



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

2023 - 2030

STRATEGY

TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary - General on Violence Against Children (OSRSG-VAC) - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

OSRSG-VAC-UNODC STRATEGY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN 2023-2030

1. THE PROBLEM	2
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE STRATEGY	4
3. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK	5
4. THE VISION	7
5. BENCHMARKS FOR ACTION	8
1. CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH	8
Child Participation	8
Gender Equality	9
2. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA	10
6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ECOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT	10
7. OBJECTIVES	13
Strategic Objectives	13
Operational Objectives	14
8. PROGRAMMING INTERVENTIONS	17
9. PRIORITY CONTEXTS	20
1. CONTEXTS OF INSECURITY	22
2. JUSTICE SYSTEMS	24
3. CYBERSPACE	26
4. CHILDREN ON THE MOVE	28
10. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	30
The Implementers	30
Partnerships	34
Resource Mobilization	35
Communication	36
Performance and Impact Monitoring	37

1. THE PROBLEM

Despite the lack of comprehensive data, global estimates indicate that over a billion children[1] aged between 2 and 17 have experienced violence.[2] **Violence against children** occurs in every country, cutting across culture, socioeconomic status, education, income, ethnicity and race. Whether in the family, in schools, in alternative care and justice institutions, or in the community, it is often socially condoned and not legally sanctioned.[3]

Rising global risks are creating conditions for the increased exposure of children to crime and violence. Today, children are at risk not only in physical spaces but also **online**. As insecurity grows around the world, organized criminal and armed groups, including terrorist groups, are becoming more skilled at targeting, recruiting and exploiting children. And while the world is slowly coming to a consensus on the immediate dangers posed by **climate change**, there is little awareness of the effects of extreme climate events and **forced displacement** on children's vulnerability to violence.

Recent studies[4] have shown that exposure to violence, including neglect, can physiologically affect the development of a child's brain. Violence inflicted on children causes **long-lasting physical, developmental, emotional, spiritual and mental harm** that they can carry into adulthood.[5]

Lifelong adverse consequences of violence include mental and physical health conditions; disabilities; reduced health-related quality of life; lower educational attainment; lower levels of economic well-being in adulthood; and increased risk of exposure to further violence. Prolonged exposure may also render children more likely to accept violence, and to become aggressive or show aggressive behaviour themselves.[6] The consequences of violence against children include not only considerable harm to the individual child, but also **high costs for families, communities, and society as a whole**.

[1] Defined as per Art. 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as individuals below the age of 18 years. General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

[2] S. Hillis and others, "Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: a systematic review and minimum estimates", *Pediatrics*, vol. 137, No. 3 (March 2016).

[3] See Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, (New York, United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children, 2006); Joint report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children on prevention of and responses to violence against children within the juvenile justice system (A/HRC/21/25).

[4] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents* (2017).

[5] *Ibid*; and Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (London, Penguin, 2014).

[6] M. Maxfield and C. Widom, "The cycle of violence: revisited 6 years later", *Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* vol. 150, No. 4 (April 1996); Coenraad de Beer, "The right to protection: ending violence against children" (SOS Children's Villages International, Innsbruck, Austria, 2017); *Psychiatric Times*, "From victim to aggressor", vol. 24, No. 7 (June 2007), referring to the "cycle of violence" and how "violence begets violence"; S. F. Lam and others., "Will victims become aggressors or vice versa? a cross-lagged analysis of school aggression" *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, vol. 46, No. 3 (2017); World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, The University of Birmingham & Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GmbH, "The cycles of violence: the relationship between childhood maltreatment and the risk of later becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence: key facts", document EUR/07/50631214; A. M. Gómez, "Testing the cycle of violence hypothesis: child abuse and adolescent dating violence as predictors of intimate partner violence in young adulthood," *Youth & Society*, vol. 43, No. 1 (2011).

Despite considerable progress, Member States continue to face numerous challenges in effectively protecting children from crime and violence. There is a growing need for enhanced knowledge and understanding of the multifaceted nature of crime and violence against children as it manifests in various phenomena and better understanding of its impact on children and society are needed. **Acknowledging that serious violence against children constitutes a crime is crucial in combatting intolerance and impunity.** This recognition sets the stage for more effective legal, policy, institutional, and operational responses.

“

Without immediate and bold action, violence against children can cost the world its future generations.

”



2. INTRODUCTION TO THE STRATEGY

In 2006, the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children^[7] revealed the extent to which children are affected by violence, including in settings designed to support their development and guarantee their protection. To promote dissemination of the Study findings and ensure support for the implementation of its recommendations, in 2008 the General Assembly appointed a **Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC)**. Over a decade later, the SRSG-VAC continues to play a key role as a global independent advocate for the elimination of all forms of violence against children.

Through the adoption of the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice,^[8] the international community issued a new set of international standards highlighting the key role of justice systems in preventing and responding to violence against children. Through this resolution, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** acquired a stronger mandate to support Member States in this critical area. Since then, the Office has significantly increased its commitment to ending violence against children across its three pillars of intervention: research, normative work, and the provision of technical assistance.^[9]

This Strategy stems from the dedication of both the **Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (OSRSG-VAC)** and **UNODC** to supporting Member States in their efforts to end violence against children. Increasing children's safety and well-being is an ambitious goal. It requires global and regional agendas, as well as national strategies and practices to prioritise this crucial work. Concurrently, policy change is meaningless without social and behavioural change to effectively tackle the problem.

Combining the strengths and ensuring the **complementarity of the mandates** of the SRSG-VAC and UNODC, this Strategy proposes a trajectory for **mainstreaming** and guiding the work on **child protection** in the field of **crime prevention and criminal justice**.

At its core, the Strategy focuses on tackling **serious forms of violence against children**, which directly undermine complete respect for, fulfilment and protection of child rights.^[10] In addition, the Strategy focuses on **institutional and structural forms of violence**, including but not limited to unnecessary deprivation of liberty and the use of punitive approaches for children in contact with the justice system, recognizing that such approaches are prevalent in contexts where children are often exposed to crime and violence.

[7] A/61/299.

[8] A/RES/69/194, annex.

[9] UNODC work in this area was carried out under the aegis of the Global Programme to end Violence against Children and from 2023 onwards will continue under its new Global Programme on People-Centred Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform (GLOJS8).

[10] According to international law, serious forms of violence against children should be addressed through comprehensive prevention and response strategies, including criminalization, to foster accountability of perpetrators, see: [A/RES/69/194](#), annex, para. 11.

The Strategy will pursue this direction by acting as a vehicle to:

1 Enhance innovation, partnership and coordination with actors working in the areas of child rights and child protection. Violence against children, a global issue with notable contextual variations, requires commitment from a variety of specialized actors through multisectoral and multilateral partnerships. These multidisciplinary partnerships create opportunities for knowledge exchange between international and local perspectives, while increasing the flexibility and adaptability of implementation methods, leading to new innovations.

Multidisciplinary and public-private partnerships create opportunities for knowledge transfer from international to local perspectives and vice versa, while at the same time increasing the flexibility of implementation methods, leading to new innovation.



2 Ensure coherence and consistency in the prevention of and response to crime and violence against children throughout broader development, rule of law, humanitarian, and security reform efforts, in collaboration with other United Nations entities.

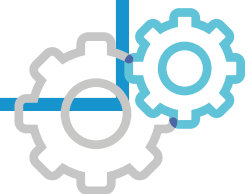
The Strategy is designed to reach:

National counterparts of the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC, to illustrate our joint vision of freeing children from crime and violence and proposing concrete interventions to translate this vision into practice.













Key partners, to foster dialogue and collaboration by formulating strategic and operational objectives and providing a basis for the development of joint interventions.

Internal staff and external experts working with the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC, to enhance cohesion and mainstream approaches to promoting child rights.

The Strategy was developed in a participatory manner based on internal and external consultation with United Nations personnel, key partners from sister United Nations entities, civil society organizations, government institutions, the private sector as well as children and young people.



3. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

 THE VISION	CHILDREN ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE FREE FROM CRIME AND VIOLENCE		
 BENCHMARKS FOR ACTION	CHILD RIGHTS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS		
 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	ECOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT		
 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES <i>(EXPECTED LONG-TERM RESULTS)</i>	<div style="text-align: center;">1</div> <p>Children and their environment are better protected from crime and violence (prevention)</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">2</div> <p>Children who have experienced crime and violence are supported towards recovery and reintegration (responses)</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">3</div> <p>Children in contact with justice systems are better served and protected from crime and violence and supported towards their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration (justice)</p>
 OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES <i>(EXPECTED RESULTS)</i>	 <p>Legal, regulatory and policy frameworks are strengthened</p>	 <p>Institutions and actors are better-equipped</p>	 <p>Children, families and communities are more resilient to crime and violence</p>  <p>Global, national and local societies are aware of and understand crime and violence</p>
 PROGRAMMING INTERVENTION	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Research</p>  <p>Normative work Awareness-raising</p> <p>Technical assistance Advocacy</p> </div>		

Priority Contexts <i>Acting where children are exposed to higher risks of crime and violence</i>			
 <p>Contexts of insecurity</p>	 <p>Justice Systems</p>	 <p>Cyberspace</p>	 <p>Children on the move</p>

4. THE VISION

“
Children all over the world need to be safe and free from the threats of crime and violence.
”

The vision behind this joint OSRSG-VAC and UNODC Strategy is that children all over the world are free from crime and violence. To promote this vision, both the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC are working to build a peaceful, inclusive, and just society, in which the role of children will be valued and their rights fully respected. Children have the potential to transform societal dynamics and to initiate and promote change. However, to realize their potential role as agents of change, they need to grow up in an environment that nurtures their developmental needs while fostering a healthy sense of dignity and self-worth.

First and foremost, children need to be safe and free from the threats of crime and violence.

A world where all children are free from crime and violence is one where all children can reach their potential. For children, feeling and experiencing safety is a crucial precondition of their healthy development and access to opportunities. Safety from crime and violence is also necessary for them to fully benefit from education, experience a healthy family life, cultivate freedom of thought and expression, feel confident participating in social spheres, and enjoy other rights.

Different actors must come together for this vision to become reality. The justice system plays a crucial role in protecting children from crime and violence, responding appropriately when these have occurred. However, the justice system cannot be effective by acting alone. Upholding children’s rights and protecting them from crime and violence requires integrated and coordinated efforts, including those of the health, education, child-protection and security sectors, in combination with communities and families.



5. BENCHMARKS FOR ACTION

CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Fulfilling, respecting, and protecting children’s rights is the cornerstone of this joint Strategy. By applying a child-rights-based approach, the Strategy recognizes children as individual rights holders rather than merely as a “vulnerable group”.^[11]

- 1 Normatively**, this Strategy uses a child rights-based approach that builds on the guiding principles and rights established in international law as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which universally recognizes that children should enjoy special protection and are entitled to specific rights, in addition to those of adults.^[12]
- 2 Operationally**, this Strategy aims to fulfil, respect, and protect child rights through application of a child-rights-based approach including the appropriate integration of child rights into project planning and implementation. It recognizes that child rights are interdependent, indivisible and interconnected: children are entitled to enjoy all of their rights at all times.

In the words of the United Nations Secretary-General, **mainstreaming child rights** “is understood as a strategy for making children’s rights, including children’s meaningful participation, an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes of the United Nations system, and for assessing the implications for children of any action taken by the UN”. ^[13]

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Participation is an essential **right** of every child and one of the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.^[14] Child participation is also necessary to initiate, change and increase the effectiveness of policies and programmes that prevent and respond to crime and violence against children.

Through this Strategy, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC commit to mainstreaming meaningful and safe child participation throughout all interventions. The Strategy pursues the principle of **inclusion**, or, more broadly, “Nothing for us, without us”, by fostering the participation of children through tailored outreach activities.

[11] United Nations Secretary-General, Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming (November 2022).

[12] The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child had been signed by 197 states and ratified by 196 by February 2023; see https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CRC&Lang=en.

[13] United Nations Secretary-General, Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming (November 2022).

[14] See CRC/C/GC/12.

Fostering child participation goes beyond simply listening to children; it requires comprehensive efforts to establish the conditions for their meaningful engagement. Specifically, children should be informed about their rights and the support available; they should be empowered to choose to participate and understand its impact on decision-making; and they should have the opportunity not only to express and defend their views, but also to ensure that they are taken into account in decision-making processes.

GENDER EQUALITY

“

Gender equality is embedded in the right of the child to be free from any form of discrimination.

”

Gender equality is embedded in the right of the child to be free from any form of discrimination.[15]

This Strategy recognizes that gender impacts the ways in which children are exposed to crime and violence, the forms of violence they experience, and the support they receive. For instance, due to their gender, girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. However, sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse against boys may be invisible due to gendered stigma. Boys who become associated with crime and violence are more likely to be perceived as inherently dangerous and therefore treated with a punitive approach, particularly one involving deprivation of their liberty. These gendered forms of victimization are often compounded by additional factors including age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, among others.

The Strategy will foster the empowerment of children through a child-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative approach across organizational systems, processes and activities, and will include targeted interventions focusing on gender-responsive justice.[16] It recognizes that gender interacts with other significant factors to shape children’s opportunities. In line with the “UNODC Strategy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women”,[17] the work to be done by both the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will adopt an intersectional approach “based on an understanding of the convergence of different backgrounds, identities and characteristics”[18] to better address children’s specific need for protection from crime and violence.

[15] See CRC/C/GC/2.

[16] See Pillar 5, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, in “UNODC Strategy 2021–2025”: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/strategy/full-strategy.html>

[17] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Strategy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2022–2026)”.

[18] Ibid., p. 8.

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The Strategy is grounded within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[19] Investing in children is a fundamental means of eradicating poverty, boosting shared prosperity, and enhancing intergenerational equity. Sustainable development starts with safe, healthy and well-educated children – and this includes ensuring that they are free from crime and violence.

Although all goals are interconnected in nature, this Strategy specifically contributes towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 17,[20] which call for a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against children as an integral part of global development.[21]

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ECOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Children are indivisible from the environment in which they grow up and are profoundly influenced by their caregivers, their community and society as a whole. Their environment determines whether they are safe, respected, treated with dignity, encouraged to voice their opinions, supported in times of need and protected from crime and violence. The ecological theory of human development[22] is used here to recognize the continuous interaction between the child and the different environments that they inhabit.

Each of the environments in which the child is immersed (e.g. family, school, the neighbourhood, etc.) functions as a unit, an ecosystem characterized by specific capacities, mechanisms and values. The social ecological model,[23] or ecology of child development, recognizes how each environment can favour or hinder the healthy development of the child, either shielding them against or increasing their exposure to crime and violence. In applying an ecological approach, this Strategy addresses their needs comprehensively through targeted interventions at each level:

- ▶ **Individual level:** The individual level concerns the physical and mental health of the child: their feelings; safety concerns; attitudes towards violence; skills, and personal ambitions. It recognizes that a child's individual characteristics and circumstances can affect their exposure to crime and violence as well as their opportunities to avoid, reject, and respond to violence.

