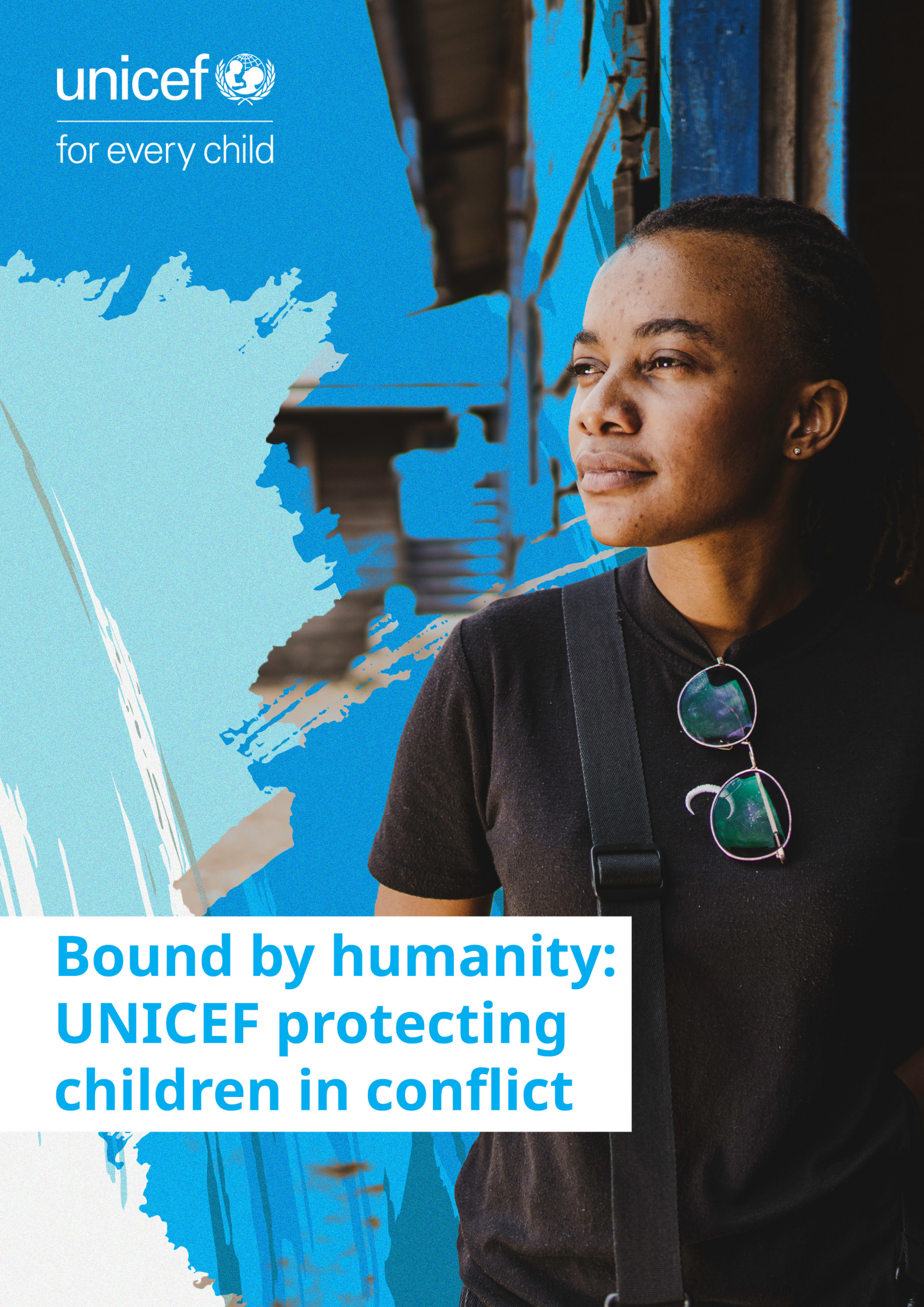


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**Bound by humanity:
UNICEF protecting
children in conflict**

Children are under threat and must be protected

In 2026, children worldwide continue to face grave threats to their security with increasing frequency and devastating impacts. From widespread killing, maiming, abduction and sexual violence to recruitment into armed forces and groups and strikes on schools and hospitals – the scale of attacks on children living in war zones is deeply shocking. In the first quarter of 2026, in Sudan alone, 77 per cent of all documented violations against children resulted in the death or injury of a child. And in the first month of 2026, 37 children were reported killed in the Gaza Strip.

The global humanitarian architecture for protecting children is under enormous strain, shaped by multiple overlapping crises, a rise in armed conflicts and the changing nature and use of new technologies in warfare. Eroding respect for international law, norms and standards, the protracted nature of crises and overstretched funding further challenge UNICEF's efforts to protect the world's most vulnerable children. As public institutions collapse under the strain of violence and conflict, climate shocks and fiscal crises, the essential services that support children to be safe, survive and thrive – from family support to social welfare and justice mechanisms – weaken or crumble,

leaving under-resourced state and humanitarian actors to address the growing protection needs of children. The imperative to protect children has never been more urgent, yet doing this effectively in an increasingly politicized and fractured world requires protection approaches to be adequately resourced, reinforced and scaled up.

