



unicef 
for every child

Protecting the World's Children

An investment opportunity for the public
and private sectors

Bangladesh

Meem, 5, is holding her soft toy standing in a Child Protection Hub supported by UNICEF.



Up to 5

per cent of GDP is lost every year because of violence against children, according to national studies from a range of countries

The opportunity

Our children's safety is priceless. Upholding their rights and investing in their protection is both a duty and an opportunity for all of us. As much as we can, we must protect all children, everywhere. We know that a protective environment supports children's development. It also improves their health, education, and well-being, and their evolving capacities to be parents, citizens, and productive members of society.

And protecting children also makes good economic sense. Research over the years has demonstrated both the cost of inaction as well as the strong returns on investing.

And protecting children also makes good economic sense. Research over the years has demonstrated both the cost of inaction as well as the strong returns on investing. For example, national studies from a range of countries have estimated that violence against children has economic costs of up to 5 per cent of GDP.¹ If child marriage had ended in 2015, the global economy could have saved US\$566 billion by 2030.²

Moreover, investment in child protection need not be cost-prohibitive. The delivery cost for a scaled-up package of evidence-based parenting programmes to reduce abuse and neglect in countries such as the Philippines and South Africa, is around US\$18 per family: similar to the cost of a standard flu vaccine.³ Programmes to reduce child marriage, only cost about US\$3.80 per child. Yet the returns are significant – six-fold on investment.⁴

So protecting the rights of all children is not only the right thing to do, it is also a great opportunity.

The challenges

Despite advancements in child rights over the past two decades – for example, rising birth registration levels and declining rates of female genital mutilation – significant acceleration is required to fully realize the rights of all children everywhere, and to achieve the child protection-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The triple crisis globally – of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 – has created a perfect storm for increased vulnerability, pushing families to turn to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour. It also drew attention to the particular vulnerabilities of children in conflict with the law, children from marginalized or minority groups, children without or at risk of losing parental care and children with disabilities. Furthermore, over the past two years, the number of children living in countries with complex emergencies has almost doubled, making the threat to rights to protection particularly acute for children in crisis situations.

While the short-term implications for child protection are increasingly known – increased risk of violence, reduced services for prevention and response and major economic contractions and increased poverty – the medium- and long-term implications are unclear. What is clear, however, is that risk factors of harm are on the rise and protective factors have been weakened because of COVID-19 containment measures.

There are clear opportunities for investing in child protection, and it is important we collectively address the following challenges:

① **Violence is a common experience in the lives of girls, boys and women**

An estimated billion children globally experience some form of emotional, physical or gender-based violence every year.⁵ The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated this violence, as they have been cut off from key support services while simultaneously suffering the additional stress placed on families.

1 in 10

girls under 18 worldwide (approximately 120 million) have experienced sexual assault or other unwanted sexual acts

Public attention is often focused on extreme or sensationalized forms of violence, and the fact that children endure violence on a routine basis in everyday settings – at home, online, in schools and in the community – is frequently overlooked or considered a normal part of growing up. Experiencing or witnessing violence in childhood may have long-term consequences for the well-being of the individual; and given its scale, in aggregate it significantly undermines the social and economic development of communities and nations.⁶

Some groups are particularly vulnerable to violence. One in ten girls under 18 worldwide (approximately 120 million) have experienced sexual assault or other unwanted sexual acts.⁷ Children with disabilities are more than twice as likely as their non-disabled peers to experience violence, and about a third of children with disabilities are survivors of violence.⁸

② Children experience grave violations in armed conflict

Children pay the highest price in humanitarian crises. Armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies expose millions of girls and boys to unthinkable forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Between 2005 and 2020, the United Nations verified over 266,000 grave violations against children committed by parties to conflict in more than 30 conflict situations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.⁹ This figure is a fraction of the violations believed to have occurred, as access and security constraints, among others, and the shame, pain, and fear that child and family survivors suffer often hamper the reporting, documentation and verification of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

Grave violations against children are committed by all parties to conflict, States and non-State actors alike. Between 2016 and 2020, State actors – including national and international forces and coalitions – were responsible for at least 26 per cent of all violations. In comparison, non-State actors accounted for about 58 per cent of all verified violations, underscoring the importance of engagement with all parties to conflict, including non-state actors, to meaningfully end and prevent violations against children.



Yemen

Rayan, age 3, lost his arm when fighting escalated near his home. "There was an exchange of shelling and our house was bombed," his father explains.

35 per cent of children under five (237 million) lack proof of legal identity

Between 2005 and 2020

More than **104,100 children** killed or maimed in situations of armed conflict

More than **93,000 children** recruited and used by parties to conflict

At least **25,700 children** verified as abducted by parties to conflict

At least **14,200 children** raped, forcibly married, sexually exploited, and suffered other grave forms of sexual violence by parties to conflict

More than **13,900 attacks** against schools and hospitals

No fewer than **14,900 incidents** of denial of humanitarian access for children

Many children are forced to flee their homes, some torn from their parents and caregivers along the way. In conflict, children may be injured or killed by explosive weapons and mines, including during attacks on schools and hospitals. They may be recruited by armed forces or armed groups. Especially for girls and women, the threat of gender-based violence soars.

