

Child Protection, the MDGs and the Millennium Declaration

World leaders made a commitment to meet children's rights to survival, health, education, protection and participation – among others – during the Millennium Summit in September 2000, from which the Millennium Declaration and, subsequently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emerged. Both the declaration and the MDGs were later reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit. Based on fundamental human rights, they provide a framework for the entire UN system to work coherently towards a series of concrete objectives for human development.

PROTECTING CHILDREN STRENGTHENS DEVELOPMENT

The Millennium Declaration addresses child protection explicitly (*see box*). A close look at the MDGs shows that not a single Goal can be achieved unless the protection of children is an integral part of programming strategies and plans. Failing to protect children from such issues as violence in schools, child labour, harmful traditional practices, the absence of parental care or commercial sexual exploitation squanders the world's most precious resource. Reaching the most vulnerable and isolated populations helps ensure the health and well-being of all and is indispensable to achieve the MDGs.

CHILD PROTECTION AND THE MDGS

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Children who live in extreme poverty are often those who experience violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination. They easily become marginalized and are frequently denied such essential services as health care and education. In a self-perpetuating cycle, marginalization of children who are victims of **violence and abuse** decreases their likelihood of escaping poverty in the future. **Child labour** – both a cause and consequence of poverty – damages a child's health, threatens education and leads to further exploitation and abuse. Poverty is a root cause for **trafficking**. Without documents to prove **birth registration**, children and families often cannot

THE MILLENNIUM DECLARATION

Through adoption of the Millennium Declaration, the world's countries resolved to:

- Strive for the full protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all.
- Combat all forms of violence against women and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- Encourage the ratification and full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

access health, education and other social services, and States cannot plan poverty alleviation and social service programmes without accurate estimates of annual births. Poverty and exclusion can contribute to **child abandonment and the separation of children** from their families, as children are sent to work on the streets or parents are forced to migrate and leave their children behind. Children might end up in foster or institutional care arrangements which can lead to marginalization and decrease their chances of breaking the cycle of poverty. **Armed conflict** depletes physical, economic and human resources and leads to displacement of populations.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling cannot be achieved without eliminating the barriers that keep children out of school. Reaching the hard-to-reach – including children affected by HIV/AIDS, orphans, children with **disabilities**, children from minorities and of migrant families, and those who are trafficked, used in armed conflict or live in institutions – is critical to achieving education for all. The school environment needs to be safe, protective and free of **violence** if children are to

be encouraged to attend and remain in school. **Child marriage** leads to the isolation of, particularly, the girl child and to early drop-out from school. **Armed conflict** can displace families, separate children from their parents and disrupt their education. **Child labour** prevents children from going to school.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Child marriage, sexual violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, child labour and **trafficking** are child rights violations that must be prevented and addressed as part of global initiatives to promote gender equality and empower women. **Sexual violence and harassment** of girls at school are a major impediment to achieving gender equality in education. When they occur in other settings such as the community and workplace, they undermine efforts to empower girls and women. During **armed conflict** situations, girls often have less access to reintegration programmes for children associated with armed groups. **Female genital mutilation/cutting** is an infringement on the physical and psychosexual integrity of girls and women.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Extreme exploitation, violence or abuse can lead to death throughout various phases of childhood. **Child marriage** affects children's health as babies who are born to very young mothers are more vulnerable to diseases during critical early years of life. **Armed conflict** has a devastating impact on children's survival. Of the 20 countries with the highest rates of under-five mortality, 11 have experienced major armed conflict since 1990. **Children without parental care** or separated from their mother at an early age, especially those who remain in institutional settings for an extended period of time, are at much greater risk of early death. Inattention to **disability** and improper care for children with disability can increase the mortality risk.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Abuses against adolescent girls endanger their physical and psychological health and, should they become mothers, their reproductive health as well. Protecting girls from **child marriage** is an important factor in improving maternal health as pregnancy at a young age jeopardizes the health of young moth-

ers. **Female genital mutilation/cutting** increases the chance of maternal mortality during delivery. **Armed conflict** jeopardizes young mothers' access to health-care services. Also, widespread **sexual violence**, including in armed conflict, has a direct impact on maternal health.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

The fight against HIV/AIDS must include efforts to prevent abuses that make children particularly vulnerable to the disease. For children orphaned or otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS, protection is a priority. Many of the worst forms of **child labour** fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS as children are **sexually exploited** and **trafficked**. At the same time, children from families and communities affected by HIV/AIDS are particularly vulnerable to these forms of exploitation and at risk of growing up **without parental care**. Child **sexual abuse** contributes to infection among young people. Reducing recourse to detention for **children in conflict with the law** decreases their vulnerability to infection, given the high rates of transmission in prisons.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Environmental disasters increase household vulnerability, which can in turn increase the pressure for **child labour**, as well as for **sexual exploitation** and **child marriage**. Overcrowding of neighbourhoods and homes can put severe strains on environmental resources, which may lead to domestic stress, **violence or sexual abuse** in the home.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Child protection demands inter-sectoral cooperation at the national and international levels. UNICEF's approach entails creating a **protective environment** for children. This means partnering with other UN agencies, governments, civil society, the private sector and international non-governmental organizations to put protective systems in place by strengthening **government commitment**, promoting adequate **legislation**, building **systems** and **capacities**, providing **services**, addressing **attitudes** and **customs**, **monitoring** and **reporting**, developing children's **life skills**, and encouraging **open discussion**.

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