



Pathfinding Global Alliance

On Ending Violence Against Children

SUMMARY REPORT

REGIONAL MEETING OF PATHFINDING COUNTRIES ON ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN AFRICA 7-8 MAY 2025 | ABUJA, NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Meeting of the African Pathfinding countries on ending violence against children held on 7-8 May 2025, in Abuja, Nigeria, built on the momentum generated by the Pathfinding Global Alliance on Ending Violence Against Children, launched in Bogotá, Colombia in November 2024.

The Abuja Regional Meeting marked a significant milestone in Africa's collective efforts to end violence against children (VAC). It was convened by the Government of Nigeria in close collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG-VAC) and UNICEF.

The Abuja Regional Meeting brought together over 100 participants, including four Ministers and senior representatives from 12 African Pathfinding countries¹, alongside regional institutions, UN agencies, civil society, traditional leaders, survivors, children and youth advocates and partners.

Over the two-day meeting, the Pathfinding Global Alliance structure (mission, components, governance, and its road map to EVAC guidance) was presented and discussed. A specific session was dedicated to presenting the Knowledge Sharing Marketplace and launching the investment Case Toolkit².

This interactive and participative regional meeting also allowed for discussion and sharing: 1) concrete actions undertaken to prevent and respond to violence against children; 2) promising practices and 3) tailored and context-specific solutions; 4) peer learning.

Participants engaged in deep reflection and open dialogue around country-led progress, shared challenges and promising practices, and strategic opportunities for collaboration and

¹ The meeting was attended by ministers from Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, and representatives from Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia (the full list of country representatives is shared in the attachment of this report).

² See [here](#) the Investment Case toolkit full document.

peer learning. Other common thematic were also raised such as high-level political engagement, data management, cross-border cooperation mechanisms, innovative programming, inter- and multi-sectoral commitment and coordination, accountability, and child and youth participation.

With Sierra Leone joining as the 44th country in the Alliance³, the meeting also celebrated Africa's growing leadership in accelerating action to end violence against children in line with the Global Agenda 2030, the African's Agenda 2040, and 2063.

THE INVESTMENT CASE: A CATALYST FOR ACTION

One of the most pivotal sessions was the presentation of the Investment Case Toolkit, developed by the SRSG VAC mandate in collaboration with Cornerstone Economic Research. This toolkit offers a method for quantifying the total economic cost of VAC, costs of inaction and the benefits of investing in the prevention of VAC. According to the findings, direct and indirect costs (including additional cost on social, health and judicial services) of violence against children are estimated in African countries up to 5–9% of their annual GDP each year.

Since 2019, Nigeria has conducted investment case studies, including lately in 2024 on child marriage, finding that failing to end it costs \$10 billion annually, while ending it could boost GDP by nearly 2%. Kenya is also undertaking an investment case study making a bold case for national investment in the social service workforce and has created this year a Public Children's Fund as a foundational pillar in the fight against violence against children. Zambia has launched in 2025 the findings of its investment case study for strengthening the child protection social service workforce across the country. This study found that the total annual cost of VAC in Zambia is nearly 25 times higher than the annual cost of expanding the workforce to prevent and respond to VAC in the country.

Zimbabwe expressed a keen interest in using the toolkit to build a compelling advocacy case for increasing child protection budget lines.

These interests and synergies built since the meeting already underscore the practical impact of the investment case framework and how it can catalyse sustainable changes.

PEER LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The meeting also introduced a new platform—the Marketplace for Knowledge Sharing—designed to strengthen the exchange of tools, promising practices, and implementation models.

This platform will provide real-time access to documented promising practices and strategies undertaken by various actors (Government, local authorities, CSOs, and community-based

³ For the full list of countries, see here: <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/pathfinding-countries>

organisations, religious and traditional leaders, children and youth, private sector) at the community and national levels.

It was clear from the meeting that countries are eager not just to share their successes but also to adapt and replicate effective models from others. For instance, Angola, committed to also conducting a similar study and plans to organize a technical mission to learn more about Iceland's integrated system linking law enforcement, child welfare, and health services.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES: IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

1. Strong political will and ownership

The presentation of advancements made through a cross-sectoral approach was a cornerstone of the meeting. Countries showcased progress made, innovations adopted, and areas where support is still needed.

Nigeria launched its National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Children under the auspices of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and in the presence of the Vice President. Kenya shared initial drafts of its national roadmap and showed its pioneering systems-based approach to tackling VAC through robust multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms anchored in national policy and guided by data.

Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire shared initial drafts of its national roadmap, highlighting the key role of the Interministerial Committee on Child Protection (comprising 12 Ministers, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), development partners, and the child Parliament) to ensure better coordination and synergistic complementarity between different players, sectors and institutions.

Guinea shared key legislative reforms such as the enactment of legislation that prohibit corporal punishment of children in all settings. This change came into effect with the publication of the country's new Children's Code in June of 2020.

Sierra Leone reported a 30% decrease in child marriage since 2022 and explained that thanks to the adoption of its new Law prohibiting it was achieved through strategic engagement with traditional leaders and consistent community outreach.

Angola also shared its National Child Protection Strategy (2024–2030), which is anchored in a decentralized, community-based surveillance model with a focus on vulnerable children in mining regions. As well as Botswana that uses Community led initiatives to improve parenting including engagement of Spouses of Local Chiefs/ Headmen to lead those initiatives.