Humanitarian emergencies exacerbate pre-existing violence and, in some cases, present new forms. For example, in South Sudan, 65 per cent of women and girls have reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence. Gender-based violence not only affects the physical and psychosocial well-being of those directly experiencing violence, it also harms others, including survivors' children, and can have wider-reaching effects on the social fabric of communities.

③ Many children lack legal identity

Birth registration and legal identity are key to recognition before the law and therefore protection. No matter their story, all children have the right to be protected, to health care, education and other forms of social protection that shield them from the lifelong consequences of violence, poverty and exclusion. But worldwide, many girls and

boys are deprived of these rights – some as early as birth. Globally, 35 per cent of children under five (237 million) lack proof of legal identity – including 166 million who are not registered, and another 70 million who do not have birth certificates.¹⁰ Births are not registered because their parents are not aware of the benefits of registration, cannot afford it, cannot reach it, or face some other barrier to accessing civil registration services.

Without a legal identity, these children cannot be protected, claim their rights and access social services or justice systems, making them especially vulnerable to violence, exploitation, abuse or harmful practices, and exclusion.

④ Children do not have full access to justice

Across the world, millions of children interact with justice systems every year. They could be victims or witnesses to a crime. They could be alleged, accused or recognized as having broken the law, or they could be in need of care and protection. In all these circumstances children need to be able to access justice to seek and obtain a remedy for violations of their rights.

But justice systems do not always fulfil the promise of fairness. Some are altogether out of reach for children, who may have no knowledge of their rights, no means to contact a lawyer, or no financial resources for legal fees. This is especially the case for vulnerable children overrepresented in justice systems, including children with disabilities, indigenous and ethnic minority children, children discriminated against due to gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and children on the move. Nor are justice systems necessarily equipped to fulfil children's rights and needs. Justice professionals – police, prosecutors, lawyers and judges – often lack the specialized training or resources to support child survivors/victims, witnesses or alleged offenders. Many may not understand the gender-specific vulnerabilities children face in the justice system.

The COVID-19 pandemic generated enormous pressure on rule-of-law systems worldwide, with particular challenges for children, especially children in detention. As countries locked down, we saw many children's rights curtailed in the name of public health and security with little or no oversight

2.7 million children worldwide are estimated to live in residential care

or opportunity for redress. Under those circumstances, courts shut down and access to essential social and justice services, such as legal aid and representation, were restricted. These challenges, ongoing in certain country contexts, include:

- Children deprived of their liberty being at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and being more vulnerable to neglect, abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence;¹¹
- Increased family violence, including gender-based and against children, and child sexual abuse and exploitation online;
- Children in street situations being rounded up and detained, while other children are detained for the violation of pandemic curfew orders and movement restrictions;
- Children seeking asylum or on the move being turned away at borders, having their cases denied or being deprived of liberty indefinitely.¹²

⑤ Children are separated from their families

Every child has the right to grow up in a supportive family environment. But worldwide, an estimated 2.7 million children live in residential care – and the actual figure could be much higher.

Children may be separated from their parents and placed in alternative care for various reasons. Armed conflict, natural disaster and migration tear many families apart. Other children end up in residential care because of discrimination. Disability (or the disability of a parent), ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation force countless girls and boys into institutions. Placing children in institutions also has clear links to inequality and violence, and to a lack of social protection to ease the impact of poverty on families, community-based social services to offer families support, and access to inclusive education and health care.

The impact of child separation and institutionalization is severe and can last a lifetime. Children placed in institutions are deprived of social, emotional and intellectual stimulation, which can hamper their healthy development – both emotionally and physically. Shut away from mainstream society, these children are also particularly vulnerable to violence, neglect and abuse.

⑥ Children are increasingly suffering from poor mental health and lack of psychosocial well-being

The risk of mental health conditions and psychosocial problems among children, adolescents and their caregivers is exacerbated when they experience violations of their rights. The development of a wide range of mental health problems in adolescence is linked to experience of abuse and neglect in childhood.¹³ In recent years, changing humanitarian contexts have created a more dangerous environment for child and adolescent well-being and development. Prolonged conflict, mass displacement, violence, exploitation, intensifying natural disasters and the measures to contain disease outbreaks all can create stress, anxiety, or distress.¹⁴ These then increase the risk of violence in the home and self-harm.



Panama

A mother and daughter share a tearful reunion, after having been separated for several days while navigating a perilous migration route.

650 million girls and women around the world today have been married as children

In addition, the consequences of COVID-19 have put the mental health and well-being of an entire generation at risk, with potential for long-term poor mental health consequences among children, young people and their parents and caregivers in all corners of the globe. Furthermore, where pandemic control measures have restricted children to their homes and closed schools, those in family contexts of violence, neglect and abuse have been cut off from external support from teachers and friends.¹⁵

⑦ Children continue to undergo harmful practices

Harmful cultural practices, such as [child marriage](#) and [female genital mutilation](#) (FGM) threaten the lives and futures of girls and women in every region of the world. While FGM exclusively affects females, girls are also at greater risk than boys of child marriage. Some 650 million girls and women around the world today have been married as children, and over 200 million have been subjected to FGM. Child marriage and FGM span continents and cultures, yet, in every society in which they are practiced, they reflect values that hold women and girls in low esteem.

