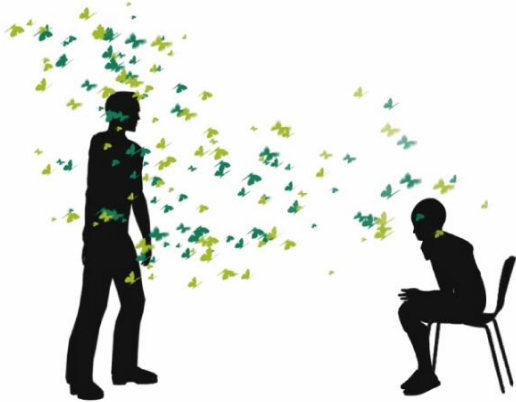


# Children speak about being free from violence and exploitation



**ChildFund Alliance**

A worldwide alliance of 12 children's development organisations, working in 58 countries to improve the lives of vulnerable and excluded children, help them overcome poverty, and achieve their rights <http://www.childfundalliance.org>

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## Summary

As the United Nations General Assembly prepares to discuss the future global priorities for people all over the world –children have made a resounding statement that violence and exploitation perpetrated against them **MUST** be included.

ChildFund Alliance conducted 55 focus groups with children in 41 countries, and involving over 1300 individual children so that their voices can be heard as part of the post-2015 agenda. This study provides horrific examples of violence and exploitation raised by some of the children:

- being punished with heated metal rods and spoons;
- being abducted so their organs could be harvested;
- their hands being dipped in boiling oil;
- girls being forced to become pregnant to act as drug mules;
- being forced into child marriage to settle family disputes and debts; and
- being severely beaten at schools, leading to death.



Children participating in focus group discussion in Laos.  
**Photo:** ChildFund Laos.

Despite their awareness of these horrendous violations, children themselves were able to recommend practical solutions to increase their safety.

The top three calls to world leaders were to create and enforce legislation against violence; to fund and run awareness campaigns at all levels; and to ensure offenders are punished so that children feel safe.

Children stated that they felt free when they were actively listened to, had access to safe schools and the opportunity to play.

Globally the top three forms of violence and exploitation identified by children were sexual violence, child labour and physical and humiliating punishment. African children also highlighted harmful traditional practices and children in the Americas pointed to the issue of bullying.

Children also identified other risks, which included drug and alcohol abuse, dropping out of school and pregnancy, as well as being forced to engage in criminal activity.

## Introduction

Throughout the world, children are subject to the worst forms of child labour, living and working in the streets; harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage, and female genital mutilation and cutting; sexual abuse; the impact of armed conflict, including the use of child soldiers by armed forces and gangs; lack of access to justice, including child-friendly justice, and unnecessary institutionalization, among others.

Preventing and responding to violence and exploitation is essential to ensuring children's rights to survival, development and well-being.

The impact of violence and exploitation is known. Countries with high rates of child labour tend to have low rates of school attendance. Children who study in a violent environment achieve lower academic results than those who do not. A child victim of abuse and exploitation can be affected emotionally, mentally and physically, and his or her ability to learn and socialize can be seriously hampered.

If the post-2015 development framework is to carry the torch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and if the next generation of development goals is to finish the job of the current one, violence and exploitation must be explicitly included and addressed.

To enhance the voices of children in this process, this report looks at qualitative data from 55 focus groups with over 1300 children who participated in this process, and also analyses 6500 MY World votes from children on their priorities for the post-2015 agenda.



Children participating in focus group discussion in Ecuador.  
**Photo:** ChildFund Ecuador.

From these focus group discussions, there were a series of common concerns and themes that children identified regarding their own protection from violence and exploitation. They include:

- Children aspire to have their rights fulfilled and to be able to exercise their fundamental freedoms –including the right to non-discrimination, and the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.
- The experience of violence and exploitation perpetrated against these children takes many different forms, most prominently sexual violence, child labour, and physical and humiliating punishment.
- While many children stressed that both girls and boys are victims of violence and exploitation, they pointed to the fact that girls are more exposed to violence and exploitation related to their sexuality, while boys are more at risk of being subjected to physical harm.

## About this Report

Child participation is not only a right, but also a general principle and part of the general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This means that the Convention cannot be fully realised if children are not respected as rights-holding citizens and their views are listened to and given due weight.

Furthermore, participation is highly valued and acknowledged in the UN Study on Violence against Children.<sup>1</sup> Of the 12 overarching recommendations of the Study, the seventh relates to children's participation, and calls upon states to engage actively with children and respect their views in all aspects of prevention and response to violence against children.

