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Reports, guidelines and recommendations prepared under the umbrella of the Conference:

Statistics on children

Guidance on statistics on children: spotlight on children exposed to violence, in alternative care, and with a disability

Prepared by the Task Force on statistics on children, adolescents and youth

Summary

This document is an abridged version of the “Guidance on statistics on children: spotlight on children exposed to violence, in alternative care, and with a disability”. The Guidance was prepared by the Task Force on statistics on children, adolescents and youth, consisting of Canada (chair), Ireland, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America, European Commission, OECD and UNICEF.

This abridged version of the Guidance has been prepared for translation purposes. It includes the introduction, most of chapter 2 on general issues for statistics on children and youth, and the full chapter of conclusions, recommendations, and future work (corresponding to chapter 7 in the full document). Please note that the numbering of the sections in this shortened version does not correspond to the numbering of chapters and sections in the full Guidance.

The full text of the Guidance, which includes chapters on statistics on violence against children, children in alternative care, and children with a disability, a chapter on ethical considerations, the reference list, and annexes was sent to all members of the CES for consultation in March–April 2022 and is available on the Conference webpage at <https://unece.org/statistics/events/CES2022>. Summary of feedback received during the consultation will be provided in document ECE/CES/2022/4/Add.1.

Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the CES plenary session will be invited to endorse the Guidance.



I. Introduction

1. This Guidance aims to improve the availability, quality, and comparability of statistics on children and takes a step towards more harmonized definitions, methodologies, and approaches across the countries participating in the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). It is prepared by a task force that was established by the CES Bureau in February 2020 and chaired by Statistics Canada.

A. Importance and policy relevance

2. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been ratified by 196 countries.¹ CRC obliges State parties 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.

3. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect a global agreement to advance and monitor progress towards international goals, including those related to the rights and wellbeing of children. A 2019 UNICEF Report highlights the lack of data as a major challenge to achieving child-related SDGs.² Even in high-income countries, where a larger share of indicators show that progress is more on track than in other regions, data for some indicators are missing. Data gaps in middle and high-income countries span across sectors, rights and themes: on health and nutrition, quality education, and violence, abuse, and exploitation. Notably, information on specific subpopulations of children such as those with disabilities is rarely available, and children residing outside of family care (in residential or family-based care) are often missing from official statistics.

4. Non-standard definitions and methodologies contribute to data gaps from an international perspective. Inconsistencies exist even for definitions of the most basic and essential concepts such as ‘child’, ‘adolescent’, and ‘youth’. Data may be collected in countries but in a way that is not internationally comparable. Challenges around disaggregation create additional data gaps. For example, administrative data systems do not always include the variables required for disaggregation (e.g. child sex or age) and surveys often lack the sample sizes necessary to study small population subgroups (e.g. children with disabilities). For topics that affect small but usually most vulnerable groups of the child population, there is limited will or capacity to develop harmonized methods or to produce internationally comparable statistics.

5. The lack of statistical standards and the weak or inconsistent adherence to standards and internationally agreed upon definitions in several domains hinder comparability and exacerbate data gaps for all groups but especially for children and youth. Moreover, legal and ethical considerations pose challenges for the collection of data and statistical reporting on children, particularly for vulnerable groups.

B. Background and work of the Task Force

6. To begin to address these data gaps, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) established in February 2020 the Task Force on Statistics on Children, Adolescents, and Youth with the objectives to improve the availability, quality, and comparability of statistics, and to work towards recommendations for more consistent and harmonized definitions, methodologies, and approaches across the countries participating in the work of the CES.

¹ The CRC defines a child as ‘every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’. This definition is applied here, and the focus is on statistics on children. Statistics on youth aged 18 and older will be discussed where relevant.

² [Progress for every child in the SDG era: are we on track to achieve the SDGs for children? The situation in 2019](#). UNICEF. July 2019.

7. The Task Force compiled an inventory of existing national and international data sources for statistics on children and youth; reviewed definitions, standards, and methods used in statistics on children and youth; assessed the comparability of child-related statistics; documented the practical and ethical challenges faced by data producers in data collection and reporting on children; and provided recommendations for addressing data gaps and improving international harmonization in the three focus areas of violence against children, alternative care, and disability.

8. Although the Task Force started off with looking into statistics on children, adolescents and youth, it was decided to narrow the overall scope to children, defined as persons below the age of 18³. Very few countries report use of “adolescent” as a statistical concept, national statistics on this age group (generally referred to as 10 to 19) are far less common than statistics on children and youth, and data sources that cover this age range—which includes both children and adults—are limited. It was also recognised that issues related to children are conceptually distinct and have specific measurement needs, which are not applicable to youth from 18 onwards (typically the age of majority).

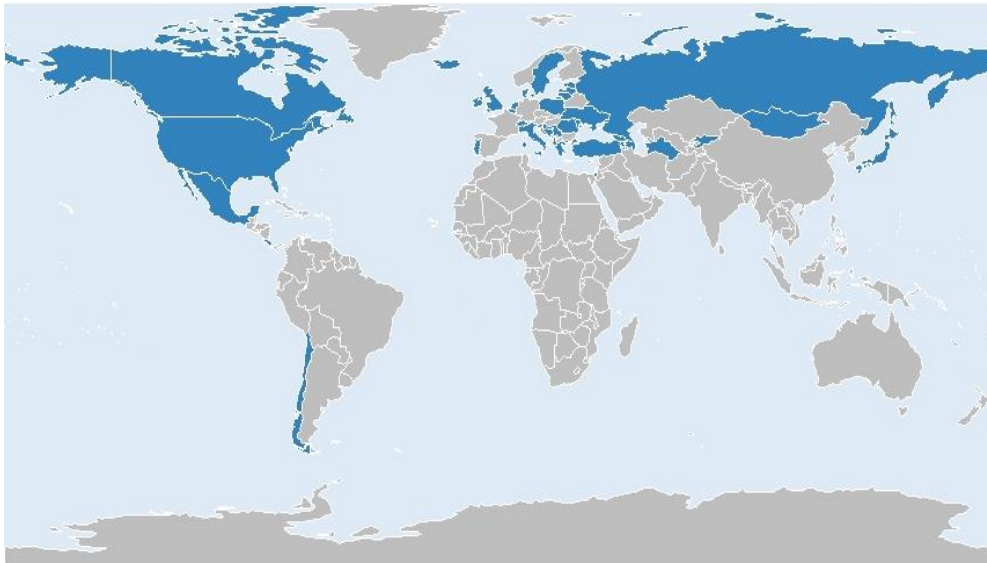
9. The Task Force comprised members from six countries – Canada, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America; and four international organizations – Eurostat, OECD, UNICEF, and UNECE. Country representatives further articulated the needs and challenges faced by national data producers and provided examples from their own countries. The international organizations represented in the Task Force provided information about the ongoing and most recent initiatives related to statistics on children and existing definitions, methods, and standards in their areas of work. This information formed the backdrop from which the work plan of the Task Force was developed and helped to identify similarities, inconsistencies, and information gaps across the countries and organizations represented in the Task Force.

