**Project: Data integration for acknowledging risks and protecting children from violence**

**Background and rationale**

Preventing and combating Violence Against Children (VAC) is one of the main objectives of the Commission’s work on the rights of the child and a thematic area of the EU Strategy on the rights of the child (adopted on 24 March 2021). This requires a full picture of the phenomenon, and data availability is crucial to understand its extent and characteristics. However, the current data collected in the EU on this topic does not provide enough comparable information on the scale of violence, as well as on its characteristics and victims' profiles. There are gaps at all levels: local, national, and European, which hamper policies addressing these issues. The current situation also needs further attention because the Covid-19 pandemic heightened children's vulnerability. The Italian Wellbeing Report has assessed that minors showed an increase in mental health issues, poverty, school drop-outs, and a general worsening in their subjective wellbeing when compared to the period before the pandemic. The actual worsening of family distress, during the pandemic and the consequent rise of domestic violence, in some cases, could have consequences on the VAC phenomenon too.

Notwithstanding, only accurate, robust, pertinent, timely, and comparable data can portray the phenomenon of VAC, its roots, and consequences in a way useful to produce sound policies aimed at preventing and combating it.

Focus on minors has been deemed crucial for a long time; the topic has been well highlighted per se, being common for many domains; education, health, poverty, and care assistance. Withal, VAC per se has often not been addressed as a whole and has been approached in a fragmented way, resulting in scattered data. Hence, the general objective of this proposal is to identify the existing informational gaps on VAC and elaborate statistical solutions able to combine, integrate, and thus produce refined and highly available data. More robust mechanisms of sustainable data collection and elaboration will foster the production of better policies, in particular when data are provided disaggregated by sex.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for instance, do not consider the topic of VAC specifically, but this is addressed as a part of goals 16 and 5, which address some forms of violence that also harm children, such as punishment from caregivers, sexual violence and human trafficking, among other harmful practices.

Recently, new attention to VAC has been burgeoning. Examples are visible in the efforts of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - Task force on Children for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) to design the “Guidance on Statistics on Children: Spotlight on Children Exposed to Violence, in Alternative Care, and with a Disability”, as well as of the Unicef work to design the International classification and operational definitions of VAC for statistical purposes. Accordingly, VAC refers to: “[…] all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse […]. Physical violence includes fatal and non-fatal physical violence, corporal punishment, and other forms of cruel or degrading treatment. Psychological violence refers to mental, verbal, or emotional abuse. Neglect or negligent treatment includes physical, psychological or emotional neglect, educational neglect, neglect of children’s physical or mental health, and abandonment. Sexual abuse and exploitation include the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any sexual activity, the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation as well as in audio or visual images of child sexual abuse, child prostitution, sexual slavery, trafficking and sale of children for sexual purposes, and forced marriage" (https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention). Children can be victims of violence at home and in the family, in schools and educational settings, in care and justice institutions, in places of work, in the community, and in the mass media. Children can experience violence at the hands of adults, and violence may also occur between children.

Considering the huge number of aspects encompassed by this definition, data collection and analysis have become increasingly complex, specifically, gaps concerning the quality and comparability of data across countries, both at European and international levels (see section 2.1). Therefore, the scope of this proposal focuses on a national case to identify methodological and content-related procedures that could represent a relevant study case with the aim of a future necessary harmonisation of data at the European level.

The Italian case is of particular relevance for several reasons:

a) a great variety of data on VAC is available, but it is scattered. It comes from different sources (surveys, administrative records, data from registers), collected by different bodies,

b) a comprehensive analysis on the topic is still lacking, in particular with reference to any attempt to integrate data coming from different sources;

c) Italy can avail of the relevant experience gained and developed in collecting and analysing data on violence against women (VAW). The multi-source approach and the integrated informative system on VAW, built by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) and the Istat's long experience in measuring Gender-Based Violence, represent a pivotal starting point for developing a similar system also on VAC.

In addition to what data can explicate about the different forms of VAC, DORA intends to explore a specific and quite invisible form of violence targeting girls that occurs in girls of some migrant communities, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). This is a customary non-medical genital surgery, which discriminates on the ground of sex and causes physical and/or psychological distress and harm. DORA aims to increase knowledge of the phenomenon in Italy to support policy-making processes.

Producing knowledgeable, accurate, and integrated data, that is open and available to further analyses is DORA's main priority. The data produced will assist our target group of policy makers as well as stakeholders and other actors working with children and/or addressing the issue of VAC.

