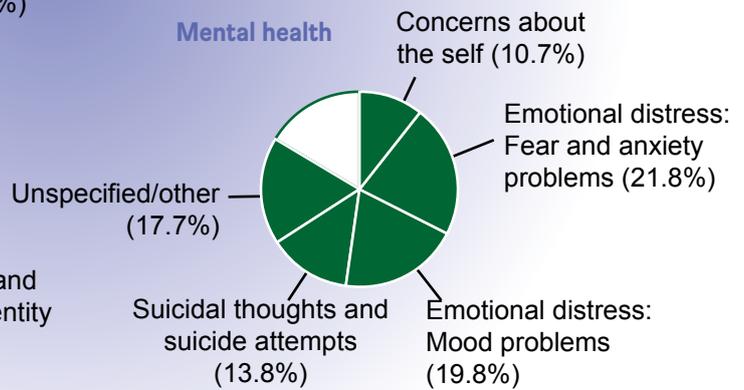
Sexuality



Violence



Mental health



- **Emotional distress** – both **fear and anxiety problems** and **mood problems** – and **unspecified/other** represent more than half of the contacts received in Europe about mental health. The child helplines also observed a high number of contacts about **suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts** and **concerns about the self**.
- The four main reasons for contacts about violence were **bullying**, **physical violence**, **mental/emotional violence** and **sexual violence**.
- **Relationship with a parent or parents** is the main reason reported by child helplines in Europe for contacts concerning family relationships, representing two thirds of all such contacts.
- When children and young people contact child helplines in Europe about sexuality, they mainly want to talk about **sexual behaviours**. However, over a quarter of the contacts want to talk about **sexuality and gender identity**.

Vulnerable children

The majority of vulnerable children contacting child helplines in Europe were children with disabilities or children and young people who are members of an ethnic or racial minority in the country where they were located when they made contact.

Groups	%
Children with disabilities	45.6%
Member of ethnic/racial minority	22.8%
Children in conflict with the law	12.2%
LGBTQI+/SOGIESC children	11.5%
Children in detention	6.3%
Children on the move/in migration	1.5%

"My parents don't really care about me..."

A 17-year-old girl called the child helpline to get advice on how to negotiate with her parents about some restrictions they had applied. She reported that her parents were very strict and made rules that were disproportionate to her age – for example, they only allowed her to go out with her friends once a week, and she had to be back home much earlier than any of her friends and classmates. "My parents don't really care about me, they just don't understand what I need."

The counsellor asked her if she has discussed these issues with her parents. The girl replied that she found it difficult to tell them how she was thinking and feeling, and she was afraid that they wouldn't understand. The counsellor shared some tips on assertive communication. The girl was relieved, and said that she would try to approach her parents in this different way. She was encouraged to call the child helpline back if she needed more support.

"I'm heartbroken that he doesn't want to see me anymore..."

A 16-year-old girl called the child helpline and asked for counselling because she had broken up with her boyfriend. She didn't know how to deal with this change and the feelings it was causing. She explained that this was her first romantic relationship: "I'm heartbroken that he doesn't want to see me anymore."

She described how the situation had affected her – for example, she now felt very depressed all the time, and she had lost her appetite. The counsellor helped her to understand the intense feelings and reactions she was experiencing as part of a "mourning process". They discussed ways for her to take time and continue her life after the end of this relationship. She told the counsellor that she now felt much more empowered.

"Knowing I'll be able to do this gives me the strength I need to go..."

A 17-year-old boy e-mailed the child helpline to share his story, which started 14 years earlier when his mother met his stepfather. As a young child he felt something was odd about his stepfather and he never felt comfortable around him. Emotional and physical abuse started from the moment he and his mother moved in with the man. His maternal grandmother noticed his bruises when he was younger, but the boy's mother refused to hear about it and threatened to commit suicide if the grandmother reported the abuse. Although the physical abuse stopped three years ago, the emotional abuse continues. After the boy's grandfather died, his stepfather had forbidden him to see the rest of the family.

By reaching out to the child helpline, the boy had been able to open up and share his story for the first time. The child helpline counsellor told him it was important to inform social services of what had happened, so that he could get help and support. However, he preferred to keep his experiences to himself. "I'll become legally adult in six months' time, and then I can come up with a plan to move out, and go and live with my grandmother and my aunt. Knowing I'll be able to do this gives me the strength I need to go on."



"A voice in my head keeps telling me that I'm gay..."

A boy contacted the child helpline through the chat service. He said he was feeling very sad and was crying every day. "A voice in my head keeps telling me that I'm gay, but I don't want to be." He has a girlfriend, but he still feels stuck and unsure because of what is going on in his thoughts, and the way he is feeling about himself.

The counsellor asked him questions about his feelings, and also what he thought might be able to help him, but he had a hard time answering. He said he would think things over a little more and said that he would contact the child helpline again. The counsellor gave him information about an organisation for LGBTQI+ youth, so that he could also turn to them for additional support and information if he needed it.

“I would’ve been able to put an end to their misery as well as my own...”

A girl contacted the child helpline because she felt completely desperate. Having already tried to end her life twice, her parents had become increasingly worried about her and were reluctant to let her out of their sight. Every time she went to her room, they would find a reason to check up on her. As a result of her parent’s constant concern, she had become even more reclusive. “I felt bad for what I had put them through but hated how much they were suffocating me. I found myself thinking that if my suicide attempts had been successful, I would’ve been able to put an end to their misery as well as my own.”

Not only did she have a history of suicide attempts, she was also regularly self-harming, feeling that this helped her cope.

She had been referred for counselling but did not get an appointment until several weeks later. Already worried about talking to someone face-to-face about how she was feeling, when this appointment was cancelled and a new one not planned until weeks later, it made her feel even more that her situation was hopeless.

Feeling disappointed and alone she sought comfort online, and came across the child helpline’s website and message boards. “I didn’t really know what I was looking for when I decided to search for help over the internet. But being able to read the experiences of other young people without having to share my own was really comforting. I did not give up!”

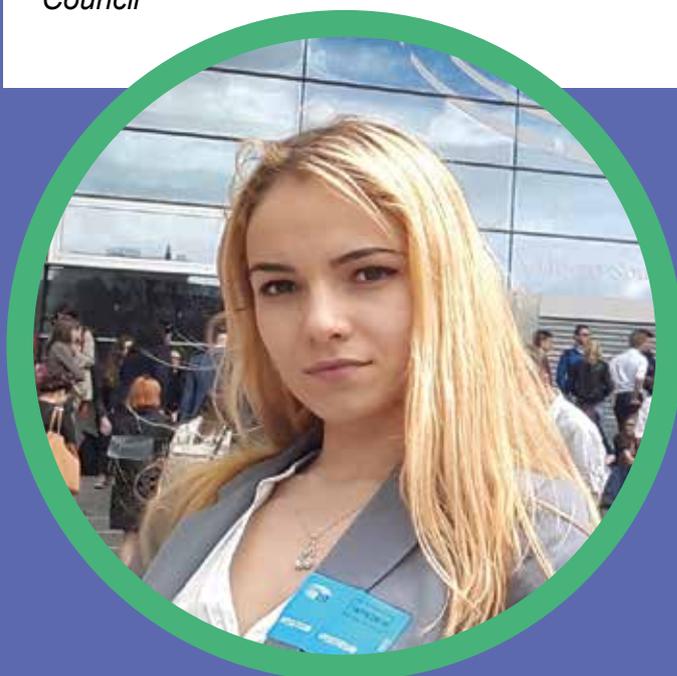


As a young person living and studying in Europe, I want to dedicate my word to the European data that Child Helpline International has collected in 2019. Going through this data, I was moved to see that mental health is ranked 1st out of the 10 categories of reasons for children and young people in Europe making contact with child helplines. Thousands of calls have been made by children and young people who have had the courage to pick up the phone and talk about their problems.

But how many did not find the courage or the right outlets to address their problems? There are many children and young people who do not get a chance to talk about their mental health. What can we do to overcome this phenomenon and empower unreached individuals to seek help? What can we do to prove to them that undertaking this step is a courageous step? We can unite in one common mission: raising awareness and encouraging every children and young person that it is okay to be not okay, and it is always better to talk about it.

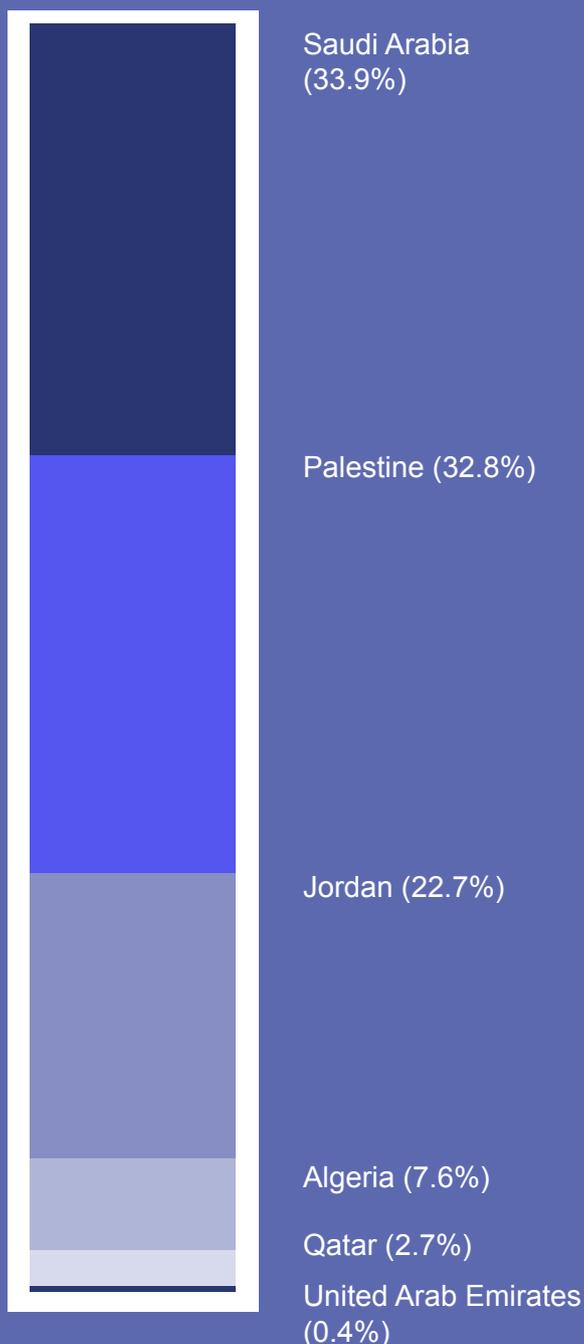
By Sara Brari

Sara is based in Albania and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council

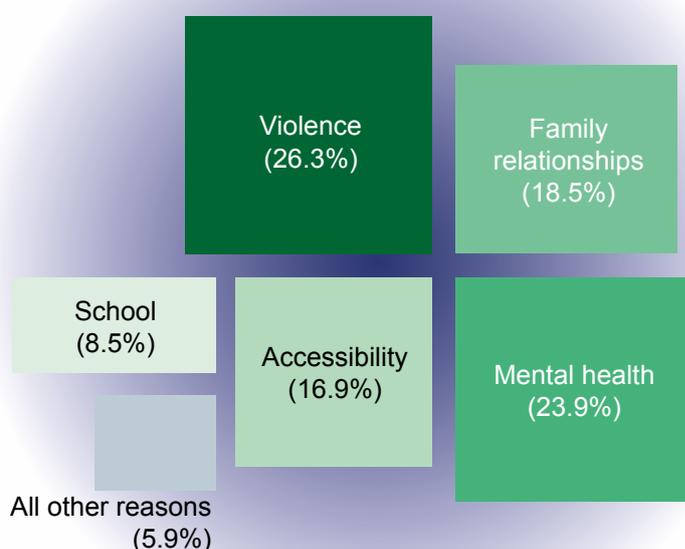


Middle East & North Africa

We received data from 6 child helplines in 6 countries in the MENA region related to 2019. The three countries that received the most contacts in the region were **Saudi Arabia**, **Palestine** and **Jordan**.

