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Expert meeting on statistics on children

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**Draft implementation strategy on International
Classification on Violence Against Children
(ICVAC)**

**Note by UNICEF Headquarters, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and
Monitoring***

Abstract

Measuring the prevalence and nature of violence against children (VAC) is challenging. Though there have been some efforts to standardize the measurement of VAC across countries, international consistency and comparability of statistics do not yet exist. The [International Classification on Violence against Children \(ICVAC\)](#) attempts to address this. The ICVAC is the international instrument to define and classify VAC for the purpose of statistical measurement and analysis. It was adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 54th Session (28 February - 3 March 2023). After its adoption, UNICEF - as its custodian - initiated the development of an implementation strategy for the ICVAC. Consultations were held with key data users and producers to understand the current situation in terms of quality and availability of statistical data related to violence against children as well as to identify tools and strategies that should be developed to foster implementation of the ICVAC. This paper summarizes the key takeaways of the consultations and briefly describes the content of each of four main strategic pillars proposed for the implementation of the ICVAC.

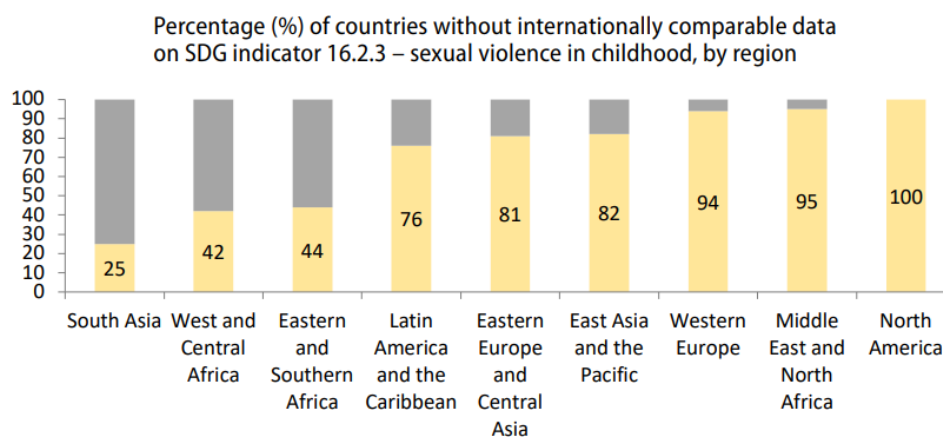
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I. Introduction

1. Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers, neighbours, strangers and other children. Such violence can inflict harm, pain and humiliation on children; and it can also kill them.
2. The [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and other international human rights treaties and standards guarantee the protection of children from all forms of violence. However, available [evidence](#) shows that children – regardless of their background and circumstances – endure violence, and millions more are at risk of violence. Violence against children can have both immediate and long-term consequences. The 2022 “[Guidance on Statistics on Children: Spotlight on Children exposed to violence, in alternative care, and with a disability](#)” (hereafter: 2022 Guidance) underlines some of these, e.g., that children who have been severely abused or neglected are often hampered in their development, experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school. They may have low self-esteem and suffer from depression, which can lead, at worst, to risky behaviour and self-harm. Witnessing violence can cause similar distress. Children who grow up in a violent household or community tend to internalize that behaviour as a way of resolving disputes, repeating the pattern of violence and abuse against their own spouses and children. Beyond the negative effects on individuals and families, violence against children carries serious economic and social costs in both lost potential and reduced productivity.
3. Over the last decade, recognition of the pervasive nature and impact of violence against children has grown. In 2015, the global community made a commitment to end all forms of violence against children by 2030, with the launch of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) that include specific targets for measuring progress related to this. The 2021 [European Union \(EU\) Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) also calls for “combating violence against children and ensuring child protection” so that children can grow free from violence. Although these commitments resulted in much-needed attention to the importance of preventing and responding to violence against children, the availability of comparable data remains limited, as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1
Percentage of countries without internationally comparable data on SDG indicator 16.2.3 – sexual violence in childhood, by region



Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2020). [A Generation to Protect: Monitoring violence, exploitation and abuse of children within the SDG framework](#)

