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# Developing evidence-based VAC prevention and response policies

This case study presents some of the challenges and the lessons learned in the development of Violence Against Children (VAC) prevention public policies, from the perspective of the technical teams and actors directly involved. The report focuses on describing the strategies developed by the technical teams to ensure that the National Action Plan (NAP) to end VAC in Colombia effectively incorporated the most rigorous, relevant and updated evidence available.

## Summary

- The stakeholders involved in the NAP development recognized and shared the methodological premise that the public policy design and implementation cycle must be based on the best evidence available.
- Throughout the design, implementation and monitoring of the NAP, concrete actions were taken to ensure evidence-based decisions.
- However, the integration of evidence into the departmental action plans was challenging, given that data was limited, outdated or unreliable.
- The development process of the plans raised awareness around the necessity of providing timely access

to data and strengthening the capacities of local leaders to effectively promote evidence-based decision making.

## Description of activities to promote the use of evidence

Activities related to the identification and provision of evidence were carried out mainly during the NAP preparatory and monitoring stages. The information collected in the preparatory stage was used to define the contents and strategic actions of the NAP. In the monitoring stage, strategies were designed to gather data to identify the implementation of initiatives initially proposed in the NAP. Additional activities were carried out during the construction of the departmental action plans to promote evidence use.

### 1. INSPIRE as a key reference

The National Alliance to end VAC outlined that the INSPIRE framework should serve as a guideline for the development of prevention strategies. This framework provides a set of strategies based on the best available evidence, that serves as a guideline for countries and governments to design and implement prevention programs to prevent and mitigate VAC (WHO, 2017). Specifically, to define the core components of the NAP, the technical teams in Co-

Colombia used INSPIRE as a reference. For instance, component 5 in the Colombia NAP, “Data and evidence”, had the objective of promoting the use and production of data to provide reliable and timely information, create predictive models for a better geographical prioritization of interventions and improving the timeliness of public policy response (National Alliance, 2021). Thus, this component proposed two specific lines of action: (i) knowledge management (e.g., data and evidence analysis, and producing new research); and (ii) evidence dissemination and communication (National Alliance against violence against girls, boys and adolescents, 2021).

## 2. Continuous use of available evidence

As the first step for the preparation of the NAP, the technical teams identified and reviewed existing sources of information and data. Prior to the development of the NAP, Colombia had various mechanisms to produce evidence to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, including surveys, and administrative reports. Table 1 presents some examples of these data sources.

Table 1. **Examples of data sources identified for the NAP development**

Type of existing data sources	Examples
<b>Surveys and nationally representative studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•La Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares y el Censo Nacional 2018 aplicada por el Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE)</li> <li>•El Sistema Integrado de Información sobre violencias de género</li> </ul>
<b>Reports based on administrative data systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reportes administrativos del instituto de Medicina legal (Administrative reports of the Institute of Forensic Medicine)</li> <li>•Reportes administrativos del Ministerio de Salud (Administrative reports from the Ministry of Health)</li> <li>•Reportes administrativos del Ministerio de educación (Administrative reports from the Ministry of Education)</li> </ul>
<b>Technical documents produced by the National Alliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•“Violencia contra Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes: etiología, consecuencias y estrategias para su prevención”- (Cuartas, 2021)</li> <li>•“Marco técnico para el desarrollo de una Alianza Nacional contra la violencia hacia Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes” (Harker et al., 2019)</li> </ul>

Data from surveys produced by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) were reviewed, such as the “Integrated Household Mass Survey” (Gran Encuesta integrada de Hogares – GEIH) and the 2018 National Census, among others. This allowed for updated information on the population density of children and adolescents, including information on ethnic groups, children and adolescents involved in work activities, and other interest groups (National Alliance, 2021).

The Integrated Information System on gender-based violence provided key information on the different types of gender-based violence, such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Institute of Forensic Medicine (Instituto de Medicina Legal) provided information that

allowed delving into the prevalence of violence and the consequences of violence in the country. The ICBF team also analysed data from administrative records of governmental institutions, such as the education, justice, and health sectors (National Alliance, 2021). Also, the technical documents produced to support and guide the actions of the National Alliance were played a crucial role by providing guidelines to the designing of the NAP and were prepared based on available evidence on the prevalence of violence and effective prevention strategies.

Professionals leading the development of departmental action plans highlighted the importance of consolidating and revising existing information. Specifically, administrative data from relevant national systems (for example, the

Child Information System of the National Family Welfare System), situational analysis produced by the departments (for example, diagnoses about VAC produced by the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation), and population-based studies (such as the VACS). The representatives of departmental governments also stressed that the information at the territorial level is scarce, that it is not updated, and that VAC is more severely underreported, which is why it was especially difficult to have data that would allow them to make decisions based on their contexts.

It is important to highlight that knowledge management not only contributed evidence to support the NAP design, but also supported advocacy activities at a political and technical level. Having credible and updated data helped to raise awareness and demonstrate the need to accelerate violence prevention strategies.

