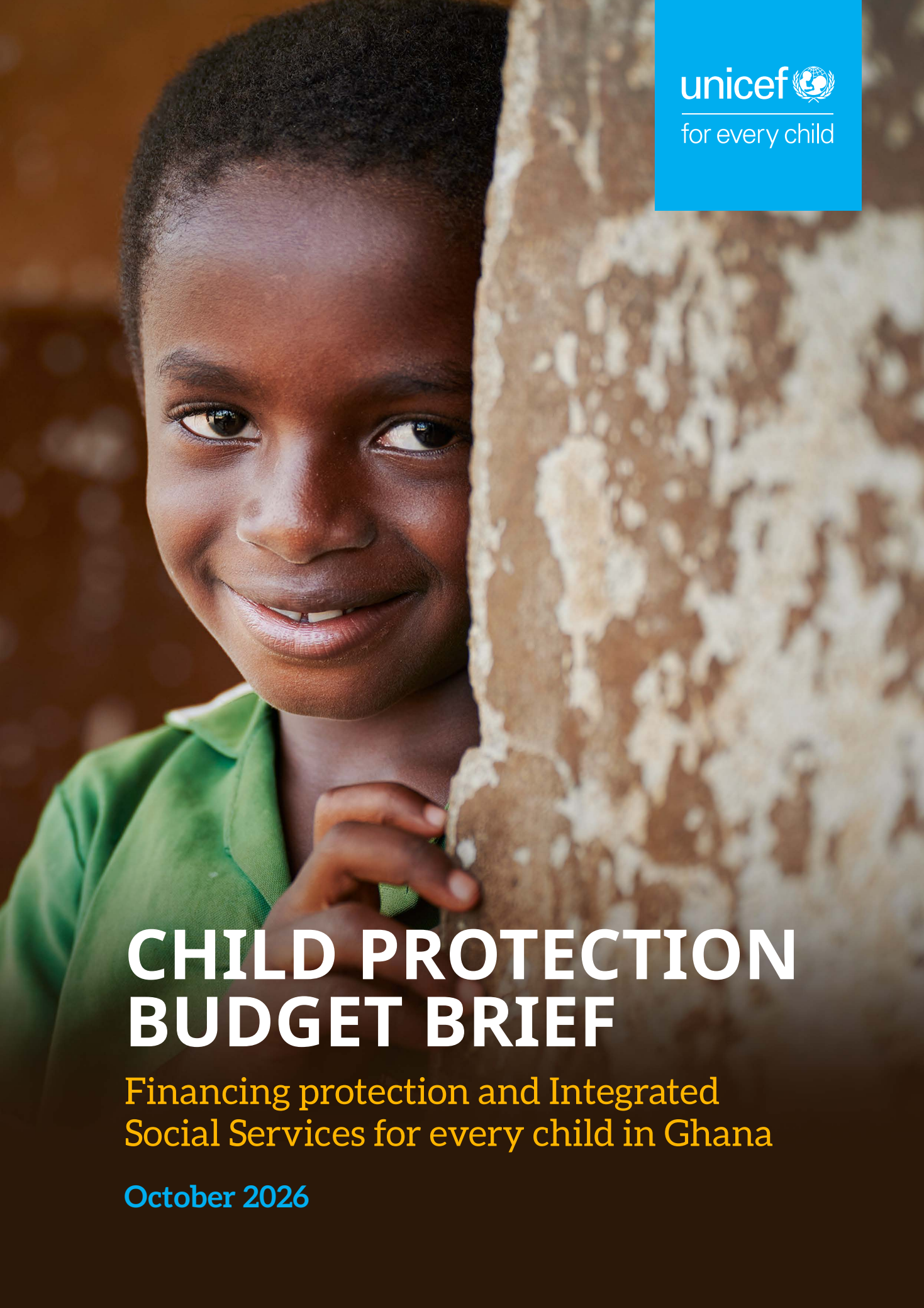


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CHILD PROTECTION BUDGET BRIEF

