

**Summary Considerations for Development of Global Guidance on  
Administrative Data on Violence Against Women from the Expert Group Meeting  
UN Women Headquarters, New York, 24–26 September 2019**

**General comments**

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) brought together a diverse group of experts from a variety of sectors and organizations with different experience working at the country, regional and international levels. The deep commitment of participants to improving responses to violence against women (VAW), building on the power of data and a broad range of knowledge and perspectives, resulted in a rich, informative and lively discussion. This document summarizes some of the discussions and inputs that should be taken into account for the development process and content of the global guidance on VAW administrative data, but it does not pretend to be exhaustive.

Keeping it simple vs. proposing a more ambitious measurement framework: Discussions during the EGM revealed varied opinions about the relative importance of ‘keeping it simple’, by asking for the minimum administrative data on VAW, and an alternative position that prioritized developing and proposing a more ambitious measurement framework. On the one hand, recognition of the very high workload of service providers in most low- and middle-income countries and existing data gaps was linked to the recommendation to ask for the minimum out of respect for service providers’ time and to increase feasibility and data quality. On the other hand, the goal of collecting VAW administrative data that is comprehensive enough to meaningfully inform policy and programmes and advance international human rights standards was associated with calls to develop a more comprehensive measurement framework. In response, the proposal is for the global guidance to take a tiered approach based on the maturity of the administrative data system in the country—i.e., to ensure that countries have the capacity to walk before running but also setting a high bar and demonstrating what is possible to encourage countries to run. The tiers will establish a core minimum as well as outlining options for additional data collection that can be adapted for the local and sectoral context. Further input and the validation of the global guidance will make contributions to striking the right balance between feasibility and generation of data meaningful for service delivery, policy and programmes.

Standardization vs. flexibility: The EGM also discussed the importance of standardizing administrative data while building flexibility into administrative data systems. Countries are generating and using administrative data for a multiplicity of purposes and will most likely use the same information systems for VAW administrative data as for other such data and other purposes rather than developing stand-alone information systems. It is important that the eventual global guidance does not introduce roadblocks for data producers. One of the key discussions on this point was regarding service provision to adolescent girls by the same providers of services to adult women. Information collection and analysis systems should not prevent documentation of VAW administrative data on adolescent girls even if the scope of the guidance is adult women, and the global guidance should communicate that adolescent girls have a basic human right to access VAW services. The global guidance will describe standardized and specific categories and response options for the minimum data set but will also guide data producers and users to allow flexibilities in data collection and analysis systems—for example, about different forms of violence that are particularly relevant for the context in an ‘other’ open text box.

Guidance audience: The EGM participants discussed the possible audience or audiences for the eventual global guidance on VAW administrative data. The following key points were mentioned. First, civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly those providing specialized VAW services, should be explicitly included

not only as an audience for the global guidance but also in the process of its development. Second, women's machineries and national statistical offices (NSOs) should be explicitly addressed as they have critical roles to play in strengthening VAW administrative data systems, particularly in coordinating national and sub-national efforts to improve the data. Third, the governance and coordination mechanisms for VAW administrative data need to convene data producers and users from different sectors because developing understanding and relationships between these different actors is central both to collecting the data in useable form and for getting the data used to support the overall objective of improving policies, programmes and services to prevent and respond to VAW.

Case examples: The guidance should provide case examples from different regions and sectors. These examples will provide inspiration about what can be achieved through the use of VAW administrative data as well as 'how to' illustrations and potentially offer lessons learned about what to avoid.

### **Minimum dataset and expanded core dataset**

The proposal is for the global guidance to establish a cross-sectoral 'minimum data set' of the most essential programme and policy-relevant variables, with standardized response options, considering the following: relevance, importance, priority and feasibility. The feedback received included the following key points:

- There was agreement about the importance of collecting the following variables across sectors: survivor sex, survivor age, perpetrator sex (including response options that can document multiple perpetrators of different sexes), survivor-perpetrator relationship and type of VAW.
- Four of the five small groups also reached consensus on the importance of documenting the perpetrator age group (as reported by the survivor), the geographic location where the violence occurred as well as the type of location (survivors' private residence, school, public place, etc.), date the violence occurred, who took the report of VAW, date of registration, service provided (response options to be sector specific) and referral to external services.
- Further work to refine and validate the response options for the minimum data set is required. Particular variable response options to be worked on include survivor-perpetrator relationship, location violence occurred, type of violence and service provision and referral options.
- The EGM strongly endorsed mutually exclusive response options to improve clarity and assist data analysis, with the exception of categories of VAW. On this issue there were divergent opinions, with some experts advocating establishing a hierarchical typology of types of VAW and identification of only one type of VAW per incident and other experts arguing for identification of all types of VAW experienced by the woman during that incident of violence.
- Consideration that cyber violence (violence enacted using computer data or computer systems) should be a stand-alone variable.
- Participants also highlighted some additional variables that they considered important for inclusion in the minimum data set or an expanded minimum data set. The most frequently mentioned were: disability status of the survivor, citizenship/displacement status of the survivor and identification of previous experience of VAW/repeated VAW.