The purpose of this report is to strengthen the voices of girls and boys in the agenda-setting process for the post-2015 development framework. Specifically, this initiative seeks two main objectives:

- a) to ensure that children's voices are included in the post-2015 development agenda;
- b) to fill a gap in qualitative research regarding children's views about violence and exploitation perpetrated against them, and their place in the post-2015 development agenda.

Understanding and defining violence and exploitation from the perspective of girls and boys is crucial, as it plays a fundamental role in developing child-centred measures to address them. To this purpose, focus groups were conducted in 41 countries, all of which engaged between twenty to thirty children in open discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (2006), *World report on violence against children* (United Nations). Available at: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>.

While the authors coordinated this process, it is in the end the result of children's views and participation.

## Methodology

This report is based on first-hand information children shared during focus group discussions in 41 countries across Asia, Africa and the Americas. The selection of the countries was based on ChildFund's countries of operations. The participation of girls and boys was ensured in each of the focus group discussions and the information coded.

To ensure that discussions were conducted in a safe and inclusive environment and to support the facilitators the following documents were shared:

- a concept note
- a facilitators' guide
- a focus group session plan
- a list of open-ended questions, with both principal and guiding questions
- all the necessary consent forms for children and their caregivers
- a reporting guideline

These documents were mostly adapted from existing publications. Additionally, the facilitators were provided with feedback and guidance, as and when necessary, to successfully conduct the discussions and collate the information.

These focus group discussions provided a platform for girls and boys to discuss child protection concerns, specifically violence against and exploitation of children; to share their understandings and experiences of these issues; and to recommend possible actions to end all forms of violence and exploitation perpetrated against children.

Facilitators asked the following questions, with the respective sub-questions to guide the dialogue:

1. What makes you feel free?
2. What makes you feel free from violence and exploitation?
3. What makes you feel free to take action to stop violence and exploitation?
4. What can world leaders do to free children from violence and exploitation?
5. What can adults do to free children from violence and exploitation?
6. What are the risks that children face? Are they different for boys or girls? What are the risks for girls? What are the risks for boys?

7. Is there anything else you would like to say about the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse?

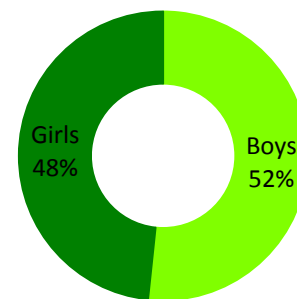
The process applied the standards for child participation as highlighted in the General Comment No. 12, enabling children to express their opinion and develop their recommendations.

The graphs indicate what percentage of the total number of focus groups raised a particular issue. Annex 2, in the long version of this report, sets out the coding that was used to collate the answers. The full report can be downloaded at: <http://www.freefromviolence.org>.

### Disaggregated information for participating children in focus groups

	Boys	Girls	Total
<b>Africa</b>	306	307	<b>613</b>
<b>Americas</b>	184	176	<b>360</b>
<b>Asia</b>	207	169	<b>376</b>
<b>Globally</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>1349</b>

Participants by Gender - Globally



## Major themes coming out of focus group discussions

### 1. Children's rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child

In all focus group discussions, children expressed the aspiration of having their rights fulfilled, and their fundamental freedoms respected. This aspiration mostly related to participation, education, health, food and their right to play. Children also pointed out that there needed to be more awareness about children's rights, and that adults at all levels need to ensure that this happens.

*"I feel free when my rights are respected by my parents, the leaders, and the state."*  
17-year-old girl, Guinea

#### 1.1. Participation

Throughout the focus groups, participation came across as one of the strongest aspirations of children. They were aware of the differences between effective participation and tokenism; of the settings in which their opinions should be brought to bear; and of the value that this would add to decision-making processes.

Many children mentioned that they wanted to be "actively heard" by adults and decision-makers. In many cases, the possibility of expressing their opinions and views was correlated with the reduction of violence.

Children expressed their desire to be partners rather than adult's beneficiaries. Intergenerational dialogue was fundamental for children to feel safe and for children to be able to take action.

*"I feel free when I reach my dreams and the elders don't tell me to shut my mouth."*  
15-year-old girl, Bolivia

#### 1.2. Discrimination

Children spoke about the desire to be free from discrimination in general. They expressed their aspirations for a life free from discrimination, where children receive equal treatment in schools and are afforded equal opportunities. More often than not, children talked about the need to stop gender discrimination, both as a violation against children but also as a solution to reduce violence and exploitation. The other dimension that was mentioned was discrimination against children with disabilities.

