



From Evidence to Action

SIX INVESTMENT PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENTS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

What the evidence shows, how governments should invest,
and how to build the evidence still needed

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THE CHALLENGE

Violence against women remains the most widespread human rights violation in the world. On [WHO's latest global estimates](#), around one in three women, at least once in their lifetime, some 840 million, have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, sexual violence from someone other than a partner, or both. Progress is glacial: [prevalence has fallen by only about 0.2 per cent a year over the past two decades](#). At the most extreme end, [in 2024 some 83,300 women and girls were killed intentionally, and 60 per cent were killed by an intimate partner or another family member](#). What has changed is the evidence: we now know much more about [what can prevent violence](#), [what can strengthen responses](#), and [where major uncertainties remain](#). The task for governments is to act on that evidence and use limited resources both strategically and carefully.

Yet government investment is not always aligned with the evidence, and evidence gaps remain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The challenge is therefore twofold: to invest in what we currently know works while continuing to build the evidence needed to improve policy and practice. This paper sets out six priorities to help governments make transparent choices, adapt approaches to local realities and build evidence as they act.

HOW WE WEIGH THE EVIDENCE

Three levels of confidence run through the paper.

-  **Established** means multiple rigorous studies point the same way. There is enough here to act at scale now.
-  **Emerging** means solid evidence from several studies with promising results, but more evaluation and scale-up is needed before we can be fully confident.
-  **Exploratory** means the evidence is early, limited or mixed. These approaches may merit carefully targeted investment, but only when implementation is accompanied by strong monitoring, learning and evaluation.

These confidence levels draw on different kinds of evidence. In most cases they reflect the strength of impact evidence from evaluation. In some cases, particularly where a measure is a recognised foundation for rights and accountability, they also reflect international legal standards and established normative consensus.

The evidence is also much stronger for some forms of violence than others. Much of the intervention evidence relates to intimate partner violence, with less evidence on what works to prevent and respond to other forms of violence against women and girls.

HOW EVIDENCE SHOULD SHAPE INVESTMENT

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE	GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT APPROACH	EVIDENCE-BUILDING REQUIREMENT
ESTABLISHED	Institutionalise and take to scale through national systems, with sustained financing and attention to quality.	Monitor reach, equity, implementation quality and longer-term outcomes.
EMERGING	Expand carefully in appropriate settings rather than treating the approach as universally proven.	Embed implementation research, comparative evaluation and adaptation from the outset.
EXPLORATORY	Fund selectively as innovation, not as routine national policy.	Use clear learning questions, ethical safeguards and independent evaluation before wider adoption.

THE SIX PRIORITIES

Each priority applies the approach above, matching the strength of government investment to the strength of the evidence and building the evidence needed as it acts.



Know your epidemic: invest in sub-national data

WHY IT MATTERS

You cannot respond effectively to an epidemic you have not measured. National averages can hide the communities carrying the heaviest burden and facing the greatest barriers to services, and [administrative data](#) from police and health systems compounds the problem, capturing only reported cases, a small and unrepresentative share of the real picture. Without reliable and ethically collected data, resources risk being allocated according to visibility, political pressure or assumption rather than need.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Across high- and low-income settings, disaggregated prevalence data can support better-targeted policy and more efficient resource allocation when it is timely, sufficiently detailed and used. Countries with established measurement systems, including regular violence against women modules in population surveys, are better placed to identify disparities and track change. However, measurement alone does not improve policy: analytical capacity, political commitment and clear links between findings, planning and budgeting are also required. In many low- and middle-income countries, these systems remain incomplete.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established that national prevalence surveys using validated methods produce reliable estimates of the scale and patterning of violence. **Emerging** for how best to generate and use sub-national estimates to guide planning and resource allocation in low- and middle-income settings.

WHAT IT COSTS

A dedicated, nationally representative prevalence survey can be a significant investment. Governments should assess whether existing survey platforms can be strengthened before commissioning separate exercises. Investment is also needed in ethical safeguards, data quality, analysis and use. Building sustained national analytical capacity may take longer, but it benefits multiple policy areas and reduces dependence on short-term external expertise. The [kNOwVAWdata initiative](#) offers a model that can be adapted and expanded.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Commission or strengthen ethically designed national prevalence surveys that can provide useful sub-national estimates where feasible. At the same time, work towards harmonising definitions and indicators across health, justice, police and social services, while recognising that administrative and prevalence data serve different purposes. This is demanding but achievable: the [European Union is working to harmonise administrative data](#) across these sectors through common standards and definitions, although full cross-sector comparability remains a work in progress.

