

# Child Protection Budget Brief 2023/24

Investing in Child Protection Systems to Safeguard  
Child Rights in Malawi

## Key messages and recommendations

1

The direct child protection budget increased in both nominal (88%) and real terms (59%) following the restructuring of the programme-based budget (PBB) of the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) that resulted in the creation of new sub-programmes on child protection.

**Recommendation:** The increase of child protection budget signifies renewed commitment in improving child protection systems in the country. However, MoGCDSW still needs to continue engaging the Treasury to increase child protection budget allocations in the medium-term and ensure efficient and timely spending of available resources.

2

Most budget items related to child protection suffer in-year cuts, with the budget for primary child protection services cut by 25% at mid-year budget review (MYBR) in fiscal year 2022/23.

**Recommendation:** The Treasury and MoGCDSW are encouraged to protect allocations for child protection programmes from mid-year cuts to avoid disruption in the delivery of essential child protection services in 2023/24.

3

The significant funding gaps, of around 90%, for child protection services at local level are linked to the current mismatch between devolved child protection functions (de jure) and those currently being implemented by Local Government Authorities (LGAs) (de facto).

**Recommendation:** The MoGCDSW, with support from the Ministry of Local Government, is encouraged to finalize the review of the sector devolution plan to help ensure clarity in expenditure assignments and use it as a basis to engage the Treasury on the need to align transfers to child protection service needs at local level.

4

LGAs continue to rely on donors to finance essential child protection services such as case management system and community child protection structures to address Violence Against Children (VAC).

**Recommendation:** LGAs are encouraged to budget for Child Protection Case Management to ensure effective prevention and response to rising cases of violence against children in communities.

5

There is an acute shortage of Child Protection Workers (CPWs) across district councils with an average paid CPW to child ratio averaging 1: 32,151.

**Recommendation:** As the MoGCDSW is continuously engaging the Department of Human Resources Management and Development (DHRMD), the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) and Local Government Service Commission (LASCOM) to create more posts for CPWs and include those working as volunteers on the Government payroll, there is a pressing need to strategically deploy them and ensure they are equitably distributed across LGAs.

MALAWI



## Introduction

This budget brief assesses the government efforts to address Malawi’s challenges with child abuse, neglect, and violence through the National Budget. It provides analyses of the size and composition of budgetary allocations to child protection services and offers insights on adequacy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of the current and past spending.

## Methodology

The analysis follows the approach defined in previous budget briefs, which divides budgets for child protection into direct and indirect categories. Direct child protection budgets refer to interventions that are consciously geared on preventing and responding to child abuse, neglect, and other types of violence. Budgets for victim assistance, mental health and psychosocial support also falls within the direct child protection category. For example, bursaries, preventive and responsive policing, gender and mainstreaming, and livelihoods programmes are examples of interventions that support the achievement of child protection objectives but are not specifically created for this reason as highlighted in Table 1.



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## Overview of Child Protection in Malawi

Child protection services are offered mainly by Local Government Authorities (LGAs) through the District Social Welfare Offices (DSWOs) and Child Protection Workers (CPWs) who are the para-social workers at community level and the first point of call on issues of children. At national level, the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) is responsible for coordinating all child protection programmes, development of policies, capacity building and setting standards. Other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) including the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), Malawi Police Service (MPS) and the Judiciary offer critical complementary child protection services.

The Government recognises the need to protect the rights of children and has demonstrated this commitment through the adoption of relevant international legal frameworks especially the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC). The CRC provisions have been domesticated in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child at regional level and in the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (CCPJA) (2010) and the National Children’s Policy at national level. To ensure that the policy is fully implemented, Government has developed several action plans including the National Plan of Action for Vulnerable Children (2022-2026), the National Strategy on Child Protection (2022-2026), the National Plan on Ending Child Marriage and the National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence.