10. To gather information on the diversity of situations and practices from an international perspective, the Task Force prepared a survey that was sent to the countries participating in CES in January 2021. Forty countries responded to this UNECE survey on statistics on children, adolescents and youth.⁴ Of these responses, 38 were provided by national statistical offices (NSOs) and two were provided by government ministries: the Ministry of Social Development and Family in Chile and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in Japan. Sweden provided a response jointly from Statistics Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Office for National Statistics, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency provided responses for the United Kingdom. The material that follows in this document is based on the responses obtained through these two information-gathering exercises.

³ Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

⁴ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States.

Figure 1
Countries responding to UNECE survey on statistics on children, adolescents and youth



Note: The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map 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.

C. Overview of the Guidance

11. In addition to providing information about the data sources, definitions, standards, and methods used in the collection of data and production of statistics on children, adolescents, and youth generally, the Task Force focused its work on three policy-relevant areas with methodological gaps: violence against children, children in alternative care, and children with a disability. Each of these areas of work was undertaken by a sub-team of the Task Force and resulted in a chapter of the full document. Each chapter describes the policy relevance of the topic, presents the results from the country survey on definitions, data sources, indicator reporting, and international comparability with specific examples chosen to highlight important initiatives or best practices. The Guidance concludes with recommendations to national statistical offices as well as for future international work.

1. Chapter 2: General issues for statistics on children and youth

12. The starting point of this work is an overview of the international policy initiatives and instruments which aim to improve the lives of children and youth, and existing frameworks to monitor progress on their rights and wellbeing. This chapter also provides information about the availability of data on children at the international and national levels, and the comparability of statistical definitions of children and youth. The chapter makes recommendations for action at the national and international levels to improve the general availability and comparability of data and statistics on children and youth.

2. Chapter 3: Statistics on violence against children

13. Millions of children worldwide experience violence every day. The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child call for an end to violence against children (VAC), but the lack of an internationally agreed upon standard definition of VAC and limited data make it difficult to assess the level of investment needed to meet targets. Chapter 3 of the full document identifies the types of violence that require measurement and describes the type of data collected and statistics produced on VAC across the countries that responded to the survey. The chapter also

includes an assessment of data comparability within and across countries, the identification of data gaps, and a discussion of the main challenges countries face in producing statistics on VAC. The chapter concludes with recommendations for developing and improving systems for monitoring VAC at the country level and suggestions for how international efforts can support this work.

3. Chapter 4: Statistics on children in alternative care

14. Despite their high risk for poor outcomes as children and in adulthood, children in alternative care are frequently missing from official statistics and national and international indicator frameworks. Alternative care systems vary across countries, and there are no recognized international standard definitions and classifications to produce statistics on children in alternative care. Chapter 4 of the full document identifies the types of alternative care and other related concepts that require measurement and describes the type of data collected and statistics produced on alternative care systems and children in alternative care across the countries that responded to the survey. The chapter also includes an assessment of data comparability within and across countries and a discussion of the main challenges countries face in producing statistics, with the quality of administrative data being a primary concern. The chapter concludes by proposing basic policy relevant indicators to start filling the data gaps and for inclusion into a global set of indicators for harmonized international reporting on children in alternative care, which is currently under development, as well as other recommendations for improving data quality and for future international work.

4. Chapter 5: Statistics on children with a disability

15. A number of frameworks to monitor and measure outcomes for persons with disabilities have been established across different world regions. There are inconsistencies in how these frameworks are implemented within and across countries and their coverage of children with disabilities. Chapter 5 of the full document describes and compares the internationally agreed upon tools for the measurement of disability and assesses the extent to which countries collect and report data and statistics on children with disabilities that align with these international standards. The chapter identifies the main prevalence and service-based indicators produced by countries and evaluates the availability, quality, and comparability of indicators across the countries that responded to the survey. Challenges faced by countries in producing statistics on children with disabilities are also discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the use and adoption of an established standardized instrument, the Washington Group-UNICEF Child Functioning Module (CFM) at the country level and suggestions for future international work.

5. Chapter 6: Ethical considerations for the collection and dissemination of data on children

16. Chapter 6 of the full document discusses the main ethical issues around the collection and dissemination of data on children highlighting, where relevant, considerations unique to the populations covered in this guidance: children experiencing violence, children in alternative care, and children with a disability. The chapter addresses five areas: evaluation of harms and benefits, informed consent, proxy respondents, privacy and confidentiality, and ethical frameworks, and ethics committees.

6. Chapter 7: Conclusions, recommendations and further work

17. The final chapter summarizes the overarching conclusions from the analysed material, brings together all the recommendations made in the previous chapters of the full document and suggests further work that could be undertaken at the international level for improving statistics on children.

II. General issues for statistics on children and youth

A. Introduction

18. Policymaking on child rights and well-being requires robust, reliable information on a wide range of areas affecting children's lives such as basic needs and material living standards; mental and physical health; social relationships; learning and development; and their perceptions around the respect of their views and their agency to contribute to decision-making about the world around them (OECD 2021). Data on children and youth's physical environments, including homes, schools, communities, and neighbourhoods are also important (OECD 2021). Data collection on these topics and the ability for these data to be disaggregated where relevant, enables the identification of children and youth who are at a greater risk of disadvantage and social exclusion and the development of national policies that ensure that all children and youth have the best possible start in life and a successful transition to adulthood. Data are also required to monitor policy and programme implementation and to improve the quality of local services for children and youth.