FGM can lead to serious health complications – including prolonged bleeding, infection and infertility – or even death. Girls who have undergone FGM are at heightened risk of experiencing complications during childbirth, and FGM causes an estimated additional one to two perinatal deaths per 100 deliveries. While girls are today a third less likely to undergo the practice than three decades ago, progress is not universal, and it is not fast enough.

The practice of child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances between men and women – and it sustains them by limiting opportunities for girls and women to realize their rights and full potential in terms of health, education, income, equality and a life free from violence. Child marriage is detrimental to a girl's well-being; girls who are married early are more likely to be out of school, more likely to have health problems, and more likely to have an early and unwanted pregnancy. In developing countries, nine out of ten births to adolescent girls occur within a marriage or a union. In these countries, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years. During the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children fell from 25 per cent to 21 per cent). However, progress has not been uniform – prevalence remained stagnant for example in Latin America and the Caribbean. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 10 million girls are at risk of child marriage by 2030, taking the total number of girls at risk to 110 million.



Ukraine

Afina was just 2 years old when the shells first began to fall in her home of eastern Ukraine. The years of stress caused by protracted conflict can have a serious impact on children's mental health.

Partnerships

are key: with governments, civil society,
the private sector and children

UNICEF's sustainable response

UNICEF's mandate – to save children's lives, defend their rights and help them fulfil their potential from early childhood through adolescence – is not a simple one. UNICEF's child protection programme plays a leadership role in both emergency responses and longer-term development programming, and in the increasingly important links between the two. And partnerships are key, with governments, civil society, the private sector and children.

To respond sustainably, UNICEF working with partners, focuses on:

① Ending violence against girls, boys and women

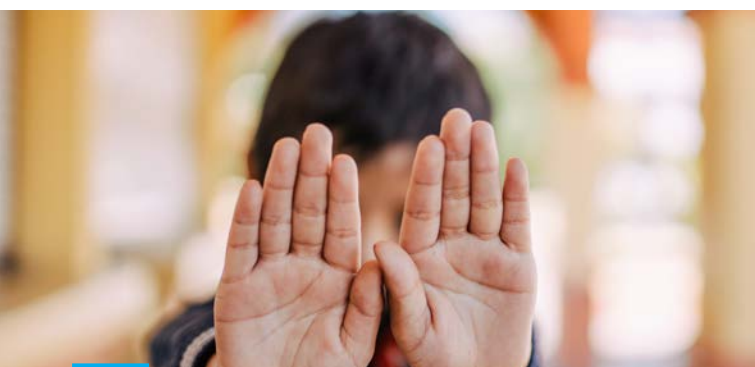
Even though international human rights law enshrines the right to live free from violence, girls, boys and women still face violence in all settings and contexts. Violence, exploitation and abuse are often perpetrated by persons known to the child, including parents, other family members, caregivers, teachers, employers, law enforcement officers, state and non-state actors and other children. Only a small proportion of acts of violence, exploitation and abuse are reported and investigated, and few perpetrators are held to account.

UNICEF considers primary prevention of violence to be crucial for building a protective environment for all children. UNICEF is scaling up evidence-based violence reduction

strategies, increasing investment in family and parenting support, and tackling the social and behavioural drivers of violence, UNICEF focuses its prevention programmes on those children in situations of greatest risk. It does so through building capacity for the provision of coordinated services for children, women and families, particularly those experiencing discrimination, disabilities, mental ill-health, violence within the home and other forms of adversity. Finally, UNICEF strengthens child protection services and the social service workforce to respond where children are experiencing violence, to prevent further harm, as well as to support recovery and access to justice.

Protecting Children Online

UNICEF conducts targeted campaigns on online child protection to raise awareness and delivers educational programmes for children, young people, parents, carers, teachers, practitioners and faith representatives, in partnership with technology companies and mobile phone providers. UNICEF Colombia partnered with Millicom-Tigo (mobile/internet provider) to co-create an initiative on online child protection entitled "School of Influencers". The initiative engaged adolescents between 10 and 19 to develop skills geared towards safe, responsible and creative internet use. In the "cyberconscious" peer-to-peer network, the adolescents exchange information including on prevention of online risks including cyberbullying and grooming. In Albania, the Municipality of Tirana and UNICEF launched the "Friendly Wi-Fi" initiative in 2019 to filter wi-fi streams from illegal, child sexual abuse materials and deliver safer internet experiences to users. UNICEF has partnered with Bangladesh's largest telecommunications company to reach 500,000 students with messages about online behaviour and support services; The 'Key to Kindness' campaign against cyberbullying attracted millions of followers and discussions on Sina Weibo, the Chinese microblogging service.



Guatemala

Violent discipline is socially accepted and common. And for many girls and boys, violence comes at the hands of the people they trust – their parents or caregivers, teachers, peers or neighbours.



