

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**  
**United Nations Children's Fund**

**Expert meeting on statistics on children**

Geneva, Switzerland, 4–6 March 2024

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Data collection on violence against children in the  
framework of surveys on violence against women  
in the EU**

**Note by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)\***

*Abstract*

Ever since the first EU-wide survey on violence against women by FRA in 2012 (published 2014), the EU has taken steps towards regular survey data collection to inform policies to prevent violence against women and assist and protect victims. Besides collecting detailed data on women's experiences of violence during their adult lives, both FRA's 2012 survey as well as the latest surveys conducted in EU Member States in 2020-2024 provide data on women's experience of physical, sexual and psychological violence and harassment in childhood, and children's exposure to incidents of intimate partner violence taking place at home.

In 2023-2024, FRA – jointly with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) – is conducting a survey on violence against women in eight EU Member States, to complement the data collection carried out by the national statistical authorities in the other EU Member States and to develop a comprehensive overview of the situation across all 27 EU Member States. This work is based on the methodology outlined by Eurostat in the context of the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV), to ensure comparability of data across countries and their relevance to EU policy making.

This paper will discuss the ways in which a survey on violence against women provides a framework for collecting data concerning violence against children and the impact of violence for children's lives in the EU. The paper will examine the changes in the measurement approach compared with FRA's 2012 survey and will present selected, preliminary results based on the EU-GBV survey.

\*Prepared by Sami Nevala (FRA)

NOTE: The designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

## I. Introduction

1. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted the first European Union (EU) wide survey on violence against women, interviewing 42,000 women in 28 countries. The data collection for this survey was carried out in 2012, followed by the first results published in 2014.<sup>1</sup>
2. In 2020-2023, some 10 years after FRA's first survey, Eurostat has coordinated the efforts of statistical authorities in the EU to carry out large-scale survey data collection on gender-based violence against women, complemented by data collection conducted jointly by FRA and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in eight EU Member States, to obtain an overview of the current situation across the EU.
3. Both FRA's 2012 survey and the more recent surveys collect data, among other survey topics, concerning violence against children, mainly in two ways:
  - Women's experiences of violence where the incidents occurred before the age of 15
  - Women reporting in the survey that their children have been exposed to violence in their home by witnessing (seeing or hearing) incidents that took place between the parents/guardians, as well as women's own childhood experiences of witnessing such incidents.
4. These survey results can be used – along with data from other sources – to better understand the extent and nature of selected forms of violence in childhood as experienced by women and girls, as well as to explore the relationship between women's childhood experiences and violence experienced in adulthood – including experiences of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence since the age of 15. These surveys on violence against women are also a rich data source that covers a large number of countries, with data collected using the same questionnaire across all countries.
5. In addition to the survey on violence against women, FRA is engaged in various other activities to support the protection of children from violence. These efforts include, for example, the agency's research on children as victims or witnesses of crime in judicial proceedings<sup>2</sup>, as well as mapping integrated child protection systems in all EU Member States<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> FRA (2014), Violence against women – an EU-wide survey. Available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> FRA (2017), Child-friendly justice – Perspectives and experiences of children involved in judicial proceedings as victims, witnesses or parties in nine EU Member States. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/child-friendly-justice-perspectives-and-experiences-children-involved-judicial>

<sup>3</sup> FRA (2024), Mapping child protection systems in the EU – Update 2023. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/mapping-child-protection-systems-eu-update-2023>

## II. Latest EU-wide surveys on violence against women

6. In response to the calls for the European Statistical System to conduct regular data collection on violence against women, the Working Group on Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice set up a task force in 2016 to develop a survey on gender-based violence, including a questionnaire and a survey methodology which the statistical authorities of the EU Member States can apply.
7. The work of the task force resulted in the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and related forms of interpersonal violence (EU-GBV survey). EU Member States were invited to carry out the survey on a voluntary basis and, as a result, national statistical authorities in 18 EU Member States have conducted the survey, while Italy contributes to data collection on violence against women through their comprehensive national survey.
8. To fill the gap in availability of data from the remaining eight EU Member States, and to provide for EU-27 aggregate results, FRA (building on its expertise in survey data collection) brought on board EIGE for the joint Violence Against Women Survey II project (VAW II). The survey interviews a representative, nationwide sample of women in each of the eight countries based on the EU-GBV survey questionnaire and methodology. To support and coordinate the implementation of the EU-GBV survey, Eurostat has issued a comprehensive manual which outlines the main survey concepts and activities to implement the survey (including ethical and safety considerations), the survey questionnaire, the output indicators, and the quality assessment criteria<sup>4</sup>. This manual also serves as the basis for FRA and EIGE's data collection in the VAW II survey.
9. To date, selected indicators from the surveys carried out by the national statistical authorities in 18 EU Member States are available on the Eurostat website<sup>5</sup>, with plans to include more countries as well as the EU-27 aggregate results upon completion of the FRA-EIGE data collection. Among the published survey indicators there are selected indicators concerning sexual violence experienced in childhood (before the age of 15), as well as indicators examining women's experiences of violence since the age of 15, with respect to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.