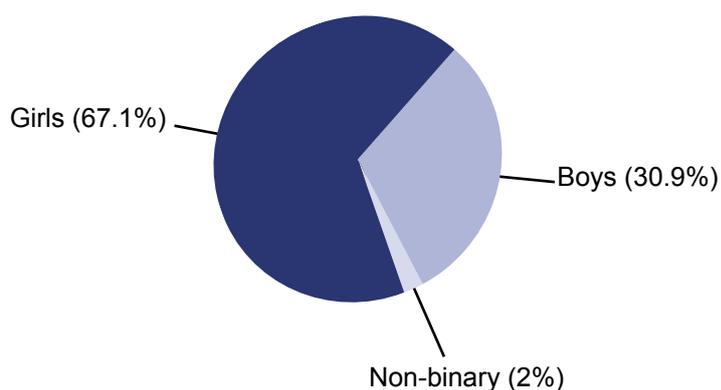


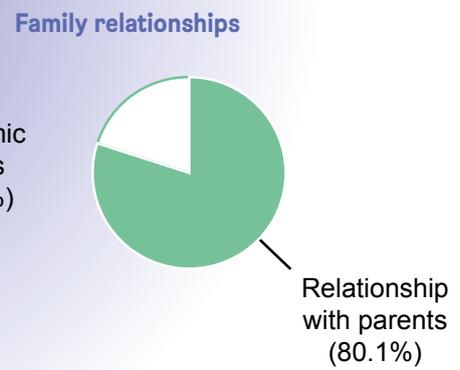
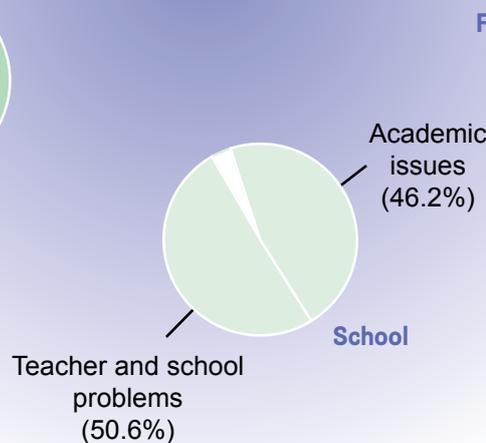
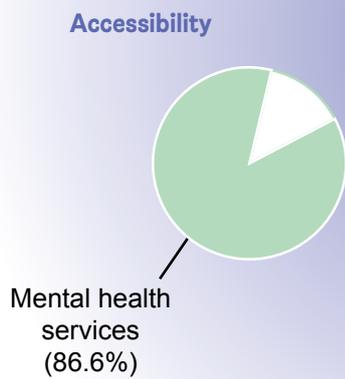
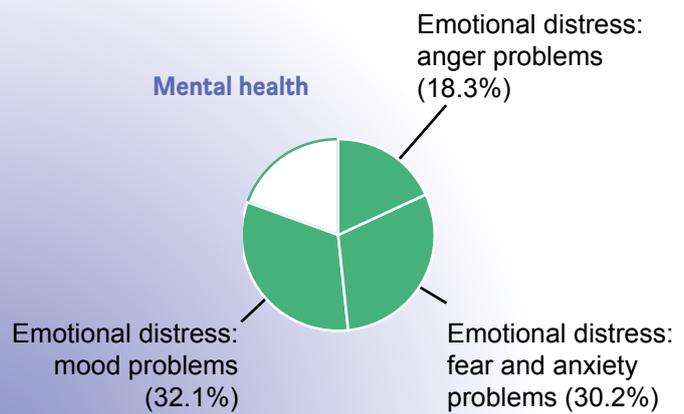
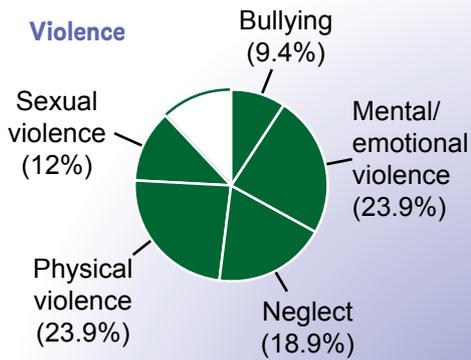
Violence and **mental health** are the main reasons for contact reported by child helplines in the MENA region, accounting for over half of the contacts received in the region. Together with contacts about **family relationships**, **accessibility** and **school**, these five reasons account for 94.1% of the total contacts received.



Contacts by gender

Girls contacted child helplines in the MENA twice as many times as boys. The remaining contacts are from children who identify as non-binary. There were no counselling contacts reported where the child or young person's gender was unknown.





- **Physical** and **mental/emotional violence** accounted for almost half of the contacts received in the region relating to violence. Together with **neglect**, **sexual violence** and **bullying**, these reasons accounted for more than three quarters of the contacts received about violence.
- **Mood problems** and **fear and anxiety problems** make up more than half of the mental health contacts received from children and young people in the region.
- **Relationship with parents** was the main reason for contacts relating to family relationships, and **access to mental health services** was by far the main reason for accessibility contacts.
- **Teacher and school problems** were the main reasons for contacts received about school, accounting for over half the contacts. **Academic issues** accounts for almost all the remaining contacts.

Vulnerable children

More than half of the contacts made by vulnerable children and young people in the MENA region were from children in conflict with the law. Children with disabilities were another important vulnerable group in the region.

Groups	%
Children in conflict with the law	67.2%
Children with disabilities	18.9%
LGBTQI+/SOGIESC children	6.8%
Children in detention	6.4%
Children on the move/in migration	0.7%

"I tried to cut myself, slit my wrists, but it hasn't worked..."

A 15-year old boy contacted the child helpline through its WhatsApp service. He reported that he was being physically abused by his father, and that he had been trying to commit suicide for months. "I tried to cut myself, slit my wrists, but it hasn't worked". He sent the child helpline operator pictures of his scarred arms.

Child helpline staff were able to get in contact with his mother in order to refer the boy to a hospital that has clinical psychologists who specialised in teenagers experiencing suicidal thoughts. They remained in contact with the child and the psychologist handling his case. He is now safe, and his father has now admitted to abusing his son. The father will be legally charged if he ever abuses the boy again.



"He touches me down there..."

A 9-year old boy called to child helpline to report that he had been abused by an older male cousin. "He touches me down there, and once he pulled down my pants." The child helpline counsellor asked him whether his parents knew about these incidents. The boy said that he didn't know what to tell them, and that he was scared that they won't believe him. "They will just start to hit me."

The counsellor explored whether there was anyone else who he trusted and could turn to for help. He said his older sister might believe him, and he was willing to talk to her. The counsellor advised him to tell her exactly what had happened, and what he had already shared with the counsellor. After a few days, the boy and his sister called the child helpline together. The sister had informed their parents about the sexual abuse, and they had now reported the cousin to the appropriate authorities.

"He is keeping all of my legal documentation from me..."

A girl called the child helpline in some distress, wanting to talk about her father, who never visited or spent any time with his family. However, the father was preventing the girl and her brothers from carrying out several activities and hobbies, because he was keeping all of their identification and official documents from them.

The counsellor calmed the girl down and explained the centre's services, collected details thoroughly and evaluated the case. In addition, an appointment was made for the girl and her family to come to the centre and meet a multi-disciplinary team. The team provided the father with some guidance and instructions on how to relate with his daughter and clarified the importance of mutual interactions between him and his daughter that avoided aggression, as this was negatively affecting her behaviour. The father was also advised that the girl should be given all of her documentation, and that there would be legal consequences if she were denied her rights.



"I'm worried that I'm going to throw up in front of everyone..."

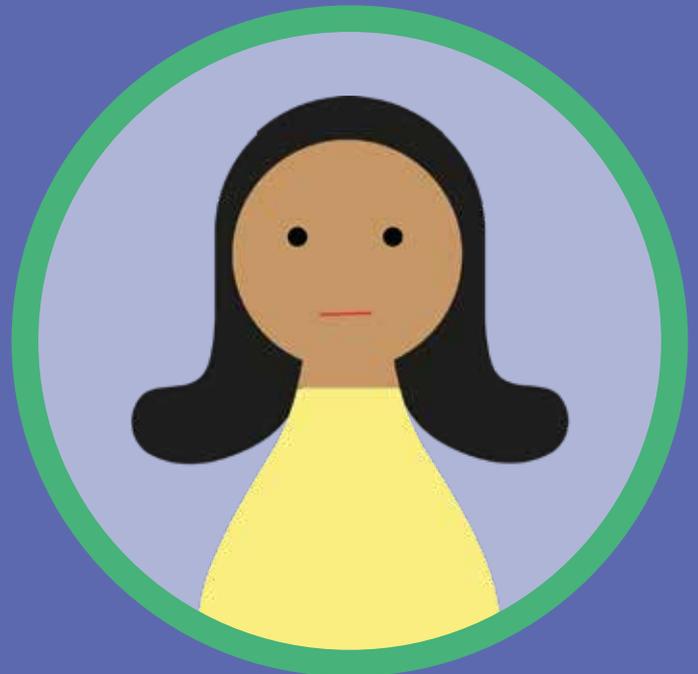
A boy called the child helpline to talk about the anxiety attacks he was experiencing. He explained to the counsellor how, every morning, he would wake up feeling short of breath, how he would shiver or begin to choke. He explained how some days he just cried but couldn't explain the way he was feeling, and some day how he just felt incredibly tense and nauseous. "Sometimes I'm worried that when I get to school I'm going to throw up in front of everyone."

The counsellor explained to the child how anxiety could cause a great deal of discomfort, but also that such overwhelming sensations and emotions were a normal reaction to dealing with things that concerned or frightened us. The boy was encouraged to confront his fears and to try to make changes in how he thinks about some of the issues in his life. This would help to boost his confidence, and he was given information about ways of managing his anxiety in the future.

“They just want me to get married and be a housewife...”

A 16-year-old called the child helpline to talk about how she felt she was being treated unfairly by her parents. She wanted to go to college, but her parents wouldn't allow her to. Her brother goes to college, and she had asked why he was allowed but she wasn't. “They don't care, they just want me to get married and be a housewife.”

The child helpline counsellor asked if there was anyone in her family who could support her or help convince her parents to let her go to college. She had an aunt who went to college, and the girl said her family looked down on her because she hadn't become a housewife. Nevertheless, she did think that her aunt could help her somehow. The counsellor praised her for having thought about this first step and asked her to call back at a later date, to tell the child helpline how things were working out. A few weeks later, she did call back and she thanked the counsellor for helping her to come up with a solution. Ultimately, the child helpline had helped her to go to college.





"I feel like this because of my father's drinking..."

A boy called the child helpline, complaining that he suffered from tension and bouts of anger, and sometimes felt aggressive towards others. He thought this was in reaction to his father's drinking. The counsellor listened carefully to the boy and arranged for him and his family to visit the child helpline. The team there provided rehabilitation sessions for them, helping to create a constructive dialogue between the child and his parents. The team provided thematic training to the family members about how to adapt and apply new methods and skills to contain attitudes and reduce differences between them all. The team checked in on the child and his family continuously to ensure stability and that the boy was not being subjected to any kind of violence.