Financing protection and Integrated Social Services for every child in Ghana

October 2026



KEY MESSAGES AND ADVOCACY

Ghana has made important policy and institutional commitments to protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, but financing remains insufficient to translate these commitments into effective services and the protection of children. In 2026, identifiable child protection allocations account for less than 0.06 per cent of the national budget and just 0.01 per cent of GDP. While allocations have increased in nominal terms, they remain low relative to the scale of child protection challenges in Ghana, including violent discipline, child labour and trafficking, child marriage, family separation, online sexual exploitation and abuse, and gaps in birth registration and access to justice. After increasing from GHS 7 per child in 2023 to GHS 15 in 2024, the child protection budget per child has remained largely unchanged, at around GHS 15 in 2026. However, when adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2021 prices, the real per-child allocation is only approximately GHS 6 in 2026, highlighting the significant erosion in the purchasing power of child protection financing. These risks undermine children's well-being and future productivity while generating significant social and economic costs.

Investing in child protection is therefore both a rights imperative and a smart investment in Ghana's human capital. Increased and better-targeted financing is needed to strengthen prevention, response and social service delivery systems. The following priority actions would help protect recent gains, strengthen national systems and establish a pathway towards sustainable domestic financing of child protection services.

- Protect and progressively increase financing for child protection, in particular, investments in core child protection services, which receive a small share of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) and Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs (MoLGCRA) allocations. This could be achieved by setting aside 3 per cent of the District Assemblies Common Fund

(DACF) allocation towards the district Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development. This would provide more predictable financing for the Integrated Social Services (ISS) approach to enhance prevention and response to children at risk or exposed to violence and harmful practices.

- Strengthen the child protection workforce. Social services and child right promotion programmes receive the largest share of MoGCSP's budget allocations for child protection, while major staffing gaps remain. Ghana has only 41 per cent of the social welfare personnel needed nationally, which limits timely and quality support for vulnerable children and families.
- Make child protection spending easier to track through dedicated budget lines and stronger programme structures across the MoGCSP, Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and related sectors. The ongoing review of programme-based budgeting provides an important opportunity to improve the visibility and traceability of child protection financing.
- Explore innovative financing for child protection, including private sector partnerships, catalytic funding, and results-based financing mechanisms to address priority child protection issues, including those identified in child labour hotspots.
- Sustain critical child protection interventions, especially as UNICEF and other partner support declines. The MoLGCRA should provide a dedicated provision in the 2027 budget, amounting to at least GHS 5 million for ISS implementation in 100 districts, as part of transition to domestic financing. Additionally, the MoGCSP shall establish a dedicated recurrent budget line for the Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS) for the documentation and management of child protection cases. The estimated annual requirement for hosting, maintenance, technical support, system upgrades and data quality assurance is about GHS 1.43 million.



1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHILD PROTECTION IN GHANA

Ghana has made important progress in strengthening the policy, legal and institutional framework for child protection, including the nationwide expansion of Integrated Social Services (ISS). Nevertheless, children continue to experience multiple and often overlapping protection risks. As the 2026 Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Ghana points out, violence is particularly widespread, with 94 per cent of children aged 2–14 experiencing violent discipline. Child labour continues to affect children, particularly across agriculture, fisheries and mining, alongside related risks such as child trafficking and online sexual exploitation and abuse.

The scale of online risks is increasing rapidly, with National Center for Missing and Exploited Children CyberTipline reports linked to Ghana rising from about 750 in 2016 to more than 51, 598 cases in 2025. Child marriage affects around one in six girls, with consequences for their well-being, education, health and career opportunities[1]. 27% of children remain unregistered as at 31 December 2027, particularly for children in poor households and living in remote areas[2]. At the same time, climate change, migration and rapid urbanisation are placing additional demands on child protection systems.

Underinvestment in child protection carries significant social and economic costs. Violence, child marriage, child labour and exclusion from essential services such as birth registration undermine children's health, education and future productive potential, while increasing demand for health, social welfare and justice services. Investing in child protection is therefore both a rights imperative and a strategic investment in Ghana's human capital and development. Increased financing is needed to strengthen prevention and early intervention, expand the social service workforce, sustain case management and information systems, and ensure quality protection services are available in every district and community.