Where appropriate measures already exist, including for [technology-facilitated gender-based violence \(TFGBV\)](#), adapt and test them for the local context rather than developing new measures from scratch. Invest in national and sub-national analytical capacity and require clear plans for how findings will inform policy, budgeting and service allocation. Prioritise locally led research partnerships so that evidence production, interpretation and use remain nationally owned.

When designing and implementing prevalence surveys, use [WHO's checklist for ensuring the quality of violence against women surveys](#). For administrative data, draw on [UN Women and WHO's global technical guidance on improving the collection and use of administrative data on violence against women](#).

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

The most appropriate frequency, sampling design and level of sub-national estimation in low-resource settings. And, perhaps most important, which institutional arrangements consistently turn data into planning, budgeting and programme adaptation rather than reports that are produced and shelved.





Build and enforce comprehensive legal frameworks

WHY IT MATTERS

Law provides a foundation for prevention, protection and accountability, but legislation alone does not change survivors' experiences. Effective legal frameworks need clear mandates, accessible remedies, adequate budgets, trained personnel and accountability for implementation. Without these, rights may exist on paper while survivors continue to face delay, disbelief, discrimination and harm.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Comprehensive legislation, when accompanied by implementation and enforcement, is associated with stronger protection and higher help-seeking, but evidence that legislation alone reduces prevalence is less certain. Countries with domestic violence legislation do report lower rates of intimate partner violence than those without ([9.5 per cent compared to 16.1 per cent](#)), though this is a cross-country association rather than evidence that the legislation itself drives the difference, since countries that legislate also tend to differ in wealth, education and gender norms. Evidence on protection orders is more specific: when properly issued and enforced, they are associated with reductions in repeat violence, although evidence comes largely from high-income countries, [where protection orders have been associated with lower rates of intimate partner violence](#). Evidence from lower-resourced settings is thinner and implementation more challenging. In South Africa, for example, protection orders have long been available, [yet women face significant personal, social and legal barriers to obtaining and finalising them](#). The [Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021](#) sought to address some of these gaps, but its effect will depend on consistent implementation. Similarly, [a growing number of countries have criminalised the non-consensual sharing of intimate images](#), but whether these reforms reduce prevalence or improve survivor outcomes remains largely untested.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established that a comprehensive legal framework is a necessary foundation for prevention, protection and accountability. **Emerging** that such legislation, as part of a well-implemented system, improves protection and help-seeking; its effect on prevalence is less certain. **Emerging** for protection orders with effective enforcement. **Exploratory** for TFGBV-specific legal frameworks.

WHAT IT COSTS

Legislative reform may be relatively inexpensive, but meaningful implementation is not. The larger investment lies in accessible legal aid, trained police, prosecutors and judges, functioning case management, survivor-centred procedures, monitoring and oversight. These systems exist in some form in most countries, but reform, resourcing and accountability are required if legal protection is to become real in practice.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Audit existing laws and procedures against international (e.g. [CEDAW](#)) and regional standards on violence against women, including [current guidance on technology-facilitated violence](#), and publish a costed implementation plan with clear responsibilities and timelines. UN Women's [Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women](#) and [Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women](#) offer detailed guidance and promising practice for both the legislative audit and the plan. Establish or expand free and accessible legal aid. Strengthen risk assessment, enforcement and monitoring of protection orders, including firearm restrictions where legally appropriate. Build accountable, repeated learning across the justice chain rather than relying on one-off training. Track implementation and survivor experience, and fund locally led research to identify where legal processes fail in practice and which reforms improve safety and access to justice. The [UN Essential Services Package](#) sets out core elements and quality standards for justice and policing responses to violence against women and girls. Together with the [UNODC and UN Women Handbook on Gender-Responsive Police Services](#), it provides an important reference point and practical benchmark for strengthening the quality of police and justice responses.

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

Key gaps remain in the evidence on how TFGBV can be effectively regulated, how enforcement can be sustained in low-resource justice systems, and how family court proceedings and parental alienation allegations affect women and children over the long term — particularly in low- and middle-income settings.



