Voices of Children and Young People in Eastern & Southern Africa

Child Helpline Data for 2019
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The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child notes with concern that the situation of millions of African children remains critical due to the several unique factors: their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, as well as natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger. All of these have a negative impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of children. Therefore, the protection of children from harmful practices and circumstances is critical for the realisation of children’s rights. In many countries, children constitute a large segment of the population and their survival, wellbeing and development is critically important.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the treaty bodies, operating under the aegis of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which has the responsibility for checking, noting and reporting on children’s issues. UN Women, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Zambia and the African Union Commission hosted a dialogue for African heads of state and traditional and cultural leaders to renew commitment to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in Africa. FGM (also known as FGM/C when it involves cutting) is a traditional practice that has impacted more than 140 million girls and women worldwide, however it has only recently received attention from governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and national and international communities. A side event at the AU Heads of State summit sought to secure and renew commitments by Heads of State, governments and traditional and cultural leaders to embrace and incorporate transformational approaches that effectively address socio-cultural barriers to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa by 2030. The African Union also launched a campaign to end child marriage in Africa, and all African heads of state and governments have made commitments towards this.

Around the world, millions of children have been subjected to various harmful practices, some well known about and others that remain undocumented. What most of these practices have in common is that they have devastating consequences on children’s lives, development, health, education and protection. Addressing harmful practices such as FGM, child/early marriages and various other forms of violation of children’s rights is a core concern for the process of following up on the UN Study on Violence Against Children, which provides a solid basis for advancing the common goal to effectively protect children. The UN Study on Violence Against Children urged states to prohibit by law all forms of violence against children, including harmful practices. The Girls Not Brides Global Partnership to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM), launched in 2014, links to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

This report presents data on the contacts made with children and young people in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) countries by Child Helpline International’s child helpline members in those countries. The data will be used as an advocacy instrument for prohibiting harmful practices and promoting the abandonment of same, and presents a comprehensive inventory of issues related to children’s rights that require urgent action by Member States, UN actors and civil society organisations at the international, national and local levels. This report will contribute to the body of knowledge on the right of children to freedom from all forms of violence, including harmful practices, everywhere and at all times.
In 2019, Child Helpline International conducted an annual quantitative survey on all its child helpline members around the world. The survey gathered data on the contacts that were made with these child helplines by children and young people through various methods of contact, including telephone support and counselling.

A total of 11 child helplines from 10 countries in the Eastern & Southern Africa (ESA) region reported data for 2019. The countries represented are eSwatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Child helplines have unique insights on the gap between policy and reality, making them key actors in advocating for children’s rights. The purpose of our annual survey is to understand the issues faced by the children and young people making contact with child helplines. The report notes the high practice of child/early marriages in both Eastern and Southern Africa, while also noting the existence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Eastern Africa with little or no evidence of it in Southern Africa. The report provides some key recommendations, which include reserving a pan-Africa national range number 116 for harmonised child helplines in Africa, promoting cross-border collaborations in addressing child/early marriages and FGM, and supporting child helplines in strengthening their data collection, analyses and use of data for advocacy purposes.

The report also presents advocacy messages concerning child/early marriages, FGM and various other forms of violence such as sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), including rape, domestic abuse and sexual exploitation.
The following are some of the key recommendations that Child Helpline International and its members have established, based on our report *Voices of Children and Young People Around the World*, which analysed the data for 2019 that was collected from our child helpline members around the world.

1. **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.

2. **The second recommendation is to enhance the quality and sustainability of child helplines so 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 infrastructure failure, and during national and global emergencies, as the Covid-19 pandemic harshly brought to light.

3. **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.

4. **Finally, our fourth recommendation is that the voices of children and young people, gathered through child helpline data and youth participation, should inform policy and decision-making that affects 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.

### Specific recommendations on child/early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The African Union should reserve a pan-African national range number 116 for harmonised child helplines in Africa, which will go a long way in the fight against child/early marriage and FGM.

**Robust, more focused and better data collection on FGM** should be set up, especially in Southern Africa. This will help provide reliable and evidence-based information with regard to the practice of FGM in Eastern and Southern Africa.

**Case management systems** should be supported, enhanced and strengthened at the national level so that they become both proactive and responsive to the needs of child survivors of child/early marriage and FGM, ensuring they receive high quality services.