2 MOGCSP BUDGET AND FINANCING STRUCTURE



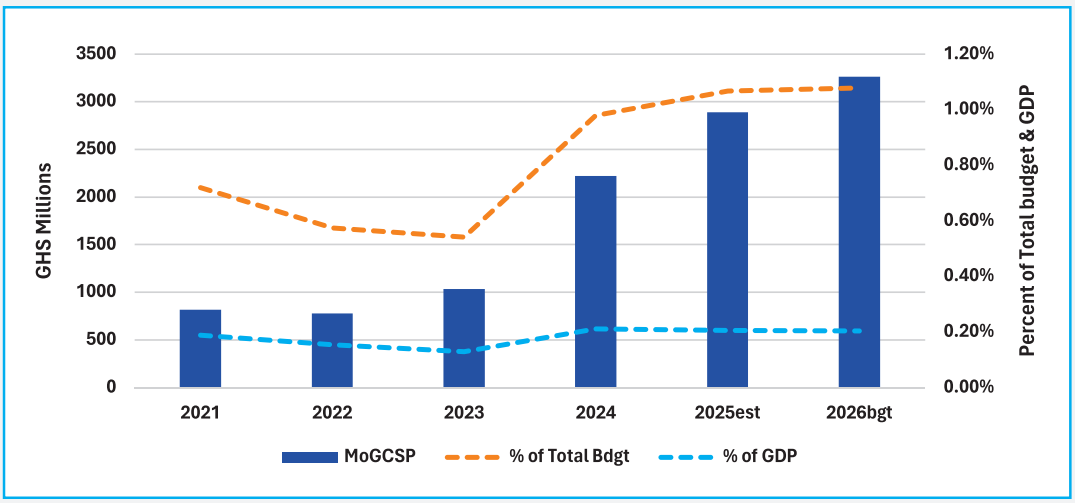
2.1 Overall budget trends

The budget for MoGCSP, the lead ministry for child protection, is projected to increase to GHS 3.26 billion in 2026, up from an estimated expenditure of GHS 2.89 billion in 2025. Despite the nominal increases, the share of the ministry's budget to total national budget and GDP remains modest. The overall MoGCSP budget is projected to represent about 1.1 per cent of total budget and around 0.2 per cent of GDP in 2026 (Fig 1).

[1] Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Ghana, UNICEF 2026
[2] Ibid