*"Adults should treat every child equally."*  
15-year-old boy, Liberia

#### 1.3. Survival

In nearly all focus groups children identified their right to the provision of basic needs, their right to survival and to health. The realization of these rights was seen as contributing to them feeling free and being free from violence. For most children, basic needs were defined as adequate food and healthcare. Children made the link between a lack of resources and their feelings of safety. They identified that they were more at risk of violence and exploitation if the household was not able to meet its basic needs. Children talked of being forced on the street to beg for money and being forced into early marriages to pay off debt.



## 2. Education and schools

According to children, three situations hinder their access to education. First, child labour – whether agricultural, domestic or otherwise– was mentioned as one of the factors preventing boys and girls from having access to education. Second, security was also identified as one of the obstacles for children going to school, as they often do not feel safe on their way from and to their homes. Third, teachers who resort to physical and humiliating punishment were also mentioned as an obstacle to children’s education, and as contributing to the fact that, on occasion, children do not feel safe –not to mention happy and free– in school.

At the same time children identified schools as a place where they were subject to violations from teachers and other students. They called upon teachers and Governments to do more to ensure that their schools are safe and free from violence.

Children emphasized the need for an easy and smooth reporting system and for administrators to ensure that action is taken against perpetrators. Many participants called for an end to sexual harassment in schools and suspension of any teacher caught harassing students.

***“Teachers and big man should stop abusing children.”***  
**15-year-old girl, Liberia**

## 3. Create and enforce legislation

The importance of laws and their implementation was raised in various ways in nearly all focus groups. Children want their leaders to make child rights known and respected to protect them. Children in each region identified the importance of world leaders to both create and enforce legislation to prevent and respond to violence against children.

***“Governments should not only enact laws but have to strive to enforce the laws.”***

**15-year-old boy, Ethiopia**

## 4. Punish offenders and perpetrators

The importance of punishing offenders of violence against children was of slightly higher importance in **Africa** and the **Americas** than **Asia**. For children, this call to punish offenders and perpetrators of violence against them indicates the high level of concern they face having offenders and perpetrators living amongst them, leaving them open to re-offending. It is well documented that violence against children does not just happen in isolated cases; many children are subject to multiple forms of abuse.

***“Existing institutions only defend adults to the point that a child cannot go to the chief for a complaint. Also people are not courageous enough to disclose violence.”***

**14-year-old boy, Burkina Faso**

## 5. Community awareness

Children identified the importance of community awareness for adults including parents, teachers, leaders, local leaders and caregivers. They felt this could be achieved through mass media campaigns. Children also made suggestions about where and how community awareness campaigns could take place, including at local markets, coffee ceremonies and through radio.

Raising awareness on the effects of violence against and exploitation of children was a common solution given by children. Whether regarded as something they can do themselves, or as actions adults could implement, children from all three regions saw in awareness raising

an effective way to prevent and address violence and exploitation.

***“My dream in the future is for parents, teachers and community leaders to take real actions to stop violence and every form of exploitation against children.”***  
**13-year-old girl, Timor Leste**

## **6. Severe and numerous forms of violence and exploitation perpetrated against children**

Children raised many different experiences of violence and exploitation. Some of the more extreme forms of violence included: being punished with heated metal rods and spoons, being abducted so their organs could be harvested, children’s hands being dipped in boiling oil, girls being forced to become pregnant to act as drug mules, children being forced into child marriage to settle family disputes and debts and being severely beaten at schools leading to death.

In many focus groups, children talked about the fact that both boys and girls faced similar risks of being subject to violence and exploitation. For example, child labour was raised for girls as mostly domestic labour and for boys it was in the context of agriculture. Sexual violence was also seen as a violation that both boys and girls experienced. The top three shared experiences of violence were sexual violence, child labour, and physical and humiliating punishment.

Across the different focus groups, children recognised that boys and girls faced higher risks of particular manifestations of violence and

exploitation perpetrated against them. While boys and girls were considered at risk of sexual violence, girls were subject to a higher risk of commercial sexual exploitation.

When children spoke of different forms of violence and exploitation the list included, in order: sexual violence, child labour, physical and humiliating punishment, trafficking, harmful traditional practices, children associated with armed forces and gangs, and bullying.

One of the main forms of violence to which focus groups referred was physical harm, including corporal punishment at home, school and work.

Focus groups also referred to armed conflict or crime-related violence as a constant source of violence and exploitation perpetrated against children.



