

Summary of the Working Group Activities and Meeting
ISPCAN Working Group on Child Maltreatment Data Collection
Vilnius, Lithuania — October 5, 2025

Morning Sessions — Brief overview

The morning program featured three rich and thought-provoking panels, each introduced with short presentations and followed by expert discussion and audience input. The panels addressed cross-cultural measurement of neglect, the integration of child well-being perspectives into child welfare, and the role of children's participation in research. While detailed summaries are provided elsewhere, the panels collectively raised important questions about how to define and measure maltreatment across contexts and how to strengthen children's voices in research and practice. Key points from these conversations were gathered to inform the afternoon subgroup work.

Before lunch, participants were introduced to the NEXT early-career network, followed by a joint networking session.

Afternoon subgroup work — Summary

In the afternoon, all participants self-selected into one of the three subgroups: self-reports, participatory approaches, or administrative data. With guidance prepared by the organizers in advance, each group combined collaborative networking with concrete planning of deliverables for the coming year. Groups also clarified their internal structure—identifying conveners, deciding who would schedule meetings, and outlining processes to keep momentum.

- **Administrative Data Subgroup:**
This group focused on improving access, comparability, and responsible use of administrative data from different sectors in the child protection system. A manuscript is in planning that will address research gaps in the context of administrative data on child maltreatment, challenges and opportunities in the next decade to outline a research agenda.
- **Participatory Approaches Subgroup:**
This group emphasized strengthening methods for involving children and young people meaningfully in research and data collection.
- **Self-report Subgroup:**
This group identified four priority areas for future work: (1) refining definitions and measurement of neglect; (2) improving the efficiency of data collection; (3) considering how changing political contexts affect research and data availability; and (4) increasing transparency around ethics review processes by sharing examples and developing common recommendations. Members agreed to pursue one to two joint outputs between conferences, such as commentaries, research papers, or funding proposals.

Closing

Participants expressed strong interest in continued collaboration, and the first follow-up meetings will focus on clarifying roles and coordinating work streams. The day ended with a shared sense of momentum and a clear commitment to advancing the working groups' contributions ahead of the next ISPCAN conference.

Subgroup on self-report data

For the self-report track, four thematic clusters emerged as priorities:

- 1. Neglect:**
Participants highlighted the urgent need to refine and update the conceptual and operational definition of neglect. The group committed to beginning collective work toward a more coherent framework.
- 2. Efficiency in data collection:**
With increasing funding constraints and administrative burdens, the subgroup emphasized the importance of developing strategies for more efficient, resource-smart data collection methods.
- 3. Political context:**
Members noted the rise of right-wing political movements globally and discussed their implications for child maltreatment research, data availability, and perceptions of families. A goal was set to draft a piece outlining these developments and their consequences for the field.
- 4. Ethics:**
Ethical approval processes were identified as a major obstacle—often slow, opaque, and highly variable. The group expressed a desire to open up this “black box” by sharing ethics application examples, building a database, and ultimately developing a manuscript addressing common challenges and recommendations.

Subgroup on administrative data

For the administrative data subgroup, four thematic clusters emerged as priorities:

- 1. Definitions**
Administrative data across different sectors of the child protection system are hardly comparable. This deprives us from identifying gaps and problems in serving vulnerable children (e.g., underreporting of certain types of child maltreatment or specific vulnerable groups). Approaches to improving consensus in definitions across sectors are supported.
- 2. Quality of data collection and reliability of coding**
Vaguely defined codes or negative incentives challenge the reliability and quality of administrative data.
- 3. Sustainability of data collection**
The sustainability of data collection is both challenged by the rise of right-wing political movements globally and budgetary cuts.
- 4. Opportunities and challenges in technical development**
Technology-facilitated child sexual abuse (TF-CSA) is on the rise; research needs to better understand how TF-CSA is mirrored in administrative to better understand how efficiently victims are identified and served. In addition, fast technical development presents an opportunity for research (e.g., in analyzing textual administrative data or data linkage). The use of AI comes, however, with a several challenges.

Research gaps and challenges in clusters 2-3 will be addressed in a manuscript identifying a research agenda for the next decade.