

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Agenda

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK ON
STATISTICS ON CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH**

Prepared by UNICEF, UNFPA, Eurostat and UNECE

This document presents considerations for work on statistics on children, adolescents and youth under the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) prepared by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Eurostat and UNECE.

At the October 2019 Bureau meeting, the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia presented their statistical activities related to youth and children, and proposed to review availability and quality of data on children, adolescents and youth. The Bureau requested the UNICEF Regional Office, Eurostat and the Secretariat to prepare a concept note for this work.

*Terms of reference for the Task Force on statistics on children, adolescents and youth are presented in document ECE/CES/BUR/2020/FEB/8/Add.1. **The Bureau reviewed and approved the proposal for work on children, youth and adolescents under CES, including the draft terms of reference for a Task Force.***

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the 67th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in June 2019, UNICEF pointed out the information gaps about youth and children, for example on children in residential care and violence against children, and called for CES to address these gaps (ECE/CES/97). In October 2019, the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia presented its statistical activities to the CES Bureau. The Bureau invited UNICEF to develop a proposal for activities under CES to review the availability and quality of data on children, adolescents and youth. UNICEF, Eurostat and UNECE volunteered to prepare a concept note for work in this area and present it to the February 2020 meeting of the Bureau (ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/23).

**II. DATA GAPS ON CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN THE
REGION**

2. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#)) has been ratified by 196 countries. CRC obliges international organizations, governments, and other stakeholders, to ensure that no child is left out of progress, that every child is supported to fulfil their rights and potential of development, has a supportive family environment, access to justice and is protected from violence, abuse and exploitation. Child protection systems exist to safeguard all children and their families from deprivations of their rights, preventing and responding to

violence, exploitation and abuse of children. The laws, policies, regulations and services that are constitutive of child protection systems, will not function – or at least not function properly – without quality, reliable and comparable data.

3. The [UNICEF 2019 Report on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), highlights that the lack of data is a major challenge to assess status and progress towards achieving SDGs (see Annex for key indicators on children, adolescents and youth). Even in high-income countries, where a larger share of indicators show that progress is more on track than in any other region, some indicators are missing as in other regions of the world. Data gaps in middle and high-income countries exist across sectors: on health and nutrition, quality education and violence, abuse and exploitation. This is due to a combination of factors; some global SDG indicators measure issues that largely do not occur in the UNECE region (e.g., female genital mutilation/cutting) or simply data is not collected even though the issues exist (e.g., child marriage). In some instances, it occurs that data is collected but in a way that is not internationally comparable (e.g. violence against children).

A. Health and education among subgroups of population

4. Other cases of data gaps are related to the fact that indicators in high-income countries are often calculated based on information in administrative data systems. However, these data do not bode well to produce reliable estimates for young children (3 and 4 years old) at population level, for example on quality education, developmental outcomes or malnourishment. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, UNFPA, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), are among the signatories of the 2018 Inclusive Data Charter manifesto, which acknowledges that [...] *“Leave No One Behind,” we need timely, comprehensive, and disaggregated data, to better understand the situation of the poorest and most marginalized [...].* The Inclusive Data Charter members *“[...] commit to improve and strengthen data disaggregation by signing up to this Charter. Between now and 2030, we will work to improve the quality, quantity, financing, and availability of inclusive and disaggregated data as well as the capacity and capability to produce and use it, in accordance with internationally accepted standards and ongoing processes under the auspices of the United Nations”.* The case of lack of data disaggregated by disability status, is relevant to other important population subgroups such as minorities (Roma in Europe and other ethnic minorities elsewhere, migrants). Coverage or access to basic services is difficult to assess without disaggregated data.

III. STANDARD DEFINITIONS: EXISTENCE AND USE

5. To be able to design policies and actions that are adjusted to the reality, to monitor results and learn from success and failure, and to incorporate the learning in other countries, consistent definitions and methodologies should be applied across countries. At a basic level, we need to be able to use common definitions across countries, such as the essential concepts of ‘child’, ‘adolescent’ and ‘youth’. While CRC defines ‘children’ as those individuals under 18 years old, the *General Comment No.20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence* (CRC/C/GC/20, 2016) stipulates that ‘adolescents’ are those persons between 10 and 19 years old, and ‘youth’ are those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years old, according to the *Resolution of the General Assembly, Third Committee A/RES/36/28, 1985*. Most UNECE countries do not apply those definitions consistently, because of national legal definitions of those groups or lack of capacity to report on these age groups in their official statistics.