[19] <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

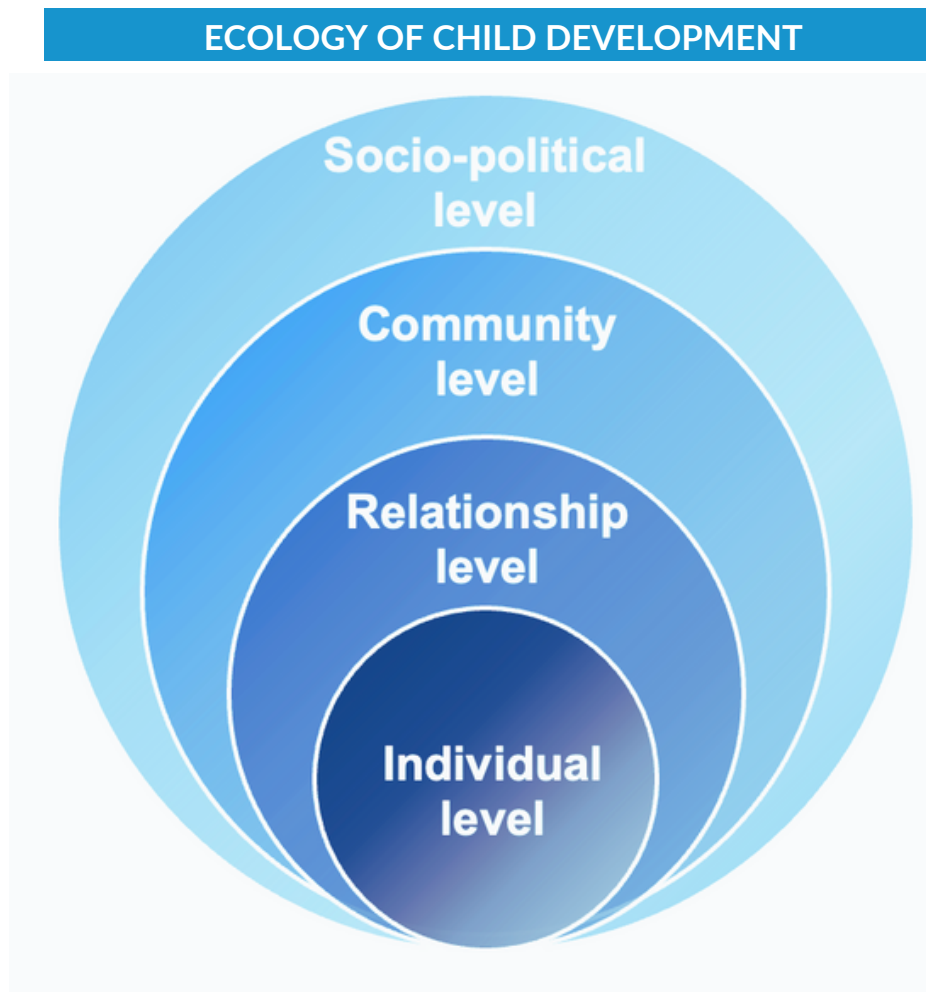
[20] A/RES/70/1.

[21] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice Section (Vienna, 2017), p. 16.[1] U. Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[22] U. Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[23] World Health Organization, INSPIRE Handbook: Action for Implementing the Seven Strategies (Geneva: 2018), p. 23. The INSPIRE technical package and related Handbook also apply the social ecological model to foster a comprehensive understanding of the multiple factors that play a role in increasing or reducing the protection of children from interpersonal violence.

- ▶ **Relationship level:** The relationships in a child's life, particularly those with family members and close peers, play a crucial role in creating the conditions for safety from crime and violence during childhood, including adolescence. Such conditions may depend on the parents or caregivers' understanding of crime- and violence-related risks; their ability to provide a safe environment for the child, including sufficient financial resources and stability; how they respond to such risks, exposure, or outright abuse; and the likelihood that the child benefits from positive relationships with peers.
- ▶ **Community level:** The community represents the immediate environment in which the child experiences social life. Opportunities and services available within the community can play a key role in facilitating protection from crime and violence, whereas a lack of services may become a driving factor in their exposure to crime and violence.
- ▶ **Socio-political level:** This level emphasizes that protecting children is ultimately the responsibility of State authorities. These broad contexts crucially affect a child's opportunities and circumstances, albeit often not involving children directly. For instance, social norms can either foster the rejection or acceptance of violence. The development and implementation of child-sensitive and gender-responsive laws, policies and services play a pivotal factor in providing meaningful support and protecting children from crime and violence.



This framework allows for a full **appreciation of developmental processes throughout childhood**, including adolescence. Children go through enormous change between birth and 18 years of age, and recent neuroscientific research has confirmed that brain development continues well into a person's twenties.[24] Accordingly, the way children are treated in their different social contexts and their broader environment can have a deep impact on their cognitive and social-emotional development, and consequently on their behaviour. This shows that the levels identified by the social ecological model are inherently connected, and therefore to minimize the risks of crime and violence, interventions at all levels are essential to encourage a truly child-centred approach. The ecology of child development is meant to be translated into practice, to:

- **Promote the identification of vulnerabilities and protective factors at all levels.** By mitigating the vulnerabilities and working to identify, protect and strengthen the protective factors, the ecology of child development fosters resilience to crime and violence in both children and their environments.
- **Recognize that while child rights are universally applicable in all the environments** where children live, each specific context requires specialized support to effectively operationalize full recognition and enjoyment of child rights. This will create the conditions for a protective environment that is resistant to crime and violence.
- **Pursue the empowerment of children at all levels**, including individual support, collective interventions designed for families, schools and/or communities, and systemic reform affecting legal and policy frameworks and institutional capacities: all actions should aim to create the conditions for children to be informed and participate meaningfully in all decision-making processes related to them.



The way children are treated in their different social contexts and their broader environment can have a deep impact on their cognitive and social-emotional development and consequently, on their behaviour.



[24] S.J. Blakemore and S. Choudhury, "Development of the adolescent brain: implications for executive function and social cognition," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 47, Nos. 3–4 (2006); B. J. Casey, J.N. Giedd and K.M. Thomas, "Structural and functional brain development and its relation to cognitive development," *Biological Psychology*, vol. 54, Nos. 1–3 (2000); N. R. Riggs and others, "Executive function and the promotion of social-emotional competence," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, vol. 27, No. 4.

7. OBJECTIVES

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Safeguarding children from violence requires action on multiple fronts, with different actors working in parallel on specific areas of intervention and driven by common objectives. It entails improving systems' ability to protect children as well as providing better services to children who have been exposed to violence, exploited, victimized. It also means recognizing that children that face specific circumstances need individualized tailored support. For instance, children in contact with the justice system require specialized, child-sensitive and gender-responsive processes and procedures implemented by adequately trained and accredited justice practitioners, including judges, prosecutors, lawyers and paralegals. In striving to foster this kind of lasting change, this Strategy includes three strategic interrelated and, to an extent, overlapping objectives.

There are **three interrelated strategic objectives**:

OBJECTIVE 1 PREVENTION	OBJECTIVE 2 RESPONSE	OBJECTIVE 3 JUSTICE
Children and their environments are better protected from crime and violence.	Children who have experienced crime and violence are supported towards recovery and reintegration processes.	Children in contact with justice systems are better served and protected from crime and violence, and supported towards recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: PREVENTION

Children and their environments are better protected from crime and violence

All children have the right to protection from crime and violence. To make this a reality, it is necessary to shed light on the extent of the problem and its various forms, and the severe consequences for children who are exposed to violence, exploited or victimized. Research, data collection and research are crucial to better prevent violence against children.

Prevention efforts must include a whole-of-society approach, aligning multisectoral stakeholders to meet the needs of children and reduce their vulnerabilities. Effective protection requires changes to social norms, mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that enable certain forms of violence by ignoring, tolerating or downplaying their gravity. Such change can be fostered through outreach and engagement in sharing information and opening dialogue with children, their families and their communities.

Preventing violence against children shall be recognized as an urgent priority for all, including the international community, all Member States, civil society organizations and the private sector.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: RESPONSE

Children who have experienced violence are supported towards recovery and reintegration processes

After violence has occurred, children require specialized support to overcome the harm they have experienced. In contexts where children face intensified exposure to crime and violence they are also more likely to experience revictimization. This is why appropriate services and care are necessary to assist them on the road to recovery and reintegration.

Adequate responses from various systems working in close coordination (i.e., child protection, education, health, security and justice) require specialized knowledge and skills to provide trauma-informed practices and care. Gender-responsive approaches are important to provide both girls and boys with the best level of care according to their specific needs. Redress and accountability mechanisms are necessary to restore truth and justice, and to empower children to overcome the harm inflicted upon them.