Zoom in: Violence

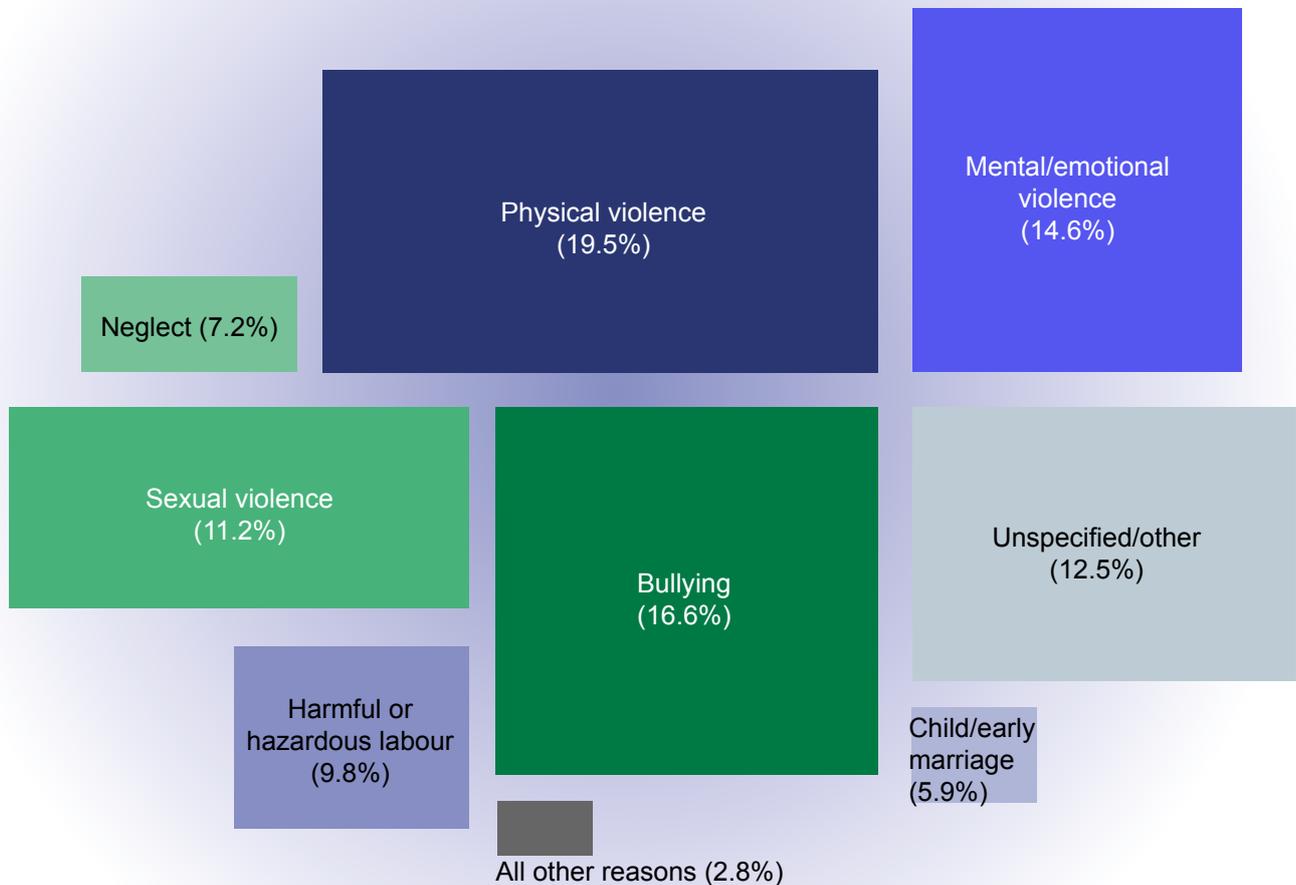
Sadly, **violence** was a key issue globally in 2019, accounting for **one out of four contacts** with child helplines around the world.

Violence can take many forms. In 2019, most violence contacts received by our child helplines concerned **physical violence**, **bullying** and **mental/emotional violence**. These three main reasons were closely followed by **unspecified/other** reasons and **sexual violence**.

Violence was a high-ranking reason for contact not just globally, but across all five regions. In the Americas & Caribbean, Asia-Pacific and MENA regions it was the largest reason for children and young people to make contact with child helplines. In the African and European regions, it was the second largest reason.

Child helplines received **more contacts from girls than boys** in most reasons related to violence, including **child/early marriage** (88.9% of contacts from girls), **commercial/sexual exploitation** (64.7%), **female genital mutilation (FGM)** (59%), **non-gender-based harmful traditional practices** (68.7%), **online sexual abuse** (66.4%), **online sexual exploitation** (66.7%), **sexual violence** (64.8%) and **bullying** (48.9%).

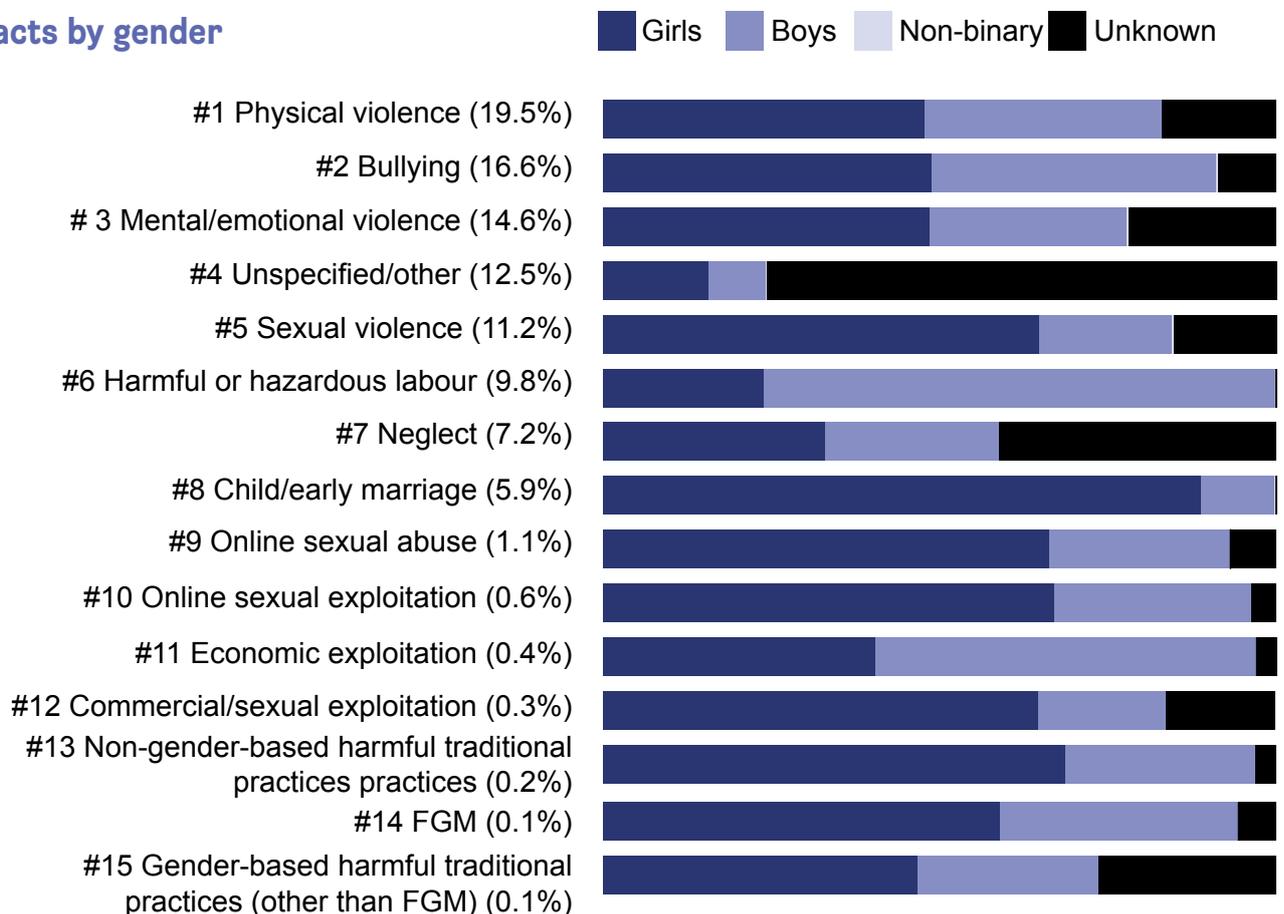
However, other reasons had a higher number of contacts from boys globally, including **economic exploitation** (56.6% of contacts from boys) and **harmful or hazardous labour** (75.9%). Children and young people who identified as non-binary represented only a minority of all contacts, and violence contacts are no exception. **Unspecified/other** reasons received a higher number of contacts from children and young people whose gender was unknown compared to any other reasons.





Showing the percentage of total contacts related to violence within each region, and this issue's ranking compared to other reasons for contact in the region.

Contacts by gender



"He rapes me every day while my husband is at work..."

A 17-year old girl was forced to marry a 30-year-old man, whom she did not love. She initially told the child helpline, "He goes to work all day and leaves me home with his father". At first it seemed like she had made contact regarding child marriage, and the emotional and physical abuse that had accompanied this. However, she then elaborated further. "My father-in-law abuses me. He rapes me every day while my husband is at work." The girl was now pregnant but didn't know whose child she was carrying. "I feel disgusting. I know I should tell the authorities, but can you imagine what will happen to me if people found out?"

The counsellor asked what she thought would happen. She imagined that she would be killed. She felt that it would bring shame and dishonour to her family, so she didn't want to tell the police and she didn't want to get anyone else in her family involved. She said she was trying to find ways to hide from her father-in-law or to persuade her husband to move out of his parents' house. The child helpline has now been providing her with psychosocial support for more than a year, and in the last few months she has successfully been able to move out of her father-in-law's house.



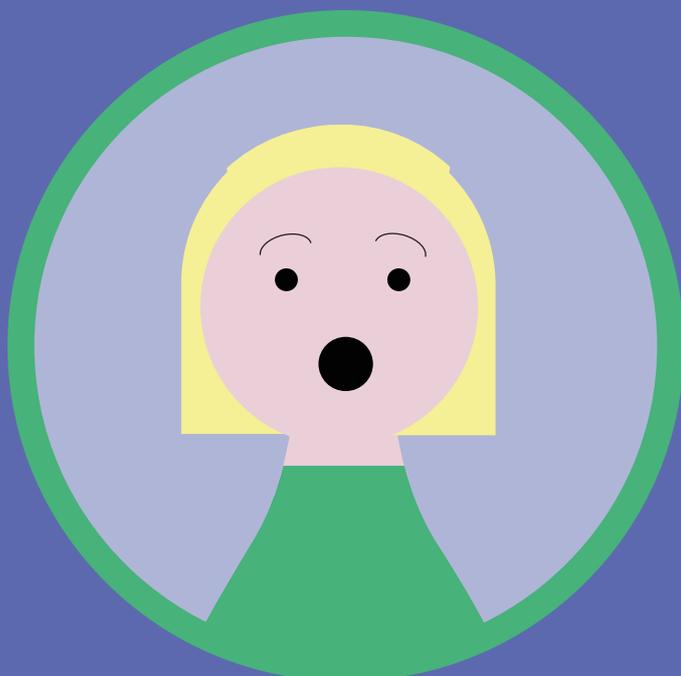
"When he found out that I'd been absent from class he got very angry..."

A 14-year-old boy called the child helpline to ask for help and support. "My father is really strict about my academic performance and forces me to attend private tutorial classes every week. Sometimes I don't want to, and when he found that I'd been absent several times he got very angry." The boy revealed that, although his father had initially tried to speak with him reasonably, he did not want to talk about the situation. As a result, his father had used a knife to prise open his bedroom door, which had made the boy feel frightened. The counsellor showed concern and suggested that the boy let the child helpline's social workers make a home visit and carry out an assessment on the incident. He agreed to let his mother talk with the social workers for further assistance and an investigation interview. Following this the interview, the child helpline found that the mother suffered from cancer, so the father had become the main caregiver for the boy. Finally, a multi-disciplinary case conference was held, and a welfare plan was formulated for the child and his family to help them all improve the situation.

"They beat him because of the colour of his skin..."

The child helpline received a call from a boy who studies in the 8th grade. The boy was hesitant at first but revealed that he had two classmates who constantly insult girls and hit boys. These two classmates also used to beat him. However, in the new school year a new boy had arrived in the class, who was African-American. The two classmates bullied the newcomer, using racial slurs and calling him a freak. The boy making contact with the child helpline sympathised with his new classmate but did not know how to help him. "They beat him because of the colour of his skin." He was afraid to intervene in the situation, as he was worried that he could be beaten again.

The counsellor thanked the child and praised him for reporting the situation and not staying indifferent. Psychological support was provided to the child, and a plan of action was made so that he could inform his parents about the situation, and then also the parents of the bullied classmate, the teacher and the school psychologist. The counsellor prepared official letters to the education department of the district and to the juvenile department of the police for further reaction.



"I feel uncomfortable when he is in the house..."

An 8-year-old girl called the child helpline to reveal a situation of child sexual abuse. The girl explained that the aggressor is a friend of her father and sometimes stays over to sleep at the house. "I feel uncomfortable when he is in the house. I am very afraid to tell my mother, because she always tells me that I shouldn't let myself be touched."