**2. Aim of the project and specific objectives**

The project is developed in the framework of the DORA project funded by the European Commission under the form of the CERV-2022-DAPHNE aimed to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children.

DORA addresses priority 4 of CERV-2022-DAPHNE "Supporting and improving national data collection on violence against children (VAC)”. It will contribute to the elaboration and delivery of more integrated and accurate data addressing VAC including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, and the improvement of data analysis, fostering accurate knowledge of the intrinsic characteristics of the phenomenon. The general objective of this proposal is to identify the existing informational gaps on VAC and elaborate statistical solutions able to combine, integrate, and thus produce refined and highly available data. By focusing on Italy and directly involving, among other partners, the National Institute of Statistics, DORA will produce the following outputs: (1) identification and systematisation of all the sources currently available on VAC, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses; (2) estimation of the scope of the phenomenon, its several dimensions and risk factors; (3) definition of a new framework for measuring VAC; (4) analysis of the phenomenon through data modelling and integration; (5) support the statistical capability building on official statistics on VAC at the national and international level; (6) advancing data analysis and methodology to understand the extent of FGM/C among girls. The dissemination of the methodologies and produced results will be done at the policy and academic level and towards civil society organisations. Besides, DORA intends to share the achieved results with other countries. DORA will guide policymaking, contribute to better target resources, plan interventions, substantiate claims for funds, monitor progress and assess trends. Target groups include civil society organisations, health care providers, child protection, police, school teachers, and policymakers.

Within DORA the present project in included in the Work Package 4 Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Data production, integration and management.

The aims of WP4 are

* Formalizing the survey methodology to carry out national surveys addressing children victims at risk of FGM/C through interviews with their parents
* Formalizing the methodology to produce an indirect estimate of FGM/C prevalence to evaluate girls at risk and cut in communities not covered by existing survey data or for countries not having survey data
* Estimates of the number of children and girls cut or at risk of mutilation/cutting in Italy

The first task (T4.1) aims at Data Mapping by conducting a desk research of available administrative Italian data and data collected in FGM/C practising countries. The direct and indirect methodologies need some relevant and aggregate statistics to be applied. In particular, the number of women and girls, and their background information, such as country of origin or citizenship, education, disaggregated by age, will be checked among the community affected by FGM/C.

The second task (T4.2) aims at will formalise the best method and procedures to conduct a survey on FGM/C among migrants to estimate FGM/C related VAC. T4.2 will produce a step by step guide in line with EIGE’s standard model to allow researchers to replicate surveys.

The third task (T4.3) aims at advancing the methodology to indirectly assess FGM/C prevalence. This task aims to methodologically refine the methods currently used to determine FGM/C prevalence and risk among children.

The forth task (T4.4) aims at producing national estimates about children affected by FGM/C or at risk of undergoing it.

**3. Job description**

The successful candidate will join the DORA project and participate fully in the research life of the research team and engage in advanced independent research within the remit of the project. More specifically, the appointed researcher will carry out the following research activities:

- Contribute actively to the research of the DORA project;

- Produce a systematic literature review on the specified research topic;

- Prepare and manage data sources for the objectives of WP4;

- Prepare scientific articles to be discussed and presented during both scheduled DORA meetings and scientific events involving external experts, and submitted to international peer-reviewed and high-impact journals for publication.

- Undertake appropriate organizational duties within the group when required such as organizing research meetings, workshops, seminars, and conference sessions.

**4. Skills, qualifications, and requirements**

- Proven competence in statistics/econometrics; experience with relevant statistical packages e.g., SPSS or STATA

- Extensive empirical research experience in quantitative social sciences, preferably in the area of migration studies.

- Demonstrated experience in developing research plans, collecting and managing data, and carrying out statistical analyses.

- Experience with data processing and handling of large-scale datasets at the micro and macro level.

- Track record in research and publication output corresponding to the career stage of the successful candidate

- Good command of written and spoken English

- Innovative and critical thinking. Proven independence in conducting research.

- Expertise in the following areas is desirable: female genital mutilation/cutting and traditional harmful practices; survey methodology; migration studies; demographic trends.

**5. Research plan**

The research activity will take place over 12 months with an expected start in July 2023.

In detail, the research plan is structured as follows:

- Step 1 Literature review and definition of the research strategy (2 months).

- Step 2 FGM/C Development of the methodology estimation (3 months).

- Step 3 Estimation of girls cut and at risk (2 months)

- Step 4 Survey Methodology Development (3 months)

- Step 5 Dissemination (2 months)