As Malawi grapples with various economic, health, and climatic challenges, the need to protect children becomes even more critical. The country has been experiencing a range of shocks, including health emergencies such as cholera,

**Table 1: Direct and Indirect Child Protection Budget Lines considered in this Budget Brief**

Ministry, Department or Agency (MDA)	Direct Budget Lines (Programmes / Sub-Programme / cost center)	Indirect Budget Lines (Programmes / Sub-Programme / cost center)
Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) (Vote 320)	139.1 Family and Child Welfare Services	140.2 Early childhood services
		137.3 Gender Mainstreaming
	139.2 Probation & Réhabilitation Services	137.4 Gender-based violence
	140.1 Child Rights and Protection Services	140.2 Early Childhood Development
	140.3 Parenting services	137.4 Gender based violence
	National Children’s Commission (NCC) <sup>1</sup>	
Judiciary (Vote 070)	Child Justice Court (CJC) (Cost Centre 010)	N/A
Local Councils	Primary Child Protection Services (sub-Programme 99.01)	99.02 Early Childhood Development
Malawi Human Rights Commission	N/A	98.1 Human Rights Promotion
	N/A	98.2 Human Rights Protection
		79.10 Human Rights Support

<sup>1</sup> The NCC is yet to be a cost center under the MoGCDSW. Since 2020/21, its allocation was made through the Department of Child Affairs’ budget.

discrimination, and atrocities against children with albinism, inflation, and climate shocks especially the recent Tropical Cyclone Freddy. Unfortunately, these factors have exacerbated the vulnerability of children, exposing them to a multitude of risks.

**Multiple and recurring climatic, macro-economic and health shocks have increased the incidence of child abuse and other violence affecting children.** The 2019/20 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) confirmed that child marriage remains prevalent, with 8.9% of women aged between 15-49 years being first married by 15 years and 37.7% of women aged 20-24 years married before the age of 18 years. Cases of violence for children amongst children aged 1-14 years subjected to violent discipline in the previous month have increased from 72% in 2015 to 82% in 2019 as shown in Table 2.

**Gender-based violence among adolescents is unacceptably high as one in five girls and one in seven boys experience at least one incident of sexual abuse before the age of 18.** There are also disparities along geographical, wealth and educational lines. For example, 46% of women aged 20-24 got married before age 18 in rural areas compared to 32% in urban areas. Child marriages especially in rural areas were further induced by shocks such as COVID-19, floods and droughts as transactional sex and early marriages are used as one of the coping mechanisms to shocks (Yukish, 2021).

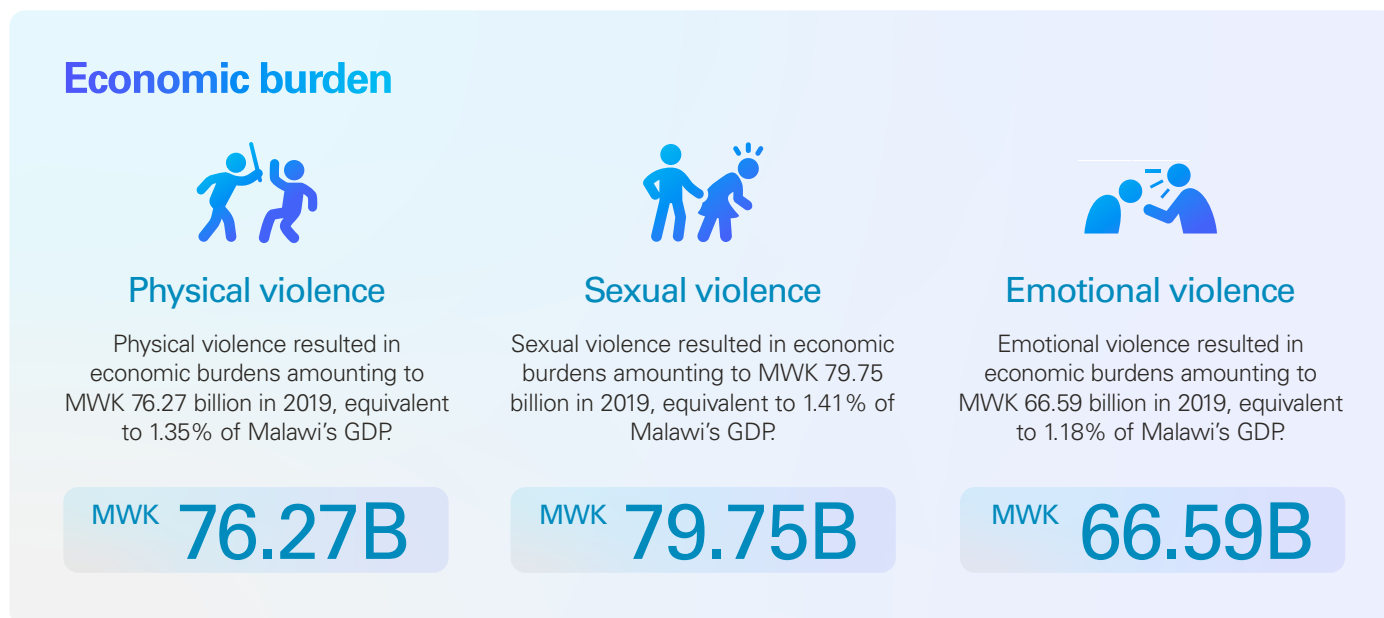
**Table 2: Key child protection indicators in Malawi**