During the contact, the psychologist establishes a bond with the girl, noting that she has been very brave and that she is not alone. The girl puts them in touch with her older sister, who can not only help the child helpline validate the girl's experience and give credibility to her story, but who can also help to protect her younger sibling. The child helpline provides the sister with guidance on the steps to be taken and above all how to look after the psychological wellbeing of the victim. The case is referred to the child helpline's legal and socio-legal teams to help the family, provide legal support, and make complaints to the relevant institution with the aim of establishing protective measures. They also help to ensure that the girl can access specialised remedial treatment.

Zoom in: Mental health

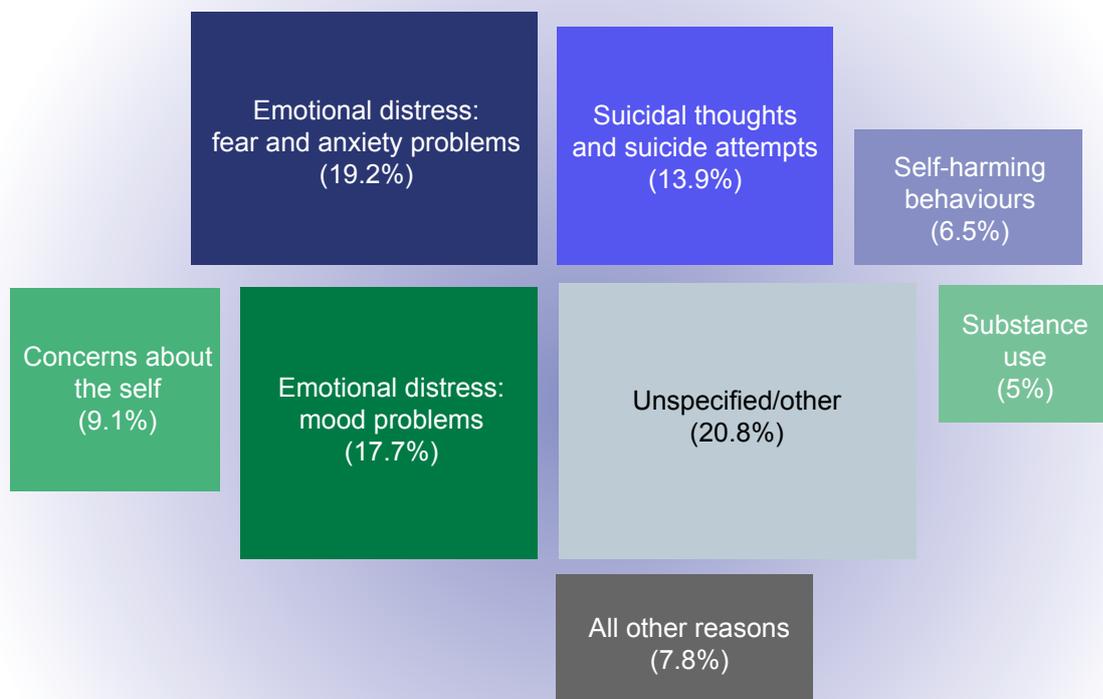
Globally, **mental health** is the biggest reason why children and young people contacted child helplines in 2019. More than **one out of every four times** that a child or young person makes contact, it concerns an issue of mental health.

Looking at these mental health contacts in more detail, we find that the three largest reasons for mental health contacts were **unspecified/other**, **emotional distress – fear and anxiety problems** and **emotional distress – mood problems**. These three sub-categories accounted for over half of the mental health contacts received. In addition, the data shows a high number of mental health contacts relating to **suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts** and **concerns about the self**.

Mental health is an important reason for making contact across all regions. It is the main reason for contact in Europe and ranks second in the Americas and Caribbean and MENA regions. In Africa and Asia-Pacific, mental health ranks as the fourth most important reason for making contact with a child helpline.

Girls contacted child helplines more than any other gender groups for several mental health reasons, including **self-harming behaviours** (74.4% of contacts from girls), **emotional distress – fear and anxiety problems** (62.5%), **problems with eating behaviour** (67.9%), **suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts** (61.7%), **emotional distress – mood problems** (59.0%) and **concerns about the self** (57.6%).

Boys, on the other hand, contacted the child helplines more frequently for reasons including **emotional distress – anger problems** (46.6% of contacts from boys), **substance use** (49.4%) and **addictive behaviours** (36.8%).

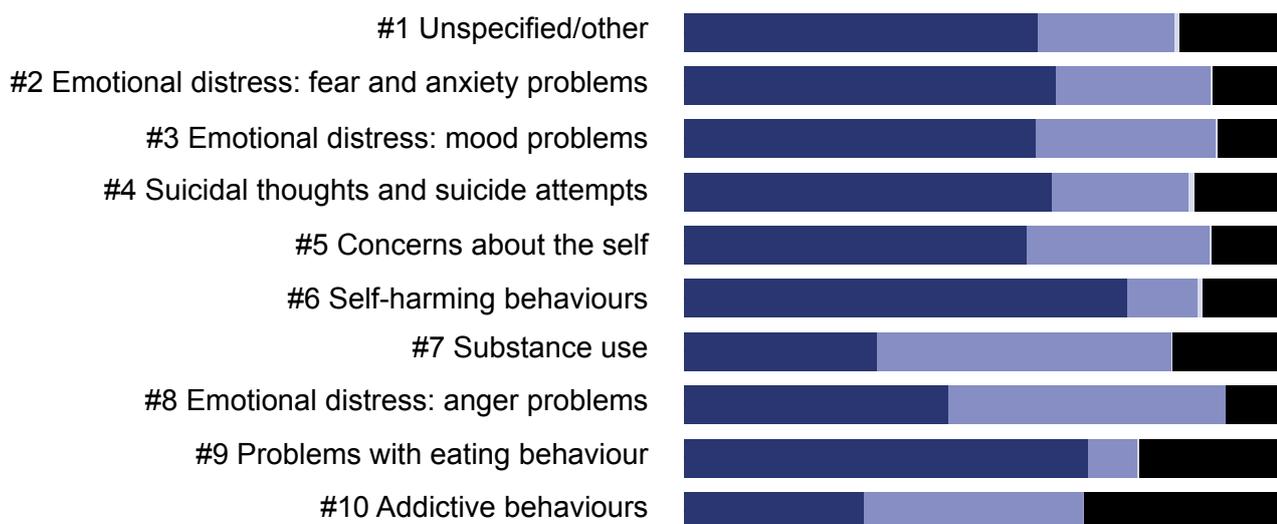




Showing the percentage of total contacts related to mental health within each region, and this issue's ranking compared to other reasons for contact in the region.

Contacts by gender

Girls
 Boys
 Non-binary
 Unknown



"One of the reasons I want to die is because of my parents..."

A 12-year-old girl, who had moved to her current school in the last year, shared with the child helpline counsellor that she had been engaging in self-harm every day, cutting herself with a blade. She said that she was planning to commit suicide and had attempted suicide once before (although she did not share any further details). "One of the reasons I want to die is because my parents say horrible things to me, and they slap me." She felt her parents had high expectations of her and her performance at school, but she also felt that they were much more interested in her 10-year-old sister than in her. On top of all this, she was being bullied in school and being accused of things she had not done.

The counsellor suggested they explored healthier ways of dealing with her emotions. Together, they listed all of the important reasons for her to go on living, among which she mentioned her friends and her maternal grandparents. Finally, the counsellor gave her the number of the local suicide prevention helpline and contacted her school counsellor so that they could follow-up her situation at school.

"People don't like me anymore because of the way I look..."

A 12-year-old came into the child helpline's chat room to talk about how she felt ugly. She had been diagnosed with Blount's disease, a rare growth disorder that affects children and causes the legs to bow outwards just below the knees. So far she had had two operations for this and, as a result, she had put on a lot of weight. "People don't like me anymore because of the way I look."

She felt suicidal. Issues around her body image were discussed, as was the importance of feeling good about herself and not having to look good just for other peoples' benefit. At the end of the chat she thanked the counsellor for their help. "Thank you so much for speaking with me. I feel better. And I feel loved."

“They don’t understand anything I’ve been going through...”

A girl reached out to the child helpline in emotional distress. She had recently returned home after a stay at a psychiatric hospital. She was feeling very depressed and having suicidal thoughts. “My friends and family don’t understand anything I’ve been going through”. She was afraid of going back to school and have her classmates find out she had been to a psychiatric hospital.

The child helpline counsellor assessed her for imminent risk and shared some steps that the girl could take to keep herself safe from any self-harm. The counsellor assured her that she could always call the child helpline again for help if these feelings continued, and they discussed a plan for her to speak to her therapist and school counsellor to get some support at school.



"I find it very difficult talking to other people..."

A girl contacted the child helpline via chat because she had been feeling sad. It was hard for her to talk about what was bothering her: "I don't trust anyone, I find it very difficult talking to other people," she explained. Her only confidante is a cat.

The girl was surprised to find that writing in the chat app worked for her, however, and the counsellor reflected that this could be the first step for her to start finding help. Throughout the conversation, she expressed that she felt useless, that she had no value, and that she deserved something bad to happen to her. The counsellor gave her space to reflect on these feelings, while at the same time reaffirming that nobody deserves to feel so bad about themselves. At the end of the chat, the counsellor gave her advice on how to help herself by doing the things that she felt good about – whether that was eating chocolate, listening to music or going to bed. In addition, the counsellor offered her the contact details of their telephone helpline.

The girl promises that she will call, but she's still a little afraid that she won't be able to talk.



"Anorexia scares me, and I need to know what I should do..."

A 14-year-old girl called the child helpline and reported that she was on a diet and had been exercising a lot over the last year, because she was unhappy with the way she looked. For the past couple of months she had been training even more intensively and was now excessively focussed on her food intake. In her biology class at school she learned about the symptoms of anorexia, and she recognised these in herself. That scared her and she wanted to know what she can do about it.

Her mother was out at work a lot, and she didn't have a particularly close relationship with her older sister. She lives in a village and the closest consultation centre is quite far away. There was no psychologist at her school. Although she said she didn't want to bother other people with her problems, the girl and the counsellor talked about the importance of confiding and sharing her concerns with others. She decided that first person she would talk to would be her mother, with the counsellor's support. They created a plan to tell her mother and agreed that she would contact the child helpline again.

"My dad wants to kill himself..."

A 16-year-old girl reached out to the child helpline through its online chatroom. It was clear from her messages that she was feeling very emotional and distraught. She explained that her parents were in the process of getting divorced, as a consequence of which her father was threatening to kill himself. Because of this, and also because of the conflicts she was getting into with her mother, the girl was feeling overwhelmed and had begun having suicidal thoughts herself.

The counsellor encouraged her to take a pause and try some breathing exercises. This helped her to calm down a little, and together with the counsellor they discussed her feelings in a safe space. The counsellor encouraged her to also discuss her feelings with her therapist and psychiatrist.



The Asia-Pacific region has the second highest number of contacts regarding mental health. To further understand the current state of mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, I conducted a survey in my home country, Malaysia. Findings from the survey¹ provide a more detailed picture of the potential causes behind deteriorating mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in the country. The survey also identifies the types of action that children and young people are taking to tackle their mental health and wellbeing issues. While mental health is still a somewhat taboo subject in Malaysia, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought it into the spotlight, and it is heart-warming to see individuals rising together through kindness, empathy and love.

By Cathryn Anila

Cathryn is based in Malaysia and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council

1. <https://www.childhelplineinternational.org/youth/blog-youth/mental-health-and-wellbeing-asia-pacific/>

If someone had a physical injury from playing sports, the gravity of their injury would not be questioned. Friends and family would recommend them to see a physician and to treat the injury with all necessary means. Yet, when youth are struggling mentally, they are often told to “toughen up”, or “it’s just a phase”.

Youth mental health is multi-faceted and can be further broken down into demographic segments. In the 2019 data collected by Child Helpline International, we see that girls account for most of the contacts being made in the mental health sub-categories. We should be perceptive to how young girls are feeling and ensure that, even if they are receiving help from a child helpline, we continue to support them. Although girls are unfortunately over-represented, we also need to be concerned about young boys. In 2015, Kids Help Phone, the national child helpline in Canada, introduced BroTalk for teen boys.¹ Boys are 31% less likely to discuss their feelings or reach out for help, as they present a stereotypical “strong” exterior image.² This does not mean that they are not struggling. When focus groups were conducted for BroTalk, Kids Help Phone found that boys often felt stigma, embarrassment, and shame. These are additional barriers that we need to overcome.