Online space spaces for adolescent girls facing gender-based violence

Physical safe spaces for women and girls have been established to provide them with key information on their rights, links to services, skills-building, peer connection, and support. Yet, access to those safe spaces – particularly during times of COVID-19 – is often limited by movement restrictions, safety concerns, disability and specific needs, or because such safe spaces do not exist nearby. In parallel, many recent humanitarian crises have included unprecedented technological access for those most affected.

In response to the pandemic, as well as to the pre-existing gender-based violence faced by women and girls, UNICEF is designing innovative digital interventions to adapt programming and enhance safe access to quality information and services. UNICEF's online platforms provide women and girls, including those with disabilities, with safe access to contextualized and interactive information and support, regardless of where they are located. One of these is "Laaha", the Virtual Safe Space platform by women and girls for women and girls. Currently, Laaha has been designed for Iraq and Ecuador, with Afghanistan and Venezuela slated for late 2022. In 2023-2025, UNICEF plans to support its deployment in four additional countries.

② Putting a stop to grave violations in armed conflict

UNICEF, in partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and other United Nations bodies, co-leads the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on six grave violations against children, an essential tool to document these incidents, mobilize greater support for affected children and communities, and hold parties to conflict accountable.

UNICEF engages with states and non-state actors to stop abuses and to help build a path to a safer environment for all girls and boys, their families and communities. Data collected through the MRM establishes trends in grave



Mali

Aliou, age 15, was recruited by armed groups in northern Mali. He spent three years with armed groups until UNICEF and its partners helped him to leave. Now his dream is to learn metalwork and set up on his own business with his parents in his hometown. Aliou's name has been changed to protect his identity.

61

million children and adults were reached by UNICEF with safe and accessible Sexual Exploitation and Abuse reporting channels in 2021

violations against children, and informs the targeting of emergency assistance to the most affected and vulnerable children and families.

UNICEF and partners provide care and protection for children living through war, advocating on their behalf, and engage with all parties to conflict to ensure that the rights of these children are upheld. This includes reuniting children with their families, reintegrating them into their communities, providing mental health and psychosocial support, and other support as needed, like entering the labour market. For example, in Somalia in 2021, 954 children (160 girls) directly benefitted from community-based reintegration services. Children received psychosocial support services using well-being programmes based on play therapy such as surfing, yoga, basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Skills training and support to identify a marketable skill and improve resilience and livelihood opportunities were delivered in plumbing, tailoring, beautification, electrical wiring, auto mechanics and computer knowledge. These processes of reintegration may take several years for some children, depending on their experience and context.

Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

UNICEF is working to build partners' capacity on the ground to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by aid workers from occurring, expand safe and accessible reporting channels, and provide immediate, survivor-centred response to child victims. UNICEF also supports efforts across the United Nations and partners to better prevent and respond to risks of sexual exploitation and abuse within humanitarian responses across all countries. For example, in 2021, UNICEF reached 61 million children and adults with safe and accessible SEA reporting channels, a 10-fold increase from 6 million in 2017. While underreporting remains an issue, we saw a seven-fold increase in SEA reports over this same time period. This indicates that our investments are yielding results – they must be sustained (and resourced) over time.

③ Promoting legal identity for all

UNICEF works to reduce the obstacles to the registration of every child at birth, close the legal identity gap and increase the availability of data and legal documents derived from civil registration and vital statistics systems. This includes documents for vulnerable groups, such as stateless, migrant and refugee children.

UNICEF supports efforts to make birth registration services accessible and affordable; and to link civil registration to other systems, including identity, health, social protection and education, as entry-points for identifying and registering children. UNICEF helps member states review laws and policies to provide for free and universal birth registration and to eliminate sex discrimination in both civil registration and nationality laws to avoid the risk of statelessness, preserve family unity, protect children and guarantee access to social services. UNICEF engages with communities to demand birth registration for every child as a matter of human right; and engages with governments and the private sector to increase investment in safe and innovative technology to facilitate birth registration and obtain timely, accurate and permanent records.¹⁶



South Sudan

Martin, age 13, sits in a holding centre while waiting for his case to come up for court. He was arrested for stealing some onions from a market stall. "My father is dead," he says. "My mother is in Khartoum and placed me with my uncle when I was little. I don't remember when." Martin's name has been changed to protect his identity.



Zambia: reaching for big targets for birth registration

At 14 per cent, Zambia has one of the lowest birth registration rates in sub-Saharan Africa. UNICEF has been supporting and working with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security (MoHAIS) and other stakeholders to improve the national civil registration system. Implementation has been weak because of centralized procedures lack of linkages with the national identity management system, absence of services at community level and lack of understanding of the importance of birth registration among communities.

For the past 10 years, UNICEF has been working with the government to rectify this situation. With UNICEF support, Zambia introduced the Integrated National Registration and Information System (INRIS) in 2019 and the system is being rolled out with UNICEF support to cover the whole country by December 2023, resources allowing. INRIS is being linked to the health sector through the Health Information Management System and UNICEF has also supported the government to develop and put in place a new monitoring and reporting system to enable data to be transmitted from the district level and allow the national office to access, compile and disaggregate data in real time. These initiatives are putting Zambia on track to achieve its target of 50 per cent birth registration by 2026.