19. Global commitment to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its aim to leave no one behind has highlighted the need for high quality and internationally comparable data on children and youth. This call for improved data and statistics on children and youth has many potential benefits beyond SDG monitoring. Internationally comparable statistics on children and youth can encourage monitoring of children and youth's well-being and stimulate the development of policies and programmes to help improve children's lives and support the fulfilment of their rights (UNICEF 2020). When definitions and statistics are internationally comparable, countries can better share information, learn from each unique context, and take advantage of best practices and lessons learned.

20. The development of international data standards and statistical frameworks help to identify methodological needs, national data gaps, and statistical domains that require increased investment and improved coordination within and across countries. The maturity and quality of data systems producing data and statistics on children and youth varies greatly across and within countries (UNICEF 2021). There are several examples of countries with well-developed information systems, particularly in the areas of health and education, which are producing statistics on children and youth disaggregated by age group. Yet in other areas such as child protection there are still significant data gaps and differences across many countries in how data are collected and how statistics are produced (FRA 2015; UNICEF/Eurochild 2020). These differences are primarily linked to the different political, social, and cultural contexts which influence national approaches to improving and protecting the well-being and rights of children and youth (FRA 2015; UNICEF/Eurochild 2021).

21. As in all statistics, adherence to the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics⁵ is paramount. It is important that data are not only comparable across countries but collected frequently and regularly over time. This enables the monitoring of change over time, the identification of patterns and trends, and comparisons across different policy contexts. Regular data are required to distinguish the effects of policy interventions from measurement-related issues and to prioritise investments and actions. Continuous and consistent data collection also allows for the examination of impacts of unexpected events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

22. Despite high-level commitments and obligations, there are still substantial gaps in the availability of relevant data for children and youth, particularly from a cross-national perspective, hindering the development of better policies and programmes for children's and youth's well-being (OECD 2021). Existing data do not adequately cover children and youth in the most vulnerable positions often rendering them invisible in national and

⁵ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/261 (2014), [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics](#) (first adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in 1992).

global statistics and data bases, including those who are maltreated, those experiencing housing difficulties and in alternative care settings; the social exclusion of children and youth with disabilities is also poorly understood (OECD 2021). Although some countries have come a long way in the past decade to improve the measurement and monitoring of children and youth's well-being (UNICEF 2020), major efforts are needed to further improve data at both national and international levels (OECD 2021). This will require investment and coordinated action at the national level in data collection, reporting, dissemination, and quality management or quality assurance which is critical to ensure policymakers and other key stakeholders trust and use the data. It will also require the strengthening of international collaboration around statistical methods and standards.

B. The international context

23. Various documents have been developed at an international level which aim to improve the lives of children and youth. The reporting requirements and evidence needs associated with these policies and initiatives have generated some data and statistics on children and youth but have also revealed data gaps.

24. See sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.4 of the full document for a discussion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), child focused Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the European Child Guarantee, and the EU Youth Strategy.

1. Focus areas

25. Overall, existing frameworks for measuring children's rights and well-being emphasize the importance of the inclusion of *all* children; this includes providing opportunities for those at greater risk of disadvantage to fully participate in society and to ensure that they are prepared for future success. The following three groups fall into this category: (a) children who experience violence; (b) children in alternative care; and (c) children with a disability.

A. Children who experience violence

26. The living conditions of children impact their development and shape their lives for future years (OECD, 2021). Research and data are important to draw attention to the experiences of children who have been victims of violence in order to advocate for a range of protection services to be available during the crisis and beyond, and to inform the design of measures to prevent violence against children and response programmes. The collection of child protection data is essential for monitoring the overall functioning and strength of child protection systems in different countries (UNICEF 2019).

B. Children in alternative care

27. In line with the United Nations CRC, many UNECE countries are deinstitutionalising their childcare systems; instead of children being placed in institutional care settings, quality, family- and community-based care is being promoted (European Commission, 2013). Comprehensive, accurate, and official data on children in alternative care and on outcomes for care leavers is essential for improving the quality of care and of child outcomes, and increases the understanding of the efficacy of social welfare and protection systems and services in keeping families together and providing equal opportunities for all children (UNICEF/Eurochild, 2021).

C. Children with a disability

28. The potential vulnerability of this group is evident in the development of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which states that children with disabilities must enjoy the same rights and freedoms as all other children. The development of relevant policies and actions to ensure that this is the case relies on the availability of reliable data. Despite significant progress in social sector reforms, children with disabilities remain one of the most excluded and invisible groups of

children. Article 31 of the CRPD mandates that States “*collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention*”. Evidence suggests that such data remain very limited in both quantity and quality, making it difficult to quantify the full extent of the deprivation of rights and discrimination against this potentially disadvantaged group of children. CRC has recommended to 36 countries in Europe and Central Asia to improve data on children with disabilities.⁶

29. Although these three areas focus on some of the most vulnerable children, it is not exhaustive. Children experiencing violence, those in alternative care, and those with disabilities, have been historically underrepresented in data and statistics, making them invisible to policymakers. Evidence suggests that the right policies at the right time can play a part in reducing negative outcomes and increasing positive experiences for vulnerable children in their homes, at schools, and in communities (OECD, 2019).

30. This section presents an overview of the primary international sources for data and statistics on children for the UNECE region, describes the findings of recent assessments of international data availability, and summarizes general information on the production of statistics on children provided by the 40 national statistical offices that responded to the UNECE survey. Subsequent chapters of the full report describe in more detail the availability and comparability of statistics on violence against children, children in alternative care, and children with a disability.

2. Statistical definitions of children and youth

31. Although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines children as individuals younger than 18 years, this definition is not universally applied in statistics. Twenty-four of the 40 countries who responded to the UNECE survey (60%) indicated use of this definition. Other definitions reported included 0 to 14 years, 0 to 15 years, less than 12 years, 5 to 9 years and conception to 12 years.

32. Several countries reported the absence of a standard or universal statistical definition for ‘child’. In these countries, the definition of child varies depending on the data source or statistical domain. For example, a different definition may be used for statistics related to education than for statistics related to the justice system.