### **Unit of measurement or unit of count**

The importance of clarity of the unit of measurement or unit of count was emphasized by several experts. The proposal is that the eventual global guidance will:

- Establish the incident or case—that is, an incident report—as the unit of count for the minimum data set. The proposal is that even though data will be collected about the survivor and perpetrator, the denominator will be the ‘case report’.
- The global guidance will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of counting cases as opposed to counting people (survivors or perpetrators). Among other challenges, there are inter-institutional barriers to following people, and their information, across sectors (e.g., from police to courts). Implications for personally identifiable information (PII) and minimums for security and confidentiality for data linkage will be discussed.

### **Sectoral specificities**

Sectoral specificities in terms of data needs and processes for data collection, processing and training was a recurring theme during the three-day meeting. Similarly, the importance of building on existing sectoral work related to VAW administrative data rather than creating additional classification systems or guidance that could be at cross purposes was also mentioned. It was also clear that while some sectors have made significant progress (e.g., health, crime and justice and the humanitarian sector that provides social services), much less international guidance on the collection and use of VAW administrative data exists for the social services sector attending to the general population.

One potential priority area for the global guidance to add value is by improving data collection by specialized services (shelters, hotlines) and integration of these data into official government reporting. Understanding capacity and gaps in specialized services as well as the number of survivors supported is a commitment under the Istanbul and Belem do Para Conventions. Care must be taken to collect and use VAW administrative data in ways that do not prejudice the service delivery by CSO- or government-provided specialized VAW services. To do so, there needs to be meaningful engagement of CSOs and other specialized service providers in the governance mechanisms providing oversight for data collection, analysis and reporting.

### **Multisectoral governance and coordination**

While emphasising that local contexts means that there will be no ‘one size fits all’ formula for governance and coordination, the EGM was in agreement with the importance of the criteria raised in the background paper as a guide for thinking through the institutional location and composition of the governance and coordination mechanism. Experts engaged in lively discussions that illustrated the importance of different levels of governance and coordination for VAW administrative data, from the international level where stewardship comes from the United Nations, to the regional, national and sub-national level and to the local level where services are delivered. The legal and political complexity of communication and coordination between and across these different levels was highlighted. Some key points and lessons learned that can be further discussed and illustrated in the eventual global guidance include:

- Opportunities for international and regional coordination through platforms such as that established by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences with other institutions such as the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). Consideration of how best to link national governance bodies working on VAW with regional bodies that are monitoring progress on the implementation of regional conventions and declarations has merit.
- At the national and subnational level, the most pragmatic approach is probably to include a working group or sub-committee focused on VAW data (either including or exclusively administrative data) within existing governance mechanisms for the VAW response. The implementation committees for

the multi-agency “Essential Services Package” may represent an important opportunity in the countries where the package is being implemented.

- Political and technical strength and ‘deep relationships’ between data users and data producers will be the foundation for moving the VAW administrative data agenda forward at the national and sub-national level. This will include multi-agency collaboration across sectors and the inclusion of VAW experts from civil society, as well as potentially independent experts from academia, human rights and the legal profession.
- Convening bodies require guidance about what should be addressed and in what detail (e.g., they should not be discussing individual cases). The governance and coordination body for VAW administrative data is not an appropriate body for individual problem solving but rather for systemic problem identification, dissemination of information and strategic system response.
- Co-leadership and leadership by NSOs of coordination and governance mechanisms was identified as a promising practice to create buy-in and motivate political will for advancing VAW administrative data collection and use for programme and policy change.
- The complexity of data sharing between different levels of government (municipal, provincial, national) because of partisan politics and barriers to data sharing in federated states was identified. The question was raised whether legislation is the appropriate tool to mandate standardized data collection and sharing between different levels of government.