### 3. Violence against children and youth survey (VACS) and the data to action workshops

In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection conducted the VACS in Colombia, in collaboration with international partners. The findings of the VACS 2018 study evidenced the urgent need to create a nation-wide collaborative strategy to end violence in Colombia. The National Alliance was the first materialization of the country's response to this urgent call. In this process, the ICBF as leading agency of the National Government, and in collaboration with international and national partners from the civil society and multilateral agencies, engaged with other decision-makers and key stakeholders to mobilize the production of a National Action Plan (NAP).

A significant undertaking in this effort was the “Data to Action” workshop, which brought together key stakeholders in the violence prevention sphere. The workshop featured presentations and discussions around the INSPIRE framework, detailed VACS study results, and description of evidence-based prevention interventions to inform potential local strategies. Its primary objectives were threefold: (1) to translate VACS data into actionable priorities for preventing violence against children and youth; (2) to align the data with goals, strategies, and policies relevant to the production of a NAP (thus ensuring that the NAP mirrors Colombia's priorities); and (3) to spark the mobilization and coordination efforts for the development of a data-driven NAP. The group discussions of conducted in the workshops resulted in evidence-based prioritized actions and recommendations, including the implementation a shared demand for a national strategy to end VAC (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2019).

### 4. Use of evidence in the implementation and monitoring of the NAP

The NAP included 184 interventions, with information on

the area of focus, the type of intervention and strategies to monitor and evaluate. In 2021, the ICBF technical team, with the support of international partners, identified the need to update the forms used to collect information to characterize each intervention. One salient adaptation the inclusion of a dimension on the available evidence on the effectiveness of an intervention. Specifically, the form collected information on the existence of evidence supporting if the intervention is “promising”, “harmful” or if it does not have supporting evidence.

This information was requested to the responsible organizations implementing the intervention, and the form was completed electronically. The data collection process through the electronic form took longer than expected -approximately one year- due to logistic and technical challenges. For instance, the ICBF technical team had to receive and respond to several rounds of inquiries from the organizations providing the information or, in many cases the organizations did not have information and had to produce it. For more detail about this challenge, see Case Study 1. Also, the team identified that the evidence provided by many organizations lacked a scientific basis or there were mistakes in filling out the collection form. Therefore, the ICBF technical team had to provide one-to-one support and assistance to each organization. To obtain high quality data, the team suggested that it was necessary to first raise awareness in the organizations about the importance of providing clear information about the use of evidence in monitoring the interventions.

### 5. Documenting the NAP development process

WHO (2019) suggests that all efforts, impacts, and lessons learned from the development and implementation of Action Plans should be documented, evaluated, and communicated. Aligned with said recommendation, international partners have supported the documentation of the NAP design and implementation processes. This documentation effort identified milestones and key actions, as well as the challenges and lessons learned. The objective was to contribute by generating recommendations to strengthen the design of similar public policies initiatives, as well as informing global collective efforts to prevent violence against children.

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1. See the Documentation report for more detail on the Data to Action Workshop

## Challenges and lessons learned

- **Professionals leading the development of the NAP and the departmental action plans recognize the need to develop public policies based on evidence.** For instance, there is a consensus among technical teams on the need to develop strategies to assess whether VAC prevention interventions have an impact.
- **One important challenge is the scarcity of disaggregated data for the most vulnerable populations (such as indigenous populations) and across more specific geographical units.** This makes it difficult to have public policy initiatives that respond effectively to the diversity of the country.
- **Although the importance and need to develop evidence-based public policies is recognized, in practice very few strategies are based on data.** Moreover, the monitoring of the NAP revealed that most of the initiatives had insufficient evidence.
- **There is a need to continue investing in knowledge management and dissemination, and to strengthen accountability processes (monitoring and evaluation).** A key action is to strengthen the production of data at the territorial level to have contextualized information. In this regard, there should be more efforts to promote and coordinate work between local researchers, practitioners and government agencies.
- **The development of the NAP and the departmental action plans, as well as the development of the monitoring and evaluation strategy, where an important opportunity to inform, sensitize and engage stakeholders and promote the importance of evidence-based decision-making in the design and implementation of public policies.** To continue this path, it is key to continue efforts to build capacities at the national and territorial levels. This is a necessary condition to enable the collection, systematization and use of high-quality information.
- **A robust portfolio of diverse activities and strategies is needed to ensure that the NAP and the territorial action plans are effectively evidence-based.** This portfolio should include a monitoring and impact evaluation strategy and investments to build capacity for knowledge management and dissemination.

**Participants:** Representatives of organizations -at a national, territorial and international level- which were involved in the elaboration and monitoring of the NAP and the territorial action plans.

**Tools for data collection:** Semi-structured interviews to key stakeholders. The interviews were anchored around pre-defined questions inquiring about the use of evidence, and the challenges and opportunities around integrating evidence to design the NAP and territorial action plans.

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## Methodology

**Objective:** Identifying the actions taken to ensure that the NAP was based on evidence, and the challenges and lessons learned in this process.