Figure 1: *Trends in MoGCSP Annual Expenditure*

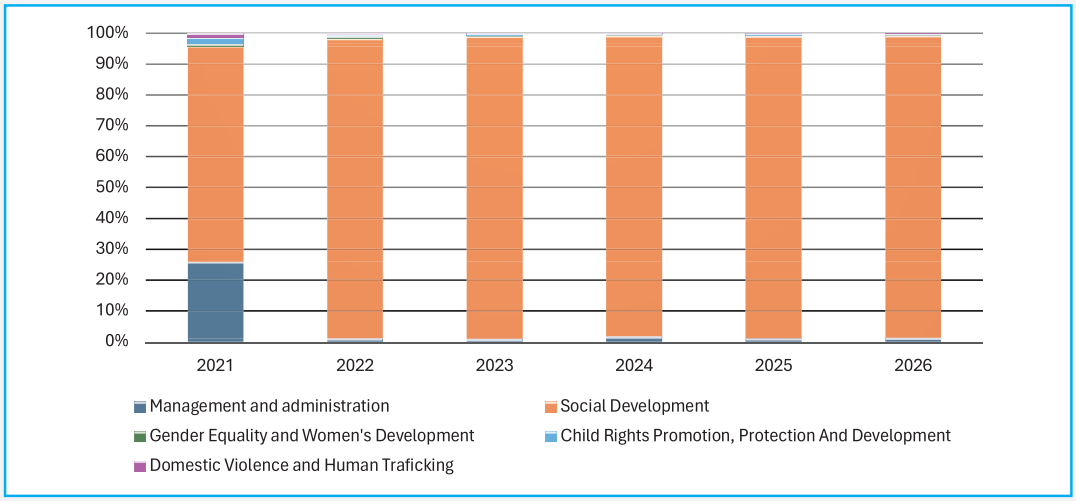


Source: *MoGCSP PBB Estimates (2021-2026) and MoF Budget Statements (2021-2026)*

2.2 Composition of the MoGCSP budget allocations by Programme

MoGCSP's budget allocations remain skewed toward social development, leaving limited fiscal space for child protection. This should not be interpreted as a call to shift resources away from social protection. Rather, social protection and child protection are complementary systems, and both require adequate investment to deliver meaningful results for vulnerable children and families. A strong social protection system can reduce poverty and vulnerability, but its impact will be much stronger when it is supported by an effective child protection system that prevents harm, responds to risks and links children and families to timely services. Together, these investments protect and build human capital by helping children remain safe, healthy, learning and able to reach their full productive potential.

Figure 2: *Composition of MoGCSP Annual Budget Allocations by Programmes*



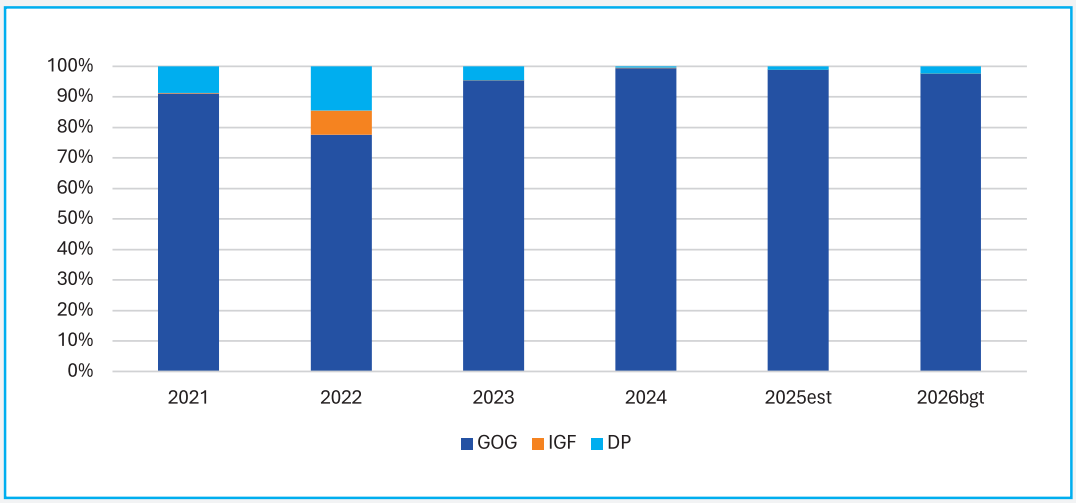
Source: *MoGCSP PBB Estimates (2021-2026)*

Since 2022, more than 97 per cent of the Ministry's allocations have gone to Social Development programmes, mainly the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme (LEAP) and the Ghana School Feeding Programme, which are critical for poverty reduction and human capital development (Fig 2). However, the current budget structure leaves only a small share of resources for other core functions, including child rights promotion, domestic violence and human trafficking response, gender equality, social services and system strengthening. As fiscal space improves, child protection financing should be strengthened and protected to ensure that children and families receive timely, quality support.

2.3 Sources of Funding for the MoGCSP

GoG remains the main source of funding for MoGCSP, which is positive for domestic ownership and the long-term sustainability of the sector. Other funding sources are becoming less reliable with Development partner support, which peaked at 14.5 per cent in 2022, declining to the projected 3.4 per cent in 2026, while internally generated funds have fallen from 7.9 per cent in 2022 to almost zero in 2026 (Fig 3). At the same time, the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) guidelines do not include a specific budget line for child protection services. This makes it even more important to explore innovative financing, including private sector partnerships, catalytic funding and results-based financing mechanisms, to protect and increase allocations for child protection, so that essential services are not weakened as external and internally generated funds continue to decline.