33. Eurostat defines children as those aged 0 to 17 years. In addition, the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey (EU-SILC) uses the concept of a ‘dependent child’, defined as a household member aged 0 to 17 years or a household member aged 18 to 24 years whose main social status is inactive⁷ and who lives with at least one parent. Two countries reported use of a similar ‘dependent child’ concept, which extends the age range used to define child beyond 17 years.

34. An even wider range of definitions for youth was reported, reflecting the absence of an international statistical standard for this concept. A plurality of countries (17, including 4 that did not provide a response) indicated an absence of a standard definition, with many reporting that the definition was context-dependent. Age based definitions for youth ranged from as young as 10 years to as old as 35 years and included various groupings such as 15 to 29 years, 15 to 24 years, 18 to 25 years, and 15 to 34 years. At the EU level, the most frequently used definition is 15 to 29 years. However, the age group used often depends on the specific indicator (e.g. for tertiary educational attainment, 30 to 34 years is used) or on the availability of data or coverage of the survey (e.g. starting with 16 years in statistics based on data collected in EU-SILC and the Survey on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in households and by individuals).

35. There is the additional issue of overlapping age ranges in definitions of children and youth. The standard definition of children is aged 0 to 17 years, but many surveys of

⁶ Based on the review of the most recent concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child by UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, November 2021.

⁷ Inactive refers to someone in education, unemployed or not economically active. The implication is that the child is being supported by the parent(s).

households and adults collect data from individuals aged 15 to 17 years. Data on overlapping age groups lead to problems with reliability. The inclusion of 15, 16, and 17-year-olds in adults surveys greatly increases the availability of data for this age group, but these data do not necessarily cover topics related to the needs and rights of children. Furthermore, surveys administered to individuals aged 15 to 17 years overlook the ethical issues around data collection from those under the age of majority.

36. A further age group to be considered is from 10 to 19 years, defined by the United Nations as “adolescents”. UNICEF compiles and monitors [a range of adolescent-specific indicators](#). However, national statistics on this age group are far less common than statistics on children and youth, particularly because very few countries reported use of adolescent as a unique statistical concept. Data sources that cover this age range—which includes both children and adults as defined by most countries—are limited at the national and international levels. Many of the indicators on adolescents reported by UNICEF cover a subset of the 10-to-19 age group. A part of this group is interviewed directly in international survey programmes (15–19 in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and 16–19 for EU SILC surveys), thus making more data available for 15–19 years old than for 10–14 years old.

37. The lack of consistently applied definitions of children and youth across the countries surveyed represents perhaps the most fundamental challenge for international comparability of statistics on children and youth.

3. International sources for data and statistics on children and youth

38. The [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) is the world’s leading source of statistics on children. The agency regularly produces cross-cutting reports such as [The State of the World's Children](#) as well as dozens of data-driven [publications](#) focused on specific issues which present standardised global and national data on children’s lives and underscore the importance of data for protecting children’s rights and promoting better outcomes. UNICEF hosts an openly accessible [Data Warehouse](#) which contains hundreds of international, validated and comparable indicators on children, enabling easy access to data across countries, with some datasets spanning back decades. Indicator topics include demography, disability, poverty, nutrition, mortality, health, learning and development, violence, abuse and exploitation, sanitation and hygiene, and child labour. These publicly available data play a vital role in informing national, regional, and global policy and programming decisions, while also directing international assistance. UNICEF also disseminates data for the 44 child-related SDG indicators through detailed [SDG country profiles](#).

39. Much of the available statistical information on children disseminated by UNICEF is derived from household surveys, particularly the UNICEF-supported [Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys \(MICS\)](#) and the [Demographic and Health Surveys \(DHS\)](#). These survey programmes represent the primary source of disaggregated child data to identify those who are most disadvantaged in low and middle-income countries across the globe (UNICEF 2014). UNICEF’s mandate to safeguard the rights of all children applies to high-income countries as well. The [UNICEF Office of Research \(Innocenti\)](#) produces a [Report Card series](#) that focuses on inequalities in child well-being in high-income countries.

40. UNICEF’s regional [TransMonEE](#) initiative for Europe and Central Asia brings together data on key indicators across all domains and sub-domains of child rights and wellbeing, while embodying a partnership with 29 countries of the region to improve data comparability and statistics on the most vulnerable groups of children, such as children experiencing or witnessing violence, children in alternative care, and children with disabilities.

41. The [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#) represents another important source for statistics on children in developed countries. The OECD’s [Child Well-Being Data Portal](#) and the [Family Database](#) bring together information from various national and international databases on child and youth well-being. These include topics such as home and family environment, health and safety,

education and school life, activities, and life satisfaction as well as links to information on public policies for children and families. A unique characteristic of the Child Well-Being Data Portal is its presentation of several indicators on adolescent (15-year-olds) behaviour and well-being including indicators on body image and exercise, subjective well-being, and activities outside of school. Also when possible, information is disaggregated by gender, families' income, parents' education, whether living with one or two parents, and families' migration status.

42. The statistical office of the European Union [Eurostat](#) produces statistics and collects data relating to child education and childcare, living conditions, material deprivation, health, and well-being. Eurostat both compiles administrative data and conducts a number of surveys, including those which ask questions directly to, or about, children living in the EU Member States. Specific modules of the EU-SILC gather data that are relevant for children, such as on children with disabilities. The [Harmonised European Time Use Surveys](#) collect time diary information from children aged 10 and older. There is not yet a single Eurostat database, domain, or web portal dedicated specifically to statistics on children. Data on children can only be found in the tables of specific domains (education, health, living conditions, etc.) in Eurostat's database [Eurobase](#). The [Eurostat website](#) and [Eurobase](#) include sections dedicated to statistics on youth. Every two years, Eurostat publishes an online report '[Being young in Europe today](#)' and many '[Statistics explained](#)' articles on youth are continuously updated. An interactive tool '[Young Europeans](#)' was created especially for young users.

43. The most fundamental and basic statistical need related to children and youth is to know how many children reside in each country and the age distributions of the child population. Age-disaggregated [demographic statistics](#) and [projections](#) disseminated by Eurostat are important for many areas of child-related policy. These come from both decennial censuses and annual and monthly demographic data collections.