Appropriate, tailored and specialized support makes a difference. With access to a full spectrum of services that allow for adequate responses, including health and mental health services, psychosocial support and rehabilitation and community-oriented reintegration, children cannot only survive after crime and violence, but also thrive, regaining their rightful place in society as agents of their own rights.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: JUSTICE

Children in contact with justice systems are better served and protected from violence and supported towards recovery

Children who are in contact with the justice system are often in a position of heightened vulnerability as victims or witnesses of crime or as alleged offenders. Accordingly, this objective aims to ensure that specialized laws, procedures and authorities are in place to ensure that this specific group of children has their rights respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Indeed, justice systems have a key role to play in respecting, protecting and fulfilling child rights. However, they are often not designed to fully consider the needs of children, and their institutional objectives, processes and procedures may not be in line with child rights.

As the primary duty bearer, the first responsibility of a justice system is to prevent further violations, ensuring that any child, regardless of their status as victim, witness, or alleged offender, is protected from secondary victimization and retaliation. Secondly, justice systems must ensure an appropriate and tailored response, ensuring that the treatment of children is conducive to their psychosocial rehabilitation and community-oriented, restorative reintegration.

For example, when children are in contact with the justice system for having allegedly infringed the penal law, the justice system should ensure the full application of children's rights-based procedures; full inclusion in which the children can participate and be heard; and fully integrate rehabilitation and reintegration.

Institutional and legislative reforms are often required in addition to specialized child-sensitive and gender responsive strategies, guidance and training before justice systems are able to offer children this transformative and supportive role, while also ensuring their continued protection.

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Fulfilling these strategic objectives requires incremental change at multiple levels. This Strategy identifies operational objectives geared towards triggering change within the different environments that promote safety and opportunities for children.

By working together towards achieving these operational objectives, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will create a child-sensitive environment with a transformative effect, leading to resilient communities and reducing children's vulnerability.

1 OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: INCREASED AWARENESS

Global, national and local communities have increased awareness and understanding of violence against children and its consequences, and know how to prevent and respond to it.

Knowledge is a powerful instrument and is key to the exercise of any right and to protecting oneself and others against violence. A globally informed society, aware of crime and violence against children and their associated consequences is better equipped to prevent and respond to such phenomena in an appropriate manner. Societal change involves all of us, including children and their families, the professionals who work with them, as well as law- and policy-makers.



awareness



self-awareness

2**OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: RESILIENCE AND PARTICIPATION**

Children, families, and communities are more resilient and participate in preventing and responding to violence.

Children are not weak and helpless; rather, they are distinct from adults, and capable and resourceful. When equipped with the right information and empowered to make their voices heard, children can play a powerful role in shifting societal dynamics and can contribute to their own protection. In this ideal scenario, children are empowered together with their families within resilient communities, fostering the necessary conditions for widespread safety, well-being and development.

3**OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: STRENGTHENED CAPACITIES**

Institutions and actors have strengthened capacities and are better equipped to prevent and respond to violence against children.

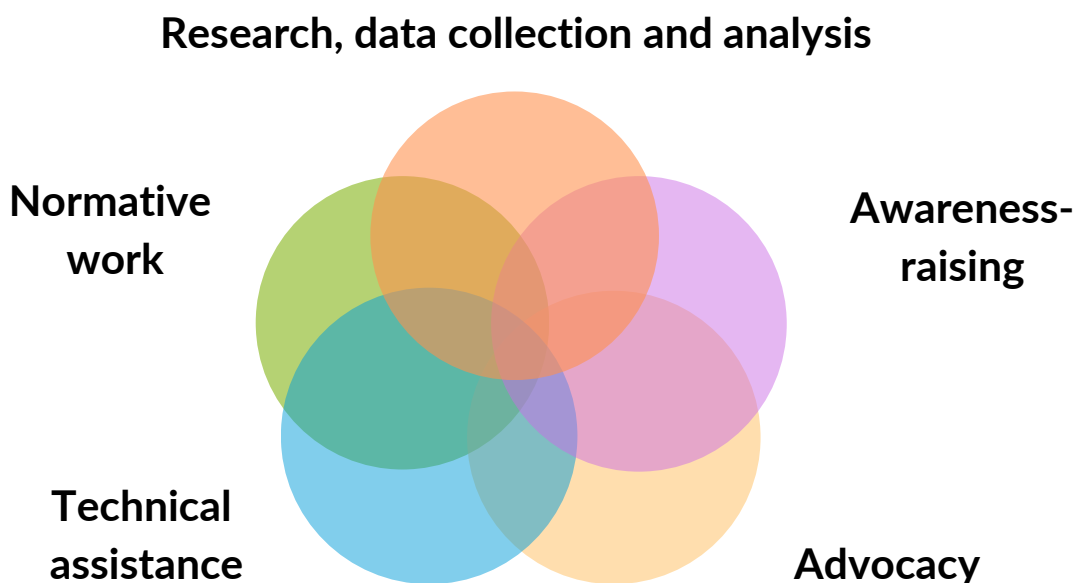
Specialized professionals working in innovative, well-equipped and technologically up to date institutions have the capacity to shape the destiny of children, becoming effective protectors of children from violence and supporting them to reach their full potential.

4**OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE: LEGAL, REGULATORY AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Legal, regulatory and policy frameworks are strengthened and reflect government commitment to better prevent and respond to violence against children.

Laws, strategies and policies set the framework for what can be expected from duty bearers and service beneficiaries, and can influence what wider society prioritizes or views as acceptable. Legal and policy frameworks that prohibit violence, criminalize serious forms of violence against children, integrate wide-reaching prevention strategies and provide for services and response mechanisms can encourage society as a whole to prioritize efforts to end violence against children.

8. PROGRAMMING INTERVENTIONS



Working together, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC are able to jointly focus on five interconnected pillars of intervention. This will advance the adoption of a systemic approach for the protection of children from crime and violence. To do this, they will build on their respective mandates. The OSRSG-VAC has a global mandate focusing on advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, including contributing to research and knowledge dissemination. These complement the mandates of UNODC, which include normative work, research and operational work through the delivery of technical assistance. The following sections highlight how the two entities will work together to enhance their effectiveness in pursuit of shared goals.

RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: Strengthen the generation and use of knowledge related to violence against children

Knowledge is the basis of effective interventions to end violence against children. There is an urgent need to generate and disseminate evidence-based knowledge and analysis of the various phenomena that manifest as different forms of violence against children, their pervasiveness, their manifestations, the ways in which they affect children and what works in addressing them. Knowledge can inform laws, strategies and policies, change societal attitudes, bring communities together and directly empower children and their families.

The OSRSG-VAC and UNODC engage in research, data collection and analysis through their internal capacities and by partnering with relevant think tanks, research partners and academia with a view to collecting and analysing data in a meaningful and reliable manner.

AWARENESS-RAISING:

Raise awareness of effective prevention of and responses to violence against children

To effectively prevent and respond to violence against children, society must be involved at the global, national and local levels.

Sharing information aimed at raising awareness among children, families, communities, practitioners and policymakers, and society as a whole can empower them to confront the cultural norms and common practices that perpetuate violence against children.

Children should also be targeted through tailored awareness-raising activities to ensure that they receive information that is understandable and meaningful to them as part of their empowerment as agents of change. Finally, specialized awareness-raising efforts will address policymakers and professionals with direct responsibility for protecting children, to directly influence policy and practice.

Through this Strategy, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will each capitalize on the other's approach and networks while scaling up their investment in awareness-raising activities, with a view to reaching an ever-growing audience and mobilizing increasing support for reforms and interventions to free children from crime and violence.

ADVOCACY:

Target law and policymakers, as well as key gatekeepers, through advocacy efforts to consolidate political will for improved protection of children from violence.

Awareness-raising initiatives will be more impactful if they are accompanied by targeted advocacy efforts. Advocacy builds on awareness-raising efforts and aims to secure political commitment. Ending crime and violence against children requires complex cultural, societal, economic and systemic change, as well as considerable and long-term investment. This is only possible when political will is mobilized in favour of these interventions.