Children participating in focus group discussion in Nepal.  
**Photo:** ChildFund Nepal.

## Children's recommendations

After analysing the data from the focus group discussions, the top actions that children wanted world leaders to take were: create and enforce legislation against children, raise awareness on violence and exploitation against children, punish offenders and perpetrators, and guarantee access to education.

Throughout the focus group process, children continued to raise issues that they thought needed to be addressed and suggested actions that adults and leaders should take to free children from violence and exploitation. They included, but were not limited to, the following list of recommendations for action:

### Services

- Run awareness training with parents and teachers to determine ways they could work together to reduce violence.
- Map risks at the local level.
- Create safe spaces for children.
- Give priority to protection programs for children not in school.
- Increase the number of local support units.
- Use children's clubs as a hub for services and activities that keep children safe.
- Implement programs that improve the safety of children travelling to school.
- Decentralize services to children.
- Ensure that water holes are well lit and placed in safe areas.
- Implement codes of conduct for teachers
- Put children's helplines in place.
- Conduct self-defence classes.
- Implement and fund parenting classes.
- Conduct local level surveys of the violations children face.



Children participating in focus group discussion in Ghana.  
Photo: ChildFund Ghana.

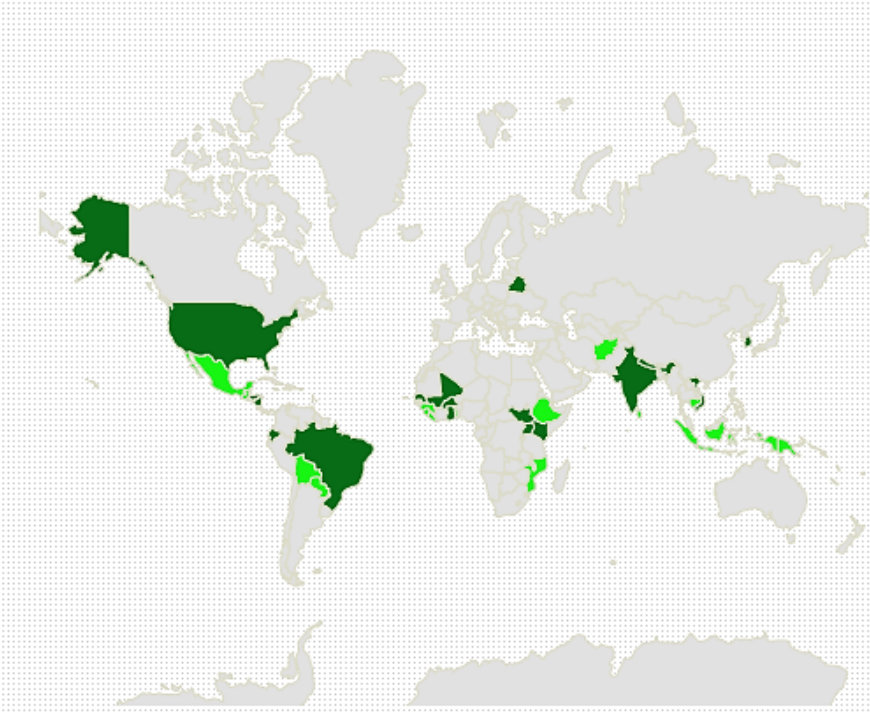
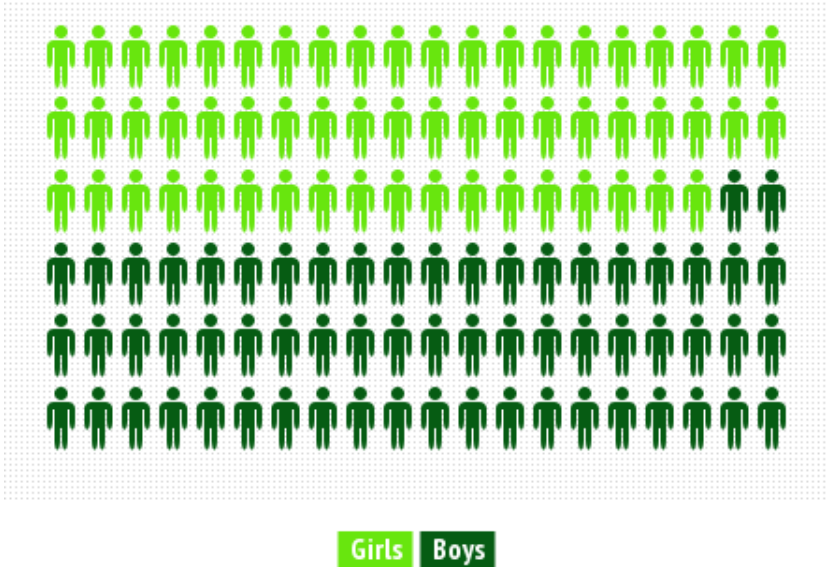
### Law enforcement

- Run counselling for perpetrators.
- Ensure anonymous reporting to the police.
- Increase the national and local budgets for the prosecution of offenders.
- Ensure all domestic laws increase the age to undertake hazardous work to 18.
- Create local police units.