4. Data gaps at the international level

44. International statistical resources provide crucial data for monitoring the implementation of international and regional initiatives and for the development of national policies that promote child rights and well-being. Still, significant inconsistencies and data gaps remain. The international databases described above include common or similar indicators which may represent a duplication of efforts and resources. Some of these common indicators are derived based on different underlying data sources leading to inconsistencies in values reported.

45. Furthermore, the availability of cross-national data is insufficient for many child-related SDG indicators and other measures of children's well-being. UNICEF recently undertook a comparative assessment of data availability for the 44 SDG indicators that directly concern children and found that 75 per cent of child-related SDG indicators have insufficient data (UNICEF 2020). The assessment revealed that Europe ranks second worst among regions in terms of the share of indicators for which data are missing (UNICEF 2019). Compared to developing countries where data gaps can be linked to limited technical and financial capacity, data gaps in high-income countries are attributed to lack of data that are internationally comparable and/or a lack of reporting to custodian agencies. Limited political will and/or limited resources for collecting data for SDG targets and indicators because issues are not relevant or commonly observed in high-income countries may also contribute to the data gaps (UNICEF 2019).

46. OECD has also assessed the data coverage for child- and youth-related SDGs for OECD countries, analysing data availability for both indicators that explicitly focus on children and indicators that should be disaggregated by age. The analysis found good data coverage for Goal 3 "Good health and well-being" and Goal 4 "Quality education." Data related to the experiences of children and youth were available for 85 percent of the targets for these goals (Marguerit et al. 2018). The largest data gaps are observed for goals 1 "No poverty", 5 "Gender quality", 11 "Sustainable cities and communities", and 16 "Peace, justice and strong institutions". For these goals, at least one-third of targets are relevant for children and youth, but no data are available for reporting.

47. OECD's recently published report [Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies](#) (2021) provides a comprehensive review and assessment of the current state and availability of cross-national data on children's well-being. The report highlights topic-specific data gaps in the areas of material deprivation, health and physical activity, socio-emotional well-being especially in early and middle childhood, and educational aspirations. The report also points to cross-cutting issues that contribute to measurement issues such as limited data on very young children and highly vulnerable groups of children, a lack of data on children's own views, a lack of data on the social capital of children and adolescents, and "siloed" approaches to producing child data which makes the assessment of well-being outcomes of vulnerable groups of children very difficult (OECD 2021).

5. Overview of data collection and production of statistics at the country level

48. As a starting point, the UNECE survey requested general information from NSOs about the collection of data and the production of statistics on children and youth including the existence of mandates or programmes around children and youth, regularly produced reports and products, primary data sources, and statistical definitions and standards. This section summarizes the information collected. Subsequent chapters of the full report describe and analyze the results of the UNECE survey questions on statistics on violence against children, children in alternative care, and children with a disability.

A. Agencies involved in data collection and statistical production

49. Information collected in the UNECE Survey of NSOs reveals variation in responsibility for the collection of data on children and/or youth across the responding countries. Just over half of countries indicated the NSO's mandate or programme included statistics on children and youth (22 countries). Some pointed out that even in the absence of a specific mandate, statistics on children and youth were published by the NSO or/and specific ad hoc surveys existed on these populations ([Figure 2](#)).

Figure 2

Mandates or programmes for child and/or youth statistics in National Statistical Offices (NSOs)



50. In most countries, government ministries or agencies other than the NSO regularly produce statistics on children and/or youth (31 of 40 countries; 78%). For these countries, most often the data producers were ministries or agencies responsible for education (in

18 countries; 45%), labour (in 16 countries; 40%), health (in 15 countries; 38%), justice (in 11 countries; 28%), and culture and/or sport (in 10 countries; 25%). However, some countries have dedicated ministries or agencies focusing on children and/or youth, including:

- (a) The State Agency for Rights and Child Protection (Albania);
- (b) The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Tusla: The Child and Family Agency (Ireland);
- (c) The Italian authority for children and adolescents (Italy);
- (d) The National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Girls, Boys and Adolescents (SIPINNA) (Mexico);
- (e) Authority for family, child and youth development (Mongolia);
- (f) The Netherlands Youth Institute (Netherlands);
- (g) Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodezh) (Russian Federation).

51. In five countries - Azerbaijan, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Israel - no other ministries or agencies were identified as mandated to regularly produce statistics on children and/or youth other than the NSO. In Canada, other agencies collect and report information in their respective areas of responsibility although not on a regular basis.

B. *Primary sources of data on children and youth*

52. Reflecting the shared responsibility between NSOs and other government agencies, for the production of statistics on children and youth, most countries reported using a combination of NSO-fielded surveys and administrative data sources from other agencies or ministries to produce statistics on this population group. Only a few countries reported dedicated surveys on children and youth such as a MICS survey, national child health surveys (Canada and Ireland), child living conditions surveys (Sweden), or school-based surveys as primary sources of data on children. More commonly countries indicated general household surveys, labour force surveys, household and expenditure surveys, social surveys (EU-SILC), and general health surveys as important sources of data on children and youth. In addition to surveys, some countries identified vital statistics systems, population censuses, and population registers as data sources.

53. In most countries, administrative data from several ministries and agencies are used for statistics on children and youth including ministries of education, labour, health and social welfare, and justice. While most countries reported that these ministries and agencies produce their own statistics based on these administrative data, it is unclear to what extent these data are also accessed by NSOs for statistical production.

C. *Statistical reports and products*

54. Most of the responding countries reported the regular publication of statistical reports or products focused on children and/or youth (33 of 40; 83%). Bosnia Herzegovina and Romania were the only two countries to indicate that they did not regularly publish statistics or reports on children and youth; the remaining countries did not provide a response.

55. These publications and products covered a variety of child-related topics and issues. The most commonly covered topics in statistical publications and products include education, demography, and health.

56. Across the countries that responded to the UNECE survey, there are a variety of tools and products for the dissemination of data and statistics on children and youth. Some countries have dedicated websites on statistics on children and adolescents that contain

tables, graphs and thematic reports;⁸ other countries disseminate information through statistical databases⁹.

57. The population covered in the statistical products varied between those with a specific focus on children, youth (or adolescents), on the one hand, and those where these groups were included as an age class within the wider population, on the other hand.