6. Besides the use of basic standard categories of age disaggregation and factors related to capacities of governments and national statistics systems, one of the main reasons for data gaps for some indicators is the absence of a clear definition and methodology for those indicators. This is the case of the tier III Sustainable Development Goal indicators. In other occasions, the number of cases of relevant populations are very small in absolute numbers and there is no pressure to have international guidance to produce comparable statistics codified in a common manner. This is typically the case of hard to sample populations. There is a third type of cases where despite the existence of a clear international standard definition and methodology, it is not applied in many countries.

7. There are three specific policy relevant cases of data gaps: (a) violence against children and adolescents (including lack of standards); (b) children and adolescents living in institutions (hard to sample); (c) children with disabilities (lack of consistent application of existing standards). In each of those areas, there is expressed demand and political will to have data and indicators. Hence it is now the right time to act to produce sound recommendations to governments to supply quality and timely data.

A. Violence against children, adolescents and youth

8. There has been a great deal of uncertainty around the best way to measure and produce statistics on children's exposure to violence worldwide. The absence of international standards for collecting violence-related data has led to the use of diverse definitions, methodologies, questionnaires and indicators that has usually affected the comparability. There is no robust data on the prevalence, and this has long compromised the ability of countries and the international community to accurately describe the problem and monitor trends, support government planning and budgeting for child protection services, and inform the development and implementation of effective laws, policies and prevention efforts worldwide.

9. Data is critical, in the first instance, for garnering political attention to a subject that is often not well understood or even thought to be a concern. Most incidents of child-related violence take place behind closed doors of which many policy makers are unaware. Without good data, it is not possible to develop evidence-based policies, programmes and interventions to address violence against children, and to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to its prevention. Information on the number of children exposed to different forms of violence, on specific vulnerable groups, on the barriers faced by children in accessing services, and how violence may affect girls and boys differently, are among the necessary data required to inform these efforts.

10. There is a recent effort to address the situation. The Inter-Agency Expert Group of the SDG on Violence Against Children, created in 2018, produced in 2019 a new statistical classification and codebook, with common operational definitions on violence against children. The group is currently overseeing the development, testing and validation of a core set of questions on violence against children, with a focus on those that can be used to report on SDG indicators 16.2.1 'Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month' and 16.2.3 'Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18'. The questions can be integrated into existing data collection efforts or used as part of stand-alone surveys. The group also oversees the development, testing and validation of a core set of tools to strengthen administrative data on violence against children; and works to identify a core set of agreed-on indicators for monitoring violence against children to serve international and national reporting needs.

B. Children and adolescents in institutional care

11. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, many UNECE countries are deinstitutionalising their child care systems. This process implies stopping placing children without parental care in institutional care settings, and promote quality, community-based care and foster care within family settings instead. See for example in this regard the European Union Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013: *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, 2013/112/EU.

12. As it has been recently stated by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/74/133: *Improving data collection, information management and reporting systems related to children without parental care in all settings and situations in order to close existing data gaps and develop global and national baselines, including by investing in quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data through capacity-building, financial support and technical assistance and ensuring that quality data guides policymaking* (20 January 2020, paragraph 35d). There is hence an urgent need to address the lack of comprehensive, accurate and official data on children without parental care, or they will remain in the blind spot of policy and social programs. The challenge here is that accurate, reliable and comparable estimates of the number of children living in alternative care are difficult to obtain due to divergent cultural views and legislations, as well as due to lack of standard definition and methodologies.

13. One example of the challenges concerns the concept of residential care, or institutional care. It varies in practice and in many parts of the world. Facilities such as boarding schools or religious centres and other types of services might be considered as a form of institutional care, depending on the country context. In other contexts, small group homes are so big, that they are difficult to distinguish from large-scale residential facilities and are, therefore, no longer appropriate as policy solutions for alternative care. While there is some general guidance on the main characteristics of small group settings, (for example, limited number of children, having an environment that resembles a family with family-style routines, short-term, and embedded in the community), the precise specifics have not been clarified and agreed across organizations and stakeholders in the region and beyond. For example, today, the existing reporting mechanisms in Europe and Central Asia – TransMonee and Eurostat – do not retain (neither collect) information that distinguish between small group homes and institutional facilities in terms of their capacity of persons.