This Strategy will build on the work of the OSRSG-VAC, which remains at the forefront of global, regional and national advocacy efforts, in partnership with the operational leadership of UNODC. Together, they will show that addressing violence against children is not only urgent but possible, and that investment in this area will yield high returns.[25]

[25] Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, and others, "The violence prevention dividend – why preventing violence against children makes economic sense", 2022.

NORMATIVE WORK:

International standards and norms set the boundaries to prevent and respond to violence against children.

International standards and norms recognize the gravity of serious forms of violence against children. They encourage prevention efforts, create conditions for children to access appropriate support, and provide a basis for ending the impunity of perpetrators of crimes against children.

However, despite considerable advances in promoting the rights of children in normative frameworks, practices that undermine their protection persist. International law must serve as the safeguard of standards of protection to ensure that the rights of children are not violated.

As part of the United Nations Secretariat, UNODC is the custodian of a number of international legal instruments and leads supporting the development of standards related to the prevention of and response to violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. Through its specialized expertise, UNODC is well-placed to continue to support the development and update of relevant international standards on the prevention of and response to crime and violence against children. By joining forces with the OSRSG-VAC, UNODC is in a stronger position to engage Member States in adopting and integrating international standards and norms into their laws, policies and practice.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

Member States are supported in their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children.

Analysis of data, knowledge, awareness, and international standards and norms alone are not sufficient to address the root causes and manifestations of violence against children. Member States, civil society organizations, the private sector and other key partners require technical assistance to support the development and implementation of laws, policies and practices.

Through its technical assistance, UNODC works to strengthen compliance with relevant international law and bolster national ownership by means of developing specialized knowledge and skills and establishing institutional capabilities. The Office is committed to respecting and supporting national counterparts that are partners in the design and implementation of programmes and activities. UNODC's assistance aims to strengthen a participatory approach, providing an open and cooperative platform for the voices of different stakeholders, and investing in children as active participants in any action that affects them.

UNODC specializes in delivering the following services:

- (A)** Research, data collection and analysis for integrated information management systems on crime and violence against children;
- (B)** Legal advisory services to align national legal, regulatory and policy frameworks with international standards and norms;
- (C)** Capacity-building to prevent and respond to crime and violence against children
- (D)** Development of mechanisms that allow the participation of children, families and communities in preventing and responding to crime and violence.

By joining forces, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will be able to rely on one another's unique added value, multiplying their reach and impact to pursue an integrated strategy that relies on the above five pillars of intervention to create lasting change.

9. PRIORITY CONTEXTS

Under the umbrella of this Strategy, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC strive to act within specific contexts in which children are exposed to increased risk of crime and violence. These contexts are outlined here as priority areas for focused interventions under the Strategy:

1

CONTEXTS OF INSECURITY, including contexts of (protracted) armed conflict, organized crime, terrorism, and other forms of prevalent crime and violence which leave society fragile and increase vulnerabilities.

2

JUSTICE SYSTEMS, including both criminal justice systems and justice systems intended to protect and support children in which they may appear as victims or witnesses and/or are alleged as, accused of, or recognised as having infringed the penal law.

3

CYBERSPACE, where children can be, and often are, victims of crime, interpersonal violence, online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and can be recruited for criminal purposes.

4

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE, as a result of extreme poverty, conflict, organized crime or climate-related events. Interventions in this context will focus on child victims of trafficking and related forms of exploitation, smuggling, and children detained for immigration-related reasons.

The Strategy's implementation and identified priorities may evolve according to emerging threats and trends affecting the safety of children. The priority contexts are not an exhaustive list, and present considerable overlaps and connections in reality. However, highlighting each priority context is important to recognize that specific phenomena and circumstances affect children's status and vulnerabilities, as well as the opportunities available for their protection. Accordingly, the Strategy aims to promote specialization in dealing with the complexities of each context. Specific actions under each priority context are further developed in the Action Plan for the implementation of this Strategy.



1 CONTEXTS OF INSECURITY

This Strategy refers to contexts of insecurity to indicate the presence of organized crime, terrorism and conflict. In such contexts, crime and violence are widespread or are more restricted but engrained.[26]

This Strategy focuses on a group of children who face a specific set of dangers in contexts of insecurity: those who are recruited and exploited by organized criminal and armed groups, including terrorist groups.[27] United Nations annual reports covering 2012 to 2017 document almost 30,000 verified cases of child recruitment.[28] In 2020 alone, the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict confirmed 8,521 cases of child recruitment and use. [29] These numbers are likely underreported and limited to conflict situations; child recruitment and exploitation also take place in otherwise peaceful environments, often undetected and unseen.

Upon recruitment, children can become victims of many types of crimes such as sexual slavery, forced labour, forced marriage, or even be exploited in combat-related and support roles that serve the purposes of the groups. These children are often exposed to extreme dangers including enslavement, physical beatings and abuse including sexual violence, sometimes leading to death.

[26] Contexts of insecurity overlap but do not coincide with humanitarian contexts, as their scale does not necessarily reach the threshold of natural disasters, man-made emergencies or complex emergencies.

[27] In this context, "armed groups" is used to refer to armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State, and that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children (see art. 4 Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (A/RES/54/263) on the involvement of children in armed conflict; "organized criminal groups" is used to refer to a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing serious offences whose organization is criminalized by national law, and that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children, as defined in art. 2 (a), United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2003; in the absence of an international consensus on the definition of terrorism, the term "terrorist groups", refers to the entities designated by the Security Council on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List and the Taliban sanctions list, and Al-Shabaab, as well as groups designated as terrorist groups at the national or regional level, that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of children. (Having given citations needed for the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List and the Taliban sanctions list, and Al-Shabaa)

[28] Reliefweb, "Child soldier levels doubled since 2012 and girls' exploitation is rising", 11 Feb 2009.

[29] S/2021/437, para. 4.



1 CONTEXTS OF INSECURITY

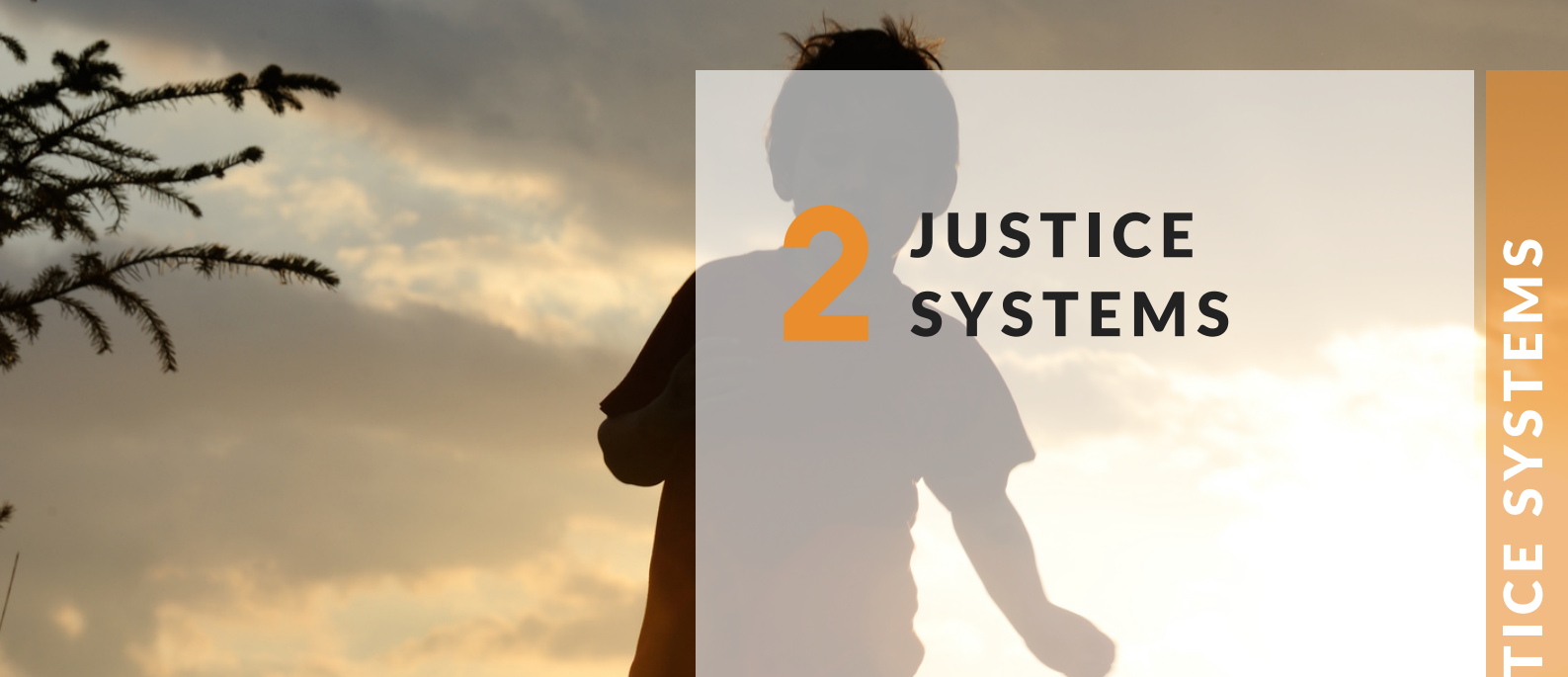
During their exploitation, these children may at times be involved in acts that pose a security threat and/or constitute a criminal offence. As a result, even when they manage to exit these groups, they are often exposed to further violence: they can be rejected by their families, stigmatized in the communities, imprisoned, tortured and addressed through punitive approaches. In other words, the specific vulnerabilities of this group of children may expose them to further victimization.