As youth ourselves, we are given the immense honour and power of being the next generation of leaders. It is my hope that we become compassionate and perceptive leaders who take action. Whether it is to vote in local and national elections for more funding for mental health programs, donate financially to a child helpline, or donate time through volunteering.

By Phyllis Huang

Phyllis is based in Canada and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council

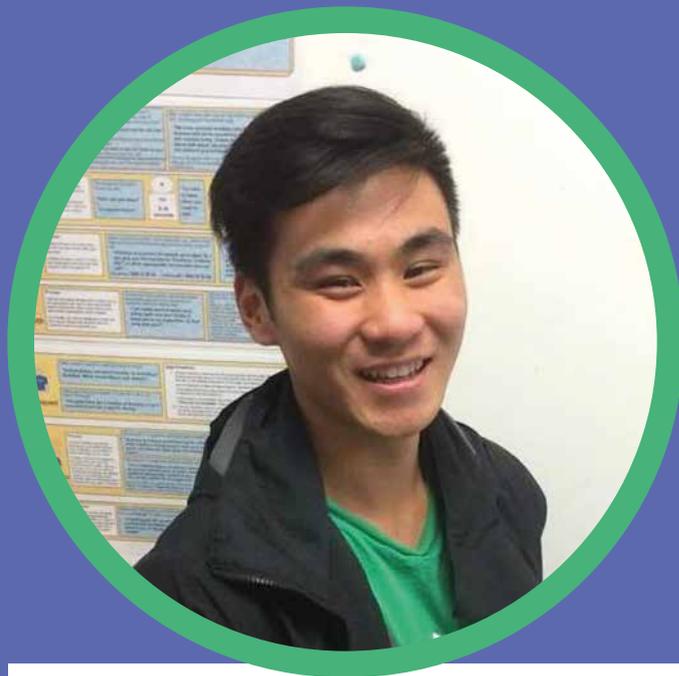
1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/brotalk-1.3263565>

2. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/kids-help-phone-launches-new-brotalk-service-for-teen-boys-1.2600799>

Girls are more than twice as likely as boys to contact helplines about mental health concerns. While this is likely the fact that girls tend to contact helplines more overall, the discrepancy between gendered contacts for other reasons (i.e physical health and sexuality) don't appear quite as stark. Are girls suffering mental health issues more than boys around the world?

In the US, initially, it appears this is the case; around 70% more females are diagnosed with mental illnesses than males. However, cultural factors lie beneath the surface. American boys are often discouraged from displaying their emotions—unless it's anger; help-seeking carries the implication of weakness. As masculinity is associated with strength, boys are encouraged to bottle their emotions up—implicitly and explicitly. The repercussions, however, are deadly. Despite higher prevalence of psychological diagnoses in American women, around three times more men commit suicide every year. Given this context, I find it of concern that this trend occurs across the world and I wonder what the implications of these results are elsewhere; what cultural norms and expectations or other underpinnings may be at work in other world regions?

*By Stephanie Konadu-Acheampong
Stephanie is based in the US and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council*



The numbers and reasons for contacting a child helpline by gender has been of particular interest to me. Girls account for the majority of contacts in four out of five of the top reasons for contacting a child helpline. For mental health contacts, girls account for over double the number of contacts compared to boys. This massive gender difference is further highlighted in the sub-categories of mental health. Girls again account for over double the number of contacts compared to boys in the seven of the ten mental health sub categories.

Why is there such a big difference in gender distribution in the reason for contacting a child helpline? Is this a true reflection of the reality of mental health issues for boys and girls? For me personally, I don't believe that numbers suggest that boys have fewer mental health issues than girls. For a child to reach out during a difficult time in their lives and contact a child helpline is already very difficult but it may be even harder for boys in some cultures. Having mental health issues may be seen as weak and not acceptable for a male. Child helplines need to be aware of their local culture and make getting help more acceptable and accessible for everyone.

*By Jason He
Jason is based in New Zealand and is a member of Child Helpline International's #Youth Advisory Council*



Zoom in: Accessibility

Contacts about **accessibility** accounted for **one in ten** of all contacts made globally to child helplines in 2019. Access to **essential needs** and **education** were the main two reasons for contact in this category, and account for more than half of the total accessibility contacts. Other important accessibility reasons for making contact include access to **mental health services**, **legal services and advice**, **general healthcare services** and **socio-economical services**. Over a tenth of the contacts were about **unspecified/other** reasons.

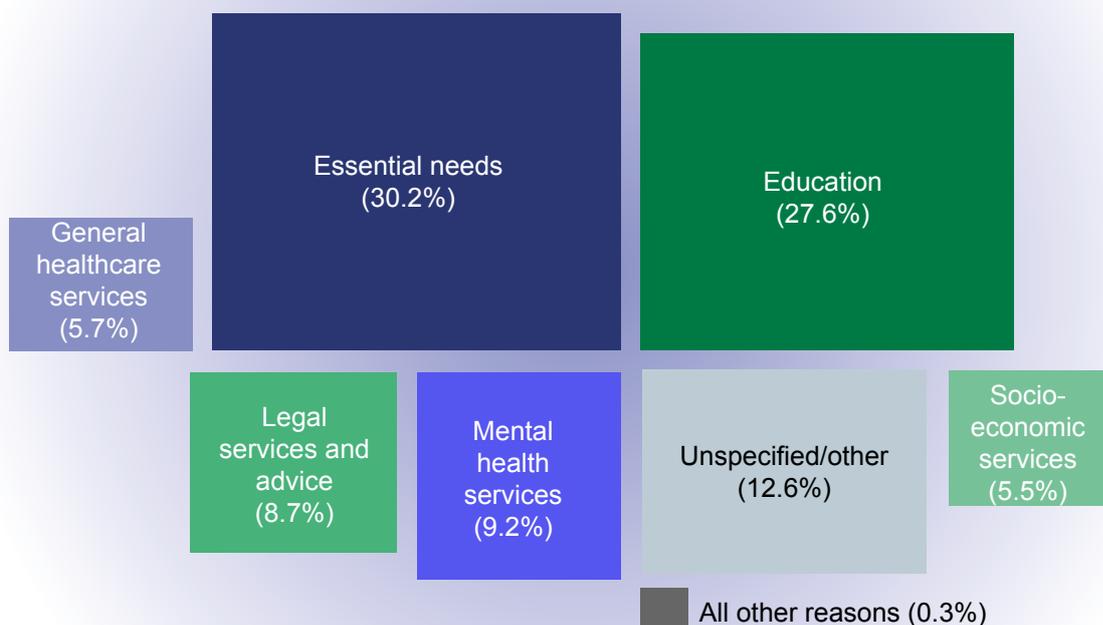
Some important regional variations related to contacts about accessibility are indicated. The highest rate is found in Asia-Pacific, with approximately a quarter of all contacts relating to accessibility issues. The Africa region reported that around a fifth of all contacts were about accessibility, making it as the third highest reason for contact.

Other regions had fewer contacts about accessibility. The MENA region ranked it as the fourth most important reason for contacting child helplines, and the Americas and Caribbean as the fifth. The European region had the least accessibility contacts of all, with only 2.6% of its total counselling contacts, ranking it eighth out of ten reasons for making contact.

We note regional similarities in the services that children wish to access. Contacts about **essential needs** were in the top two highest reasons for accessibility contacts in Africa, the Americas and Caribbean, Asia-Pacific and Europe. This is an important point of focus as it consistently ranks high across regions.

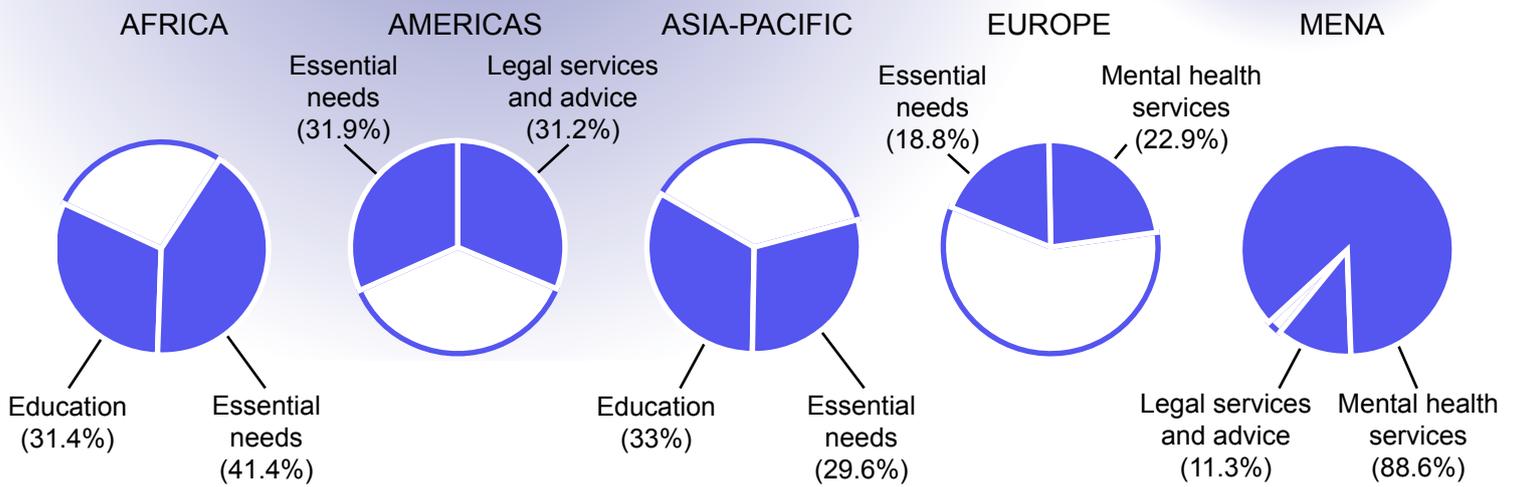
Education was the largest reason for accessibility contacts in Asia-Pacific, and second highest in Africa. Access to **mental health services** was the main reason for contact about accessibility in Europe and MENA. This is an interesting finding in relation to the high numbers of contacts in the mental health category received globally and in these regions. **Legal services and advice** was ranked the second reason for accessibility contacts in the Americas and Caribbean and MENA.

Boys made the most frequent contact about accessibility. However, girls accounted for the most contacts related to **legal services and advice**, **sexual health services**, **socio-economical services** and for **unspecified/other** reasons.

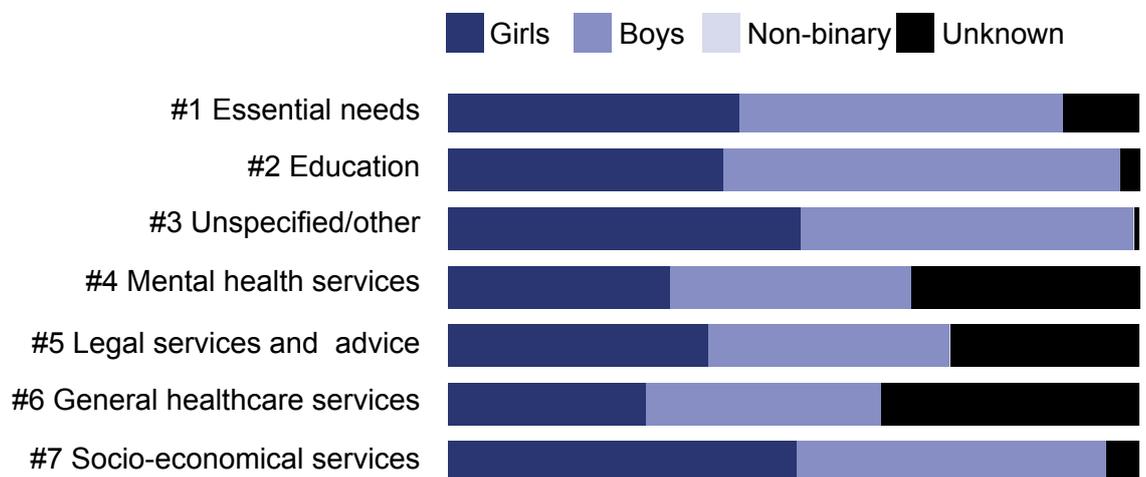




Showing the percentage of total contacts related to accessibility within each region, and this issue's ranking compared to other reasons for contact in the region.