	Indicator	2019/20
Child Abuse	Children aged 1-14 years subjected to violent discipline in the previous month	82%
Child Marriage	Women aged 20-24 years married before the age of 18	38%
	Women aged 15-49 married before the age of 15.	8%
Child Labor	Children in Child Labor aged 5-17 years	14%
Child Neglect	Children under age 18 not living with a biological parent	17%
Early Childhood Development	Birth registration (percentage of children under age 5 whose births are reported registered with a civil authority)	67%

Source: MICS, 2019/20

**The high prevalence of violence against children has far reaching impacts on socio-economic development.** For instance, a cost of inaction study on child protection undertaken by UNICEF (2022) estimated that violence against children in Malawi was associated with an economic cost of MWK234 billion in 2019, equivalent to 4.13% of GDP as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Economic Burden from Violence Against Children**



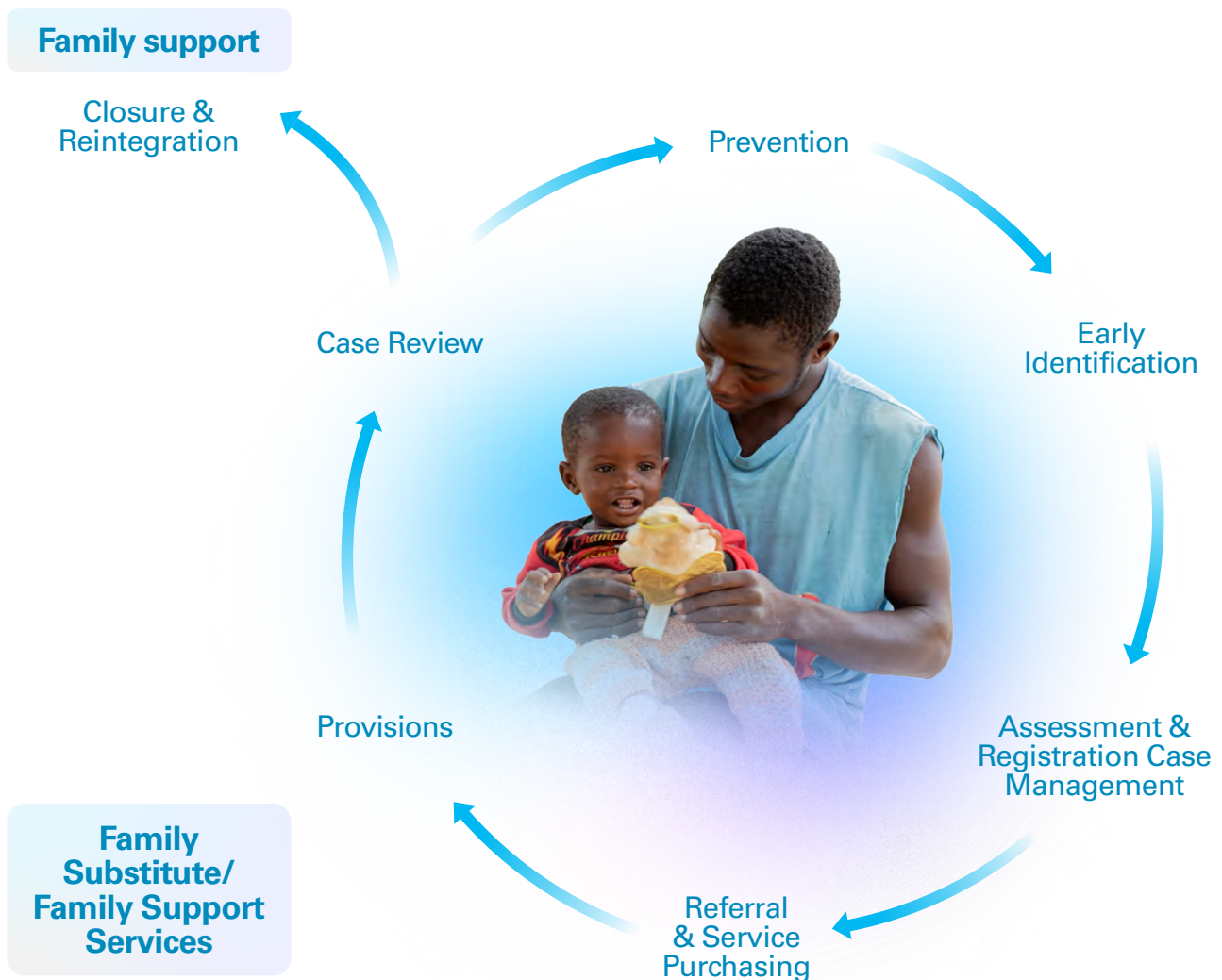
Source: UNICEF Malawi, Child Protection Cost of Inaction Study, 2022