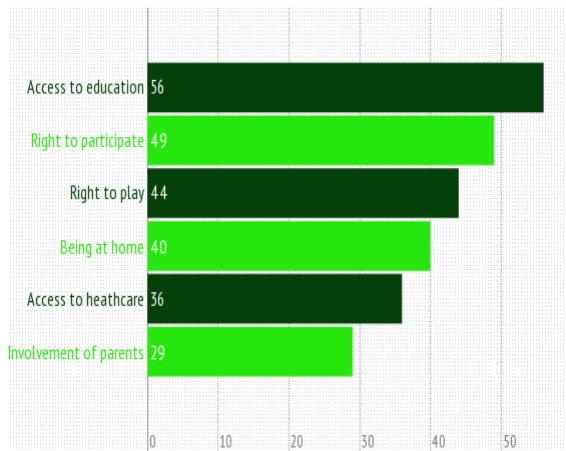
### Education

- Have a greater focus on the education on the Convention of the Rights of the Child and other international instruments.
- Implement a worldwide campaign on violence.

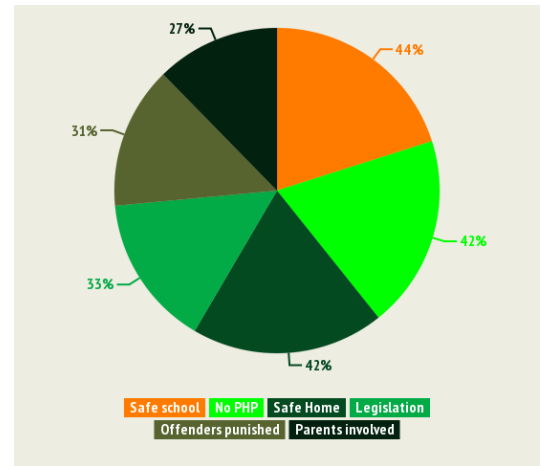
# Global findings: A graphic summary



## What children need to feel free



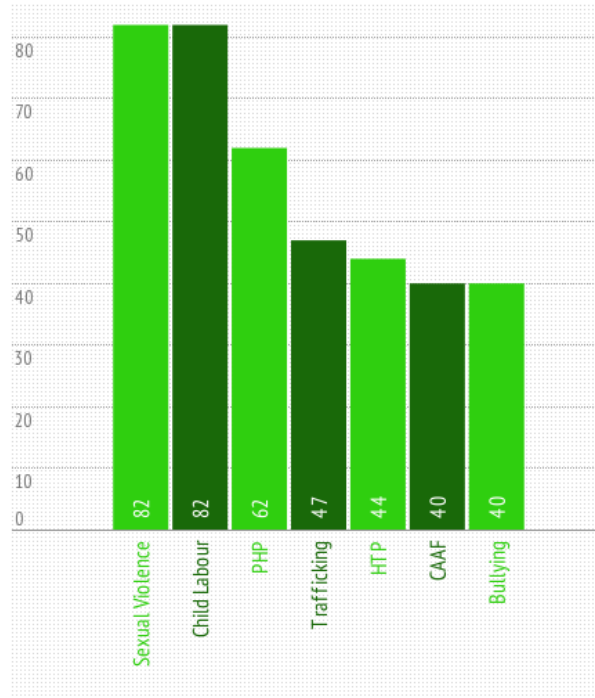
## What children need to feel free from violence and exploitation