**Cross-border collaborations** to address child/early marriage and FGM should be promoted in order to help curb cross-border FGM, which has been on the rise especially in Eastern Africa.
Advocacy

Child Helpline International offers a wealth of data on the issues that affect children and young people in the local, regional and international context. The advocacy messages of Child Helpline International and its member organisations are intended to help them respond to child protection issues. Child rights, and rights to protection, apply in all situations, including emergencies such as those related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The messages are derived from the protection concerns that have been reported, the long-standing experience that Child Helpline International has, and the recommendations arising from evidence-gathering processes in response to child protection concerns faced by children, young people and other adult beneficiaries.

Special support is required to ensure child helplines can deal with cases of abuse and violence, and with cases concerning mental health issues.

A basic guide to Child Helpline International’s advocacy messaging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the issue?</th>
<th>Why should the target audience care?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the solution and its impact on the problem?</td>
<td>What specifically should the target audience do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Investing time and effort in creating compelling and effective messages that include a call to action, helps convince and get buy-in from decision-makers or influencers.

The process of designing messages should always take into account the issue, why target audience(s) should care about the issue, the proposed solution and its impact on the problem as well as the call to action for target audiences, also the availability of resources.
Key advocacy messages

- **Reserving a pan-Africa national range number 116 for harmonised child helplines in Africa will go a long way in the fight against child/early marriages and female genital mutilation.** Currently the 116 toll-free number is being used in 26 African countries. Harmonisation will help to create a pan-African number of social value that is toll-free and accessible for children and young people everywhere in Africa. It will enable those who are victims of abuse and violence, have been trafficked from one country to another, or are seeking help, care and protection, to be heard by professionals and to be protected in accordance with international and regional frameworks, enhancing their development and protecting their rights in the context of ICTs.

- **Voices of children and young people, gathered through child helpline data and youth advocacy, should inform policy, learning and high-level decision-making** (national, regional and international) on the protection of children’s rights. Amplification of children’s voices should be adequately funded and resource measures should be put in place to ensure children’s safety and wellbeing. Valuable data, information, evidence or knowledge generated by Child Helpline International and other advocates on issues affecting children should not go to waste.

- **Women and girls who face the greatest risk of female genital mutilation (FGM), child/early marriages, and sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) – including rape, domestic abuse and sexual exploitation – should be protected guided by the theme, “leave no one behind”.** Mainstreaming anti-FGM interventions would strengthen responses and facilitate the behavioural change required to eliminate the practice.

- **Governments in ESA countries should prohibit by law all forms of violence against children, including harmful practices.** National and multi-stakeholder response plans must prioritise child protection (particularly for adolescent girls), abuse, FGM/C, child/early marriages and other forms of violence, and support child survivors through standalone and mainstreamed efforts. Commitments by national governments and humanitarian actors to prevent and respond to violence experienced by children must also be fully funded and supported in all contexts, to prevent and address those harmful patterns identified.

- **Funding agencies or donors should support the enhancement of quality and sustainability of child helplines** to enable them to do their crucial work in promoting children’s rights, through their support of children and the implementation of good practices such as bridging the child protection data gap, knowledge generation, and the empowerment of counsellors and responders on child protection issues or concerns.

- **Structured partnerships and collaborations have a crucial role to play in eradicating violence against all children.** Government, child protection agencies, thematic expert organisations and other referral service providers should work with child helplines to build a highly integrated service network that takes into account the needs of children and young people. Vulnerable and under-represented groups of children stand to benefit from increased coordination among child helplines and other actors.
Eleven of our child helpline members in 10 countries across the ESA region reported data for 2019: eSwatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We performed quantitative data analyses in order to understand issues of violence, in particular relating to child and early marriage and FGM.

Depending on the requirements of their counselling and research activities, our child helpline members record various information for each contact they receive. Child Helpline International has worked closely with the child helplines to create a common categorisation for those contacts, in order to establish a shared understanding of each child helpline’s data and strengthen the comparability of data at both the regional and global level. This categorisation consists of 11 broad issues or reasons why children and young people are making contact with child helplines, and these are then further divided into a number of sub-issues or sub-reasons, as well as nine types of contextual information, also divided into various sub-types.

Every year, the child helplines provide the number of contacts received for each of these different reasons and sub-reasons, as well as the supportive contextual information.

As a result of creating a common categorisation for our data framework, there are some limitations to the data and analysis processes.

- It should be noted that the content and level of detail of the information recorded for each contact is the prerogative of the child helplines themselves, and is not dictated by Child Helpline International. Therefore, categories might differ from those used by some child helplines when the data was originally collected. In addition, if a child helpline does not report any contacts for certain categories it is noted that they did not report contacts, instead of no contacts. Child Helpline International does not verify the accuracy or validate if a child helpline does or does not have reported contacts for these categories.