Invest in services that work for survivors

WHY IT MATTERS

Every system a survivor turns to should be able to respond safely, respectfully and effectively. Yet health, police, justice and social services are often fragmented, under-resourced or, at times, harmful. Rather than investing heavily in particular service models because they are visible or politically attractive, governments should ensure that wherever survivors seek help, they receive appropriate first-line support and can access the additional services they need.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

The strongest evidence supports specific health-sector responses: good first-line support and clinical care, clear referral pathways, and ongoing training and support for providers. Women experiencing violence are often more likely to come into contact with health services than with police or courts, [making health an important point of entry](#). WHO-aligned approaches, including the [LIVES first-line support model](#), can improve provider knowledge, identification,

support and referral, although results depend on supervision, organisational readiness and functioning services.

Evidence for specialist service models is less consistent. [Evaluation of Brazil's women's police stations](#) found reductions in female homicide among younger women in metropolitan areas, but not elsewhere, illustrating the importance of context and implementation. [Evidence on one-stop centres is weak](#): a systematic review of 42 studies across 24 low- and middle-income countries found persistent implementation barriers and insufficient rigorous evidence of improvements in access, quality of care, health or wellbeing. Some studies report greater survivor satisfaction, but investment has outpaced evidence of improved safety and outcomes.

Responses also need to address those who use violence. [Evidence on perpetrator programmes remains mixed](#), although more tailored approaches show promise.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established for first-line health response and provider preparation when supported by functioning systems. **Emerging** for specialist police responses in some settings. **Exploratory** for one-stop centres, particularly evidence of improved survivor safety and outcomes.

WHAT IT COSTS

Integrating first-line response and referral into pre-service education, ongoing training, supervision and routine quality improvement is likely to be more sustainable than stand-alone training. Specialist units require dedicated budgets, management and oversight, while one-stop centres can be costly to establish and operate. Evidence on their cost-effectiveness is insufficient to prioritise new centres over strengthening existing services and referral systems in resource-constrained settings.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Make survivor-centred first-line support and referral a routine part of health services, using validated tools such as [WHO's first-line support materials](#), and embed these approaches in pre-service education, supervision and quality assurance. Establish clear and tested pathways between health, social services, justice and police, without shifting responsibility onto survivors or exposing them to further risk.

Develop evidence-informed responses for people at high risk of repeated or escalating violence, linked to survivor safety, risk assessment and accountability. Before expanding one-stop centres, evaluate existing services, survivor outcomes, reach and costs, and compare these with investment in strengthening services across the system. Fund locally led implementation research to identify which approaches work, for whom and under what conditions.

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

We need to know more about how to sustain good health-sector responses at scale; which elements of one-stop centres, if any, improve survivor outcomes and whether they can be delivered more efficiently; and which interventions for people who use violence reduce repeat violence over the long term. Important gaps also remain around responses to adolescents who use violence and technology-facilitated perpetration.



Invest in prevention

WHY IT MATTERS

Prevention is underfunded and often among the first areas cut when budgets tighten. Yet response alone cannot reduce the future incidence of violence. Governments need both to protect and support survivors and to invest in approaches that address the social, economic and institutional drivers of violence before it occurs.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

There is now good evidence that violence against women and girls can be prevented within programmatic timeframes. Much of this evidence is organised around the WHO and UN Women RESPECT framework, which identifies seven prevention strategies. [A 2025 global systematic review of reviews](#), updating the [RESPECT](#) evidence base, found substantial evidence of effectiveness across several strategies, while also showing considerable variation between interventions and contexts.

No single model works everywhere. Across approaches, programme design and implementation matter. The UK government funded [What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls](#) programme shows that [successful interventions](#) tend to address gender and power explicitly, use participatory approaches that build skills and critical reflection, provide sufficient intensity and duration, and invest in skilled facilitators and high-quality implementation. Gender-transformative and women's empowerment approaches have a particularly strong evidence base, while findings for some economic and relationship-focused interventions are more mixed. Brief, stand-alone awareness activities are unlikely to produce sustained behavioural change.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established for several well-designed gender-transformative and women's empowerment approaches, and for the importance of implementation quality and sufficient intensity. **Emerging** for economic strengthening combined with gender-transformative approaches across different settings.

WHAT IT COSTS

Cost data remain limited and context-specific. [SASA!, a community mobilisation intervention evaluated in Kampala, cost approximately USD 5 per person per year over four years](#), with an estimated cost of around USD 460 per case of past-year physical intimate partner violence averted. These estimates are uncertain and should not be transferred directly to other settings. Governments need better comparative data on costs, reach, equity and outcomes to inform investment decisions.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Create protected prevention budgets and make spending visible across ministries. Provide multi-year funding so that programmes have sufficient time to work and organisations can retain skilled staff. Shift resources away from short, stand-alone awareness activities towards approaches with stronger evidence and sufficient intensity to achieve change.