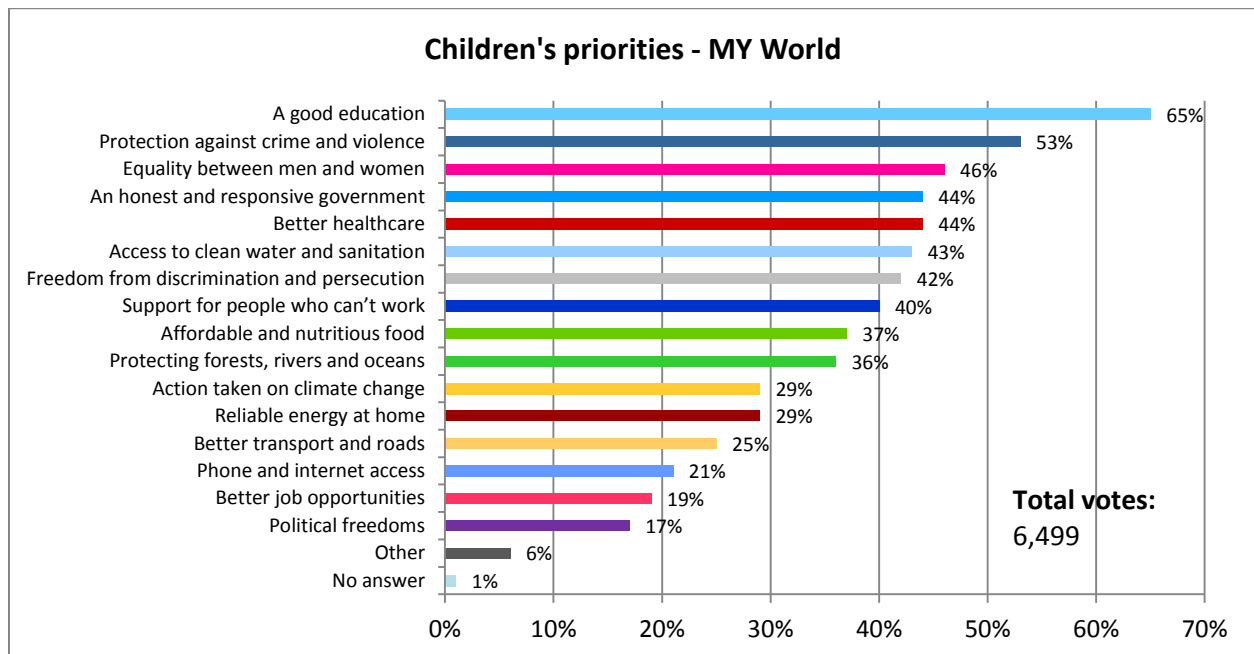
## What world leaders should do to free children from violence and exploitation