**Gender-based violence among adolescents is unacceptably high as one in five girls and one in seven boys experience at least one incident of sexual abuse before the age of 18.**

Government is reviewing key child protection related policy frameworks and strengthening management of child protection administrative data. In 2023, Government embarked on reviewing the National ECD Policy and National Strategy on Ending Child Marriages. Government is also developing an orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) database that will be linked with the Demographic Health Indicator Survey (DHIS) 2 as a means of enforcing reporting requirements and making better use of the data in designing and monitoring child protection interventions.

District Councils still face an acute shortage of frontline workers to prevent and respond to the numerous child protection cases. On average, 32,151 children are served by one paid Child Protection Worker (CPW) due to slow recruitment of CPWs. Government plans to gradually reduce the CPW/child ratio and in 2023, as it already deployed 85 CPWs in all the 28 districts to enhance the human capacity and strengthen child protection structures in the country.

**Figure 2: Child Protection Continuum of Care**



Source: The Malawi Situational Analysis for Vulnerable Children, 2021

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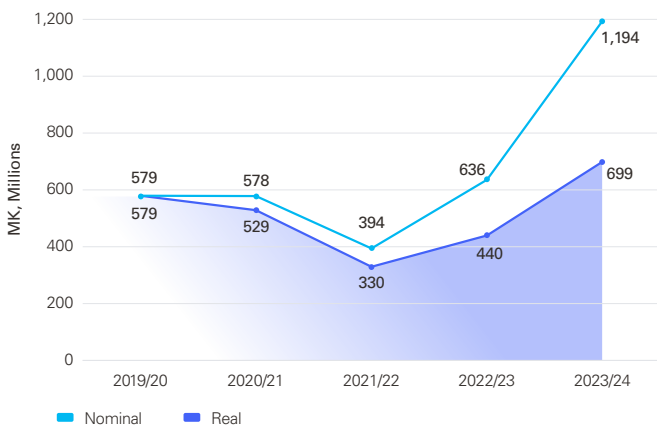
# Size of Child Protection Spending

## Direct Child Protection Allocations

Government allocated MK1.2 billion to direct child protection interventions in 2023/24, the highest since 2016/17. The direct child protection budget increased in both nominal (88%) and real terms (59%) compared to 2022/23. This follows the restructuring of child protection programmes in the MoGCDSW PBB which resulted in the introduction of new programmes such as on “parenting services”. This signifies increased government commitment to financing child development and protection services in Malawi.