#### **Data literacy and knowledge translation**

Data literacy and the gap between the collection and use of VAW administrative data were identified as important issues to address. In general, there is a lack of access to data and limited capacity on the part of users to analyse them. Existing information gaps are compounded by limited dissemination capabilities within NSOs and other government actors, and there is a need to further build the capacity of policymakers and other stakeholders to understand and use available data. Relationships are necessary not only to share administrative data but also to use them. Joint analysis by data producers and users, and putting in place the appropriate dissemination or knowledge translation tools, can drive virtuous cycles that support policy, programme and service improvements. Providing guidance to improve the analysis, dissemination and uptake of VAW administrative data for policy, programme and service delivery decisions should be a key focus of the eventual global guidance.

- Specific efforts must be undertaken to build the ability of the media and legislators (politicians) to understand and appropriately communicate statistics. Key areas for capacity building include: how to correctly interpret data; how to avoid stigmatization and victim blaming; the importance of ensuring confidentiality of survivors; and how to promote services.
- With respect to interpretation, the global guidance should provide specific explanations in plain language to help the media, legislators and other data users understand and communicate clearly around the following issues:
  - The number of cases of VAW reported in administrative data can be expected to increase if service delivery or recording improves. This presents a political messaging problem. Care must be taken to explain that administrative data only reflect the number of cases reported. Administrative data cannot be equated to trends in actual numbers of cases or survivors.
  - When you aggregate data by time periods, and instances of VAW are reported after they occur, aggregate numbers that may previously have been reported publicly will change. Spokespeople require simple and clear speaking points to be able to explain such changes.
  - There are challenges to multi-source data production, including how to use and reconcile data from surveys and from administrative data, and how to report on such data.

- Efforts to increase the data literacy of data users presents opportunities to build a common language and understanding of VAW. An example raised for multiple countries was raising awareness among politicians, the media and police forces that rape is not only perpetrated by strangers.

### **Bridging the data use gap**

- Some of the suggested ways to bridge the data gap include: dedicated human resources for dissemination/knowledge translation; alliances with academics and the media; the possibilities provided by technology—e.g., pre-formed reports and taking a graduated approach to analysis, so that there are automated analysis options that are immediately available by pressing a button as well as more flexibility to design analyses where capacity exists.
- There is a recognition and recommendation that data flow needs to be bi-directional, going up to policymakers but also flowing back to service providers who can make decisions that improve services in real-time.
- Administrative data can function very effectively as a flag, identifying where attention is needed, but they do not tell the whole story. Placing administrative data in a comprehensive context and seeking to triangulate with additional data sources (from academics and from qualitative inquiry with service providers and survivors) *prior* to identifying options to solve problems and presenting them to decision-makers was identified as a promising practice during the EGM.

### **Training needs, capacity building and useful job aids**

- As outlined in the background paper, there is a need for both VAW expertise and data and information systems expertise to convene, analyse and report on VAW administrative data. At the local level, a lesson learned is that it is better to hire people with VAW experience and teach them about information systems than to hire people who are specialized in information technology (IT) but do not have a background in VAW. For interoperability of information systems, VAW programme specialists and information management need to work together.
- Effective training in VAW administrative data will also require a team approach that includes experts on data and data collection, experts in VAW and people who understand the viewpoints of the survivors in addition to the professional group being trained. For some professions, including physicians, judges and the police, it is critical to have members of those professional groups as part of the training team.
- Dedicated training on the collection and management of VAW administrative data should be tailored for and integrated into existing sectoral training systems and needs. For effective training, it is important to pay attention to the priorities of those who are providing services and simultaneously collecting data. Throughout the meeting, experts called on the eventual global guidance and process of implementation to take into account the perspective of service providers on the relevance of data points. Pre-service and in-service training on VAW can increase understanding and motivation about why particular data points (e.g., sex and survivor-perpetrator relationship) are critically important. To increase ‘buy in’ on variables that are needed to drive not only quality improvement of direct services but also policy and programmes will require persuasion. The global guidance should include inspiring examples related to using data for service improvements, policy and programmes as part of this ‘marketing’ exercise.
- Multisectoral training/cross-training (even if time limited) was identified as a promising practice—e.g., day-long training for police with an hour in the afternoon that involves professionals from other sectors.
- A general recommendation was not to take anything for granted in training by making assumptions about what people know. There is a need to explain all variables (e.g., what is citizenship) and to

provide opportunities to practice the behaviours (e.g., role play for meaningful consent to data collection or sharing).