- It should also be noted that child helplines have differing practices relating to the information recorded. Whereas some indicate the reason voiced by the child or young person for calling, others indicate the reason identified by the counsellor, which might not be the same in some cases.
The child helplines in Eastern Southern Africa received a total of 1,703,790 contacts from children and young people in 2019. Out of there, 228,782 (13% of total) were counselling contacts, that is, contacts for which the child helplines provided support or counselling to the child or young person.

The remaining contacts did not involve support or counselling because of the nature of the contact (missed contacts, silent contacts, testing / abusive contacts, information contacts).

Out of the counselling contacts, the main reasons for children and young people to contact the child helplines were physical health, violence, accessibility, mental health and peer relationships.
In the violence category, most contacts from children and young people concerned physical violence, bullying, emotional violence, neglect and sexual violence. Child/early marriage ranked 6th reason for contact in the region, while female genital mutilation ranked 15th reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Physical violence</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Mental/emotional violence</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Child/early marriage</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Online sexual exploitation</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Harmful or hazardous labour</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Non-gender-based harmful traditional practices</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Online sexual abuse</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Gender-based harmful traditional practices (other than FGM)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Commercial sexual exploitation</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13</td>
<td>Unspecified/other</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>Economic exploitation</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15</td>
<td>Female genital mutilation (FGM)</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Child/early marriage has been one of the major child protection issue of concern across Africa, with the African Union running its Campaign against Child Marriage from 2014-2017. Globally, more than one in four girls are married as children – that is, before the age of 18. In Eastern and Southern Africa the percentages are 36%, and 10%, respectively, of girls in the region being married by the age of 15 (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017). This has attracted the attention of policymakers of both regional blocs–the EastAfrica Community (EAC) and the SouthernAfrica Development Community (SADC) – amid growing calls for more specific laws to address the problem. In September 2015, leaders from Africa joined other governments from around the world in adopting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including a target to end child marriage in the next 15 years.

For Southern Africa, the SADC model law on eradicating child marriage and protecting those children already married was adopted in 2016 to provide guidance to parliamentarians, ministries of justice, policymakers and other stakeholders in SADC Member States as they develop effective national laws to end child marriage and address inconsistencies in their current legal frameworks (Girls Not Brides, 2018). Girls who marry young are often denied a range of human rights, as many must discontinue their education, face serious health risks from early and multiple pregnancies, and suffer sexual and domestic violence. Agenda 2063, the African Union’s 50-year action plan for development, recognises that child marriage is a major impediment to regional development and prosperity.

A child marriage mapping of programmes and partners in Eastern and Southern Africa conducted by UNFPA & UNICEF in 2017 found that the number of girls affected by child marriage in the 12 countries involved in the mapping is enormous. Although greater attention is now being given to the issue, existing programmes do not have the capacity to meet current needs (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

The study also revealed that "child marriage practices vary widely among districts and even communities," and that they are "closely interconnected with traditional practices and social norms surrounding female genital mutilation/cutting, notions of family honour, puberty (menarche), virginity, parental concerns surrounding premarital sex and pregnancy, dowry pressures, the perception that marriage provides protection from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and the desire to secure social, economic or political alliances."

Data collected by child helplines will be useful in developing national and local responses and interventions that are specific to the districts and communities, since the data is disaggregated according to the geographical location from which the contacts have been received.

In 2019, child helplines in the Eastern and Southern Africa received 2,214 contacts related to child/early marriage. Of the 10 countries where Child Helpline International has members in the region, 8 reported contacts received about child/early marriage, which indicates an 80% response rate for ESA countries reporting these contacts. The two countries that did not report child/early marriage contacts were eSwatini and South Africa. Consistent with distribution of contacts for each country for the violence category as a whole, the figures indicate that Zambia received the vast majority of those child/early marriage contacts.

Based on the data, girls appear to be eight times more likely to contact child helplines with concerns related to child/early marriage than boys. The data also shows that this gender imbalance between girls and boys is present in every country that submitted data on child/early marriage.