C. Children, adolescents and youth with disabilities

14. The [2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) states that children with disabilities must enjoy the same rights and freedoms as all other children. Yet, despite significant progress in social sector reforms, children with disabilities remain the most excluded and invisible group of children in Europe and Central Asia. Article 31 of the CRPD mandates the States to “collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention”. The development of relevant policies and actions, however, has often been constrained by a lack of reliable data on children with disabilities. Such data remain very limited in both quantity and quality, making it difficult to quantify the full extent of rights deprivations and discrimination against this particularly disadvantaged group of children.

15. [A joint statement](#) made by the disability community was released and signed by 10 agencies calling for the systematic use of the WG/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning for SDG data collection and disaggregation. Countries conducting the sixth round of the Multiple

Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6) maintained by UNICEF, incorporate the Child Functioning module to disaggregate data by disability status of children 2-17 years. Eurostat included in the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), the WGDS module for adults as an optional module; the National Statistics Institute of Greece, included this module in its 2019 EHIS as well as the WGDS/UNICEF Child Functioning module. UNFPA included in all the population censuses supported in 2020, the WGDS modules for adults. The World Bank's *Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework* (2018) commits to support data disaggregation by disability status in censuses, surveys and administrative data in the mid-term.

16. Most UNECE countries collect some data on the situation of disabled people in different sectors, either by extracting information from national registers or by managing national surveys or modules related to disabled people. These data collection exercises are usually based on different national definitions and therefore not usable in comparative ways, even sometimes within countries across sectors.

IV. PROPOSAL TO CREATE A TASK FORCE

17. Strengthening data on children, adolescents and youth and monitoring the situation requires multiple actors to each play their part. International organizations and inter-governmental bodies are focused on the provision of critical public goods intended to benefit the entire international community, for example the creation of publicly available internationally comparable measures and recommendations. They can also contribute to developing methodologies for new indicators on frontier issues concerning children, and understanding data governance, barriers and bottlenecks at regional and national levels that prevent the use of standards when they exist.

18. While the placement of children in residential care is considered a form of violence against children, and while many cases of children placed in residential care used to be children with disabilities, the three phenomena are analytically different and occurrences are not necessarily linked. Creating and assuring a reliable and valid evidence base in these areas requires that governments systematically collect, aggregate, analyse and disseminate data that are usually generated by organisations and institutions working in different sectoral areas. This is a complex endeavour that national governments have the capacity to deal with, and national statistical offices (NSOs) have a right and legitimate aspiration to coordinate the present complex data environments. Importantly, they also have the capacity to rationalize data production and processing, including integration. Therefore, we propose to the Conference of European Statisticians to create a Task Force to accomplish the following tasks:

a) Review data gaps, sources and collection mechanisms across countries in the UNECE region regarding indicators and disaggregations, in particular in the areas of education, health, violence, care of children without parental care, and disabilities. This review will include the local definitions and use of age-based groups (children, adolescents, youth);

b) Conduct a systematic review across countries and per topic of the use of standards and recommendations, definitions and methodologies that are internationally agreed;

c) Develop a set of recommendations for a harmonized and rationalized improvement of the availability, quality and comparability of statistics on children, adolescents and youth, in particular, in the three areas mentioned.

ANNEX

Key indicators on children, youth and adolescents

Education and health (disaggregation by age, sex, disability status)
Proportion of children 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being (<i>SDG indicator 4.2.2</i>)
Prevalence of overweight among children under 5 (<i>SDG indicator 2.2.2b</i>)
Violence against children (disaggregation by age, sex, disability status)
Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age (<i>SDG indicator 5.2.1</i>)
Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month (<i>SDG indicator 16.2.1</i>)
Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (<i>SDG indicator 16.2.3</i>)
Children without parental care
Children in institutional care (disaggregation by age, sex, disability status):
Number of children in formal residential care at the end of the year
Number of children who entered formal residential care during the year, by reason(s) for placement
Number of children who left formal residential care during the year, by destination upon leaving care/death of child
Children in family-based care (disaggregation by age, sex, disability status):
Number of children in formal family-based care at the end of the year
Number of children in formal foster/kinship/other care at the end of the year
Number of children who entered formal family-based care during the year, by reason(s) for placement
Number of children who left formal family-based care during the year, by destination upon leaving care/death of child
Children with disabilities
Measurement of children with disabilities: indicator definition and data sources