- The global guidance should provide examples and implementation stories from different sectors and countries. For example, this intake form can be used to collect administrative data on VAW in the health sector, and this is how it is being used in a hospital or district in India. Where possible, such implementation stories should also illustrate any improvements in awareness, service delivery or policy and programmes that have resulted.
- The data collection, information management, analysis and reporting training needs of specialized VAW services merits further consideration.
- It was questioned whether, over and above reinforcing the guiding principles, the global guidance could identify how to leverage training on VAW administrative data collection to shift power dynamics to make service delivery more survivor-centred. Identification of methodologies/protocols that have been successful (if any) and validation could be considered for the further development of the guidance.

### **Management of personal identifiable information**

- Personally identifiable information (PII) used for case management needs to be clearly distinguished from PII included in analysis and aggregated data for reporting.
- Technology can support the management of PII by restricting access to information. Whether paper or digital, in all cases role-based access (individuals only have access to data to fulfil role/on need-to-know basis) should be instituted.
- One consideration is that there are different levels of ‘identifiability’ of data: identifiable (name), coded (pseudonym or case number that is separated from name) and aggregated with no names and with a sufficient number of cases to prevent re-identification. Only sufficiently aggregated data should be made routinely available to governance or oversight committees or in public reporting as the purpose of analysis and reporting is to identify and respond to systemic issues and not to analyse individual cases.
- Whether data are collected and analysed in paper, digital or mixed systems, there is a need to reinforce institutional cultures and individual behaviours to ensure data security and the importance of confidentiality to ensure survivors’ safety.
- Digital data are creating demands for greater data security. In the days of paper, data could be locked in a cabinet; with digital data, however, not only IT people but also programme people need to know about data protection. This is a new proficiency that is becoming a core competency and needs to be taught and maintained.
- There was discussion of whether ‘informed consent’ is the appropriate concept for provision of information to survivors about collection and use of VAW administrative data and survivors agreeing or declining to provide such data. International standards for managing PII and meeting privacy obligations establish that when PII is collected, the individuals providing this will receive information about what their data will be used for and who will have access to it—critical components of informed consent. Best practice for interactions with survivors by the police, health-care providers and specialized VAW services includes explanation of the process of criminal investigation or health-care and social service delivery and the options available to the survivor (e.g., to complete a forensic rape kit or not, to access support services or not, to agree to testify or participate in a criminal investigation or not, what options are available for health care or social services and how providing or declining to provide information may impact delivery of these services). But these best practices are not always implemented on the ground and there is frequently no explicit consent to document. Thus, some experts questioned the concept of ‘informed consent’ in the context of administrative data collection.

For example, informed consent for data collection is not common when a crime is reported as the survivor is coming forward and voluntarily reporting. In health, there is generally no written consent for data collection and sharing because it is part of routine service delivery. One option is for the global guidance to seek to explain in sector-appropriate terminology how to reinforce the agreed-upon principles that survivors should be able to make decisions about what information to provide and to understand the implications of sharing and not sharing information as well as how their information will be stored and used. The global guidance could draw on examples from different sectors to illustrate how to share information with survivors about how information is collected and managed to meet international standards for PII data management and to reinforce the agreed-upon guiding principles for collection and use of VAW administrative data.

- The global guidance will reinforce the guiding principles. Among other issues, this means that survivors must not be asked about violence if services are not in place to respond to their needs, must know about any limits to confidentiality before disclosing and should understand that they can refuse data collection or sharing without negative consequences for receiving services. At the practical level, women require time to process what has happened to them and think about their options. The guidance can support sensitization of service providers to this need, which is an aspect of being survivor-centred, and information collection and management systems can be designed to accommodate delays in response and refusals to share information. Finally, it is crucial to be meticulous in the management of PII to ensure that women's information is kept confidential and that perpetrators are not able to learn of women's disclosure of violence as this can put survivors at risk.

#### **Femicide panel**

- Different perspectives on what should be included in definitions of gender-related killings of women (femicide/feminicide) were shared, including ongoing joint work by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) to develop an operational definition for statistical purposes (as recommended by the UN Statistical Commission), based on the recognition that killings of women by intimate partners and family members (currently reported globally) only represent a proportion of the totality of cases, and that statistics should not only rely on national definitions based on national legislations. The Spotlight Initiative in Latin America is also contributing to work in the region towards the development of this operational definition.
- VAW administrative data will be important for determining the gender-related motivation for killings (e.g., history of intimate partner violence, history of sexual violence).