Burkina Faso shared the promising practice of its network approach through its community-based protection mechanism at the local and regional levels.

Regarding harmful practices, Guinea and Burkina Faso championed the expansion of the African Union Saleema Initiative, based on religious and community dialogue to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Various countries have also raised the urgent need for action regarding early pregnancies.

Tanzania has shared its programme to protect, rehabilitate and reintegrate children in street situations.

In addition, many countries have highlighted key reforms and initiatives to ensure a better child-friendly justice system. Botswana is developing a Child-Friendly Justice Roadmap to enhance access and improve the justice system. And Cote d'Ivoire shared key reforms also in the juvenile justice system.

Zimbabwe's National integrated Case Management System has made it possible to improve the detection and multidisciplinary care of children victims of violence, as well as coordination between the various players and partners.

South Africa⁴ recently launched the '365 Days Child Protection Programme' illustrates advancement made to end violence against children through awareness, prevention, early intervention, and victim support.

In Namibia the fight against Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse has been strengthened through legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and the establishment of a multisectoral coordination via the National Child Online Protection Task Force. Kenya, Namibia, and Tanzania to advocate for harmonized legislation, following the African Union's Digital Compact and Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy.

Despite these advancements, common challenges were highlighted across presentations such as the need to: 1) strengthen the cross-sectoral coordination through a coordination and accountability framework given the trans-sectoral dimension of VAC and its intersectionality with Gender Based Violence (GBV); 2) allocate adequate human and financial resources; 3) strengthen the collection of reliable and disaggregated data and; 4) putting an end to social resistance and to harmful norms and practices. These common issues underscore the importance of peer and cross-country exchanges, joint advocacy, and sustainable investment in child protection and well-being.

This meeting also highlighted clear cross-border priorities. Countries affected by displacement due to climate change and conflicts stressed the urgent need for standardized cross-border protection protocols for refugee and displaced children.

⁴ South Africa didn't attend, but during the SRSG VAC's visit to South Africa on 11-16 May, key advancements were shared to input into the Regional meeting.

2. Multistakeholder mobilization and engagement:

Emphasis was placed on the importance of adopting, in addition to the whole-of-government approach involving all sectors and departments, a whole-of-society approach involving all key actors of the society.

- **Civil Society and Community engagement:**

Representatives from regional and global networks, such as the African Child Policy Forum and the Brave Movement, as well as national and local CSOs⁵, emphasized the importance of including CSOs in designing, implementing, and monitoring the national road maps. Survivor networks, in turn, advocated for more engagement in the decision-making process to ensure that support services and justice are trauma informed.

The meeting strongly reaffirmed the value of including civil society organizations and children in governance structures.

- **Child and Youth engagement:**

Children delegates from the Nigerian Children's Parliament presented a compelling 10-point charter calling for safer reporting mechanisms, access to justice, and the institutionalization of children and youth participation and engagement across the region.

Representatives of the African Children's Summit emphasized the need for more child participation in decision-making processes and the importance of creating safe spaces for children to express themselves, especially in schools and communities.

Children highlighted the urgent need for effective implementation of policies to protect children from violence. They called for more action and less talk in addressing these issues.

- **Traditional and religious leaders' engagement:**

The crucial role of traditional and religious leaders in addressing harmful practices against children were largely stressed. Many initiatives undertaken by traditional and religious leaders to prevent VAC, including Child Marriage and FGM, were shared by countries like Zambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa... The need to systematically engage traditional and religious leaders as well as faith-based organisations in the design, implementation, and

2 CSOs present included: African Child Policy Forum/APEVAC, Brave Movement Nigeria Chapter, Child Rights Network for Southern Africa, Global CSO Forum for Ending Violence Against Children, Forum for African Women Educationalists- Representing Coalition for Good Schools, Baobab Research Programme Consortium, Child Protection Network Nigeria, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Malala Fund Nigeria, and Faith-Based Organisation in Nigeria.

monitoring of national roadmaps was highly stressed by the traditional leaders present during the meeting.

- **Regional Mechanisms engagement**

The significant role of regional and sub-regional mechanisms was duly highlighted, given the cross-sub-regional and regional dimension of violence against children particularly in terms of strengthening regional cooperation. The participation of African Union Commission, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, regional economic communities such as Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the regional network of National Human Rights Institutions, allow to reiterate the monitoring and evaluation role of regional and sub-regional mechanisms

COMMITMENTS AND WAYS FORWARDS

Participating countries agreed to finalize their costed national road maps by 31st July 2025, in line with the Guidance note that was shared⁶. To this end, the Office of the Special Representative on Violence Against Children stand ready to provide guidance and support to the country Focal Point, in close collaboration with UNICEF and UN country and regional teams.

This regional meeting successfully forged new relationships and strengthened regional cooperation in accelerating progress towards ending VAC by 2030. As part of a series of regional meetings (in Europe -April 2025, in the Americas-July 2025 and Asia-September 2025), this regional meeting reflects a growing mobilisation and confidence for an investment in integrated prevention and child protection services that are easily accessible to all children and families, particularly the most vulnerable, a child protection agenda that is bold, data-driven, result-oriented, and inclusive. As poignantly reiterated, children's protection and well-being are non-negotiable.

The next milestone will be the global meeting of the Global Alliance in the Fall of 2025 or the beginning of 2026, early 2026, at which all the Pathfinding countries and partners will be invited to present and discuss the results, install the members of the governance structure and define the next steps.

⁶ [Guidance note for national road map.](#)