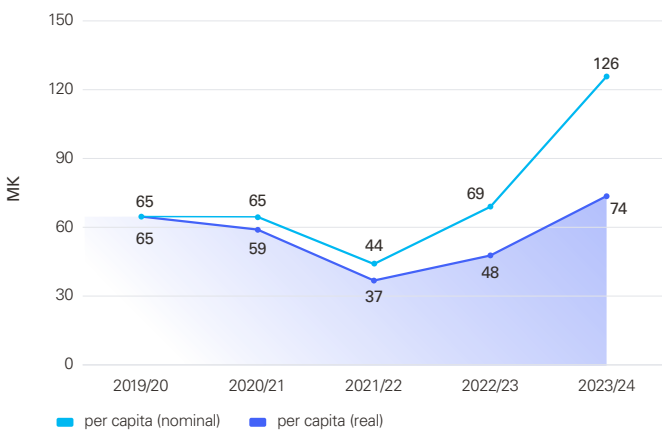
Consequently, real per capita child protection budgets have notably increased, worth MK126 (USD0.12) per child per year in 2023/24. This represents 54.3% nominal increase from MK69 in the previous year and represents the highest real allocation since 2019/20 (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Trends in Direct Budget Allocations to Child Protection**



Source: Government Budget Estimates (2020-23)

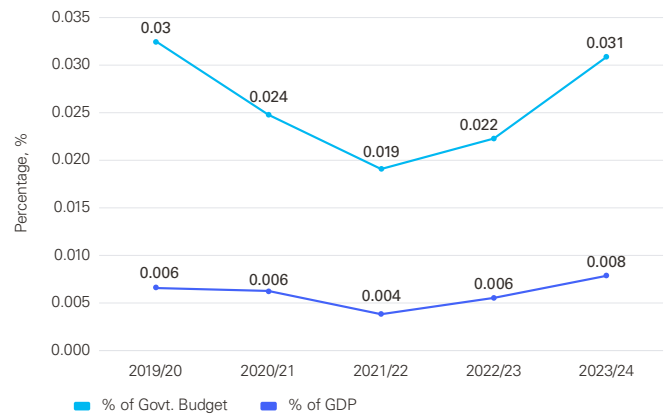
**Figure 4: Trends in Per Capita Direct Child Protection Budgets**



Source: Government Budget Estimates, 2020-23

Child protection budgets remain significantly low in relation to total government expenditure (TGE) and GDP. As a share of TGE, the direct child protection budget for 2023/24 is 0.03%, similar to the levels of 2019/20 (Figure 5). Child protection budgets have averaged less than 0.01% as a share of GDP, since 2021/22.

**Figure 5: Trends in Direct Budget Allocations to Child Protection as a share of TGE and GDP**



Source: Government Budget Estimates (2018/19 to 2023/24)



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## Indirect Child Protection Budgets

There are several indirect budget lines supporting the implementation of child protection services in Malawi (Table 3). Unadjusted allocations to these programmes have steadily increased from MK24.6 billion in 2021/22 to MK28.6 billion in 2023/24. This translates to 16% increase in nominal terms and is mainly on account of the increase in the ECD budget by 21%.

**Table 3: List of Selected Indirect Child Protection Budget Lines, in MK millions**

MDA	CP-related Sub-Programme/ Cost Centre	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>MoGCDSW (Vote 320)</b>	140.2 Early Childhood Development	21,700	12,355	13,329	16,098
	137.3 Gender Mainstreaming	28	29	40	57
	137.4. Gender based violence	14	9.23	30.49	57
	Social Cash Transfer	3,000	19,981	10,330	10,859
<b>Local Councils</b>	99.02 Early Childhood Development	44	30.19	32	34
<b>Malawi Human Rights Commission (Vote 430)</b>	179.1. Human Rights Promotion	248	242	320	284
	179.2. Human Rights Protection	366	210	449	257
<b>Ministry of Justice (Vote 350)</b>	79.10. Human Rights Support	91	69	39	31
<b>Ministry of Education (Vote 250)</b>	Construction of Girls Hostels Bursaries to Girls	500	814.40	45.23	1,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,991</b>	<b>33,740</b>	<b>24,615</b>	<b>28,677</b>