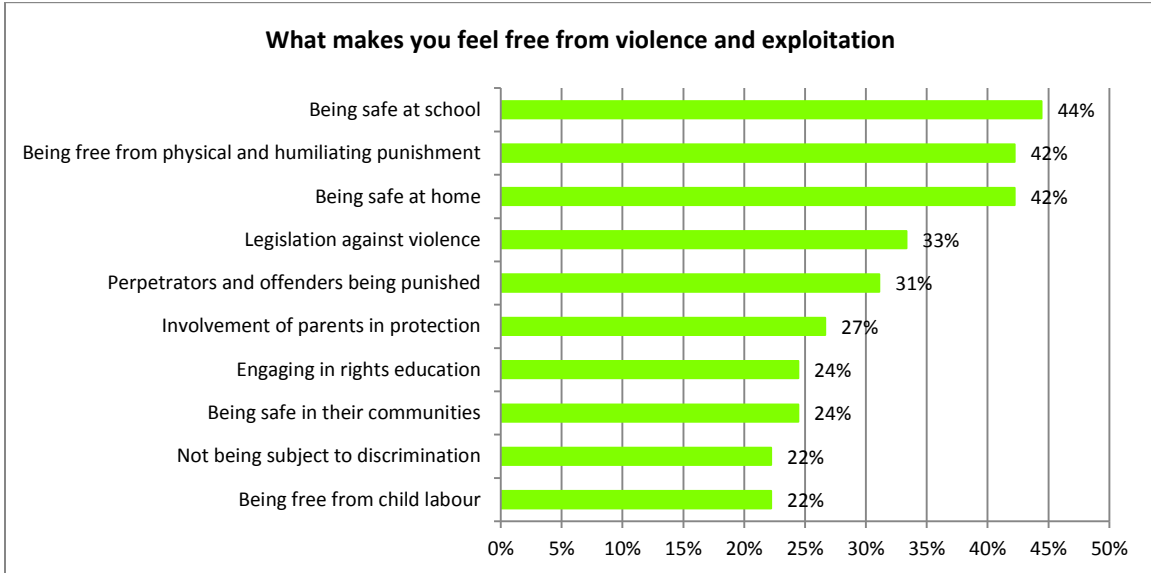
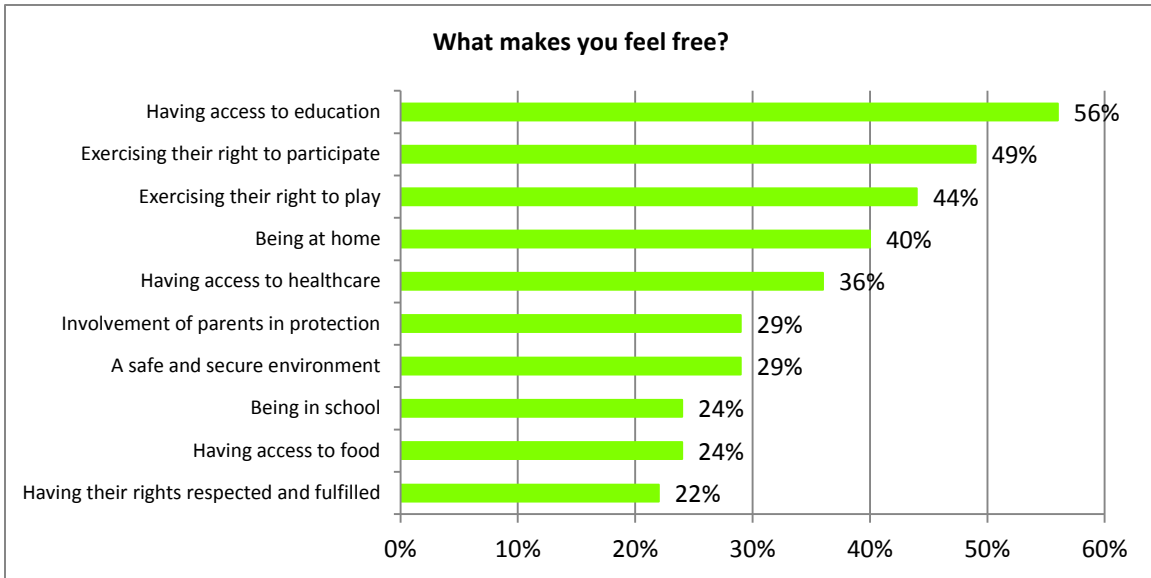
## Forms of violence and exploitation perpetrated against children