Contacts by gender



"If I keep missing school I'll have to start all over again..."

A 13-year-old child contacted the child helpline because she needed support with her school fees. Her parents had passed away and after some time living with an older sister, she was currently living with her grandmother. Her grandmother had enrolled her in a private school, paying the school fees for the first term but didn't have any more money. The school had therefore sent the girl home due to the unpaid school fees for the second term. She was worried that she may now miss the third and final term of the year, which would require her to repeat the year over again.

The child helpline staff counselled her and agreed to get in touch with the grandmother to discuss the matter further. The counsellor urged the grandmother to either move the child to a government school, as these are free, or to try to raise the necessary financial resources various relatives. The grandmother agreed to discuss the matter with other relatives. A week later, when the child helpline tried to contact the girl to follow up on the situation, a neighbour informed them that the child was no longer living there. After the counsellor's discussions with the grandmother, a family meeting had been convened, and one of the uncles had agreed to take charge of the child's education and had enrolled her immediately in a boarding school.



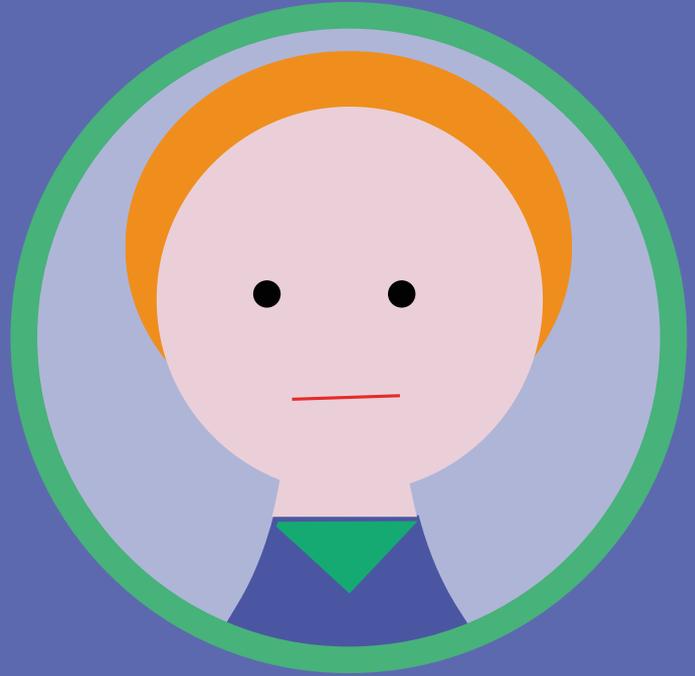
"Everyone at school laughs and makes fun of me..."

A 14-year-old boy contacted the child helpline and said that he suffered from visual impairment and was ridiculed by his peers as a consequence. "Everyone at school laughs and makes fun of me because of my glasses." He asked the child helpline for support, emphasising that his family did not have the financial means to pay for the operation he needed to correct his sight.

The child helpline gathered all the detailed information about the child's situation and helped the child's family with an official application to the health authorities. The child helpline provided its support towards the child receiving a free operation.

"I don't know what my rights are, and I can't afford a lawyer..."

The child helpline received a call from 15-year-old boy, who was turning 16 in two weeks' time. He was shy at first, but eventually told the counsellor that he wanted to take his father to court so that he could receive the alimony due from him. His father was disabled and had threatened that, if his son took him to court now, then in two years he would take his son to court as well, so that once the boy started working and had an income, he would be obliged to maintain his father financially for the rest of his life. Throughout the conversation the boy was nervous and worried whether or not his father could actually succeed in this. "I don't know if he can do this to me. I don't know what my rights are, and I can't afford a lawyer." The counsellor calmed the boy down and offered him advice and support. The boy was provided with some legal information on the relevant issues and the counsellor referred him to a local free legal aid centre, so that he could find a lawyer free of charge, who could represent his interests in court to help him get alimony from his father.



"My family doesn't accept me for who I am..."

A transgender young person reached out to the child helpline because they could not deal with their family anymore. The family did not accept them being trans and were refusing access to Hormone Replacement Therapy. They lived in a small town where they did not have access to LGBTQ or Trans-specific support resources. Apart from a few close friends and one teacher at school, they didn't feel like they had a lot of support.

The counsellor shared a few national support resources to hopefully help them feel more supported and affirmed of their transgender identity. The counsellor and the young person discussed how they were currently coping, which included playing music and even writing some of their own songs, in addition to reaching out to other trans youth online. By the end of the chat, the young person shared that it felt good to get their concerns out in the open in a safe space. They planned to reach out to one of the national LGBTQ resources in the following weeks.



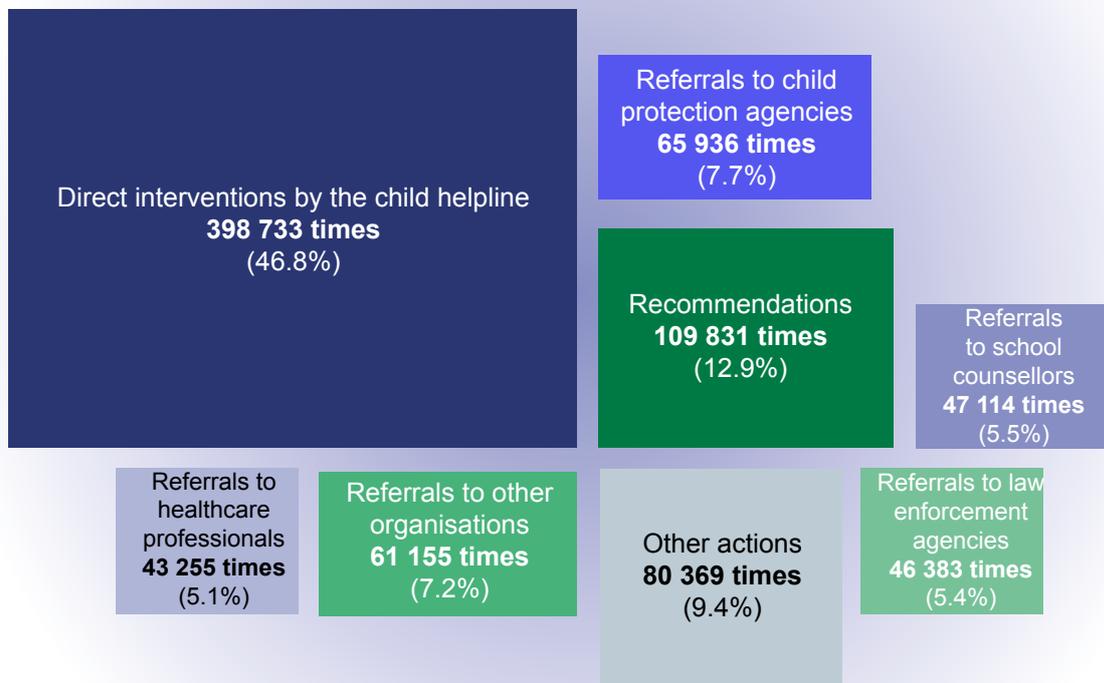
Actions taken

Child helplines do much more than simply taking calls and talking to children and young people. Child helplines engage in many different actions to help the children and young people who reach out to them. The actions taken by child helplines are those steps taken following the initial contact, in order to provide continuing support to the child or young person.

Globally, in 2019, **852,776 actions** were taken by our child helpline members. **That's 852,776 times that a child helpline has been able to provide support to a child or young person beyond simply talking about the issue that they were concerned by.**

Direct interventions by the child helpline were by far the most frequent action taken - child helplines intervened directly **398,733 times**. This suggests that child helplines often provide some form of direct help or support. The second most frequent type of action taken was making **recommendations**.

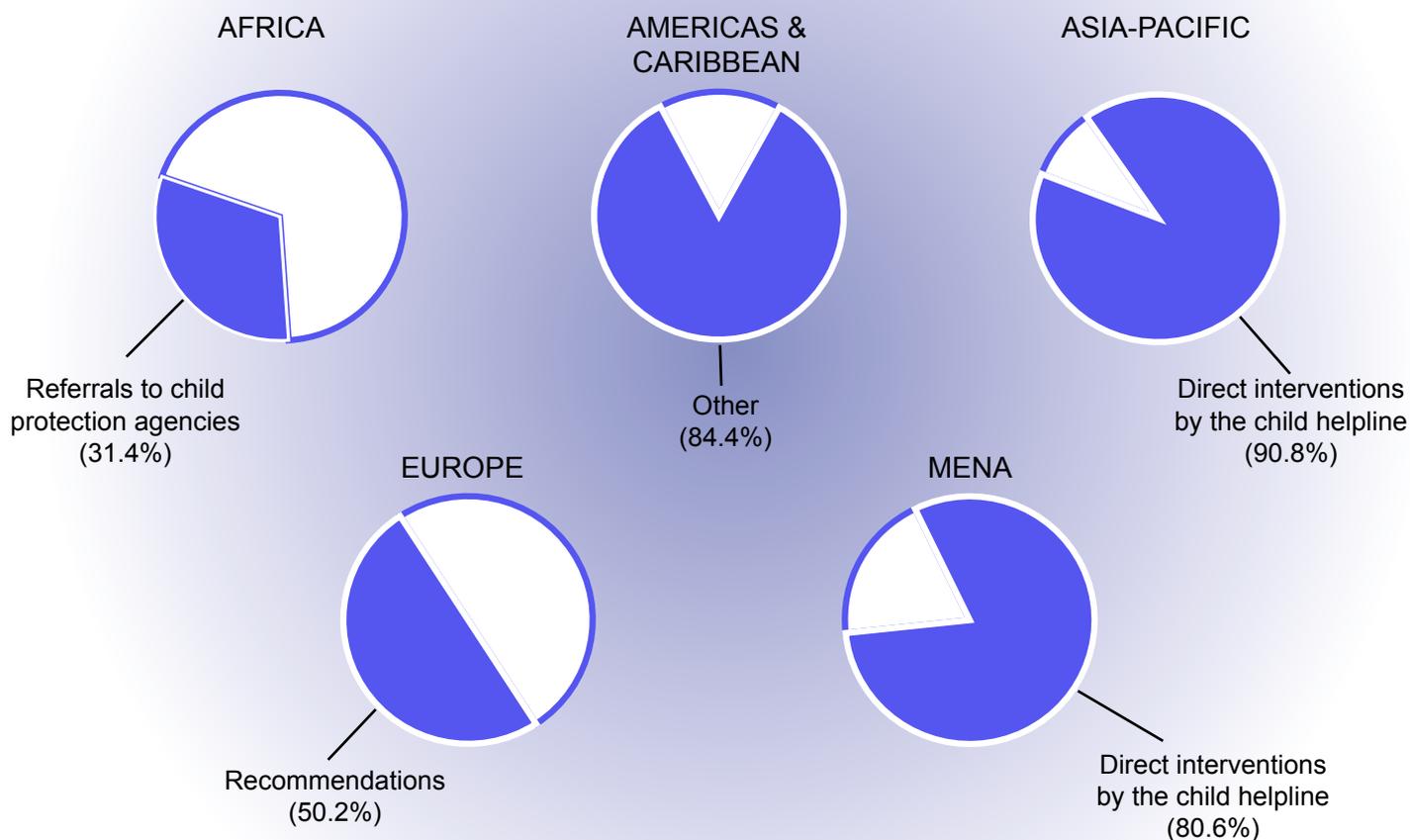
Together these two types of actions account for more than half of all actions taken. Other types of actions taken included **referrals** – whether to **child protection agencies, other organisations, school counsellors, law enforcement agencies or healthcare professionals**.



It should be noted that the types and frequencies of the actions taken by child helplines vary greatly from region to region.

- Member child helplines in Africa reported that they mostly make referrals to child protection agencies.
- In the Americas and Caribbean region, most actions taken were categorised as “other”. Unfortunately we don’t have any information about what these other types of Action Taken may have encompassed.