It is a priority for UNODC to promote specialized research, advocacy, awareness-raising, normative work, and technical assistance aiming to support Member States in preventing and responding to violence against children. This approach aims to ensure that they are seen and treated as children first, rather than as a security threat, recognizing that they are primarily victims.[30] Work in this area focuses on bridging the gap between security and child protection, advocating for child rights as an effective basis of long-term peace and security.

Accordingly, this Strategy supports integrated interventions to:

- 1 Prevent child recruitment and exploitation;
- 2 Foster the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of recruitment; and
- 3 Support justice and security responses that are in line with child rights and conducive to recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

[30] See UNODC, Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System (2017); idem, Justice for Children in the Context of Counter-Terrorism: A Training Manual (2019); idem, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Victims of Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: A Training Manual (2019), Prevention of Child Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System: A Training Manual (2020)



Children in contact with the justice system are in a vulnerable situation. They may be in need of protection; they may have witnessed or experienced a crime; or they may be alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law.

Justice systems are designed for adults, and are developed in pursuit of law and order. They often lack the capacity to respond to children's needs, to recognize their vulnerabilities in these complex situations, including in relation to gender, and/or to respect, protect and fulfil child rights through appropriate action. At present the capacity of justice systems to adapt to children's circumstances is further threatened by competing crises that often result in budget cuts, strained resources, and insufficient time.

Many children are unable to access justice or are left to deal with complex bureaucratic processes alone. They may lack information, explanations and support, and may be faced with punitive approaches. Many do not understand what they are accused of and do not receive adequate information on their rights and the consequences of their actions; e.g., to waive the right to a lawyer during police interrogation. This leaves them more exposed to crime and violence and deprived of appropriate protection and responses. While e-justice represents an opportunity in this context, it can also lead to further risks for children.

The OSRSG-VAC and UNODC work to promote justice for children. This entails:

- A justice system that recognizes that it can play a crucial role not only the response to crime and violence against children but also in protecting children from these phenomena through proactive prevention strategies;



2 JUSTICE SYSTEMS

- A justice system that only uses deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort,[31] and that implements a variety of alternative measures to judicial proceedings (diversion) and to detention that are more conducive to rehabilitation and reintegration processes;
- A justice system that recognizes trafficked children as victims of crime and does not punish them or smuggled migrant children for acts that they were compelled to commit as part of their trafficking or through having been smuggled;
- Coordination mechanisms that connect the justice system with health, education, and child protection systems, to provide children with comprehensive support and tailored assistance;
- Institutions, laws, and procedures tailored and specialized to child-sensitive and gender-responsive strategies that are accessible, participatory and capable of fulfilling the specific needs of children with full respect for their rights. This includes specialized procedures and services for child victims and witnesses as well as tailored strategies for the treatment of child alleged offenders;
- Specialized capacity development for professionals to ensure that they are trained in child rights, specific forms of violence against children, and appropriate prevention and response strategies.

When it comes to the treatment of children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, this Strategy advocates for change beyond simple adaptation. Specialized child justice systems should not merely aim to adapt procedures and measures for adults to the needs and circumstances of children but rather pursue a fully child-centred approach. This approach is based on the latest research and understanding of the developmental processes of children, recognizes their specific needs, and takes a restorative approach to justice aimed at repairing and overcoming harm, rather than applying mere punishment. Justice systems can only truly serve the whole of society when they protect, respect and fulfil child rights.

[31] See UNODC, Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System (2017); idem, Justice for Children in the Context of Counter-Terrorism: A Training Manual (2019); idem, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Victims of Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: A Training Manual (2019), Prevention of Child Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System: A Training Manual (2020)

3 CYBERSPACE

Internet accessibility and digital vulnerabilities have increased over the last decade, especially for children. It is estimated that around the world, a child goes online for the first time every half-second.[32] The growing number of Internet users has resulted in a global rise of potential cybercrime victims and cybercriminals, as predicted by UNODC.[33] Navigating these less-regulated spaces can be difficult and destabilizing for children, caretakers and parents alike if prevention and countering measures, including reporting mechanisms and reparation measures, are not fully established and made available at the institutional level. In this context, gender and age are vulnerability factors for the victimization of children in cyberspace.

Children, in particular girls, are more likely to become victims of certain types of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crimes, in particular online harassment, child trafficking, and child sexual exploitation and abuse. Children can also be recruited by organized criminal and armed groups, including terrorist groups, using information and communication technology (ICT).

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is a serious form of violence against children that can only occur by means of ICT.

Violence against children in cyberspace is an extremely complex crime to handle, as:

- Child victims, offenders, and data or systems harming children may exist in different jurisdictions.
- Perpetrators globally exploit the lack of regulations, utilize anonymization techniques, and capitalize on the accessibility of the web, enabling them to operate with impunity.
- The majority of elements of evidence relating to cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crimes are digital and their extraction, collection and analysis require specialized techniques.
- Member States lacking technical tools and specialist capabilities, or frameworks cannot respond to the rapidly changing online environment.

[32] See UNICEF, "Protecting children online: every child must be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse on the Internet", www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online.

[33] See UNODC, "Cybercrime and COVID19: risks and responses", 14 April 2020.

3 CYBERSPACE

The current nature and scale of this phenomenon is unprecedented and represents a serious threat to public health and security. The justice system plays a key role in addressing crime and violence committed against children via ICT. It has the ability to offer protection to child victims of violence and can create a dissuasive effect by investigating and prosecuting incidents of violence against children.[34] But the ecosystem of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is complex and there is a need to also enhance accountability of internet service providers that host illegal content of CSAM.

To ensure effective prevention of and responses to violence against children in cyberspace, the Strategy will bring together a range of stakeholders to:

- Create specialized knowledge on the risks of online crime and violence against children and disseminate it broadly as possible thus empowering communities and children to act as agents in their own protection;[35]
- Encourage public-private partnerships supporting the prevention of and responses to violence against children, especially in relation to online child exploitation and abuse; [36]
- Strengthen global and national normative frameworks to increase the protection of children from cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime, and to enhance assistance for child victims through a survivor-centred approach;
- Continue to support the development of sound policy on the topic in intergovernmental fora.

[34] A/RES/69/172, Part Two.