④ Ensuring access to justice

UNICEF supports children's access to justice across all legal systems, and supports the strengthening of judicial systems to be child-friendly and gender responsive and to provide remedies for violations of children's rights. UNICEF advocates to end the detention of children in all its forms by prioritizing prevention and early intervention in child offending through the child protection system, community engagement and linkages with allied systems such as education, health and mental health and social protection. UNICEF promotes restorative justice approaches and taking diversion to scale through the provision of child protection services and by promoting non-custodial measures and therapeutic approaches.

UNICEF also invests in legal rights awareness for children in justice and welfare systems and supports access to free legal aid, representation and services by building a cadre of specialized professionals – including police, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, social service workers and health professionals – able to effectively protect children in the justice system: whether as alleged offenders, victims of and witnesses to violations of children's rights or other violence, or in proceedings for care, custody and protection.

UNICEF works with traditional/informal and transitional justice mechanisms and supports the establishment of specialized children's courts and alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms to uphold children's rights and provide remedies for violations of children's rights. This involves supporting stronger collaboration between justice and social welfare systems for prevention, mitigation and response to risks of violations of children's rights. UNICEF increasingly supports public finance for children in the justice sector, with a special focus on diversion and alternatives to detention and legal aid provision.

Ensuring the full participation of children without parental or family care is critical to care reform



Bangladesh: improving children's courts

In Bangladesh, UNICEF support contributed to the country's first-ever virtual children's court. Prior to COVID-19, there was limited use of virtual courts, with only juvenile and family courts using elements in cases involving child survivors and witnesses. Most of the children held in detention centres in the country are there for alleged minor offences with many in pre-trial detention, and these cases can take months or even years to resolve. COVID-19 created an urgent need for new methods of delivery of court services, including greater use of virtual juvenile or children's courts.

In 2020, use of virtual courts expedited the release of 1,976 children. Most (1,964) were reunified with their families. To reduce the risk of reoffending, UNICEF also supported the deployment of additional social workers to strengthen post-release support for these children and their families. By the end of 2020, only two cases of reoffending were reported. In 2021, during a second wave of the pandemic, the authorities reactivated over 100 virtual courts to process the release of children from detention centres. Case processing was expedited and over 5,000 children have been safely released to date.

⑤ Preventing family separation

UNICEF works with national partners to drive forward care reform to prevent the separation of children from families, prioritize family-based alternative care in the community when necessary, end immigration detention through the use of alternative care arrangements, and end institutionalization of children. UNICEF also seeks to ensure protection and care for children travelling alone, separated children and children in street situations. UNICEF prioritizes the prevention of separation of children from families on the basis of disabilities of children or their caregivers and promotes family-based alternative care for children with disabilities.

UNICEF is also engaged in strengthening child welfare and protection systems and services, including through ensuring adequate financial and human resources. At the global, regional and national levels, UNICEF works with international organizations to strengthen international cooperation on these issues.

Improving data collection and regular reporting as well as ensuring the full participation of children without parental or family care are equally critical to care reform. UNICEF is continuing to invest in developing and implementing data collection tools to generate accurate information on children in alternative care.



Romania

A UNICEF staff member plays with children at an event to bring local children and recently arrived refugee children together. "I made a lot of new friends today and I am very happy about it," said one of the children.

12

million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers in humanitarian contexts in 2021 received UNICEF support to access mental health and psychosocial support services



Rwanda: Alternative care during a full lockdown

The Government of Rwanda has implemented a successful care reform strategy since 2012, reintegrating around 3,300 children with their families. However, at the onset of COVID-19, over 4,000 children – most of whom had disabilities – remained in residential care institutions. As soon as lockdown restrictions were enforced, UNICEF took steps to ensure the continuity of services to support these children and prevent the separation of children at risk.

At the same time, UNICEF also advocated with the government for the child protection workforce to be considered essential and have increased mobile phone airtime. This enabled a network of nearly 30,000 community-based volunteers to continue remote service provision. These community-based volunteers, also known as Inshuti z'Umuryango (IZU or 'Friends of the Family' in Kinyarwanda language), are paraprofessionals who work closely with district social workers on child protection.

To support the nearly 300 children with disabilities released from institutions, district social workers initiated retroactive remote assessments and case management plans. These children had been rapidly placed back with their families from care facilities in the early days of COVID-19 without an adequate case management protocol. District social workers, supported by IZU, were also given exceptional 'case-by-case' authorization to place 21 children abandoned during lockdown with trained foster care families. Strong collaboration between UNICEF and the government also allowed IZU to follow up with over 3,000 children in families with high risk of separation. Of these, 150 families were supported through emergency cash transfers.

⑥ Supporting mental health and psychosocial well-being

UNICEF's mandate promotes mental health throughout the life cycle, recognizing and analysing rights violations, risks, gaps, capacities and opportunities for child, adolescent, parent/ caregiver and community participation.

UNICEF promotes the psychosocial well-being of children and their caregivers to reduce risk of other child rights violations. Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is a priority in humanitarian settings, and included in support for children affected by armed conflict, separated from families, and surviving gender-based violence. UNICEF is contributing to building evidence and developing standards, such as minimum services standards for MHPSS. An acceleration initiative is increasing the breadth and depth of MHPSS programmes, currently in over 100 countries, as well as leadership in evidence and learning.