Total number of child/early marriage contacts received in 2019 across all regions:

2,214
Total number of contacts by country (with percentage of total contacts in the region)

- Zambia: 1,023 (46%)
  - Girls: 1,967 (89%)
  - Boys: 243 (11%)
  - Unknown: 4 (<0.2%)

- Zimbabwe: 654 (30%)
  - Boys: 239 (11%)

- Mozambique: 239 (11%)
  - Boys: 22 (11%)

- Uganda: 189 (9%)
  - Boys: 16 (2%)

- Kenya: 57 (3%)
  - Boys: 55 (99%)

- Tanzania: 26 (1%)
  - Boys: 26 (100%)

- Ethiopia: 22 (1%)
  - Boys: 22 (100%)

Total number of contacts by gender:

- Girls: 1,967 (89%)
- Boys: 243 (11%)
- Unknown: 4 (<0.2%)
It is estimated that more than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation in the countries where the practice is concentrated (WHO, 2020). Furthermore, there are an estimated 3 million girls at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation every year. At a continental level the African Union Initiative for the Elimination of FGM was launched in 2019 to hold governments accountable for meeting their obligations to eliminate FGM based on international and regional human rights frameworks. In some countries in Eastern Africa where the practice of FGM has been documented, findings for the period 2010-2015 show that the percentages of girls aged 0 to 14 years having undergone FGM/C was 24% in Ethiopia, 3% in Kenya, and 1% in Uganda (UNICEF, 2016).

Infibulation, which is the most severe form of FGM, is mostly practiced in the north-eastern region of Africa: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan (WHO, 2020). The last decade has seen a rise in cross-border FGM, as more people try to avoid prosecution in their own countries by travelling to neighbouring countries that are not very strict on enforcing measures against FGM for girls and women. Collaborative efforts between countries in Eastern Africa have been initiated. For example, the need for increased cooperation between the governments of Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, in order to tackle FGM, was discussed during a side meeting at the Ouagadougou Conference, and the Joint Programme facilitated collaboration between the four countries (UNFPA& UNICEF, 2018).

There is little or no evidence on the prevalence or practice of FGM in Southern Africa, hence a need for more and better data collection on FGM. Current progress is insufficient to keep up with increasing population growth. If trends continue, the number of girls and women undergoing FGM/C will rise significantly over the next 15 years (UNICEF, 2016). The data on FGM collected by child helplines in Eastern and Southern Africa will go a long way in generating evidence on the practice.

In 2019, the child helplines in the Eastern and Southern Africa region received 68 contacts about FGM. Of the 10 countries where Child Helpline International has members in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, three reported receiving contacts about FGM, which indicates a 30% response rate for ESA countries reporting these contacts. Uganda received nearly three quarters of these contacts.

On average, girls appear to be four times more likely to contact child helplines with concerns about FGM than boys. It should be noted that Uganda was the only country where contacts relating to FGM were being made by boys.
Total number of contacts by country (with percentage of total contacts in the region)

Uganda  
49 (72%)

Tanzania  
12 (18%)

Kenya 
7 (10%)

Total number of contacts by gender
- Girls: 56 (82%)
- Boys: 12 (18%)

Total number of contacts by gender (where known) and by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>37 (78%)</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Addressing issues of child/early marriage and FGM in Eastern and Southern Africa should be prioritised by all stakeholders concerned if we are to create an ESA region fit for children.

Reserving the national range number 116 for harmonised child helplines in Africa will enhance cross border collaboration and efforts to tackle child/early marriage and FGM. With political will and commitment from all stakeholders, combined with effective utilisation of data from child helplines, it is possible to end the violation of children’s rights through such practices as child/early marriage and FGM.

This is the time when the voices of children and young people, as gathered by child helplines in the ESA region, should take centre stage in informing policy, child protection responses, and institutional frameworks in efforts to create an environment free of violence against children and young people.

Child helplines as a trusted platform for child engagement will continue positioning themselves by continuing to gather data on the direct experiences of children and young people in the ESA region.
Our Child Helpline members in the Eastern & Southern Africa region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Child Helpline Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>Childline Botswana</td>
<td>3900900 / 11611</td>
<td><a href="http://childlinebotswana.org">http://childlinebotswana.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eSwatini</td>
<td>SWAGAA 951 Helpline</td>
<td>951</td>
<td><a href="http://www.swagaa.org.sz">http://www.swagaa.org.sz</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Childline Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>Child Helpline Lesotho</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>Allô Fanantenana Ligne 511</td>
<td>511</td>
<td><a href="http://www.arozaza./mg">http://www.arozaza./mg</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ligne Verte 147 Madagascar</td>
<td>147</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>Linha Fala Criança</td>
<td>116</td>
<td><a href="http://www.linhafala.org.mz">http://www.linhafala.org.mz</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Lifeline/Childline Namibia</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.lifelinechildline.org.na">http://www.lifelinechildline.org.na</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Childline South Africa</td>
<td>08000 55 555</td>
<td><a href="http://www.childlinesa.org.za">http://www.childlinesa.org.za</a></td>
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<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Tanzania National Child Helpline</td>
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<td>Zambia</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.childline.org.zw">http://www.childline.org.zw</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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