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

Catalyzing sustainable finance for gender and equalities

Session 7 – Breakout Group 2 – Ending Violence against Children

Wilton Park, 24 March 2026
Case study: building investment cases to end violence against children

Pablo Espiniella – check against delivery

Summary

More than half the world's children are exposed to violence each year. This violence is closely linked with violence against women (VAW), often occurring within the same households and driven by shared risk factors such as gender inequality and harmful social norms. One in four children globally lives with a mother or caregiver experiencing intimate partner violence, exposing them to environments that undermine their physical, mental and cognitive development. When multiple forms of violence occur together, harms compound and can persist across generations.

Beyond the human cost, violence against children (VAC) imposes substantial economic costs. These costs are preventable through integrated, evidence-based interventions, yet spending on child protection remains low and fragmented.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC) has worked with governments and partners to address this gap by promoting investment in child protection and wellbeing. This includes political advocacy, peer learning, and the development of a Toolkit to support countries in building investment cases. This case study highlights these efforts to strengthen investment in child protection – shifting the narrative from child protection as a cost to a strategic investment in human capital and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Why generate investment cases to end VAC?

- VAC is both a fundamental rights violation and a major development challenge. It harms children directly and undermines human capital formation across the life course.
- VAC generates significant economic costs. Children exposed to violence may not reach their full education and health potential, reducing future income and

productivity. Governments incur direct costs through health, child protection and justice systems. Indirect costs also arise as violence reduces the effectiveness of public investment across sectors.

- National estimates suggest that VAC can cost up to 11% of GDP, with total costs in some countries exceeding government spending on health. These losses are therefore highly relevant to fiscal and economic policy.
- The economic case makes visible the scale of losses already borne by societies, helping engage finance ministries, planning institutions and development partners. Importantly, this complements rather than replaces rights-based arguments.
- Interventions to prevent VAC can generate benefits that significantly exceed their costs. Many are relatively low-cost compared to national budgets, yet yield substantial long-term returns.
- When children grow up free from violence, health and education outcomes improve, productivity increases, and societies become more cohesive.
- Despite this, spending on prevention and response remains insufficient, and child protection is often underprioritized in budgets and development plans.
- Investment cases provide a practical tool to address this gap. They help quantify the costs of inaction, assess the costs and benefits of interventions, and translate child protection priorities into costed plans that can inform budgeting and policy decisions.

2. How the Special Representative has promoted investment in child protection and wellbeing

- The SRSG-VAC has led a participatory global effort to promote investment in child protection, combining advocacy, technical work and peer learning.
- Key milestones include a thematic report to the Human Rights Council (2022), a joint advocacy brief on the violence prevention dividend, and a series of ministerial roundtables and global convenings to share country experiences.
- To strengthen the evidence base, the Office reviewed methodologies for estimating the costs of VAC and returns to prevention, addressing inconsistencies across studies.
- This led to the development of the Investment Case Toolkit (2025), which provides a structured, step-by-step approach to analysing the cost of violence, costing interventions, and estimating returns.
- The Toolkit provides evidence of the approach in multiple country contexts:
    - **Iceland**: Estimated long-term returns of 11% from implementing an integrated system for child protection and wellbeing, supported by a national monitoring dashboard. Prosperity legislation is now in implementation stage.

    - **Fiji**: Found that the cost of VAC (4.2% of GDP) was 85 times higher than the cost of implementing its national child protection strategy. Reduction targets were incorporated into the national development plan.
    - **Solomon Islands**: Found that the cost of VAC (9.1% of GDP) was 94 times higher than the implementation costs of a multi-sectoral child and family welfare plan to address VAC.
    - **Zambia**: Estimated VAC costs at 9.1% of GDP. Strengthening the social service workforce would cost less than 1% of the government budget while significantly reducing these losses. Government committed to the recruitment of an additional 5,000 social workers.
    - **Kenya**: Estimated VAC costs at 4.9% of GDP. Workforce investments costing just 0.15% of the budget could halve these costs, contributing to recent government commitments to expand services.
- The Toolkit is increasingly being adopted:
    - **Angola** has completed cost of VAC and teenage pregnancy studies and is moving toward additional investment case components.
    - Additional work is underway in **Rwanda** and **Ghana**, regionally in the **Middle East and North Africa** with country-level studies in **Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia**, and **globally** with a thematic investment case into specific EVAC interventions.
- The SRSG-VAC facilitates also peer learning between countries and is supporting future capacity building through knowledge-sharing platforms and planned e-learning modules.
- A Market Place for Knowledge sharing is about to be presented with ideas in action of all countries that are members of the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence Against Children and others.

3. Lessons learned so far

- **Process is as important as outcome:** Investment cases require sustained engagement across sectors, particularly with finance and planning ministries. Their value lies not only in analysis but also in building consensus and aligning policy priorities.
- **Investment cases support a systems approach:** Ending VAC requires integrated responses across sectors. Investment cases help identify gaps, overlaps and opportunities for coordination, including synergies between VAC and VAW. They also support implementation by strengthening cross-sectoral budgeting, improving expenditure tracking and monitoring, and reinforcing accountability frameworks to ensure coordinated and effective delivery.

- **Context specificity is critical:** The Toolkit's flexibility allows adaptation to diverse country contexts, increasing its relevance for real-world planning and budgeting processes.
- **Investment cases must connect to financing architecture:** Evidence must translate into funding. Aligning investment cases with national budgets, expenditure frameworks and development strategies is essential for sustained impact.
- **The approach provides common ground across stakeholders:** It enables finance institutions to assess costs and returns, supports governments in aligning policy and budgets, strengthens advocacy for social policy actors, and provides a shared framework for donors, civil society and researchers.