In 2021, in humanitarian contexts, we contributed to 12 million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support services.

Mental Health Support

My Hero is You is a collaborative story book to help children understand and come to terms with COVID-19, aimed primarily at children aged 6–11 years old. It is a unique collaboration between United Nations agencies, national and international non-governmental organizations and international agencies providing mental health and psychosocial support in emergency settings. During the early stages of the project, more than 1,700 children, parents, caregivers and teachers from around the world shared how they were coping during the pandemic. Since its release, My Hero is You has been translated into over 125 languages, including braille and sign language, and has taken many forms around the world. It has been delivered through storytelling (including virtual) initiatives, audiobooks, videos, radio and television.

⑦ Ending harmful practices

Because UNICEF works across sectors with both high-level decision makers and grassroots community organizations, it is uniquely positioned to identify and address some of the systemic and underlying factors that lead to harmful practices occurring. UNICEF is working with governments and other partners to strengthen legislation outlawing harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage, and to enable communities to make a coordinated and collective choice to abandon them.

UNICEF focuses on: enhancing governments' capacity for legal and policy responses to end child, early and forced marriage; supporting adolescent girls' empowerment; promoting girls' equal rights to education and alternative opportunities; supporting multi-sectoral coordination and stakeholder engagement to strengthen the accessibility and quality of gender-responsive information services to adolescent girls, including sexual and reproductive health; supporting social and behaviour change communication to influence social and gender norms; and providing global leadership to advocate for action.


Strategies to end FGM focus primarily on prevention and include: developing and implementing policies and legislation that end FGM; transforming discriminatory social and gender norms that sustain harmful practices; supporting girls' empowerment; ensuring access to education and child protection services, including gender-responsive information on sexual reproductive health services; promoting gender-responsive parenting; and bridging the humanitarian and development divide. UNICEF and sister United Nations agencies support governments and civil society partners, including women's groups, child rights groups and youth-led groups that work in this area.



Sudan: ending female genital mutilation (FGM)

In Sudan, female genital mutilation (FGM) is a highly accepted social practice with deep cultural roots. National FGM prevalence was 86.7 per cent in 2014, and in certain areas the practice is almost universal. To reduce these high prevalence rates, the Saleema Communication Initiative – a programme of the Sudanese Government – was launched in 2008, supported by UNICEF (funded by the Joint Programme). This initiative celebrates girls who are intact as Saleema (whole and healthy). Public pledging to keep the community's daughters "saleema" is an instrumental element to develop a critical mass and enable people to assess and reality-check what they believe about others, which in turn may influence their attitude towards FGM.

In July 2020, following years of advocacy, the Government of Sudan adopted legislation criminalizing FGM. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a renewed Saleema Campaign 2020 was launched. In total, 70,179 men and boys (24,307 adolescents) participated in Saleema community dialogues and sensitization sessions. Through these sessions, men and boys reaffirmed their commitment to eliminating FGM in Sudan.

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a blue hoodie, is seen from the back, holding a newborn baby. The baby is wearing a green jacket with a yellow 'G' logo and is looking directly at the camera with large, dark eyes. They are inside a tent, with the white fabric of the tent visible in the background. In the background, a woman wearing a blue face mask and a white and black uniform is partially visible.

Syrian Arab Republic

Muhammad, 11 years old, holding his newborn sister, Aya, in their tent in Roj Camp, Malikia, northeast Syria, in February 2022. Nearly eleven years into the conflict in Syria, freezing winter temperatures and heavy rains add to the vulnerability of families, who are increasingly barely able to make ends meet.

Above all, we have learned that child protection violations are preventable

Results

Child protection has long been a key component of UNICEF's work. In 1986, the publication of the report *Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances* raised awareness of the need for child protection. In 1996, UNICEF supported two major initiatives to protect children: the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the first international gathering dedicated to combating this global problem; and the ground-breaking United Nations study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, by Graça Machel. In the 1990s and 2000s, UNICEF played a key role in global efforts to ban landmines, end the worst forms of child labour, prevent sexual exploitation of children and ban the use of children in armed conflict. UNICEF has also increasingly worked at local level to help countries build national systems to protect children.

And there have been further significant and positive changes in child protection in recent years. Government- and community-led actions have resulted in increases in birth registration and reductions in child labour, child marriage and female genital mutilation. Above all, we have learned that child protection violations are preventable, and that progress can be made through political will, societal change and an emerging science of prevention and treatment strategies.

UNICEF, through sustained partnerships, advocacy and support to over 150 countries in 2021, reached an all-time high number of children across many areas of our child protection work.

UNICEF, through sustained partnerships, advocacy and support to over 150 countries in 2021, reached an all-time high number of children across many areas of our child protection work. Selected key results from 2021 are presented below:

- 4.4 million children who had experienced violence reached across 129 countries with health, social work and justice services, 80 per cent more than in 2017.
- Community-based mental health and psychosocial support, including targeted awareness campaigns, reached over 8.4 million children and adolescents in 111 countries (up 170 per cent over 2017) and 3.6 million parents and caregivers in 97 countries.
- 7.6 million adolescent girls across 47 countries received child marriage prevention and care interventions through regional alliances, particularly with the African Union, and the traction gained by the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to End Child Marriage.
- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 45,000 children in at least 84 countries have been released from detention. In 2021, child-friendly justice services reached 384,000 children in 81 countries.