- Almost all actions taken by child helplines in the Asia-Pacific region were direct interventions by the child helpline.
- Child helplines in the MENA region also reported a very high number of direct interventions.
- Finally, in the European region, around half of all actions taken were recommendations.



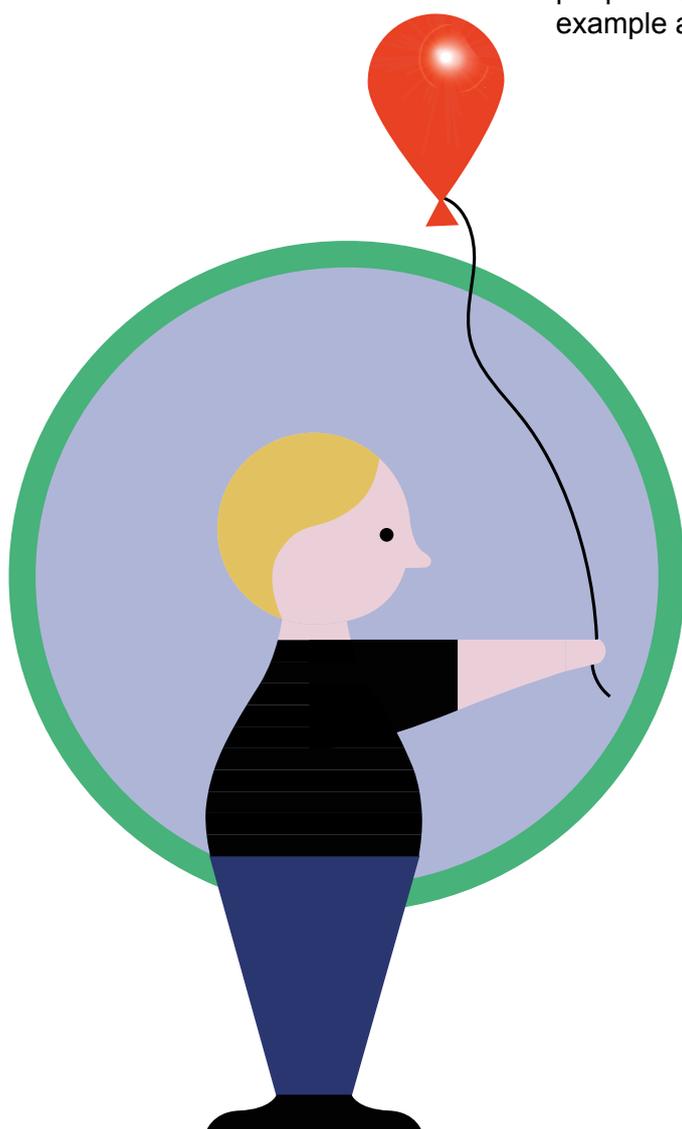
Our key findings ≡

Our 2019 data collection sadly confirms **violence** as a main issue for concern. Violence is either the first or second most frequent reason for contact in each of the five regions. This means that, around the world, **one out of every four times a child or young person contacts a child helpline, it is because of a concern related to violence.**

Violence can take many forms. The three main problems faced by children and young people making contact about violence were **physical violence** (which includes physical abuse and physical punishment), **bullying** (repeated intentional and aggressive behaviour between peers) and **mental/emotional violence** (for example, humiliation, threats or constant criticism).

Another large issue of concern in 2019 was mental health. This issue was the **main reason for contact globally**, and was among the top four main reasons for contact in each of the five regions. **More than a quarter of the contacts made to child helplines globally in 2019 concerned a mental health issue.**

Most of the time, the children and young people making a contact about mental health are express some form of **emotional distress**, usually related either to **fear and anxiety**, or to a **mood issue** (e.g., sadness, loneliness). **Suicidal thoughts and suicidal attempts** also represent a large proportion of the mental health issues brought up by children and young people contacting the child helplines. Finally, a significant number of children and young people expressed **concerns about themselves**, for example a lack of self-confidence.



Issues of **accessibility** of various services were also among the top five reasons for children and young people making contact with the child helplines in most of our regions, the only exception being in Europe, where it ranked 8th. Accessibility was a particularly important concern for children and young people who contacted child helplines in Asia-Pacific (one out of four contacts in the region), Africa (one out of five contacts), and the Middle-East and Northern Africa (one out of six contacts). The services that children and young people wish to access are for the most part **essential needs** (shelter, water and so on), **education** or **mental health services**. This finding is consistent with the above-mentioned finding related to the importance of mental health issues.

Together, the data suggests that **these concerns deserve special attention**. They are the most frequent topics brought up by the children and young people who are making contact with child helplines around the world. Special support and measures are required, including dedicated counsellors' trainings and relevant established referral pathways, so that child helplines are appropriately equipped to respond to these numerous cases.

A final key finding from our 2019 data collection relates to **children at home**. According to the data, the majority of the issues that children and young people wanted to bring up during their contact with a child helpline concerned something that was **happening inside their own homes** (more than half of the contacts, globally). The vast majority of children and young people who contacted a child helpline appear to currently be **living with their parent or primary caregiver** (almost 9 out of 10 children and young people). The data also revealed that **the majority of issues that children and young people wanted to bring up was also in some way connected to their parent or primary caregiver** (two out of three contacts globally).

In the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures implemented in many countries around the world, this finding emphasizes even more strongly the crucial role played by child helplines. **Child helplines are by their very nature able to provide remote and easily accessible services for children and young people in need of support or protection.**

As such, this finding further reinforces our key recommendations that **every child should have free and unrestricted access to a child helpline**: they could be **one of the only available services to some children and young people made particularly vulnerable by the consequences of the pandemic.**

Our key recommendations

Every child should have free and unrestricted access to child helpline services

Governments and the ICT sector should support child helplines to **ensure they are accessible to all children and young people**. This is more true now than ever before. The Covid-19 pandemic has particularly highlighted the need for child-friendly, remotely accessible services. Greater accessibility of child helpline services should guarantee that child helplines are always **free of cost** and offer a **variety of appropriate contact methods**, in order to accommodate the unique needs and service barriers of vulnerable children and youth.

Child helplines should be strengthened through investments in infrastructure and new functionalities, offsetting service costs, and evidence-based inclusive practice. Additional considerations include expanding modes of contact, service languages offered, and hours of operation at child helplines.

Furthermore, funding and support should be made available to raise awareness of child helplines in a child-friendly manner to ensure children and young people know how to use child helpline services and what they can expect.

Promotion of regionally harmonised child helpline numbers has a vital role to play in raising public awareness of child helpline services and easing access for children and young people wherever they may be in the world. For example, many child helplines in Africa use 116, many in Asia use 1098, most in Europe use 116 111 and several Commonwealth of Independent States use 150.

Quality and sustainability of child helplines is crucial to ensuring children's rights

Child helplines provide **essential social services** to children and young people within relevant national jurisdictions, while contributing to the broader realisation of children's rights. The sustenance of their operations and the consistent improvement of the quality of services offered require reliable long-term funding.

Child helplines should receive funding and support towards, among others: the implementation of good governance practices; effective data collection and analysis; comprehensive training programmes for staff and volunteers interacting with children and young people; and contingency plans to help keep

child helplines operational during technological or infrastructural failure, and during national and global emergencies, as the Covid-19 pandemic harshly brought to light. Governments should thus provide **long-term funding to facilitate high-quality and sustainable child helplines**. Telecoms and the ICT industry should waive costs where possible.

Governments and other actors should support child helplines to implement the **core quality standards** of child helplines, and to monitor and evaluate the broader social service system available to children and young people in need of support or protection.

Structured partnerships are needed to eradicate violence against all children

The implementation and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 – to end the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children – is the responsibility of all governments and child protection actors. Child helplines have a crucial role to play in ensuring children's safety as they are frequently the **first point of contact for children and young people facing violence**.

This is likely to be even more the case during the current Covid-19 pandemic, which has not only helped worsen the situation of children and youth already vulnerable to violence, but it has also made it more difficult for them to reach support services due to national lockdown measures.

Because they are remotely accessible, child helplines should be able to remain operational and accessible to children and young people, and to provide critical counselling services and referrals to the broader child protection network.

Governments, child protection agencies and thematic expert organisations should work with child helplines to promote their services as a low-threshold entry point into national child protection systems. Structured partnerships are needed to establish **clear referral pathways and interventions to protect children**, and to create **effective knowledge exchange on topics relevant to children's lives**.

Child helpline data and youth participation should inform policy and decision-making that affects children's lives

Every child has the right to be heard and it is the responsibility of child helplines, governments and other child protection actors to listen to and act upon the views and needs of children and young people. Children's voices should not only play a role in shaping child helpline services, but should **inform decision-making at the highest levels**. Governments, INGOs and other children's rights and child protection actors should promote strong research activities and effective child and youth participation practices to ensure that services and policies affecting young people are relevant to their lives and uphold their best interests as enshrined in the UNCRC.

Child Helpline International and child helplines offer a wealth of data on the issues and trends most affecting children and young people at the local, regional and international levels. Governments, INGOs and relevant actors should act on children's voices and child helpline data to implement the kinds of evidence-based changes children and young people need in society. They should sign onto and monitor the implementation of international conventions, such as the UNCRC, which protect a favourable policy climate for children's rights and the work of child helplines.

Our Child Helpline members in Africa

Benin	Benin child helpline ☎ 138	Malawi	Tithandizane Helpline ☎ 116 http://tithandizanehelpline.org
Botswana	Childline Botswana ☎ 3900900 / 11611 http://childlinebotswana.org	Mauritania	AMSME Mauritania ☎ 8000 1010 http://www.amsme.org
Burkina Faso	Allo 116 ☎ 116 http://action-sociale.gov.bf/	Mauritius	Child Helpline Mauritius ☎ 134 http://helplinemauritius.org
Burundi	Yaga Ndakumva ☎ +257 7991 6331	Mozambique	Linha Fala Criança ☎ 116 http://www.linhafala.org.mz
Cameroon	Lignes Vertes Cameroun	Namibia	Lifeline/Childline Namibia ☎ 116 http://www.lifelinechildline.org.na
Côte d'Ivoire	Ligne Verte 116 <Allo enfant en détresse> ☎ 116 http://www.famille.gouv.ci/	Nigeria	Cece Yara Child Helpline ☎ 0800 800 8001 http://www.ceceyara.org
Democratic Republic of Congo	Tukinge Watoto ☎ 117 https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/drc		HDI Nigeria Child Helpline ☎ 0808 0551 376 http://www.hdinigeria.org
eSwatini	SWAGAA 951 Helpline ☎ 951 http://www.swagaa.org.sz	Senegal	Centre GINDDI - Allo 116 ☎ 116
	Ministry of Education ☎ 116 http://www.govpage.co.za/swaziland-education-and-training.html	Sierra Leone	ChildHelp Sierra Leone http://www.childhelpsl.org
Ethiopia	Adama Child Helpline (ECFA) ☎ +251221 - 117575 http://ecfaethiopia.org/index.php/2015-12-14-20-32-53/84-about-us		EEHR Sierra Leone Child Helpline http:// eehrsl.wixsote.com/eehrsl
Gambia	Child Helpline Gambia ☎ +2209940239	Somalia	Women Action for Advocacy and Progress Organisation ☎ 334 http://waapo.org
Ghana	AMPCAN Ghana	South Africa	Childline South Africa ☎ 08000 55 555 http://www.childlinesa.org.za
Guinea	AGUIAS 116 ☎ 116	South Sudan	South Sudan Child Helpline
Kenya	Childline Kenya ☎ 116 http://www.childlinekenya.co.ke	Tanzania	Tanzania National Child Helpline ☎ 116 http://www.sematazania.org/child-helpline
Lesotho	Child Helpline Lesotho ☎ 116	Togo	Allo 1011 ☎ 1011
Madagascar	Allô Fanantenana Ligne 511 ☎ 511 http://www.arozaa./mg	Uganda	Uganda Child Helpline - Sauti 116 ☎ 116 http://uchl.mglsd.go.ug/login.html
	Ligne Verte 147 Madagascar ☎ 147 http://www.arozaa./mg	Zambia	Childline Zambia ☎ 116 http://lifelinezambia.org.zm
		Zimbabwe	Childline Zimbabwe ☎ 116 http://www.childline.org.zw