C. Recommendations for the general production of statistics on children and youth

58. The analysis of the information provided by countries in the UNECE survey and the availability of data and statistics on children and youth at the international level led to the following recommendations.

1. Recommendation 1

59. Countries should elaborate national indicator plans and invest in the production and dissemination of data on children and youth, if possible internationally comparable. Plans should be developed based on an assessment of the maturity of data systems, data and reporting needs, and existing data gaps. NSOs, other national data producers, research organizations, and relevant policy stakeholders should work together to identify the data and the indicators required for international reporting initiatives and evidence-based public policy and to coordinate data collection efforts.

60. NSOs should consider designating a *national focal point* for child and youth statistics to serve as a resource about national indicators and standards, data collection, and reporting for the country. This would include not only NSO data but data in other relevant ministries or organizations.

2. Recommendation 2

61. Most countries regularly produce reports or statistical products focused on children and/or youth. These products most commonly focus on basic demographic, education, and health information. Countries should *include children in regular data collection, including child focused surveys*, to ensure that the main national statistical reports highlight the situation and needs of child and youth in all relevant policy areas.

3. Recommendation 3

62. Increase and promote the visibility of data on children and youth through:

(a) The development of web pages dedicated to statistics on children and youth on the websites of the NSO and/or the relevant government ministries;

(b) The regular publication of statistical reports and analytical products on children and youth;

(c) The development of user-friendly approaches to disseminating data *on and to* children and youth, including the use of interactive platforms, infographics, videos, and social media. Children and youth should be consulted on the design of dissemination products aimed at them.¹⁰

63. *At the international level*, further work is needed in several directions.

64. The lack of consistently applied definitions of children and youth within and across countries represents the most fundamental challenge for international comparability of statistics on children and youth. Further work is needed to *develop clear and harmonized statistical definitions of child and youth*. To define children as those aged

⁸ E.g. [the United States Department of Health and Human Services](#).

⁹ E.g. [the website about children indicators of Belarus](#).

¹⁰ The EU Children's Participation Platform is an example in this field.

0 to 17 years is too broad for many purposes; further work should propose standard age-group dis-aggregations suitable for policy areas.

65. International statistical resources from UNICEF, OECD, and Eurostat provide crucial data for the monitoring of the implementation of international and regional initiatives and for the development of national policies that promote child rights and well-being. Still, inconsistencies, duplication, and data gaps remain. Further work is required to *promote a structured collaboration between international organizations producing statistics on children and youth* to harmonize methods, increase efficiencies, and to identify collaborative opportunities and existing data gaps.

66. Currently, countries use a combination of survey and administrative data sources to produce statistics on children and youth. In some areas, administrative data are increasingly or exclusively used to meet national information needs. Further methodological work and guidance are required on best practices around *data sources for key indicators* and the *use of administrative data* for statistics on children and youth.

67. Many data producers would benefit from lessons learned in other countries. Efforts should be made to *facilitate exchange of national experiences*, identify good practices, and encourage and fund pilot studies exploring innovative data collection and dissemination.

III. Conclusions, recommendations and further work

A. Conclusions

68. The work on the present Guidance led to three key findings.

69. The first is that the work to produce internationally standard and comparable statistics on children and youth is in its infancy. The inclusion of child-focused targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has provided a framework for internationally comparable indicators for certain topics and groups of children. Still, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) reporting obligations have failed to spur the collection of sufficient data to monitor progress towards most child-related targets. The regrettable omission of some of the most vulnerable groups of children from the 2030 Agenda, particularly those in alternative care, has diminished the prioritization of data and statistics for these groups.

70. Considered through the lens of SDG indicator tier classification, none of the focus areas covered in this report approach a tier 1 rating. No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for data and indicators on children in alternative care placing it in tier 3. The most recent tier classification of SDG indicators rates those related to violence against children as tier 2.¹¹ SDG indicators do not cover all types or dimensions of violence against children, and work is still underway to develop guidelines and classifications for statistics in this area. Statistics on children with a disability also rate as tier 2. Internationally established methodology (UNICEF – Washington Group Child Functioning Module) exists for the measurement of disability among children, but few countries in the UNECE region regularly produce data according to this model.

71. All three focus areas could benefit from further methodological work and guidance around statistical definitions and classifications, recommendations and best practices for data sources for key indicators, survey designs that consider children with disabilities and children in alternative care, quality assessments and the use of administrative data, and the implementation of existing or forthcoming tools and guidelines (on violence against children and the UNICEF – Washington Group Child Functioning Module, for example).

72. The second key finding is that definitions and classifications pose a challenge. Inconsistency is found around even the most fundamental concepts of children and youth.

¹¹ [Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators as of 29 March 2021](#).

Classifications and definitions of violence, forms of alternative care, and disability vary both within and across countries. Valid and standard definitions and classifications will ensure accuracy of national statistics and strengthen international comparability. Work towards harmonized definitions and operationalization is also required around standard variables for disaggregation.

73. The third key finding pertains to coordination on international and national levels. International organizations such as UNICEF, OECD and Eurostat have made efforts to improve the collection and dissemination of data on children and youth. Yet, there is a need for better coordination of these efforts. Closer collaborations across international organizations and with national data producers is required to avoid duplicating efforts and to fill methodological and data gaps.

74. Better coordination is required at the national level as well. In most countries, the production of statistics on children and youth is decentralized. Multiple government agencies collect data and produce statistics based on a variety of survey and administrative data sources. The need for the coordination of national efforts was highlighted by several NSO responses to the UNECE survey which were unable to report on data and statistics produced by other ministries or agencies.

75. The Guidance recommends that countries elaborate national plans for the production and the dissemination of data and statistics on children and youth that coordinates efforts between NSOs and other ministries. Special attention or dedicated plans may be required for areas with the most significant data gaps. The exchange of experiences and best practices among countries will benefit data producers as they take on this important work.

B. Recommendations

76. This section brings together the recommendations that were presented in the respective substantive chapters of the full Guidance.