4. For many reasons, the phenomenon is largely undocumented and underreported. This can fuel the misconception that violence remains a marginal phenomenon. Using data to make violence against children and its many ramifications more visible will bring about a fuller understanding of its magnitude and nature and offering clues to its prevention. This requires systematic investments in data generation and analysis. The evidence that results is essential to monitoring policy and programmatic commitments, informing the development of new programmes, policies and laws and assessing their effectiveness.
5. The UNECE survey that informed the 2022 Guidance found that the majority of responding countries reported the use of administrative data to produce statistics on violence against children. Only 17 countries reported the use of survey data, but these data produced many more indicators than countries relying on administrative data only.
6. Measuring the prevalence and nature of violence against children is challenging. The 2022 Guidance shows that there is not only an issue related to data availability but also with regards to variable quality and coverage of the available data, with mandates to collect data, lack of resources for data collection, inconsistencies and differences in definitions used and the conceptions of what constitutes violence, lack of comparable data, and potential duplication in the recording of cases due to the lack of linked or integrated monitoring systems, among other issues.
7. Though there have been some efforts to standardize the measurement of violence against children across countries, international consistency and comparability of statistics does not yet exist. The [International Classification on Violence against Children \(ICVAC\)](#) attempts to address this. The ICVAC is the international instrument to define and classify violence against children (VAC) for the purpose of statistical measurement and analysis. It was adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 54th Session (28 February - 3 March 2023).
8. After its adoption, UNICEF - as its custodian - initiated the development of an implementation strategy for the ICVAC. A senior consultant was hired and an initial series

of consultations with key stakeholders were held from July to August 2023. More consultations are expected to take place in the coming months.

9. The primary users of the ICVAC at the national level will be the national statistical offices (NSOs) and the line ministries that collect data on violence against children. Data on violence against children involve multiple actors and sectors, such as social protection, health, education, law enforcement and justice, among others. The implementation of the ICVAC at the national level is expected to be a gradual process that will consider the maturity of data collection systems in each country. Based on implementation uptake at the national level, implementation challenges and lessons learned, the ICVAC will be periodically revised and updated.

II. Results from consultations

10. Consultations were held with key data users and producers (list available in the annex), to understand the current situation in terms of quality and availability of statistical data related to violence against children as well as to identify tools and strategies that should be developed to foster implementation of the ICVAC.
11. Key takeaways of consultations are summarised below:
 - At national level, there may be multiple agencies producing some data on VAC including ministries of health, education, social welfare, as well law enforcement and the criminal justice system. However, data harmonisation is a challenge. From available administrative data it is difficult to have a consistent picture of the situation and to assess time trends. The NSO is usually not involved in the production and collection of administrative data on VAC and, in general, there is no dedicated entity leading the work on VAC data.
 - In countries that have survey data on VAC it is thanks to the [Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys \(MICS\)](#) or the [Demographic and Health Surveys \(DHS\)](#). This means that data are available every three to four years. NSOs are usually involved in implementing MICS/DHS surveys. There are no dedicated surveys on VAC that can collect comprehensive and comparable data at regular intervals and in a comparable manner.
 - In general, there is a widespread lack of technical capacity on VAC data at national level, also because of limited involvement of NSOs in this area.
 - VAC includes many forms: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), bullying, sexual violence, homicides, violent discipline, etc. and there is a need for a comprehensive and consistent statistical framework, which the ICVAC provides.
 - Important policy documents or strategies on child protection at national level rarely refer to the need of improving statistical data on VAC.
 - There is a great need of comprehensive and comparable data on VAC. They are needed for several purposes:
 - More effective advocacy about the need to step up efforts on child protection.

- Trend data are needed to assess progress in the reduction of violence against children.
 - Granular data on victims and perpetrators are needed for better programming.
- Data availability and quality varies considerably across regions and countries, depending on interest and capacity of specific institutions. Some countries are more advanced than others in terms of VAC data, even within the same region.
- In many instances, there is a connection between violence against women and violence against children, both in terms of actors and victims of these forms of violence but also in terms of stakeholders or advocates. The harmonisation of respective statistical surveys was voiced as a challenge.
- There are specific ethical problems when collecting data on VAC and they need to be addressed appropriately.
- Among data users, the goal of an international statistical classification is not always clear. For example, it is not always clear that it is a tool to harmonise and improve data rather than to produce and/or make data immediately available. This lack of understanding may generate expectations that data will improve in a very short time frame.
- Apart from a few exceptions, there is a lack of comprehensive analytical products on VAC at national, regional, and international level. Global level figures on VAC are also lacking.
- The inclusion of two indicators on VAC in the SDG framework has been useful to give more visibility to child protection as an important component of sustainable development; however, the impact in terms of improved data availability has been limited¹.
- There is a clear need to raise additional resources to foster implementation of the ICVAC at global and national levels.
- There is a number of on-going partnerships on VAC, especially at regional level (notably in Europe, Latin America, Africa) that can be leveraged to foster the uptake of the ICVAC.