UNICEF's goals in child protection are primarily taken from the SDGs, which have challenged the child protection sector to focus more strongly on prevention: Target 16.2 commits the international community to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children" and target 5.2 to "eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls", and Target 16.9 is for legal identity for all, including birth registration. Other targets address underlying causes of child protection violations in the areas of poverty, health, gender equality, education, safe environments and justice.



The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Chirac, age 4, and Felix, age 7, lost their mother to Ebola. They talk with a UNICEF Child Protection Officer, who is helping to support their mental health during this difficult time. "After our studies, we dream of becoming presidents of this country," say Chirac and Felix.

UNICEF

includes robust measurement of key child protection indicators around the world

UNICEF ensures robust measurement of key child protection indicators around the world, and reports on these against Goal Area 3 of our Strategic Plan for 2022-2025: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices. The indicators address the seven components of this investment case:

- Percentage of girls and boys aged 15 to 17 years who have ever experienced any sexual violence and sought help from a professional
- Percentage of mothers (or primary caregivers) who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise/educate children
- Proportion of girls and boys aged 15 to 19 years who consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one of the specified reasons
- Percentage of students aged 13 to 15 years who reported being bullied on one or more days in the past 30 days
- Percentage of children subject to a diversion order or a non-custodial measure
- Proportion of children in family-based care of the total number of children in all forms of formal alternative care
- Number of countries that have interoperability between the health system and civil registration system to facilitate birth registration
- Percentage of countries tracking services and referral information related to mental health and psychosocial support services for children and adolescents
- Percentage of girls, boys, women and men aged 15 to 49 years who believe that female genital mutilation should be eliminated



Burkina Faso

Fatimata, age 8, receives a hug from her grandmother. The young girl is a survivor of female genital mutilation, which damaged her organs and resulted in serious threats to her health. "It is still a tradition in our culture, but after having seen what a danger it is to the child, I am against it," says Fatima's grandmother. "I could have lost my granddaughter."

We know what it takes to use resources to achieve the greatest impact for children

Why partner with UNICEF

As donors, you make deliberate choices to use your resources in a way that can create the best results. At UNICEF, we do the same. With over 75 years' experience, we know what it takes to use resources to achieve the greatest impact for children. This impact rests on five key comparative advantages, all made possible by donor support. This way of working means we tackle the challenges that matter, with the right responses, in ways that benefit the greatest

numbers of children. When you partner with us on child protection, you help us strengthen systems that pay dividends for whole communities long into the future. And more than that, you support an approach that integrates protection into other essential services in the community. As a result, your contribution goes even further and supports the well-being of the whole child.

Key comparative advantages of partnership with UNICEF

- **Our expert staff:** We are immensely proud of our child protection staff. Working around the world, they have deep expertise and a network of contacts and relationships which are the lifeblood of the impact we deliver for children day in day out. We cherish the hard-earned trust placed in them by donors, governments, partners and of course, children and their families.
- **Leading and pioneering:** Your support allows us to lead and innovate for children. We work with ministries responsible for child protection policies and services and local authorities to jointly address priorities as they emerge. Our work to ensure the protection of children from the multiple threats they face online is just one example of this. Your trust gives us the flexibility to take risks and innovate, which is how we create new ideas to benefit children now and into the future.
- **Taking the work to scale:** UNICEF achieves impact for children because we have a footprint in over 190 countries. You amplify our impact by pooling your funds with other donors and helping us scale up innovations, proven best practices and programming. What this means is that UNICEF can promote adoption of global best practices, then tailor them for each country's contexts and the needs of children, and then roll out policies or programmes to reach scale around the world.
- **Meeting needs throughout the entire childhood and adolescence:** No matter how challenging or remote the setting, we find new ways to reach the children, adolescents and mothers most at risk of violations of their rights. And we never give up. And we complement this with key interventions from across all of the social sectors – from health and nutrition, to education, to clean water and sanitation. This means we meet all their needs as they develop through stages.
- **Before, during, and after an emergency:** In a crisis, every hour matters. Our teams are first responders because your support has enabled us to be in a country long before a crisis, building the effective systems, relationships and plans that we need to support children. And when emergencies strike, our experts are in place and can use their existing skills, equipment and relationships to make an impact wherever it matters most. We have close relationships with the partners that can deliver real change, fast: with ministries of health at national and sub-regional levels as well as in communities. Sadly, when a crisis first ends, the children's suffering may not. Your support means we can stay long after the emergency and for as long as children need us to ensure their future well-being.

However you invest, your funds will make a difference, for every child

How you can invest with UNICEF

As a 100 per cent voluntarily funded organization, UNICEF has worked for over 75 years with donors and partners who, like us, want to be there for every child. We offer you partnership opportunities that are designed to meet your mission or passion, and also achieve our shared ambition for children.