Source: PBBs (2020/21 to 2023/24)

## Composition of Child Protection Spending<sup>2</sup>

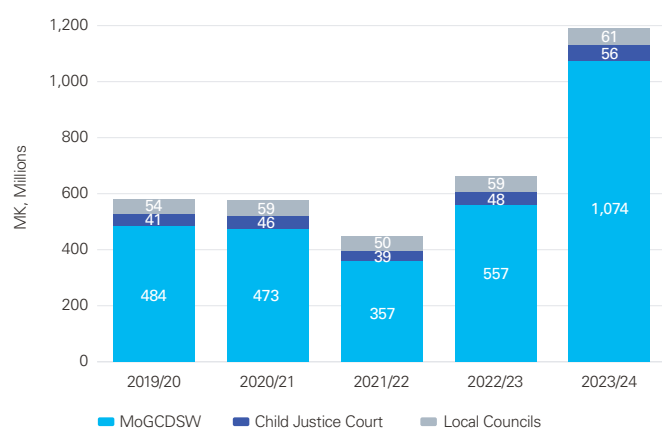
The direct child protection budget remains heavily centralized, with 90% of the 2023/24 allocation going to the MoGCDSW. About 5% is to support decentralized functions under the LGAs while the other 5% is allocated to the Child Justice Court (CJC) (Figure 6). The allocation to LGAs remains very low in relation to child protection services undertaken at local level and the shortage of Child Protection Workers.

Government is working to rebalance allocations to preventive and responsive child protection interventions following a historical imbalance towards response programmes. Following advocacy efforts by different stakeholders and the restructuring of child protection programmes in 2023/24, government has introduced new sub-programmes, including “parenting services” and has transformed the sub-programme on “primary child protection services” to “child rights and protection services”, which is more focused on preventive services. In 2023/24, about 24% of the child protection budget is geared towards preventive services while 76% is for response services (Figure 7).

Government allocated MK93 million to the National Children’s Commission (NCC) in 2023/24. Cumulatively, the NCC has been provided MK368 million since 2020/21. This is, however, significantly lower than the cost estimate provided by the MoGCDSW of MK2 billion required to cover the capital and operational costs for the NCC to be fully functional.

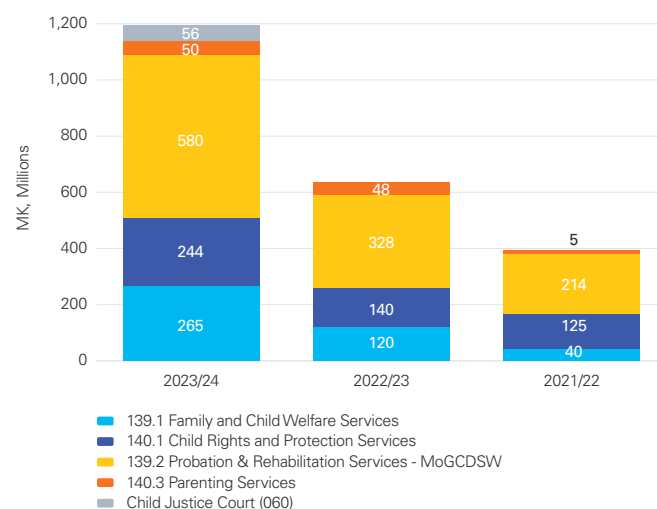
<sup>2</sup> The composition analysis consider only direct child protection budgets for which data is disaggregated by different components (i.e., by programme/sub-programme/cost center, economic inputs, and level of Government).

**Figure 6: Composition of Direct Child Protection Budgets by Level of Government**



Source: Government Budget Estimates (2020-23)

**Figure 7: Trends in the Programme Composition of Direct Child Protection Budgets**



Source: Government Budget Estimates (2020-23)

# Budget Credibility and Execution

In 2022/23, child protection programmes experienced significant mid-year budget cuts. The allocation to primary Child Protection Services (99.01) was revised downwards by 25%, impacting critical child protection interventions including the operationalization of the NCC. The budgets for probation and rehabilitation services programme and Child Justice Court were revised upwards by 2% and 13% respectively. Two out of the three revisions were beyond the  $\pm 5\%$  variance bracket provided by the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) framework for a budget to be deemed credible. Such variability and unpredictability in funding flows could potentially result in inefficiencies in public spending on child protection.