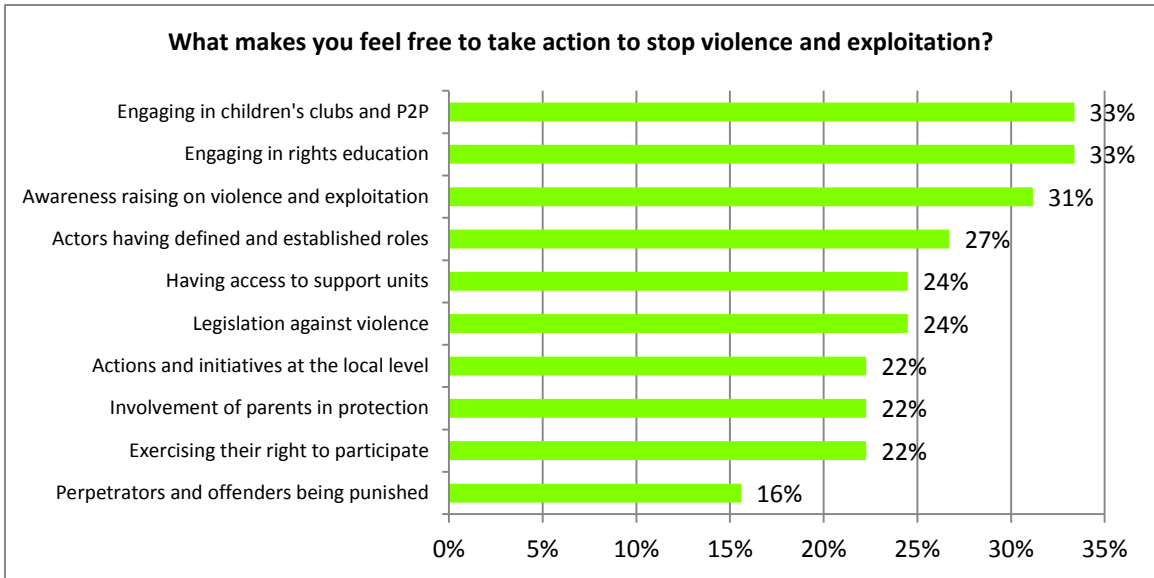


## 6500 children in 47 countries vote for the priorities the post-2015 agenda should address to make them free

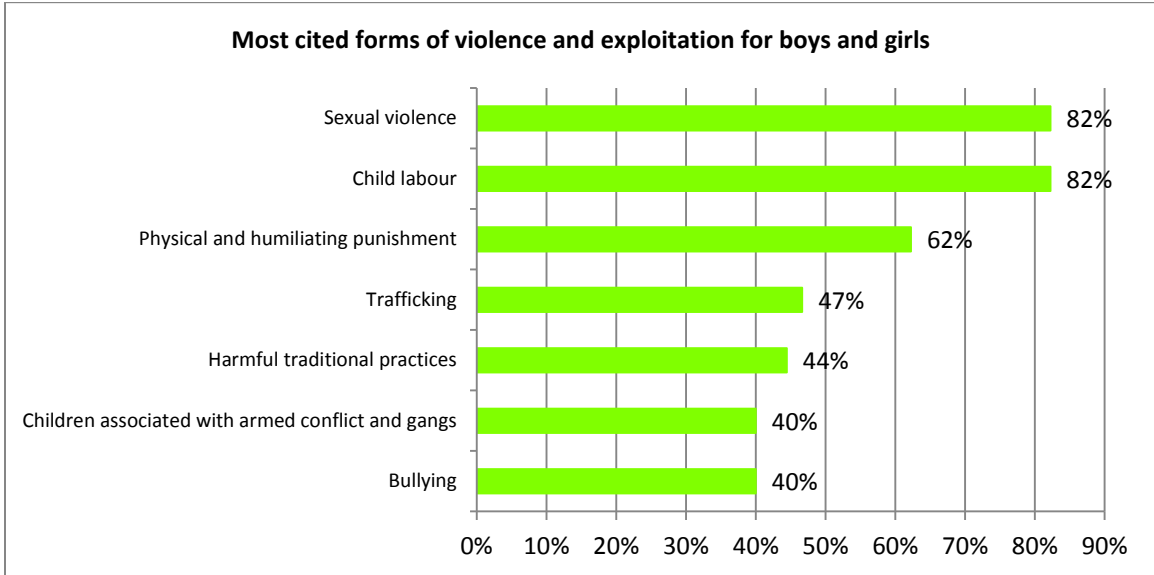
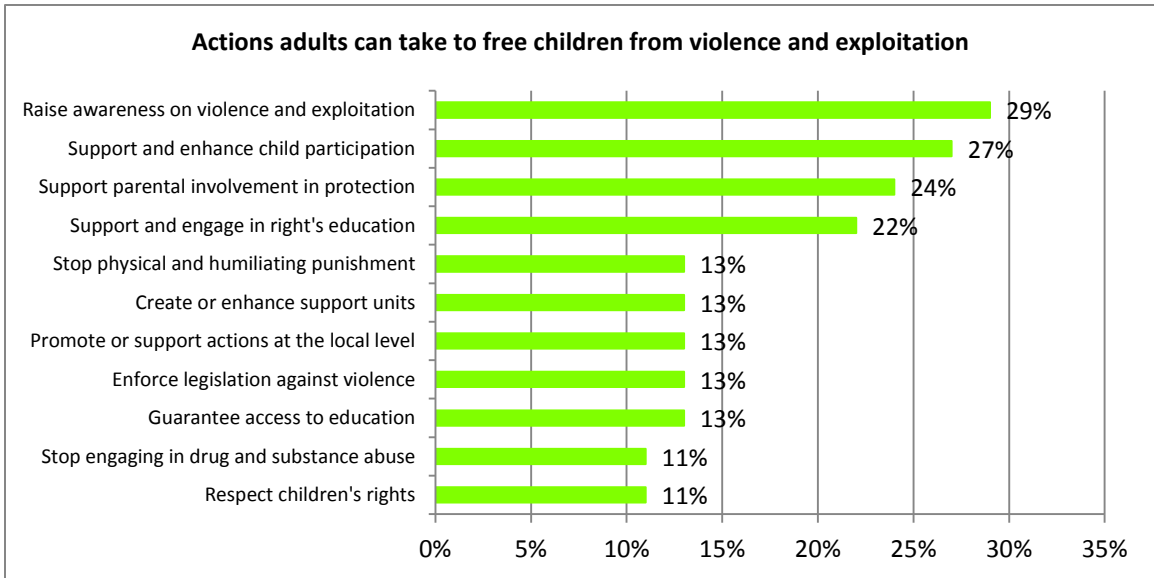


## Global findings from discussion questions









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