[35] This action will build on the findings and recommendations of the SRSG-VAC to the HRC (March 2023), which focuses on violence against children in the digital environment.

[36] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Tech against Trafficking, "Policy responses to technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings: Analysis of current approaches and considerations for moving forward" (Vienna, 2022), p. 3.



4 CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Crime, conflict, terrorism, economic inequality and lack of opportunities can push children on the move. Today, the effects of climate change are exacerbating this with 920 million children currently exposed to water scarcity and 820 million exposed to heatwaves.[37] The climate crisis, which the OSRSG-VAC has identified as a “threat multiplier” for violence against children, [38] is accompanied by extreme weather events and resource scarcity, exacerbating forced displacement.

When in transit, children may be travelling unaccompanied or with family members; they may be seeking asylum or social prospects; and they may be targeted by traffickers and smugglers, including recruiters from organized criminal groups and terrorist groups. Often, these situations overlap.

While children can participate in their migration choices to varying degrees, it is important to recognize that, when on the move, their exposure to crime and violence increases. They can become separated from family members or caregivers, and may experience injury, lack of assistance and maltreatment. When reliant on migrant smugglers and traffickers they can face exploitation neglect, harassment, deprivation, abuse, violence, and even death. The risks are higher for girls, who are disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence.

Children on the move may also be more vulnerable when dealing with public authorities and accessing justice: they are likely to see their rights denied and to be treated with hostility, often as criminals. These children may end up in administrative detention, in spaces that are often overcrowded with no separation of children and adults. They may be prosecuted for offences associated with their situation as victims of trafficking, or for having been smuggled.

[37] The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index, UNICEF publication (2021) p. 10.

[38] A/77/221; The climate crisis and violence against children (United Nations publication, 2022).



4 CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Through this Strategy, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC aim to:

- Produce further research and raise awareness of the specific forms of crime and violence to which children on the move are exposed, particularly by including children's descriptions of their experiences;
- Strengthen coordinated multistakeholder approaches to ensure appropriate protection and assistance for children on the move, with a particular focus on unaccompanied and separated children;
- Develop more knowledge on and build capacity for understanding the non-punishment principle in the context of trafficking, and the non-criminalization provisions of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol;
- End all immigration-related detention for children on the move, including the use of administrative detention for the purpose of deterring irregular migration.

10. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The OSRSG-VAC and UNODC have collaborated towards mutual objectives since 2012. With this Strategy, they have the opportunity of scaling up efforts and achieving greater impact supporting countries in protecting children from crime and violence. The OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will be jointly responsible for implementing and monitoring the Strategy.

THE IMPLEMENTERS

THE OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The SRSG-VAC is a global independent advocate in favour of the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. The SRSG-VAC mobilizes action and political support to maintain momentum around this agenda and generate renewed concern about the harmful effects of violence on children.

The mandate of the SRSG-VAC is anchored in human rights standards, promoting the universal ratification and effective implementation of core international conventions. The SRSG-VAC cooperates closely with human rights bodies and mechanisms, United Nations funds and programmes and specialized agencies, as well as regional intergovernmental organizations. Furthermore, it actively encourages cooperation among stakeholders, including national institutions and civil society organizations, and, especially, children and young people.

The SRSG-VAC makes use of mutually supportive strategies, including the contributing to strategic international, regional and national meetings, the identification of good practices and experiences across regions, sectors and settings, the organization of field missions, and the promotion of thematic studies and reports.

In its role, the SRSG-VAC can access the highest levels of Member States' political decision-making. At the country level, there is no comparable United Nations official with both high-level access and a specific focus on all forms of violence against children in all settings, both offline and online.

The SRSG-VAC can, therefore, play a crucial role in amplifying and promoting country-level United Nations advocacy objectives related to ending violence against children, which are developed in close collaboration with the Resident Coordinator and other relevant members of the United Nations Country Teams. Furthermore, as violence affects children in all countries, the global role of the SRSG-VAC provides a mandate for advocacy in high-income countries where there is no United Nations programmatic presence, but where the issue of violence against children still requires stronger action from national authorities.

The SRSG-VAC chairs three inter-agency working groups within the United Nations: the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence against Children, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), and the United Nations Task Force on Children Deprived of Liberty.

The OSRSG-VAC will contribute to the implementation of the Strategy through its work amplifying the voices of children, advocating for accelerated implementation of the SDGs to end all forms of violence against children, and promoting child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice systems as part of the integrated services for children from different sectors.

The OSRSG-VAC will closely coordinate with UNODC to magnify the latter's work to end crime and violence against children by drawing international attention to the various phenomena that manifest as crime and violence against children; promote international standards and guidance tools; and support UNODC programmatic work on the ground, among other such efforts, by coordinating country missions and implementing targeted joint activities. Moreover, OSRSG-VAC and UNODC, as part of the United Nations Task Force on Children Deprived of Liberty, will continue to support and contribute to United Nations Task Force joint advocacy on ending deprivation of liberty, including in the context of the administration of justice.

To address children's vulnerability to violence, the SRSG-VAC will continue to advocate for investment in child- and gender-sensitive violence prevention and protection systems, and in services of which justice is an integral and essential part.

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

The mission of UNODC is to contribute to global peace and security, human rights and development by making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism, and to work for and with Member States to promote justice and the rule of law and build resilient societies.

The multiple mandates of UNODC, including crime prevention and criminal justice; countering transnational organized crime, cybercrime, corruption, terrorism; and drug control, are areas of work where key stakeholders have a crucial role to play in protecting children from crime and violence. This Strategy recognizes the urgency of mainstreaming children's rights and protection throughout broader development, rule of law, humanitarian and security reform efforts. The UNODC Strategy (2021–2025)[39] calls for the meaningful participation and empowerment of children and youth in international policy discussions, and stresses that their protection will be made an important part of the work of UNODC. In this regard, UNODC has called for a framework to ensure that such efforts are streamlined across all of its operations.

[39] <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/strategy/index.html>

Within the UNODC Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section (Division of Treaty Affairs) and, within that section, the specialized END Violence Against Children Team (END VAC Team) will have a coordinating function supporting the implementation of this Strategy in close cooperation with all relevant UNODC sections, branches and programmes, in particular the Research and Analysis Branch; the Terrorism Prevention Branch; and the Organized Crime Branch, and its Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section and its Global Programme on Cybercrime.

The END VAC Team comprises legal experts working to ensure that national laws and policies comply with international standards and norms related to child-rights, creating the necessary conditions to protect children from crime and violence; psychosocial support experts specialized in developmentally-appropriate child-centred support measures; knowledge management experts focused on the identification, production and dissemination of a specialized knowledge-basis to foster the protection of children within UNODC mandate areas; communication experts; and monitoring and evaluation experts specialized in communication strategies and identifying, monitoring and measuring the impact of the work of UNODC to advance and mainstream child rights.

Building on its mandates and resources, the Strategy will support UNODC in strengthening its role as a catalyst for the integration of child rights into broader security, rule of law, and developmental reform efforts, in line with the SDGs and the United Nations reform, [40] by:

- **Defining commitments to new results:** UNODC managers, with the support of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section END VAC Team, will continue to identify new commitments to advancing the Strategy's vision of freeing children from crime and violence. This will be pursued through enhanced internal coordination and interconnection among the UNODC pillars of intervention.
- **Promoting integrated programming:** The systemic approach developed by UNODC to tackle crime and serious forms of violence against children by stressing the role of the justice system in cooperation with other sectors offers an opportunity to integrate the work on Violence Against Children into other UNODC-mandated areas, laying the ground for consistent programming from the global level to the field.
- **Enhancing innovation:** The END VAC Team, in coordination with all UNODC teams (from all divisions of UNODC Headquarters and field operations), and in particular the Knowledge and Innovation Team of the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, will work to identify emerging threats and opportunities in order to provide guidance to Member States and develop new and specialized knowledge in support of the Strategy's objectives. The team will also develop a network of partnerships to promote the dissemination of the Strategy objectives through a culture of innovation.