## III. Questions related to violence against children

10. Both FRA's 2012 survey as well as the EU-GBV and VAW II surveys interview women who are 18-74 years of age at the time of data collection. The minimum age of 18 years has

---

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat (2021), Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV) – 2021 edition. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-manuals-and-guidelines/-/ks-gq-21-009>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gender-based-violence/database> . First results of the EU-GBV survey are also made available in November 2022 in Eurostat (2022), EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV) – first results – 2022 edition, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-reports/w/ks-ft-22-005>

been set in view of the sensitive nature of the interviews, as well as requirements in some countries to seek parental consent for interviewing people under the age of 18.

11. Due to the nature of the survey, it has been considered important that the topic of the interview is not disclosed to anyone except the respondent. This is because perpetrators of violence can include members of the respondent's family, and disclosing the topic could jeopardise the safety of the respondent and the interviewer. In addition, it would be very difficult to seek informed consent from the guardians of an underaged respondent without undermining the confidentiality of the interviews while at the same time providing sufficient details of the interview content as a basis for informed consent.
12. Nevertheless, the EU-GBV and VAW II surveys collect data on violence against children – its prevalence and consequences – in various ways, while interviewing women who are 18 years of age or older. This includes asking women in the survey about the experiences they had earlier in life, including childhood, as well as asking whether children who live in the same household as the respondent have been exposed to violence between the respondent and her partner. Similar questions were also included in FRA's 2012 survey, and the results have been reported by FRA<sup>6</sup>.
13. While the respondents in these surveys are at least 18 years old, the sections of the survey that collect data on women's experiences of violence perpetrated by non-partners (that is, people such as colleagues, acquaintances or strangers) refer to experiences that took place since the time women were 15 years old. This age cut-off is used in many surveys collecting data on violence against women, including those carried out by the World Health Organization<sup>7</sup>.
14. In contrast, the sections of the survey that ask about incidents where the perpetrator was an intimate partner do not apply a specific cut-off point in terms of the time when the incidents have taken place – that is, the questions refer to experiences that have taken place in the relationship, without specifying when, so that some of these experiences may have occurred before the age of 15 if that is when the relationship started. This provides a further possibility to analyse the survey data and examine women's experiences of violence in childhood. However, carrying out this analysis is challenging given the more limited number of respondents in the survey who describe the events taking place in their relationship when they were under the age of 18 or, in the case of violence perpetrated by non-partners, incidents that took place when the respondent was between 15-17 years old. Therefore, the main source of data concerning women's experiences of violence in childhood comes from specific questions in the survey focusing on experiences that took place before the respondent was 15 years of age.

#### **IV. Personal experiences of violence before the age of 15**

15. The EU-GBV survey – and the VAW II survey by FRA and EIGE – collects data concerning women's (18-74 years of age) experiences of violence that took place before they were 15

---

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 7 in FRA (2014), Violence against women – an EU-wide survey. Available at [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> WHO (2005), Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241593512>

years old. This includes questions concerning psychological violence – experiences of being belittled or humiliated – and physical violence by a respondent’s mother or father. These questions are followed by questions concerning selected acts of sexual violence that the respondent may have experienced before the age of 15, by various perpetrators including male or female family members, relatives, acquaintances or strangers.

### Box 1

#### Questions used in the EU-GBV survey and VAW II survey concerning respondent’s experiences of sexual violence before the age of 15

**Question P9 (EU-GBV): Before you were 15 years old, did anyone, male or female, do any of the following things?**

- Make you pose naked in front of any person or in photographs, video or an internet webcam when you did not want to do this
- Touch your private parts – genitals or breasts – when you did not want them to
- Make you touch his/her private parts – genitals or breasts – when you did not want them to
- Make you watch or look at pornographic material – when you did not want to
- Make you do something else sexual – when you did not want to

(Answer categories for each item: Yes, No, Don’t want to answer, Don’t know/Can’t remember)

**Question P11 (EU-GBV): Before you were 15 years old, did anyone, male or female, ever force you to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?**

(Instruction to interviews to read out as necessary: By sexual intercourse, we mean here vaginal or anal penetration or oral sex or penetration with objects)

(Answer categories: Yes, No, Don’t want to answer, Don’t know/Can’t remember)

16. Regarding experiences of sexual violence, the survey collects information concerning the type of perpetrator(s) involved, frequency of incidents and respondent’s age at the time when the first such incident took place. Respondents can also indicate whether they have informed anyone about the sexual violence they experienced before the age of 15, for example a family member or a friend, someone at school such as a teacher or other professional, police, or victim support organisation.
17. Starting in November 2022, Eurostat has published selected indicators from the EU-GBV survey, updating Eurostat’s online database on a rolling basis as more countries completed their data collection. At the time of writing, available results include data from 18 EU Member States as well as selected other countries outside the EU where the EU-GBV survey has been conducted. The database includes selected indicators with results concerning women’s experiences of sexual violence before the age of 15, by respondent’s age (at the time of data collection), type of perpetrator involved in the sexual violence incidents, and the type of person or service which victims informed about their experiences.