**Table 4: 2022/23 Budget Revisions for Selected Sub-Programmes, in MK millions**

Vote/Sub-Programme	2022/23 Approved	2022/23 Revised	Revision (%)
<b>Primary Child Protection Services (71.01)</b>	60.89	60.89	0%
<b>Primary Child Protection Services (99.01)</b>	175.00	139.81	-25%
<b>Probation &amp; Rehabilitation Services (71.02)</b>	321.23	328.02	2%
<b>Child Justice Court (060)</b>	41.51	47.82	13%

Source: PBBs for 2022/23

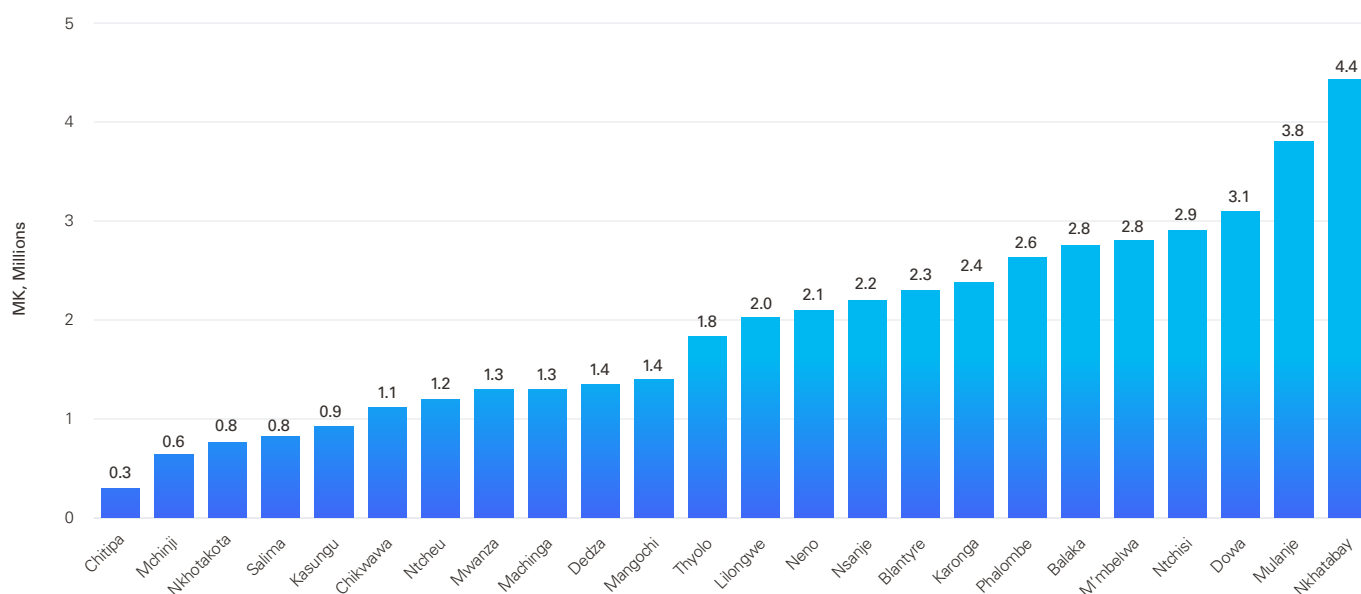
# Fiscal Decentralization

On average each district allocated MK1.5 million per year to support the implementation of child protection interventions. The allocations for child protection vary across districts (Figure 8). Nkhatabay district council allocated the highest budget of MK4.4 million in 2023/24 while Chitipa allocated the lowest of MK300,000. These budgets are extremely low to meaningfully respond to district child protection needs in areas such as case management, psychosocial support, victim assistance and follow-up of cases of violence.