[40] To learn more about the United Nations reform, please visit: [United to Reform](#).

- **Strengthening institutional capacity by ensuring coherence and consistency in the pursuit of shared goals:** In partnership with the Human Resources Management service, the END VAC Team will coordinate efforts to enhance substantive knowledge and procedures aiming to mainstream compliance on child rights across UNODC-mandated areas. This will include fostering a culture of learning and accountability with respect to child rights and child protection in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice.
- **Building on the achievements of UNODC work to end violence against children:** For years, UNODC has worked to support Member States in ending crime and violence against children. The achievements so far under the Global Programme to End Violence against Children, in terms of normative development, specialized knowledge production, and partnership with key international stakeholders and national counterparts, provide the basis for the continued development of UNODC activities in this area, which as of 2023 are conducted within the framework of the UNODC Global Programme on People-centred Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. UNODC has also contributed to strengthening the global response to cybercrime, and child trafficking and smuggling at the normative, research and technical cooperation levels through the work of its Research and Analysis Branch, as well as through its Global Programme on Cybercrime and its Global Programme against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants.
- **Strengthening a coherent approach at interagency level:** As per the General Assembly resolution on improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons,[41] UNODC is the Permanent Coordinator of the ICAT located in its Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section. In 2023, OSRSG-VAC and UNODC has been working closely within the ICAT framework to provide essential guidance on preventing and combating child trafficking and ensuring a harmonized approach across the Group's membership.

This Strategy will be operationalized through a joint Action Plan for 2023–2024, a living and work in progress document.

[41] A/RES/61/180

PARTNERSHIPS

Implementation of the Strategy will benefit from the combination of existing partnerships and the vast networks of the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC and will also attract new partners through continued outreach and innovation.

This Strategy will be used to enhance coordination among State and non-State actors and to facilitate cross-sector, multilateral collaboration, thereby increasing learning opportunities and advancing the discourse on protecting children from crime and violence. Partners are envisaged to include the following:

Member States

Member States will continue to play the leading political role through their willingness and commitment to integrate child rights into broader socioeconomic and developmental reform efforts, to strengthen child protection systems, and to advance evidence-based legal, policy and institutional reform towards preventing and responding to violence against children.

United Nations Entities

In line with the United Nations reform, this Strategy will be an opportunity to strengthen cooperation among United Nations entities with a view to aligning priorities and plans, maximizing resources and avoiding the duplication of efforts. At the global level this will be ensured through the existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms, including the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Ending Violence against Children, the United Nations Task Force on Children Deprived of Liberty, and the United Nations ICAT; and in the country context, through the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system and closer coordination with relevant members of the United Nations Country Team.

Non-Government and Civil Society Partners

This Strategy aims to bring together child-rights and child-protection organizations, including international non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations that will benefit from this Strategy by:

- ▶ Building onto the strengths of the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC partnership by coordinating approaches and work-planning towards common strategic objectives;
- ▶ Joining outreach and advocacy efforts and mirroring key messaging;



Supporting knowledge creation and innovation through joint partnerships in research.

Think Tanks, Research Partners and Academia

Think tanks, research partners, and academic institutions will be crucial partners under the Strategy, contributing high-quality and rigorous research on existing trends in crime and violence against children, and promising approaches to prevention and response.

Academic institutions may also provide opportunities to rapidly expand capacity-development efforts by supporting learning opportunities for multisectoral professionals.

Children and Young People

In line with the principle of inclusion, or “Nothing for us, without us”, the Strategy will build on the vast network that is part of the OSRSG-VAC outreach and promote the inclusion of children and young people on issues related to violence against children. The Strategy will expand this approach through increased outreach and by mobilizing children as agents for their own protection from crime and violence. It will also foster the inclusion of children in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies in the areas of crime prevention and criminal justice.

Public-private partnerships

The Strategy will strengthen and increase public-private partnerships of entities from local businesses to international financial institutions as a means of facilitating solution-oriented approaches and innovation for the prevention of and responses to crime and violence against children.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Budgetary support towards future returns

It is estimated that violence against children costs approximately 7 trillion US dollars annually^[41], while violence prevention is nominal in comparison. As part of the effort to mobilize resources to ensure flexible and adequate financial resourcing of the Strategy, the OSRSG and UNODC will develop a customized resource mobilization plan rooted in the concept of investment for future returns and safeguarding from the financial impacts of crime and violence.

[41] P. Perezniето and others, The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence Against Children (London, Overseas Development Institute 2014).

Partnership-centred

Resource mobilization will also include an emphasis on multilateral and multisectoral partnership. With partnership at their centre, joint efforts will have a multiplying impact in which resources can be streamlined for the most efficient and effective approach to implementation.

In addition to maximizing the benefits of existing financial and in-kind resources, the resource mobilization plan will include outreach and the inclusion of United Nations development cooperation partners, traditional and non-traditional donors, international financial institutions, and public-private partnerships driven by mutual interests and objectives.

Inclusive approach to building and maintaining confidence

The Strategy resource mobilization plan will include regular engagement with existing partners and outreach to new or potential partners through ongoing dialogue around key issues and regular information-sharing. Through such exchanges, the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC will encourage alignment with and investment in child rights, while increasing donor trust.

COMMUNICATION

The power of strategic communication will be used to promote the vision: “Children all over the world are free from crime and violence” under a tailored Communication Plan built on the objectives of the Strategy. The Communication Plan will drive the implementation of communication activities while remaining flexible to accommodate changing trends, contextual dynamics and stakeholder needs.

Vertical and horizontal information flows will increase coherence within and between the OSRSG-VAC and UNODC, to drive joint efforts across all five pillars of intervention by aligning key messaging within and across agencies, from global to local efforts, in order to achieve the greatest impact.

Communication will be used to promote accountability and the progress of actions taken to implement the Strategy. Learning and knowledge achieved during the implementation of this Strategy will also be used to shape strategic communication.

Strategic communication will also be used to regularly share information on successes and achievements with stakeholders in order to improve and increase the visibility of these initiatives. Effort will be invested to ensure that creative and innovative forms of communication are applied that remain relevant to the wide range of stakeholders, including child-rights practitioners and professionals, Member States, multisectoral professionals, private and public partners, communities, families, young people, and children themselves.

PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT MONITORING

The Strategy will utilize a joint Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework and Plan that monitors the impact and results achieved through a Strategy Action Plan. This framework and plan will apply a lens to three key indicators of sustainable change:

- 1 Increased awareness and understanding of child rights and key issues around crime and violence against children;
- 2 Changes in behaviour, or actions and activities that lead to children being better protected at all levels and by all actors;
- 3 Changes in services, policy, systems and institutions to facilitate prevention of and responses to crime and violence.



**UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
Violence Against Children**

<https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org>
Headquarters of the United Nations
New York City, New York
United States



United Nations Office On Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

<https://www.unodc.org> | <https://www.unodc.org/endvac>
Vienna International Centre
PO Box 500
A 1400 Vienna
Austria

Alexandra Martins

Team Leader
END Violence Against Children Team
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

alexandra.martins@un.org

<https://www.unodc.org/endvac>
P.O. Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria

Tea Machaidze

Child Protection Officer
Office of the Special Representative of
the Secretary-General on Violence
against Children

tea.machaidze@un.org

<https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org>
New York, USA | FF-1714C



Vienna, November 2023



**UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
Violence Against Children**

<https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org>
Headquarters of the United Nations
New York City, New York
United States



United Nations Office On Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

<https://www.unodc.org> | <https://www.unodc.org/endvac>
Vienna International Centre
PO Box 500
A 1400 Vienna
Austria

Alexandra Martins

Team Leader
END Violence Against Children Team
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

alexandra.martins@un.org
<https://www.unodc.org/endvac>
P.O. Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria

Tea Machaidze

Child Protection Officer
Office of the Special Representative of
the Secretary-General on Violence
against Children

tea.machaidze@un.org
<https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org>
New York, USA | FF-1714C



Vienna, November 2023