III. ICVAC implementation strategy contents

12. Based on the consultations held to date as well as a review of similar processes, it is proposed that the ICVAC implementation strategy be composed of four main pillars:
 - Preparing the ground for ICVAC implementation
 - Development of methodological tools

¹ See also: [Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda - UNICEF DATA](#).

- Development of knowledge products both at national and international levels
- Implementation framework.

13. The contents of each pillar are briefly described below.

A. Preparing the ground for ICVAC implementation

1. Outreach campaign

14. An outreach campaign should be developed to identify and engage key stakeholders that may be interested in being associated with the ICVAC implementation. These partners should support UNICEF in promoting ICVAC implementation. Examples of such partners include countries (national authorities/NSOs) that can feature as champions of ICVAC implementation and other international agencies that have a common interest in pursuing the improvement of data on VAC (such as the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UN Women)).

2. Information and advocacy campaign

- Prepare advocacy materials to inform key stakeholders about the game-changing role of ICVAC. This campaign should target two main entities - national data producers, national data users - and specific messages should be used to reach each of these groups. An advocacy video is already [available](#), and its dissemination needs to continue.
- Involve UNICEF Country Offices and develop a “call to action” at national level with relevant partners.
- Translate the ICVAC into (at least) the six official languages of the United Nations - translation the six official languages of the United Nations is under way, and the translated versions are expected to become available in early 2024.
- Produce technical booklets to illustrate contents of the ICVAC.
- Organise visibility/advocacy events in international fora, possibly in partnership with other international agencies.

B. Development of methodological tools

15. The development of methodological tools to provide technical guidance to data producers.

1. Methodological guidance to map national administrative statistics systems in ICVAC

16. In most countries, administrative statistics on VAC are already produced by different institutions, such as law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, health authorities and the education system. Practical guidance is needed on how to map national statistical frameworks into the conceptual and definitional framework of ICVAC. Data of this nature inherently suffer from undercounting – as a large share of VAC cases go unreported – and lack of comparability, as each institution gather data according to specific practices and definitions.

2. Development of a comprehensive survey instrument on VAC

17. Current survey data on VAC rely mainly on international multi-topic survey programmes, including MICS and DHS as well as the VACS (US CDC) and [Health Behaviour in School-aged Children \(HBSC, WHO\)](#). Implementation of relevant survey modules on VAC need to be fostered in national surveys that are not part of existing programmes.

C. Development of knowledge products both at national and international levels

1. International data collection

18. The use of the existing international data collection system on VAC for which UNICEF is the custodian, will enable the fostering of data quality, availability and use. Through UNICEF annual country consultation and data collection exercise, it will be possible to monitor to what extent countries are complying with ICVAC, while at the same time identifying implementation challenges. It is key to establish a link between UNICEF global data collection processes and ICVAC.

19. Regional data collection processes, such as VAC data collection through the [TransMonEE](#) network, will also need to be adapted and linked to ICVAC.

2. Global and regional knowledge products on VAC

20. A vital link between data production, data collection and their analysis can support the cycle for better data and better knowledge. It is important to establish this dynamic link, as users need to see tangible results from activities promoting the implementation of the ICVAC.

D. Implementation framework

1. Technical advisory group

- 21.** A technical advisory group should be established to support UNICEF in its role as custodian of ICVAC. The group would comprise of experts from NSOs and other national institutions responsible for the production and dissemination of statistics on VAC. In particular, the group will provide technical advice in the development of methodological tools and training programmes and on the application of ICVAC.

2. Technical assistance activities

- Implementation of technical assistance activities and programmes targeting national data producers.
- Development of an implementation manual on ICVAC as well as development of an on-going capacity building component.
- Priority will be given to activities at the regional level to optimize the use of resources and facilitate the exchange of expertise.

3. Fund-raising activities

- 22.** The implementation of the plan will require additional resources for which availability will determine the pace of completion.

IV. Annex

Consultations held during July-August 2023

UNICEF Offices

Data and Analytics Section, Headquarters

Programme Group, Headquarters

Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office

West and Central Africa Regional Office

Türkiye Country Office

Sierra Leone Country Office

Dominican Republic Country Office

National Statistical Offices

TURKSTAT, Türkiye

ONE, Dominican Republic

STATS SL, Sierra Leone