1. General issues for statistics on children and youth

A. 1. Recommendation 1

77. Countries should elaborate national indicator plans and invest in the production and dissemination of data on children and youth, if possible, internationally comparable. Plans should be developed based on an assessment of the maturity of data systems, data and reporting needs, and existing data gaps. NSOs, other national data producers, research organizations, and relevant policy stakeholders should work together to identify the data and the indicators required for international reporting initiatives and evidence-based public policy and to coordinate data collection efforts.

78. NSOs should consider designating a national focal point for child and youth statistics to serve as a resource about national indicators and standards, data collection, and reporting for the country. This would include not only NSO data but data in other relevant ministries or organizations.

B. 2. Recommendation 2

79. Most countries regularly produce reports or statistical products focused on children and/or youth. These products most commonly focus on basic demographic, education, and health information. Countries should include children in regular data collection, including child focused surveys, to ensure that the main national statistical reports highlight the situation and needs of child and youth in all relevant policy areas.

C. 3. Recommendation 3

80. Increase and promote the visibility of data on children and youth through:

(a) The development of web pages dedicated to statistics on children and youth on the websites of the NSO and/or the relevant government ministries;

(b) The regular publication of statistical reports and analytical products on children and youth;

(c) The development of user-friendly approaches to disseminating data *on* and *to* children and youth, including the use of interactive platforms, infographics, videos, and social media. Children and youth should be consulted on the design of dissemination products aimed at them.¹²

2. Violence against children

81. While there has been progress in the measurement of violence against children (VAC), capturing data on this remains challenging in most countries. NSOs reported challenges related to the application of different definitions across different data sources, mandates to collect data, fragmentation of data collection, low quality of administrative data, limited capacity and lack of resources.

A. *Error! Reference source not found.*

82. Establish a coordination mechanism. Identification of a designated body or mechanism for coordination in each country is critical to building a comprehensive data collection and monitoring system on VAC at the national level. This will ensure that there is a holistic approach and long-term planning for the systematic collection, analysis, interpretation, use, and dissemination of VAC data.

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83. Provide NSO and line ministries responsible for producing data on VAC with a clear mandate and necessary resources. Resources should be directed towards strengthening administrative data systems on VAC, which should ideally be interoperable with other administrative data (school, health etc.), as well as the implementation of periodic surveys on the different forms of VAC. While survey data are critical to understanding how widespread violence is and to track progress in reducing its occurrence, administrative data have an important role in assessing how child victims of violence are using services, as well as how agencies and providers serve child victims. Both sources of data are critical components of a well-functioning data system on VAC and investments are needed to ensure that high-quality data are produced from such sources at regular intervals for information and use by decision-makers. Each country should identify a comprehensive set of VAC indicators to monitor and develop plans for the systematic collection/compilation, analysis and dissemination of data, following rigorous methodological and ethical standards and protocols.

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84. SDG indicators should be a starting point. With less than ten years left to meeting the goals of the 2030 agenda, it is critical that all countries deliver on commitments and prioritize collecting data on the SDG indicators related to VAC, using internationally available and recommended data collection tools. Acknowledging that SDG indicators do not cover all the types and dimensions of VAC, they nevertheless present a unique opportunity to use international common definitions and metadata to produce comparable indicators. Regular and robust data on VAC-related SDG indicators should constitute the absolute minimum of indicator reporting. In addition to this, countries are encouraged to extend data collection to other issues to fill data gaps, such as commercial sexual exploitation, sexual violence against boys, neglect by caregivers, and psychological maltreatment.

¹² The EU Children's Participation Platform is an example in this field.

3. Children in alternative care

A. *Error! Reference source not found.*

85. Countries should develop and adopt standardized definitions and classifications for alternative care, for the two main types of alternative care (residential and family-based care), and for sub-types of family-based care and of residential care (e.g. institutional care). Facility size is an objective and useful criterion for use in national definitions and classifications of residential care.

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86. Internationally comparable indicators need to be developed with consistently applied criteria. Countries should use the same or similar criteria when reviewing and deciding on national indicators on children in alternative care. Along with standard definitions of types of alternative care, standard definitions for stock, inflow, and outflow should be established. The minimum requirement is regular measurement of stock, inflow, and outflow from alternative care. This information is critical for national governments and international agencies to monitor deinstitutionalisation efforts.

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87. Countries should consider collecting and reporting data beyond stock and flow to measure other critical aspects of alternative care. The development of an indicator framework, developed in coordination with relevant sectors and line ministries dealing with alternative care, would be beneficial. It could include indicators such as the quality of the placement, placement stability, time spent in care, reasons for entering care, destination upon leaving, characteristics of children overrepresented in care, effects of pre-care, in-care and post-care conditions, and effects on child outcomes and well-being.

88. As part of the indicator framework, countries should adopt a standard set of disaggregation variables for children in alternative care including age and sex. Further variables to be considered for disaggregation of data on children in alternative care include:

- (a) Disability status (see section **Error! Reference source not found.** for guidance on measurement);
- (b) Citizenship or country of origin; the influx of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children often increases the number of children in alternative care in a country;
- (c) Geographic location;
- (d) Socioeconomic status; in some countries, children at risk of poverty and social exclusion may also face an increased risk of being separated from their families;¹³
- (e) Household composition.

D. *Error! Reference source not found.*

89. Countries need to make resources available to ensure collection, management, monitoring, and evaluation of data systems and statistics on children in alternative care to address incomplete coverage of the target population in administrative data systems or survey instruments, and weak mandates to collect data on children in alternative care and on care leavers. The target population needs to be well defined to ensure proper coverage, and administrative and survey data needs to align with both national requirements and international standards.

E. *Error! Reference source not found.*

90. NSOs should assess the quality of national statistical surveys as well as administrative data for coverage of children in alternative care, particularly in residential

¹³ Additional information is available at [the web site of the Better Care Network](#).

and institutional care, and to decide whether and how children should be included. Attention should be given to measurement of outcomes for children in alternative care and for care leavers.