Invest directly in women's rights organisations and feminist movements, and design funding mechanisms that smaller organisations can access. Keep monitoring, evaluation and learning requirements proportionate so that they support accountability without inadvertently excluding smaller organisations.

Invest in locally led adaptation and implementation research and make prevention a responsibility across government – including education, health, social protection, finance and local government – rather than the responsibility of the gender ministry alone. [UN Women's Together for Prevention handbook](#) provides guidance and examples for developing multisectoral, whole-of-government approaches to preventing violence against women and girls.

[UN Women's guidance on gender-responsive budgeting](#) provides practical approaches to making spending visible and accountable, while the [South African Child Gauge 2025](#) provides a useful national example of tracking financing for violence prevention and response across government departments.

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

We still need better evidence on the intensity and duration required for different approaches; how to reach population scale without losing quality; whether effects are sustained after programmes end; and the costs and cost-effectiveness of different approaches at scale.



Using national systems to achieve population reach

WHY IT MATTERS

Specialist programmes cannot reach everyone, but schools, health and social protection systems, parenting and family services, and local government already reach large parts of the population. These systems offer opportunities to take prevention to scale, but integration alone does not guarantee results. Prevention needs adequate resources, skilled delivery, leadership and monitoring. Starting early matters, but prevention should continue through adolescence and adulthood rather than being treated as a one-off curriculum or intervention.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

The [INSPIRE](#) and [RESPECT](#) frameworks bring together evidence on several prevention approaches that can be delivered through existing systems. [School-based programmes](#) addressing gender, relationships and violence can improve some violence-related outcomes, particularly when they are participatory, sustained and appropriate to age and context. [Parenting programmes](#) have a strong evidence base for reducing harsh and violent parenting and improving child and parent outcomes, although evidence that they also reduce intimate partner violence is less developed. [Economic and social protection interventions](#) are more likely to affect violence when they deliberately address gender, power and relationships rather than providing economic support alone.

Across these approaches, implementation matters: simply adding prevention content to an existing service or curriculum is unlikely to be enough. For technology-facilitated gender-based violence, education on digital consent, harmful online behaviours and help-seeking is increasingly important, but evidence on effective prevention approaches remains limited.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established for parenting interventions to reduce harsh and violent parenting. **Emerging** for school-based violence prevention and for approaches combining economic strengthening with work on gender and power. **Exploratory** for interventions specifically designed to prevent TFGBV.

WHAT IT COSTS

Using existing systems can increase reach, but it is not cost-free. Integration requires workforce preparation, supervision, safeguarding, monitoring and recurrent funding. Governments therefore need to budget for sustained delivery, rather than funding curriculum development or initial training alone.

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Invest in parenting and school-based prevention approaches with evidence of effectiveness, adapting them carefully to new contexts rather than continually creating new programmes. Build violence prevention objectives and dedicated budgets into education, health, social protection and local government plans. Where appropriate, integrate gender-transformative components into parenting, economic strengthening and social protection programmes. When adapting proven programmes to new contexts, [use a systematic process to assess context, test and refine adaptations, and monitor whether programme quality and core components are maintained as coverage expands](#).

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

We need better evidence on which approaches retain their effects at scale; how to sustain quality when prevention is integrated into large public systems; which approaches work best at different stages of childhood and adolescence; and how to prevent TFGBV as technologies and patterns of use change.



Resource and protect civil society to lead, learn and hold governments to account

WHY IT MATTERS

Governments cannot end violence against women through state institutions alone. Autonomous women's rights organisations connect policy to lived experience, support survivors, build demand for change and hold institutions to account. Their independence matters: they need to be able to challenge government, scrutinise budgets and expose gaps between commitments and implementation.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE AND PRACTICE SHOW

[Cross-national evidence identifies strong autonomous feminist movements as a major driver of progressive policy change on violence against women](#). More recent initiatives, including [ACT to End Violence Against Women](#), reinforce the importance of women's rights organisations and feminist movements in shaping policy, building coalitions and sustaining accountability. Civil society should be involved throughout the cycle of change: from setting priorities and shaping policy to monitoring implementation and holding governments to account.

EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE

Established for the role of autonomous feminist movements in driving progressive policy change on violence against women.

HOW THIS WORK SHOULD BE RESOURCED

Civil society needs predictable, flexible and multi-year funding, including adequate core and indirect costs and resources for advocacy, evidence generation, movement-building and organisational wellbeing and security. Funding should be accessible to smaller and locally rooted organisations, with proportionate reporting requirements. Public funding should not compromise independence: allocation needs to be transparent and protected from political interference. [ACT similarly calls for sustained, long-term and flexible funding for women's rights organisations and feminist movements](#).

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO NOW

Recognise civil society as an independent accountability partner, not only a service provider. Create meaningful opportunities for women's rights organisations to shape national and local plans, budgets and reviews. Publish expenditure and implementation data so civil society can assess progress. Protect freedom of association, expression and peaceful organising. Establish flexible, multi-year funding for autonomous women's rights organisations and networks, including support for locally led research and the use of evidence to hold institutions to account.

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE GOVERNMENTS NEED

Important gaps remain in the global evidence base, and these should shape future investment. They are not reasons to delay action where sufficient evidence already exists, but reasons to invest strategically in the gaps that matter most for policy and practice.

We need stronger evidence on what drives violence, what changes perpetrator behaviour, and which prevention and response approaches are effective across different forms of violence. Gaps remain in relation to perpetration, sexual violence prevention and response, violence affecting women and girls who are underrepresented in existing research, and how approaches perform across different settings and populations. New and evolving forms of violence, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), also require continued attention. [Research priorities](#) developed collectively with the field can help identify and guide investment towards the questions that matter most for policy and practice.

We also need stronger evidence on how to deliver accessible, ethical and survivor-centred responses. This includes health, psychosocial, justice, policing and social services, and how these services can work together effectively. Research needs to look beyond whether services exist to whether women can access them safely, whether they meet different survivors' needs, and whether they improve outcomes without causing further harm. Governments also need evidence on how effective responses can be adapted to different settings and delivered sustainably at scale.

The evidence base itself has important structural weaknesses. Evidence on costs, cost-effectiveness and affordability remains limited, with much more known about whether interventions can be effective than about their cost per person or outcome, or their feasibility at scale. Governments and funders should build proportionate economic analysis into major evaluations and support shared costing approaches that enable comparison across contexts. Evidence is also geographically and institutionally uneven, with research from low- and middle-income countries concentrated in particular countries and regions and often led by institutions outside the settings where programmes are implemented. Greater investment in locally led research and adaptation is needed so that evidence reflects national systems, priorities and realities.

Finally, long-term and implementation evidence remains limited. Many evaluations measure outcomes at programme end or shortly afterwards, while governments need to know whether effects last, how interventions function within real-world systems, and whether quality and effectiveness can be maintained as programmes are adapted and taken to scale. Investment should therefore include longer-term follow-up and implementation research, with mechanisms to feed findings back into policy, programming and budgets.





PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTMENT

Across these six priorities, several principles should guide government investment.