Figure 3: *Sources of financing for MoGCSP*



Source: *MoGCSP PBB Estimates (2021-2026)*

3 OVERALL CHILD PROTECTION FINANCING TRENDS

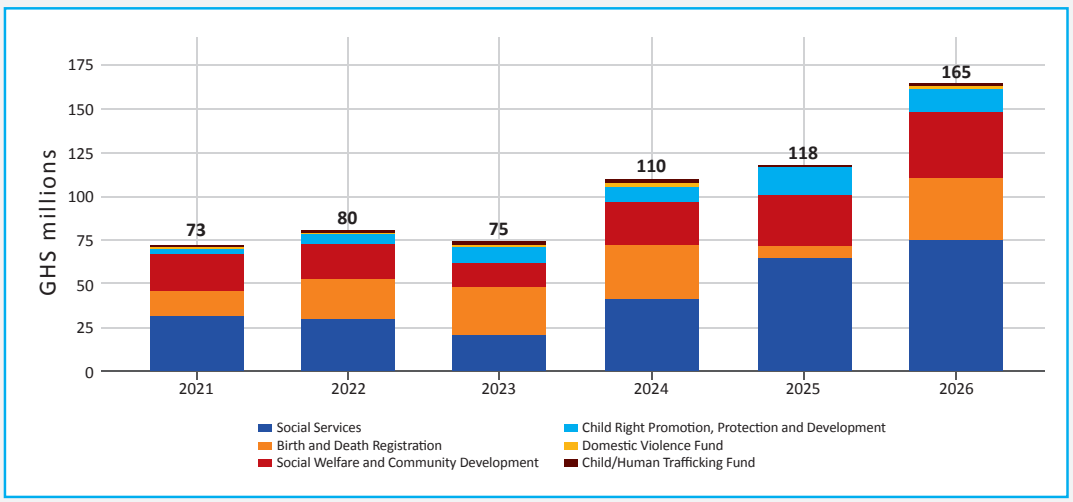
3.1 Trends in child protection budget allocations

While the MoGCSP leads policy development on child protection, other MDAs – including the Ministries of the Interior (MoI); Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs (MoLGCRA) and Justice and Attorney-General (MoJAG) – also play critical roles in preventing and responding to child protection risks and therefore require adequate financing to deliver on their mandates. The identifiable child protection allocation across different Ministries, Departments and Agencies, (MDAs), has increased substantially in nominal terms, from GHS 73 million in 2021 to GHS 165 million in 2026. The largest nominal increase was in Social Services (MoGCSP), reflecting higher



allocation towards social services at the policy level, as well as allocations through the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) and Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) for Social Welfare & Community Development. This was followed by increased allocation for Birth and Death Registration (MLGDRD)[3] and Child Rights Promotion, Protection and Development[4] (MoGCSP), (Fig 4).

Figure 4: *Trends in Child Protection Allocations by Programmes*



Source: *MoGCSP, MLGDRD RCC and MMDAs PBB estimates (2021-2026)*

Despite birth registration accounting for a significant share of the child protection allocation, challenges remain as 27% of infants were unregistered in 2025 within their first year of life when registration and the certificate is free. Drawing on the 2025 Child Protection Budget Brief, birth registration remains constrained by inadequate and unsustainable financing, low-budget execution, staffing and logistics gaps, and weak digital systems. Heavy reliance on internally generated funds, limited operational resources, and persistent barriers in remote and underserved communities continue to hinder progress towards universal birth registration and legal identity.

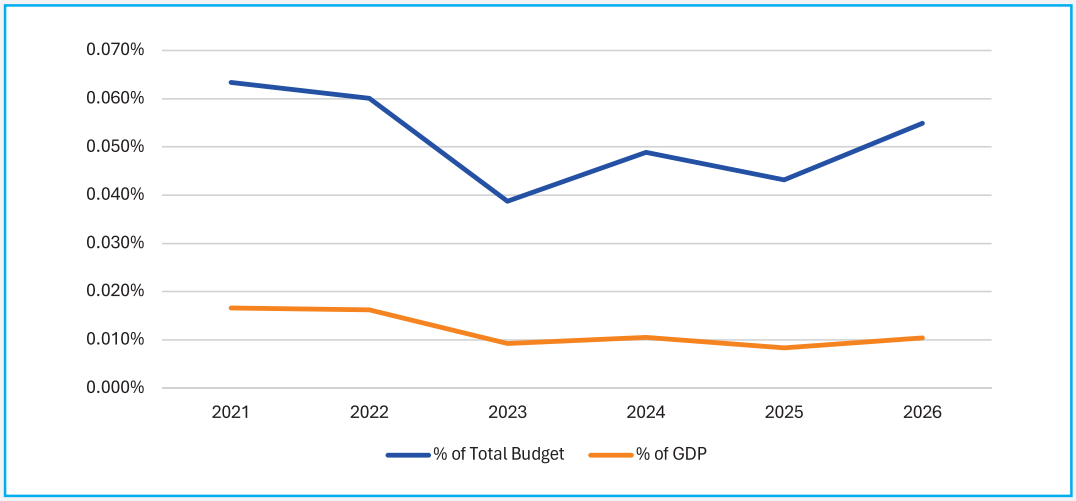
3.2 Trends in CP budget Allocation relative to total budget and GDP