Our Child Helpline members in the Americas & the Caribbean

Argentina

Línea 102 CaBA
☎ 102
<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/cdnnya/linea102>

Línea 102 Provincia de Buenos Aires
☎ 102
<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/cdnnya>

Aruba

**Telefon pa Hubentud
Aruban Youth Telephone Line**
☎ 131
<http://www.telhubentud.aw>

Bolivia

**Plataforma de Atención Integral a la Familia
(Línea Gratuita 156)**
☎ 156

Dirección de Igualdad de Oportunidades (DIO)

Brazil

Safernet Brasil
<http://www.safernet.org.br/helpline#>

Canada

Kids Help Phone
☎ 1 800 668 6868
<http://kidshelpphone.ca>

Chile

Fonoinfancia
☎ 800 200 818
<http://www.fonoinfancia.cl>

Línea Libre
☎ 1515
<http://www.linealibre.cl>

Colombia

Línea 106 Bogotá
☎ 106
<http://www.saludcapital.gov.co/Paginas2/Linea106-inicio.aspx>

ICBF Colombia
☎ 141
<http://www.icbf.gov.co>

Costa Rica

Patronato Nacional de la Infancia (PANI)
<https://pani.go.cr/>

Curaçao

Telefon pa mucha i hoben
☎ 918
<http://www.facebook.com/stichting.curacao/>

Grenada

Sweet Water Foundation
☎ 473 800 4444
<http://www.sweetwaterfoundation.ca>

Haiti

Jurimédia
<http://www.jurimedia.org>

Nicaragua

Línea 133
☎ 133
<http://www.mifamilia.gob.ni>

Paraguay

Fono Ayuda Línea 147
☎ 147
<http://www.minna.gov.py/pagina/1224-fono-ayuda-147.html>

Peru

Télefono ANAR
☎ 0800 2 2210
<http://www.anarperu.org>

Saint Kitts & Nevis

The Ripple Institute
<https://rippleskn.com/>

Suriname

Kinder en Jongeren Telefoon
☎ 123
<http://www.bel123.org>

Trinidad & Tobago

Childline Trinidad & Tobago
☎ 131 / 800 4321
<http://www.childlinett.org>

Uruguay

Línea Azul
☎ 0800 5050
http://www.inau.gub.uy/content_page/item/512-linea-azul-denuncias

USA

2ndfloor Youth Helpline
☎ 1 888 222 2228
<http://www.2ndfloor.org>

Boys Town National Hotline
☎ 1 800 448 3000
<http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org>

Crisis Text Line
☎ Text 741741
<http://www.crisistextline.org>

National Child Abuse Hotline
☎ 1 800 422 4453
<http://www.childhelp.org>

National Runaway Safeline
☎ 1 800 786 2929
<http://www.1800runaway.org>

Polaris
☎ Text 233733
<http://www.polarisproject.org>

Stop It Now!
☎ 1 888 773 8368 / 1 800 PREVENT
<http://www.stopitnow.org>

The Trevor Lifeline
☎ 1 866 488 7386
<http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

Our Child Helpline members in Asia-Pacific

Afghanistan	Voice of Children ☎0707 199 199 https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/afghanistan	Myanmar	Childline Myanmar https://www.syfmyanmar.org
Australia	Kids Helpline ☎1800 55 1800 http://www.kidshelpline.com.au	Nepal	Child Helpline 1098 ☎1098 http://www.cwin.org.np
Bhutan	Child Helpline Bhutan ☎1098 https://ncwc.gov.bt	New Zealand	0800 What's Up? ☎0800 94287 87 http://www.whatsup.co.nz
Brunei	Helpline Kebajikan ☎141 http://www.japem.gov.bn		Kidsline ☎0800 543754 http://www.kidsline.org.nz
Cambodia	Child Helpline Cambodia ☎1280 http://www.childhelpline.org.kh		Youthline ☎0800 376633 http://www.youthline.co.nz
China	Child Emergency Hotline Xi'an Philanthropic Child Abuse Prevention & Aid Centre	Pakistan	Madadgaar National Helpline ☎1098 http://www.madadgaar.org
Fiji	Child Helpline Fiji ☎1325 http://www.msp.org.fj	Papua New Guinea	1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain ☎71508000 http://www.childfund.org.au
Hong Kong	Parent-Child Support Line ☎2755 1122 http://www.aca.org.hk	Philippines	Bantay Bata 163 ☎163 http://www.bantaybata163.com
India	Childline India ☎1098 http://www.childlineindia.org.in	Singapore	Tinkle Friend Helpline ☎1800 2744 788 http://www.tinklefriend.sg
Indonesia	TePSA - Telepon Pelayanan Sosial Anak ☎1500771	Sri Lanka	Childline Sri Lanka ☎1929 http://www.childprotection.gov.lk
Japan	Childline Japan ☎0120 99 7777 http://www.childline.or.jp		Don Bosco Lama Serana http://www.donbosco.lk
Kazakhstan	Telefon 150 ☎150 http://www.telefon150.kz	Taiwan	113 Protection Hotline ☎113 http://http://www.worldvision.org.tw
Kyrgyzstan	The Centre "Helpline for Children" ☎111 http://www.crdl.kg	Tajikistan	Child Rights Centre
Laos	Vientiane Youthline ☎1361 for females, 1371 for males	Thailand	Childline Thailand - Saidek 1387 ☎1387 http://www.childlinethailand.org
Maldives	Child Help Line 1412 ☎1412 https://gender.gov.mv	Uzbekistan	Children & Family Support Centre
Mongolia	Child Helpline 108 ☎108 http://108.mn/mn/m/4/c/5	Vanuatu	Vanuatu Youth Toll-Free Helpline ☎087777 https://vfha15.wordpress.com
		Vietnam	National Hotline for Child Protection ☎111

Our Child Helpline members in Europe

Albania	ALO 116 ☎116111 http://www.alo116.al	Greece	The Smile of the Child ☎1056 / .116 111 http://www.hamogelo.gr
Armenia	FAR Child Protection Hotline & Helpline ☎0800 61 111 http://www.farusa.org		Together for Children ☎11525 http://www.mazigiapaidi.gr
Austria	Rat Auf Draht ☎147 http://www.rataufdraht.at	Hungary	Lelkisegély-vonal ☎116 111 http://www.kek-vonal.hu
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan Child Helpline ☎99 412 4802280 / 99 450 6802280 http://www.childhelpline.az	Iceland	Red Cross Helpline - Hjálparsíminn 1717 ☎1717 https://www.raudikrossinn.is
Belgium	Jongerenlijn AWEL ☎102 http://www.awel.be	Ireland	ISPC Childline ☎1800 66 66 66 / 116 111 http://www.childline.ie
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Plavi Telefon ☎0800 50305 http://www.plavitefon.ba	Israel	ERAN ☎1201 http://en.eran.org.il
Croatia	Hrabritefon ☎0800 0800 / 116 111 http://www.hrabritefon.hr		Natal Helpline ☎1800 363 363 https://www.natal.org.il
Cyprus	Call 116 111 Cyprus ☎116111 http://www.call116_111.com	Italy	Hello Telefono Azzurro ☎19696 http://www.azzurro.it
Czech Republic	Linka Bezpečí ☎116 111 http://www.linkabezpeci.cz	Latvia	Uzticibas Talrunis ☎8006006 / 116 111 http://www.bti.gov.lv
Denmark	BørneTelefonen ☎116 111 http://www.bornsvilkar.dk/det-goer-vi-boernetelefonen/	Liechtenstein	Sorgentelefon für Kinder und Jugendliche ☎147 http://www.147-sote.li
Estonia	Lapsemure http://www.lapsemure.ee	Lithuania	Vaiku Linija ☎116 111 http://www.vaikulinja.lt
Finland	MLL Nuortennetti ☎116 111 http://www.nuortennetti.fi	Luxembourg	MLL Nuortennetti ☎116 111 http://www.nuortennetti.fi
France	Allô Enfance en Danger ☎119 http://www.all119.gouv.fr	Malta	Kellimni.com http://www.kellimni.com
Georgia	Child Helpline Georgia ☎116 111 http://phmdf.ge		Support Line 179 ☎116 111 https://fsws.gov.mt/en/appogg/Pages/support-line-179.aspx
Germany	Kinder- und Jugendtelefon ☎116 111 http://www.nummergegenkummer.de/kinder-und-jugendtelefon.html	Moldova	Telefon Copilului ☎116 111 http://www.telefoncopilului.md

Our Child Helpline members in Europe (contd.)

Netherlands

De Kindertelefoon
☎ 116 111 / 0800 0432
<http://kindertelefoon.nl>

Helpwanted.nl
☎ 31 20 261 5275
<http://helpwanted.nl>

North Macedonia

SOS Helpline for Children & Youth
☎ 0800 122 22
<http://www.childrensembassy.org.mk>

Norway

Kors På Halsen
☎ 800 333 21
<https://korspaahalsen.rodekors.no>

Alarmtelefonen for barn og unge
☎ 116 111
<http://www.116111.no>

Poland

**Telefon Zaufania
(Trust Phone for Children & Youth)**
☎ 116 111
<http://www.fdds.pl>

Portugal

SOS Criança
☎ 116 111
<http://www.iacrianca.pt>

Romania

Telefon Copilului
☎ 116 111
<http://www.telefonulcopilului.ro>

Serbia

NADEL - Nacionalna DeČija Linija Srbije
☎ 116 111
<http://nadel-decijalinija.org>

Slovakia

Linka Detskej Istoty
☎ 0800 112 112 / 116 111
<http://www.lds.sk>

Slovenia

National Telephone Helpline - TOM
☎ 116 111
<http://www.e-tom.si>

Spain

**Télefono ANAR de
Ayuda a Ninòs y Adolescentes**
☎ 116 111
<http://www.anar.org>

Sweden

BRIS
☎ 116 111
<http://www.bris.se>

Switzerland

Pro Juventute Beratung + Hilfe 147
☎ 147
<http://www.147.ch>

Turkey

Gençlik Destek Hattı (Youth Support Line)
☎ 0850 455 0070
<http://www.genclikdestekhatti.org.tr>

Ukraine

Ukraine National Child Toll-Free Hotline
☎ 0800 500 225 / 116 111
<http://www.la-strada.org.ua>

United Kingdom

BEAT
☎ 0808 801 0677
<https://www.beatingeatingdisorders.org.uk>

Childline UK
☎ 0800 1111 / 116 111
<https://www.childline.org.uk>

Muslim Youth Helpline
☎ 0808 808 2008
<http://www.myh.org.uk>

The Mix
☎ 0808 801 0677
<http://www.themix.org.uk>

Our Child Helpline members in the Middle East & North Africa

Algeria

Je t'écoute (NADA)
☎3033

Bahrain

Child Helpline 998
☎998
http://www.mlsd.gov.bh/en/childhood/childhood_care/998

Egypt

Child Helpline Egypt
☎16000
<http://nccm.gov.eg>

Iran

Sedaye Yara
☎+98 21 42152
<http://www.irsprc.org>

Iraq

Child Helpline Kurdistan Region
☎116
<http://www.molsa.gov.iq>

Jordan

JRF 110 Helpline
☎110
<http://www.jordanriver.jo>

Kuwait

Help Hotline 147
☎147

Lebanon

Naba'a
<http://www.nabaa-lb.org>

Higher Council for Childhood
<http://std.atfalouna.gov.lb/Home.aspx>

Palestine

Sawa
☎121
<http://www.sawa.ps>

Qatar

Hotline 919
☎919
<http://www.aman.org.qa>

Saudi Arabia

Child Helpline
☎116 111
<http://www.nfsp.org.sa>

Sudan

Child Helpline
☎119
<http://www.fcpcu.gov.sd>

Syria

Mobaderoon
<http://www.mobaderoon.org>

United Arab Emirates

DFWAC Helpline (Dubai)
☎800111
<http://www.dfwac.ae>

Child Helpline (Sharjah)
☎800700
<http://www.sssd.shj.ae>





Every child has a voice.

No child should be left unheard.

Child Helpline International is a collective impact organisation with 168 members in 139 countries and territories around the world (as of June 2020).

We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to help and support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices.

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