Ensuring the world's children and adolescents receive the protection they require in their communities is a difficult and complex task. In order to ensure that our work is the most efficient and effective, UNICEF offers three distinct investment options, each fit for the challenge and each offering donors the opportunity to capitalize on our experience and skills to create the best results for children. These are: Core Resources for Results, the Child Protection Thematic Fund, and Specific Programmes. However you invest, your funds will make a difference, for every child.

Option 1 – Invest in Core Resources for Results

If you believe in this simple mission: for every child, this option may be for you. The unique challenges of child protection for children and adolescents may be of strong interest, but you also recognize that it takes a set of support across all areas of a child's life to ensure their well-being. You might also have a wide area of countries that you are open to exploring. Core Resources for Results, known within UNICEF as "RR", is our most prized resource because it enables three things: predictability for our staff who are planning and implementing programmes in changing contexts around the world, the maximum flexibility to decide how best to spend these valuable contributions to achieve the greatest impact, and efficiency by maintaining them as "unrestricted" and thereby reducing transaction costs and maximizing the funds that can go straight to children.

Each year, UNICEF uses a portion of its total RR funding to achieve outcomes specifically to improve child protection. Partnering with UNICEF on Core Resources for Results offers ambitious donors the chance to scale up their impact with exceptional value for money.



ABBA donated proceeds of new song to UNICEF's Child Protection Thematic Fund

The four members of the pop group ABBA are donating all the royalty payments received for the next five years from their December 2021 single Little Things to UNICEF. The royalties are generated each time someone purchases the single, taken from the group's latest album Voyage, or streams it. ABBA's contributions are paid into UNICEF's Global Child Protection Fund, helping to support the growing number of children affected by economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in social services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Programmes supported by the fund aim to protect girls against violence and provide opportunities for empowerment, among other objectives.

"We think it is impossible to eradicate poverty without the empowerment of women. That is why we support UNICEF in protecting girls from sexual violence and empowering them through the Global Child Protection Fund. We have done so for many years with our song Chiquitita and now we have decided to give UNICEF a Christmas gift in the form of a second song: Little Things from our album Voyage," said Agnetha, Björn, Benny & Anni-Frid.

ABBA and UNICEF have a longstanding relationship. Since 1979, ABBA have supported UNICEF through royalties earned on their song Chiquitita, raising US\$4.8 million to date.

Option 2 – Invest in the Child Protection Thematic Fund

If you or your institution are dedicated to our child protection programming, then you may want to consider the UNICEF Child Protection Thematic Fund. Like RR, it also provides high levels of predictability and flexibility, while also enabling you to target your funding to child protection results. And you can designate your contribution to achieving global aims or to a specific country. We believe that this trust-based approach delivers donors one of the strongest returns on investment. You could think of UNICEF's Child Protection Thematic Fund like a portfolio. Investments may include pilot projects to test new innovations, or the provision of risk capital to support UNICEF's most ambitious and high-reward system strengthening activities.

The flexibility of thematic funds gives UNICEF the opportunity to balance the needs against the immense challenges facing children today and our ambitious targets. A select Child Protection report shared with you each year provides a collection of key achievements, learnings, and stories of children globally or in your chosen country.

Here are some indicative ways in which investments in UNICEF's flexible Child Protection Thematic Fund could achieve results for children.

US\$1 million

provides structured mental health and psychosocial support services to children in a crisis response and trains social workers on how to support the psychosocial well-being of children, adolescents and caregivers who have experienced or witnessed grave violations or distressing events

US\$1 million

enables UNICEF to roll out a safe schools programme in one country

US\$550,000

supports an integrated programme to tackle child marriage by improving legislation, addressing harmful social norms and strengthening integrated referral systems in one country

US\$500,000

allows UNICEF to provide specialized technical assistance to governments and civil society to design child protection programmes at scale, such as safe schools, child safety online, parenting programmes and response services in one country

US\$500,000

enables UNICEF to roll out child protection response services (child lines, local-level interventions) in one country

US\$500,000

pays for the development of language-appropriate materials to be contextualized across countries and localities in one region to address prevention and response to staying safe online (including bullying)

US\$320,000

supports the deployment of a protection information management application in one country to support field-based staff with case management, incident monitoring and family tracing and reunification

Option 3 – Invest in specific programmes

For some of you, your organizational mission or your own unique passions may lead you to fund a specific child protection programme. UNICEF has a long history of developing strategic partnerships to meet partners' priorities and philanthropic goals. We also work with partners to complement financial investment with the technical expertise of their corporation or institution or by joining forces to advocate for child protection. These bespoke partnerships see donors build long term relationships with our experts and country offices to develop lasting and powerful initiatives that endure and can be scaled up to benefit children in the long term.



Afghanistan

Children play at the UNICEF and EU-supported Gazargah Transit Centre in Herat.

Endnotes

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¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Birth Registration', June 2020, accessed 21 May 2021.

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¹⁶ See: United Nations Economic and Social Council, 'Introduction of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda: A holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management', E/ CN.3/2020/15, 2020, accessed 21 May 2020.



Niger

Barira, age 18, was married four years ago. After she reported her husband's abuse to the local protection centre he was convicted. UNICEF is supporting the Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection to lead the Community Child Protection Approach.



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