

FACTS ON CHILDREN

CHILD PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and development. The approach of UNICEF is to create a protective environment in which girls and boys are free from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family and where laws, services, behaviours and practices minimize their vulnerability while addressing known risk factors and strengthening children's resilience. UNICEF's Child Protection Strategy, approved in 2008, lays out the strategic actions needed to build this protective environment. The strategy is centred around: a) strengthening child protection systems, including the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors — especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice — to support the prevention of and the response to protection-related risks; b) promoting social change that is consistent with human rights principles; and c) strengthening child protection in emergencies. Building a body of evidence and convening and catalysing a wide range of partners are priority cross-cutting areas.

KEY FACTS

Birth registration

- Birth registration provides an official record of a child's existence and nationality and is considered a fundamental human right under Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- One in four developing countries with available data has birth registration rates of less than 50%.
- At the country level, however, data indicate that birth registration has increased in several countries, including the Gambia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.
- Around 51 million children born in 2007 have not had their births registered. Nearly half of them live in South Asia.
- The births of nearly two of three children in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia were not registered in 2007.
- Children younger than 5 years (under-5) who have been denied the right to identity tend to be poor, and many children without a birth certificate live in rural areas. However, in some regions and countries, there are still intra-country disparities between urban and rural areas and between the rich and poor.
- Most countries show that birth registration is highest among the richest 20% of their population, confirming that poverty is associated with low levels of birth registration.
- Children who are not registered often have limited access to the protection and services to which they have a right, such as health care and education.
- Cost and distance to the registration centre are the reasons most frequently cited by parents for not registering their children.

Violence against children

- It is impossible to measure the true magnitude of violence against children worldwide. There is a lack of data on the number of child victims because so much happens in secret

and is not reported. However, an estimated 500 million to 1.5 billion children experience violence annually. Each year, up to an estimated 275 million children worldwide witness domestic violence.

- In the Global School-Based Student Health Survey, between 20% and 65% of school-aged children reported being verbally or physically bullied in school in the previous 30 days.
- Although some violence is unexpected and isolated, most violence against children is carried out by people they know and should be able to trust and look to for protection and support, such as parents, step-parents or parents' partners, extended family members, caregivers, boyfriends, girlfriends, schoolmates, teachers, religious leaders and employers.
- While the family should be the natural environment for the protection of children, the home can also be a place where children experience violence in the form of discipline. Data from 37 countries show that 86% of children aged 2–14 years experience physical punishment and/or psychological aggression. Two of three children are subject to physical punishment.
- Certain groups of children are particularly vulnerable to violence, including children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups, children living on the streets, adolescents in conflict with the law, and refugee, displaced or migrant children. Generally, boys tend to be at greater risk of physical violence, and girls face greater risk of neglect, sexual violence and exploitation.

Child Labour

- As of 2006, an estimated 158 million children aged 5–14 were engaged in some form of labour.
- More than one-third of children in sub-Saharan Africa work.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that more than two-thirds of all child labour is in the agriculture sector. It has found that children in rural areas – girls in particular – begin agricultural labour as young as 5-7 years old.
- However, boys are more likely to be engaged in child labour than girls because they are more likely to be engaged in economic activity. Those engaged in household chores are overwhelmingly girls.
- Understanding Children's Work, an interagency project of the ILO, the World Bank and UNICEF, has reviewed the data from several countries for which comparable data exist in child labour. It observed a reduction in children's engagement in economic activity in most countries, including large ones such as Brazil, India and Mexico. But in several countries, the trend is stable or child labour has even increased.

Female genital mutilation and cutting

- UNICEF estimates that 70 million girls and women aged 15–49 in 28 countries in Africa, plus Yemen, have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). The prevalence of FGM/C declined slowly but steadily over the past few decades. Older girls and younger women are less likely to have experienced any form of FGM/C than older women.
- Some 60% of girls and women who have been cut live in sub-Saharan Africa, while 40% live in the Middle East and North Africa.
- There are 29 countries in which the prevalence of FGM/C is 1% or more, according to data from nationally representative household surveys; of those countries, only Yemen is outside the African continent.
- A 2006 WHO Study Group on Female Genital Mutilation and Obstetric Outcomes provides clear evidence that complications in deliveries are significantly more likely among women with FGM/C. It also found that FGM/C is harmful to babies and leads to an extra one or two perinatal deaths per 100 deliveries.
- FGM/C is generally carried out on girls between the ages of 4 and 14; it is also done to infants, women who are about to be married and, sometimes, to women who are pregnant with their first child or who have just given birth. It is often performed by

traditional practitioners, including midwives and barbers, without anaesthesia and using scissors, razor blades or broken glass.

Child marriage

- As of 2007 worldwide, more than 60 million women aged 20–24 were married before they reached the age of 18. The extent of child marriage varies substantially between countries, but about half of the girls who are affected live in South Asia.
- In the developing world, the latest international estimates indicate that more than one-third of women aged 20–24 were married or in a union before the age of 18. In some regions, the incidence of child marriage is particularly high, at 46% in South Asia and 39% in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the latest estimates.
- Child marriage is becoming less common overall, but the pace of change is slow. In the six countries where child marriage is most prevalent, more than 60% of women 20-24 years old were married as children.
- Girls from poor households are more likely to be married as a child than girls from richer households.
- Data for 47 countries show that, overall, the median age at first marriage is gradually increasing. But the pace of change is slow in many countries. In Bangladesh, Guinea and Nepal, for example, the median age at first marriage has increased but remains younger than 18.
- If a mother is younger than 18, her infant's risk of dying in its first year of life is 60% greater than that of an infant born to a mother older than 19.