Despite the nominal growth in allocations, relative priority in the total government budget remains low. Allocations have declined from 0.063 per cent of the national budget in 2021 and have since remained below 0.055 per cent in recent years, through to 2026. As a share of GDP, allocations have remained below 0.01 per cent since 2023, from the peak of 0.017 percent in 2021, (Fig 5). This means that although child protection allocations have grown in nominal terms, this growth has not kept pace with the expansion of the overall national budget or the size of the economy.

[3] Falls under the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Rural Development (MLGDRD)

[4] This sub programme includes activities to: facilitate the promotion of early childhood care and development; development and implementation of child protection policies; and the management of state-owned recreational facilities for children.

Figure 5: *CP Allocation as a share of Total Budget & GDP*



Source: *MoGCSP and MLGDRD PBB estimates (2021-2026)*

The current investment is insufficient to avoid the much larger social and economic costs associated with child protection system failures. Emerging evidence from the ongoing child protection investment case will help assess the costs of inaction associated with violence against children, child marriage and low birth registration and strengthen the evidence base for prioritizing preventive and responsive services.

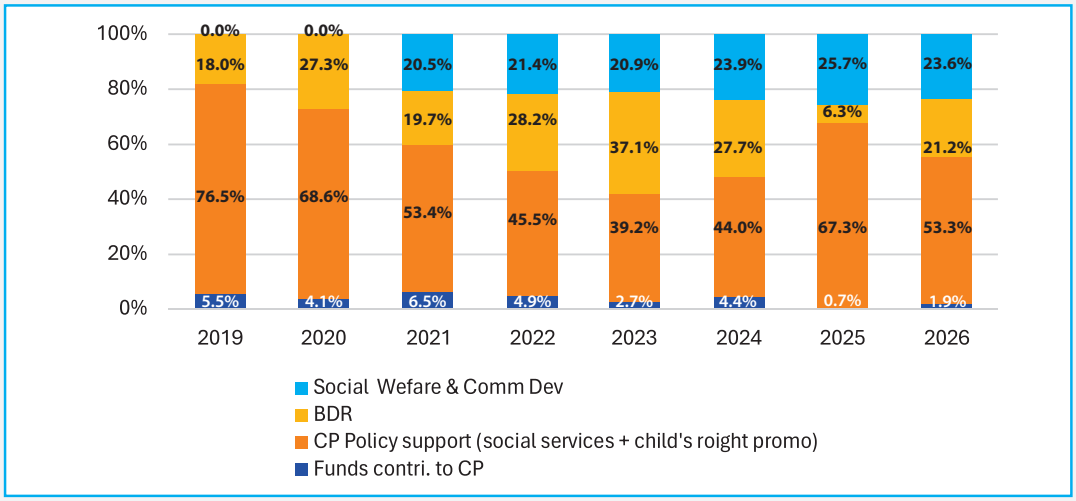


3.3 Composition of Child Protection Allocations

The composition of child protection budget allocations shows that frontline delivery receives the largest share of the resources. In 2026, approximately 53.3 per cent of CP allocations are for policy support, 23.6 per cent for Social Welfare and Community Development officers' compensation and Goods & Services at regional and MMDAs levels, 21.2 per cent for Birth and Death Registry and 1.9 per cent for child protection related funds[5] (Fig 6).