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**Figure 8: 2023/24 Budget Allocations to Child Protection by District**



Source: National Local Government Committee, 2023/24 PBB for LGAs

**Local Councils continue to face acute shortages of salaried Child Protection Workers.** On average, the paid CPW to child ratio is 1: 32,151. The shortage is exacerbated by unequal distribution of CPWs across districts. For instance, Lilongwe and Ntchisi District Councils have almost the same number of CPWs despite the latter having a larger population (Figure 9). This implies that some districts with higher population of children requiring the services of CPWs have fewer of them than districts with smaller populations of children. Further, 61% of CPWs operate on voluntary basis and face several challenges including mobility.

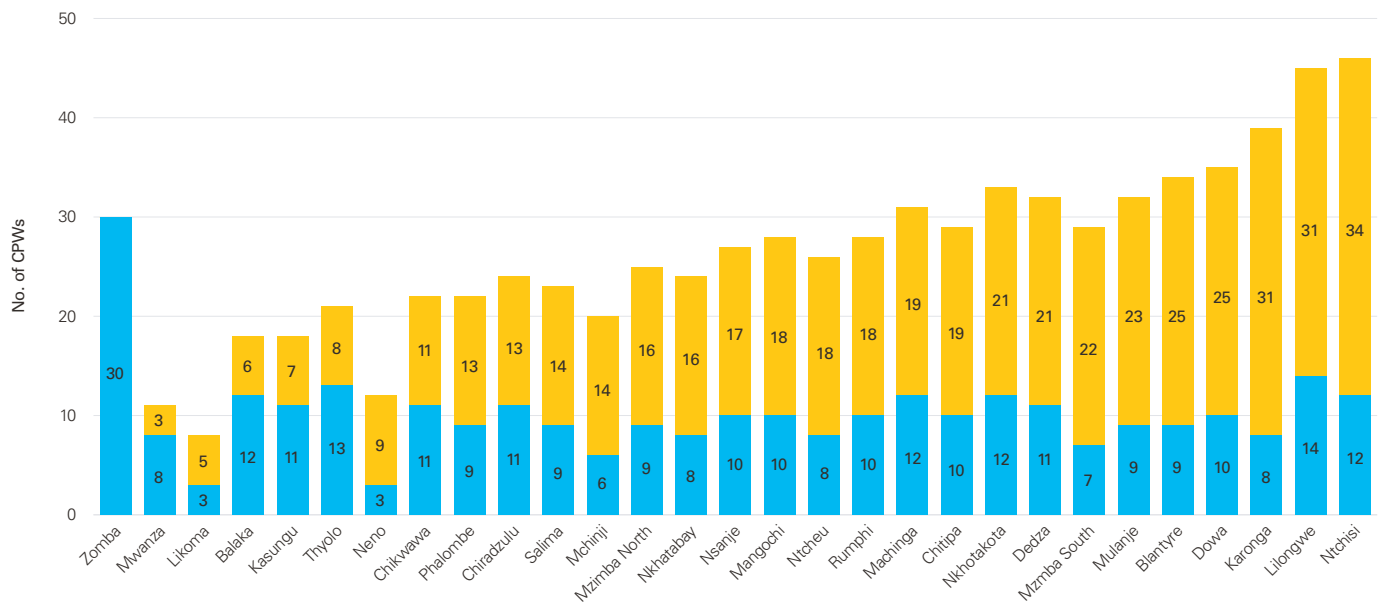
**The child protection case management system and local child protection structures are mostly still funded by development partners.** Development partners and CSOs are primarily responsible for funding the case management system, which serves as the primary tool for handling child protection matters at the local level. The case management system has not

been implemented in districts where development partners are not present.

**The MoGCDSW is in the process of reviewing the sector devolution plan to ensure devolved functions are aligned to service delivery needs at local level.** This follows recent evidence showing a mismatch between devolved functions (de jure) and functions currently being implemented by LGAs (de facto).

**Latest evidence has established significant funding gaps for implementing child protection services at local level.** The cost of implementing a basic package of gender, child protection and social welfare functions was estimated to cost MK9.5 billion per year – against annual average allocations of around MK390 million. This translates to significant funding gaps, averaging over 90%.

**Figure 9: Distribution of CPWs Across Districts**



Source: MoGCDSW, 2023; National Statistics Office (NSO)

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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