18. Based on countries for which data is available (18 EU Member States, EU-GBV survey), depending on the country - between 1.6 and 13.7 per cent of women have experienced sexual violence before they were 15 years old. The highest prevalence is found in Finland (13.7 %), Denmark (12.4 %) and the Netherlands (12.3 %), and the lowest in Bulgaria (2.2 %), Poland (1.8 %) and Lithuania (1.6 %)<sup>8</sup>. Differences between countries in reported rates of violence are to be expected in survey research. This can reflect the extent to which respondents feel able to disclose abuse during a survey interview, which can also be influenced by cultural norms about reporting intimate acts<sup>9</sup>. Overall, out of the 18 EU Member States for which data are available, in seven EU Member States under 5 % of women have experienced sexual violence before the age of 15 years, compared with five to ten percent in 7 EU Member States, and over ten percent in 4 EU Member States. For the moment, these results don't provide a full overview of the situation in the EU, but a more detailed analysis will be possible later in 2024 as additional results can be added to the data based upon completion of the FRA - EIGE data collection in eight EU Member States.
19. The preliminary results of 18 EU Member States also show that a majority – depending on the country, between 81 % and 98 % – of the women indicate that the perpetrator of sexual violence before the age of 15 was male. Furthermore, between 64.3 % and 26.8 % of women victims of sexual violence before the age of 15 had disclosed their experiences to someone – often a friend or a family member, more rarely police, health service or a victim support organisation, social services, or somebody at school. Examining the results at the country level, between 7.5 % and 21.7 %<sup>10</sup> of women indicate that they reported any episode of sexual violence before the age of 15 to any authority, including police, health services or school personnel ranges.

## V. Questions concerning other experiences of violence before the age of 15, and experiences of children living in the same household

20. In addition to experiences of sexual violence before the age of 15, the EU-GBV survey and the VAW II FRA-EIGE survey include several other questions concerning experiences of violence before the age of 15, including experiences of the respondent as well as exposure to violence – incidents which the respondent has witnessed as a child, or incidents against the respondent witnessed by children living in the same household. The following list provides an overview of the questions included in the survey concerning these experiences.

### *Respondent's experiences*

- Experiencing physical violence before the age of 15 – incidents where the perpetrator was the respondent's mother or father

---

<sup>8</sup> The result for Lithuania is flagged as having low reliability, based on rules used to note results which are based on a smaller number of observations in the survey.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of factors contributing to differences between countries with respect to prevalence of violence against women, as an example, see pp. 22-26 in FRA (2014), Violence against women – an EU-wide survey. Available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> This range excludes results which are flagged in the Eurostat database as having low reliability.

- Experiencing stalking before the age of 15
- Experiencing selected forms of online or offline abuse before the age of 15
- Whether intimate partner has been violent against the respondent during her pregnancy, and whether the frequency of violent behaviour increased during pregnancy
- Whether respondent was limited in her ability to do housework and take care of children after an incident of violence by an intimate partner

*Experiences of children living in the household where intimate partner violence takes place*

- Whether children were present when intimate partner was violent against the respondent
  - Whether any child has seen or heard it when the intimate partner was violent against the respondent
  - Whether respondent before the age of 15 ever witnessed psychological or physical abuse between her parents.
21. With respect to experiences of violence in childhood, the published results from the EU-GBV survey are currently limited to experiences of sexual violence. The results concerning other experiences – based on the survey questions listed above – will be examined in future analysis of the survey results, including the analysis which FRA and EIGE will conduct jointly with Eurostat.

## VI. Conclusion

22. EU-GBV and VAW II surveys will provide various opportunities to analyse experiences of violence against children, both in terms of women's experiences before the age of 15 as well as incidents where children witness intimate partner violence in their home – with respect to respondent's children as well as the respondent, as a child, witnessing intimate partner violence between her parents. These data from the survey concerning violence against children comes in addition to the surveys collecting detailed data on women's experiences of violence during their adult lives, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.
23. While the latest available EU-GBV survey results concerning violence against children relate to experiences of sexual violence in childhood as one of the key indicators of the survey, the full data set will include data concerning other experiences related to other forms of violence against children, such as psychological violence and physical violence. These results will be examined in the comparative analysis which FRA, EIGE and Eurostat will carry out, upon completion of data collection activities in all survey countries. The results of this analysis will be made available in 2024 and 2025 in a series of outputs, including a comprehensive results report scheduled for publication in 2025.
24. The results of the EU-GBV and VAW II surveys should be considered alongside other efforts made by the EU to strengthen data collection on violence against children, including

the harmonisation and further use of both administrative statistics and survey statistics, as well as available qualitative research, and with due attention to intersectionality.

---