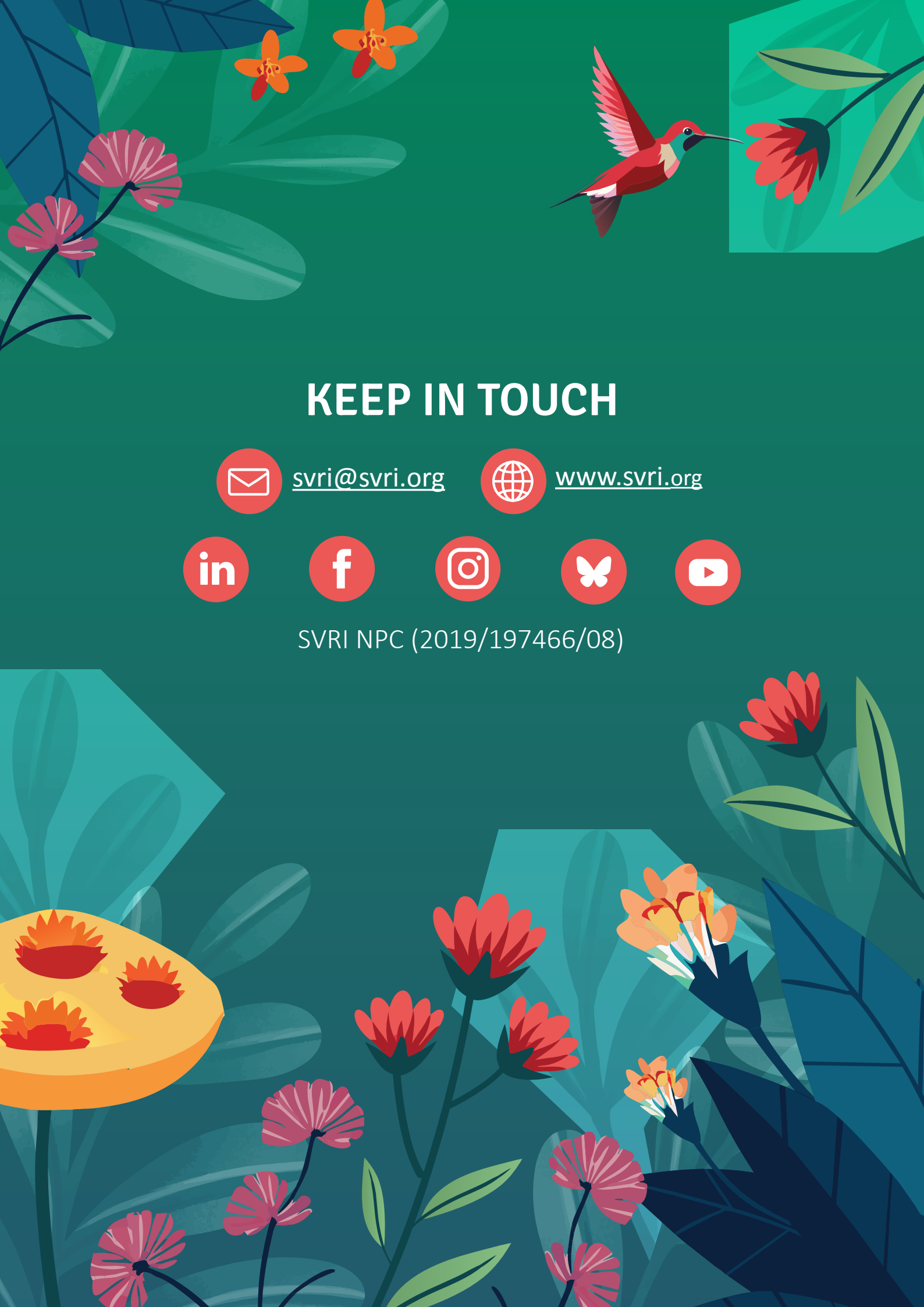
- Follow the evidence. Scale approaches with evidence of effectiveness, evaluate emerging approaches, and invest carefully in innovation where important gaps remain.
- Strengthen systems, not isolated projects. Embed effective approaches within the institutions, services and systems that can sustain them.
- Build evidence as you act. Invest in locally led research and use findings to strengthen implementation, inform budgets and guide scale-up.
- Work with and resource civil society. Ensure women's rights organisations and feminist movements have the resources and space to shape policy, contribute expertise and hold governments to account.
- Invest for the long term. Provide predictable, multi-year funding to sustain prevention, quality services and the skilled people needed to deliver them.
- Build on what already exists. Adapt and strengthen proven tools and approaches for different contexts rather than continually starting again.

Taken together, these gaps point to a clear approach: governments should invest in what the evidence already supports while building evidence where uncertainty remains. This requires investment decisions that are sustained, locally grounded, open to learning and matched to the strength of the evidence.



EVIDENCE CONFIDENCE AT A GLANCE

FINDING/APPROACH	CONFIDENCE
National prevalence surveys using validated methods	Established
Using sub-national estimates to guide investment and planning.....	Emerging
Comprehensive legal frameworks as a foundation for protection and accountability.....	Established
Well-implemented legislation improving protection and help-seeking	Emerging
Protection orders with effective enforcement	Emerging
TFGBV-specific legal frameworks.....	Exploratory
First-line health response and provider preparation.....	Established
Specialist police responses	Emerging
One-stop centres improving survivor outcomes	Exploratory
Gender-transformative and women’s empowerment prevention approaches.....	Established
Economic strengthening combined with gender-transformative approaches	Established
Parenting interventions to reduce harsh and violent parenting.....	Established
School-based violence prevention	Emerging
TFGBV-specific prevention.....	Exploratory
Autonomous feminist movements as drivers of progressive VAW policy change.....	Established
Stand-alone perpetrator programmes	Exploratory



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