[5] Child and Human Trafficking Fund and the Domestic Violence Fund

Figure 6: *Composition of CP Allocations by Functional Area*



Source: *MoGCSP and MLGDRD PBB estimates (2021-2026)*

This notwithstanding, major workforce gaps remain. Currently, only 41 per cent of the social welfare personnel required to meet national needs are employed, implying a 59 per cent staffing shortfall[6]. On average, districts have just three staff with a social welfare background serving more than 100,000 people, falling to 2.3 staff per district in northern regions. This limits the system's ability to provide timely and quality support to vulnerable children and families.

The current expenditure mix also points to the need for greater balance between frontline delivery, prevention and response. While frontline capacity is essential, financing for core prevention and response services remains limited, including violence prevention, access to justice, trafficking response, domestic violence prevention and response services, parenting support, family strengthening and alternative care. Investing earlier in prevention and timely intervention can reduce the need for more costly remedial responses after harm has occurred. It can also help mitigate the longer-term consequences of violence, child marriage and other protection risks for children's health, education, productivity and future earnings. A more preventive child protection system is therefore not only better for children; it can also represent a more efficient use of public resources over the long term.

[6] Social Welfare Service Workforce Capacity Assessment | UNICEF Ghana



4 PRIORITY ACTIONS

4.1 Sustaining the Integrated Social Services (ISS) for Improved Child Protection Results

KEY FACT:
Ghana requires an estimated GHS 13 million annually to sustain the Integrated Social Services System across all 261 MMDAs, as UNICEF financing is progressively phased out, starting with 100 districts in 2027

Ghana's expansion of ISS to all 261 MMDAs in 2026 represents an important investment in a national system for preventing, identifying and responding to vulnerabilities affecting children and families. With nationwide coverage achieved, the financing challenge is shifting from expansion to sustaining the quality and functionality of services. A projected annual investment of GHS 13 million would be required to sustain the system and the attendant in-service training. Additional resources would be required for routine data management, maintenance and scale-up of the Child Protection Toolkits App. The cost for 2026 is estimated at GHS 2.4 million, through UNICEF support.

A significant transition will begin in late 2026, when Government will progressively assume responsibility for sustaining ISS implementation in 100 districts at an estimated cost of GHS 5 million, as direct UNICEF financial support is phased out. This represents an important step towards national ownership and long-term sustainability, while also highlighting the need to ensure that districts have adequate resources to maintain essential functions, including case management, supportive supervision, outreach and referrals, prevention and parenting services, and continuous workforce capacity development.

Existing accountability mechanisms, including Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS) and Child Protection Toolkits App data and district performance monitoring, could provide a basis for linking financing and incentives to measurable service-delivery performance. This would help safeguard the investments already made in nationwide scale-up while strengthening accountability and value for money.

Government should therefore develop and implement an ISS Incentivisation and Sustainability Strategy to guide the transition to sustainable domestic financing and establish appropriate performance-based incentive mechanisms to support quality ISS implementation across all 261 MMDAs.

4.2 Sustaining SWIMS as the National Protection Information Management System

The Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS) is a critical component of Ghana's protection system, supporting case management for children and adults, service referrals, monitoring and evidence-based decision-making across the country. With the nationwide expansion of ISS to all 261 MMDAs, SWIMS provides an important mechanism for documenting and monitoring services delivered to vulnerable children and families and strengthening accountability for child protection results. As ISS transitions towards greater Government ownership and domestic financing, the sustainability of SWIMS will become increasingly important. Continued operation of the system requires predictable financing for system hosting and maintenance, technical support, system upgrades, data quality assurance, user support and continuous capacity development for frontline personnel. UNICEF's annual support in 2026 amounts to GHS 1.43 million, which would be required to ensure that SWIMS continues to support quality case management, monitoring and accountability across all 261 MMDAs.

Without adequate operational financing, there is a risk that investments already made in establishing a nationwide digital case management system will not translate into sustained improvements in service delivery and accountability. Government should therefore establish a dedicated and predictable budget for the operation and maintenance of SWIMS, including its core recurrent costs, while integrating these requirements into the broader sustainable financing arrangements for ISS. This would strengthen national ownership of the system and ensure that SWIMS continues to support quality case management, monitoring and accountability across all 261 MMDAs.

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