



STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN! CHILD PROTECTION

What does UNICEF mean by child protection?

Child protection means acting to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and neglect, exploitation of and discrimination against children. Child protection abuses are not only abuses of children's rights; they are a massive and unacknowledged obstacle to child survival and basic child development.

Children subjected to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect are at risk of:

- shortened lives
- poor physical and mental health
- educational problems (including dropping out of school)
- poor parenting skills later in life
- homelessness, vagrancy and displacement

Why are children abused; and what are the effects of these abuses?

Many child protection abuses are symptomatic of widespread and deeply entrenched global poverty. Yet, because exploitation usually keeps children out of school, in poor health and subject to psychological and physical abuse, it reinforces this poverty by keeping yet another generation from fulfilling anything close to its potential.

This is why child protection abuses must send alarm bells ringing not only for those of us concerned with child rights, but for everyone who is working to overcome poverty.

Child protection links closely to all aspects of children's well-being. Often, the *same* child is prone to malnutrition and illness, deprived of early stimulation, out of school, and more likely to be abused and exploited.

An immunised child who is constantly beaten is not a healthy child in the same manner that a girl who goes to school but who is sexually abused is not a well-educated child.

Child abuses around the world

- 500 million-1.5 billion children have been affected by violence
- 150 million children 5-14 years old are engaged in child labour.
- 145 million children have lost one or both parents due to all causes.
- 70 million women and girls in 29 countries have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting.
- 64 million women aged 20-24 in the developing world reported they were married before age 18.
- 51 million children are unregistered at birth.
- 18 million children are living with the effects of displacement.
- 15 million children have lost one or both parents due to AIDS.
- 14 million young women give birth between the ages of 15 and 19 years old.
- 1.2 million children were trafficked each year as of the year 2000.
- >1 million children are detained through justice processes.

* Source: State of the World's Children Special Edition on Child Rights, 2009



What is the protective environment?

Fortifying a child-friendly environment will protect children from child protection abuses. In seeking to ensure that all children grow up in an environment which prevents abuse, UNICEF addresses the following eight elements:

- 1. Attitudes, customs, behaviour and practices:** In societies where attitudes or traditions facilitate abuse (early marriage, FGM/C, etc), the environment will not be protective of the child.
- 2. Open discussion of child protection in the media and civil society:** Bringing some of the child protection abuses to the forefront of national and international debate can provoke governments and communities to support the protective environment.
- 3. Legislation and enforcement:** An adequately protective legislative framework and its consistent implementation will strengthen the protective environment.
- 4. Capacity:** Health workers, teachers, police, social workers and others who interact with children need to be able to identify and respond to child protection abuses.
- 5. Children's life skills, knowledge and participation:** Children need information to best protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. Children also need to be provided with safe and protective channels for participation and self-expression.
- 6. Services for recovery and reintegration:** Victims of child protection abuses are entitled to care and non-discriminatory access to basic social services.
- 7. Governmental commitment to fulfilling protection rights:** Government interest in, recognition of and commitment to child protection are essential elements of the protective environment.
- 8. Monitoring and reporting:** A protective environment for children requires an effective monitoring system that records the incidence and nature of child protection abuses and allows for strategic interventions.

When any of these layers of the protective environment is stripped away, a child becomes more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence. Likewise, the weakness of one of the elements within each layer will increase the child's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Child Protection Priorities

- Children in armed conflict
- Children deprived of their primary care-givers (orphans, children living in institutions, etc.)
- Forced and bonded labour;
- Trafficking of children;
- Sexual exploitation of children;
- Violence against children outside of armed conflict (in homes, schools, prisons, orphanages, etc.).

UNICEF's approach to Child Protection

UNICEF seeks to ensure that all children grow up in an environment free from abuse and exploitation.

This "protective environment" consists of eight interconnected elements which individually and collectively work to protect children from exploitation.

Together these eight elements define the environment in which the child lives in.

These eight elements co-exist within three layers of protection which – when peeled off – leave the child unprotected, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

UNICEF's interventions in the area of child protection strengthen the various elements of the protective environment.