91. Quality assessment should include;

- (a) Completeness of data and standardizations of collection and reporting;
- (b) Strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance systems for administrative data;
- (c) Identification of information gaps in national policy indicator frameworks;
- (d) Identification of areas for improvement for data use and dissemination across government agencies;
- (e) Compliance with international quality frameworks for statistics.⁵³

F. *Error! Reference source not found.*

92. Countries should aim to learn from more advanced information systems that exist in their country such as in the health or education sectors. In addition, the roles of line ministries and NSO's should be identified in data management and in the production of information on children in alternative care to better inform governance frameworks as well as the planning and improvement of data. From this, further development of a road map to resolve identified issues, to articulate actions to strengthen data collection systems, and to bridge gaps in relevant national action plans would be beneficial. The strengthening and harmonization of legal frameworks for statistics on children in alternative care would be of value for such efforts.

4. Children with a disability

A. *Error! Reference source not found.*

93. In order to generate internationally comparable measures of the prevalence and severity of disability among children, the adoption of the UNICEF-Washington Group Child Functioning Module (CFM) is recommended for national statistics. This tool has been internationally developed, tested, and validated and is currently being used in several countries.

94. The WG-SS is generally recommended for measuring disability in population and housing censuses, largely due to questionnaire space limitations. However, the WG-SS is not appropriate for children younger than age 5 according to the WG recommendation.¹⁴ It should be clearly communicated to data users that disability prevalence data collected using the WG-SS very likely underestimates the number of children with disabilities due to the limited number of domains included. Countries using the WG-SS in censuses should consider adding the full UNICEF-WG CFM to surveys to quantify the underestimation of disability among children based on censuses using the WG-SS.

B. *Error! Reference source not found.*

95. To understand the progress towards realization of rights of children with disabilities, countries should collect reliable data on prevalence and outcomes that can be disaggregated by age, sex, and other socio-demographic variables. A special focus is required for children with disabilities in alternative care (residential or family based).

C. *Error! Reference source not found.*

96. Countries should work towards the harmonization of basic information on disability in administrative data.

¹⁴ See [The Data Collection Tools Developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and their Recommended Use](#).

D. Error! Reference source not found.

97. NSOs should lead an intersectoral effort to map, plan, and implement systematic data collection on children with a disability with the imperative of monitoring the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and national and international comparability as the main considerations.

C. Further work at the international and national level

98. To address the issues and data gaps identified by the Task Force, further work is needed both on international and national levels.

1. General issues for statistics on children and youth

99. The lack of consistently applied definitions of children and youth within and across countries represents the most fundamental challenge for international comparability of statistics on children and youth. Further work is needed to develop clear and harmonized statistical definitions of child and youth. Children are those age 0 to 17 years. As for certain purposes this age group might be too broad, further work should propose standard age disaggregations by policy area.

100. International statistical resources from UNICEF, OECD, and Eurostat provide crucial data for monitoring implementation of international and regional initiatives and for the development of national policies that promote child rights and well-being. Still, inconsistencies, duplication, and data gaps remain. Further work is required to promote a structured collaboration between international organizations producing statistics on children and youth to harmonize methods, increase efficiencies, and to identify collaborative opportunities and existing data gaps.

101. Countries use a combination of survey and administrative data sources to produce statistics on children and youth. In some areas, administrative data are increasingly or exclusively used to meet national information needs. Further methodological work and guidance are required on best practices around data sources for key indicators and the use of administrative data for statistics on children and youth.

102. Many data producers would benefit from lessons learned in other countries. Efforts should be made to facilitate exchange of national experiences, identify good practices, and encourage and fund pilot studies exploring innovative data collection and dissemination.

2. Violence against children

103. Work by UNICEF is ongoing to develop measurement guidelines and a statistical classification on violence against children. Further work will be required to establish a roadmap for the progressive implementation of the guidelines and statistical classification. The roadmap could describe the investments required for regular collection and analysis of data on all aspects of violence against children and provide concrete recommendations to NSOs towards a systematic approach to implementation.

3. Children in alternative care

104. While many countries do gather data on children in alternative care, no international standards or protocols to support the collection of such data exist. The availability, quality, and comparability of data are limited by the absence of international reporting obligations and the exclusion of children alternative care from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Further work is urgently required to develop methodological standards around the collection of data and production of statistics on children in alternative care.

105. Future efforts should work towards the development of standard statistical definitions and classifications for the forms of alternative care and guidance for NSOs on the inclusion of children in institutional care in the production of national statistics. The

guidance must consider the issues related to definitions and classifications, survey design and data collection, as well as ethical considerations specific to this population group, and should build on existing guidelines, such as the 2020 UNECE *Recommendations for Measuring Older Populations in Institutions* and the 2021 UNECE *Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Administrative Sources for Use in Censuses*.

106. Recently, international projects led by UNICEF have started to review available definitions and develop a set of core indicators for children in alternative care.¹⁵ Taking this work forward requires an inter-agency and international expert group mandated by a relevant international statistical body to develop a proposal for international statistical standard definitions and classifications for the forms of care including specifications of the populations to be covered.

107. NSOs require a framework for assessing the quality of administrative data systems for data on children in alternative care. Future work could develop and promote the adoption of a toolkit for NSOs and line ministries on how to assess the quality of administrative data systems and strengthen data systems to produce better data on children in alternative care, building on existing tools currently being developed by UNICEF.¹⁶

4. Children with a disability

108. Standard tools such as the UNICEF-WG Child Functioning Module (CFM) provides a validated framework for the collection of internationally comparable data on children with a disability. Uptake of the tool, however, has been limited. Further investigation into barriers to the use of the UNICEF-WG CFM should be undertaken.

109. Guidance for survey design and data collection could be developed to ensure the correct measurement of disability among children. The appropriate use of the UNICEF-WG CFM should be central to this guidance, but issues of sample size and capacity to disaggregate, coverage of all children including those in alternative care, age-appropriate measurement tools, and ethical issues should also be considered.

5. Ethical considerations

110. International guidance is being developed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the collection and dissemination of data on children and adolescents that covers many of the ethical issues discussed in this chapter. Future work could support the implementation of such guidance and explore topics that require further attention such as the governance and use of administrative data collected from children.

¹⁵ E.g., future work can build on the results of the key initiatives on strengthening the evidence of the [Better Care Network](#) in cooperation with global partners, the work of the [Data for Impact \(D4I\) project](#) on indicators on children in alternative care, and the [DataCare project](#).

¹⁶ For instance the [2021 UNICEF guidance and tools on assessing administrative data systems on justice for children](#).