Children associated with armed forces and groups

- An estimated 250,000 children are involved in conflicts around the world. They are used as combatants, messengers, spies, porters and cooks; girls in particular are forced to perform sexual services, depriving them of their rights and their childhood.
- Since the beginning of 2008 alone, UNICEF and partners on the ground have been involved in the direct release of more than 12,600 children from various armed forces and armed groups in nine countries, including 1,648 girls.
- UN Country Task Forces on the monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations, including child recruitment, have been established in 14 countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.
- In 2006, an estimated 18.1 million children were among populations living with the effects of displacement. Within that group, 5.8 million were refugees and 8.8 were internally displaced.
- A 2004 report found that in at least 65 countries around the world, boys and girls were recruited into government military forces, either legally as volunteers or illegally through force or deception.

Child trafficking

- Estimation of the number of child trafficking continues to be a challenge given the clandestine nature of the crime. Variation in the numbers prevail depending on methodology used. ILO in 2005, for example, estimated that 980,000 to 1,250,000 children - both boys and girls - are placed in a forced labour situation as a result of trafficking (<http://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Traffickingofchildren/lang--en/index.htm>).
- Evidence from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicates that more than 20 per cent of victims of all trafficking, both within countries and across borders, are children, while the 2006 US Department of State Annual Trafficking in Persons report notes that of the 600,000 – 800,000 trafficked across international border annually, 50% are children (<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65983.htm>).

- In parts of West Africa, the Mekong region in East Asia and some countries in Central and South America, children are the majority of persons trafficked, although information from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009) shows that of survivors identified in 61 countries, 13% were girls and 9% were boys.
- Given the continued focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation, available information (*Global Report on Trafficking*, 2009) cites sexual exploitation as by far the most commonly identified form of human trafficking (79%), followed by forced labour (18%). The victims of sexual exploitation are predominantly women and girls.
- Recent data gathered in 46 countries suggest that women make up a disproportionately large proportion of traffickers. This information could be interpreted in a number of ways, and whether these women are 'traffickers' or facilitators of movement needs to be analysed. The information that some 80% of those trafficked are women and girls (Department of State, 2006 Annual Trafficking in Persons Report) also could mean that these 'victims' would have a greater tendency to trust women than men.
- Trafficking in human beings is one of the most lucrative and fastest-growing transnational crimes. According to a recent ILO publication, an estimated \$32 billion per year profit is made by criminals who exploit trafficked victims for both sexual and economic purposes (2009, ILO global report on forced labour, *The Cost of Coercion*).

Children without parental care

- Recent estimates place more than 2 million children in institutional care around the world, with more than 800,000 of them in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). This global estimate is likely to be severely under-calculated due to the under-reporting and lack of reliable data. Many institutions are unregistered and many countries do not regularly collect and report data on children in institutional care.
- More than 17.5 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS; more than 14 million of them live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- In 2007, more than 82 million children in South Asia and East Asia had lost one or both parents due to all causes.

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children

- There are few accurate statistics regarding sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children because these crimes are often covert, secret and associated with intense feelings of shame that prevent children and adults from seeking help or reporting them.
- Although statistics in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation are broad estimations and should be treated with caution, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys younger than 18 have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence and exploitation involving physical contact. In 2000, an estimated 1.8 million children were sexually exploited in prostitution and pornography. An estimated 1 million children enter prostitution every year.
- Although the majority of the child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse are girls, both girls and boys, of all ages and backgrounds, everywhere in world, fall victim to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Justice for children

- More than 1 million children are detained through justice systems worldwide at any one time, although this is likely to be a significant underestimate, given the difficulties in obtaining data about the many unreported children in custody. Not only are data collected inconsistently, they often do not include children awaiting trial, young children detained with their parents or children held temporarily by the police.
- Among 44 countries for which data were available, around 59% of the children in detention had not been sentenced.

- The vast majority of children in detention have not committed a serious offence. Many are only charged with a status offence, such as running away from home, violation of child-related curfews, truancy or alcohol use. Children are also detained in the context of immigration, mental health concerns or for 'their own protection'. Children who are victims of a crime and children who are witnesses to a crime are often 're-victimized' by justice systems that are not adapted to children's rights and needs.
- Five countries are known to have applied the death penalty to children since January 2005.

Children with disabilities

- Overall, an estimated 650 million people worldwide live with a disability.
- Reliable statistics on children with disabilities are difficult to obtain. According to the World Health Organization, around 10% of the world's children and young people, some 200 million, have sensory, intellectual or mental health impairment. Around 80% of them live in developing countries.
- The reported incidence and prevalence of impairment in the population vary significantly from one country to another. Specialists, however, agree on a working approximation, giving a minimum benchmark of 2.5% of children aged 0-14 years with self-evident, moderate to severe levels of sensory, physical or intellectual impairment.
- An additional 8% of children aged 0-14 years have learning or behavioural difficulties, or both.
- Mortality for children younger than 5 with a disability can be as high as 80% in some income-poor countries.
- Children with a disability are particularly vulnerable to physical violence and sexual, emotional or verbal abuse, and in some instances, the disability is itself caused by maltreatment.
- Data for 15 countries show that, in 7 of the countries, parents of children who screened positive for disability were significantly more likely to report hitting them either on their face, head or ears, or repeatedly and as hard as possible. In only 2 of the countries were children who screened positive for disability significantly less likely to be hit. (In six countries, the relationship between disability screening status and likelihood of being hit was statistically insignificant.)

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