In 2025, violations against children in armed conflict continued to be recorded at shocking levels and the United Nations verified 38,558 grave violations against children. The data from 2025 also shows that within the reporting period, and for the first time since the establishment of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda, State actors were the highest perpetrators of violations, responsible for 41.2 per cent of all such heinous acts against children. We know that the scale of harm to children is far greater than this verified number because many incidents of grave violations go unreported, and yet this figure marks a fourth consecutive year of alarming figures. This signals the deeper erosion of respect for international law and is a stark reminder of the brutality of war and violence against children, which impacts families and communities for generations.



“In a context like ours, education is a refuge for young girls. It is a place of protection, not just for their dreams, but for their lives and their bodies.”

Esther Nabintu, independent journalist, feminist, storyteller and U-Reporter, stands in front of a school classroom in North Kivu province, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. A member of the U-Report community since 2018, Esther has worked alongside other young girls to make their voices heard, including covering UNICEF-supported events designed to help combat sexual violence.

“

The tolerance for the killing of children seems to be expanding. I am not numb, I am stunned, I am angry.... I think something fundamental has shifted. It's like society is being asked, pushed, just to absorb it. The killing of a single child should stop us cold.

UNICEF Spokesperson, James Elder

”

A clear pattern is emerging. When protection systems erode, children pay the price – not just in lost lives, but in fractured families, mass displacement and cycles of violence that reverberate for decades. Protecting children is not a peripheral humanitarian concern, it is an urgent moral obligation.

Yet widespread funding cuts are making this harder. Across the world, child protection services are being scaled back at precisely the moment they are needed most. In early 2026, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action reported a systemic deterioration of child protection services and capacity across humanitarian contexts. Eighty-four per cent of humanitarian actors surveyed reported cuts to protection programmes, 91 per cent reported a reduction in children's access to child protection services, and almost half reported

closure or suspension of services. Impossible choices are having to be made, between programmes that protect children from deadly explosive ordnance and those that provide essential care to survivors of sexual violence, reunite separated families or deliver critical case management for affected children. In contexts where UNICEF's humanitarian response is already chronically underfunded, these cuts push children further from safety.

This does not have to be the trajectory. Investing in protection systems through flexible, long-term and predictable funding is both critical and urgent and enables UNICEF to deliver prevention and response services and advocate to end and prevent grave violations and other attacks on children. At its heart, such quality funding for protection services is an investment in children, their survival and their futures.



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“

The thing that scares me most is the bombs. I don't want to hear the sounds of the bombs in the streets and gunfire anymore.

”

”

Nine-year-old Tuqaa, in North Darfur, Sudan as the country reaches the third-year mark of a violent conflict.

How grave violations destroy children's lives and futures

In 2005, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1612, identifying and condemning six grave violations against children in times of war. Twenty years on, and despite continuous efforts, grave violations are more prevalent than ever, and children around the world remain under threat.

The work of the United Nations to monitor, document, and report on the impact of armed conflict on children is needed now more than ever. The United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism collects data on grave violations and provides an analysis of the patterns, trends, scale and scope of how children's rights are violated, including how children are recruited and used by armed actors, displaced, exploited, and sexually abused. Year on year, data, analysis and reports on grave violations tell a horrifying story of the negative impact of armed conflict on children's lives and the deprivation of their right to life, to liberty, to health and education, their right to be with their family and community, to develop their personalities and to be nurtured and protected.

The six grave violations against children



Killing and maiming of children

Killing and maiming of children can be a result of direct targeting or indirect actions, including torture, or through crossfire, landmines, cluster munitions, improvised or other indiscriminate explosive devices.



Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups

Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups refers to compulsory, forced, or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group – and in any capacity including as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers and spies.



Attacks on schools or hospitals

Attacks on schools or medical facilities that cause total or partial destruction are grave violations against children. Schools and hospitals are protected spaces, where children must be safe even in times of conflict.



Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children

Sexual violence including acts of rape, other sexual violence, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, enforced prostitution, forced marriage or pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or sexual exploitation and/or abuse of children remain one of the most disturbing violations of children's rights.



Abduction of children

Abduction of children refers to the unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently, and it is often combined with or leads to other violations, particularly recruitment and use of children and rape and other forms of sexual violence.



Denial of humanitarian access for children

Denial of humanitarian access for children includes the intentional deprivation or impediment of humanitarian assistance essential for children's survival and includes the willful impediment of humanitarian access and assistance for affected children in situations of armed conflict.

UNICEF protecting children and their futures

With our partners and supporters, we use the data on grave violations collected by the United Nations to better understand the impact of conflict on children, and to inform our protection programming for children. Knowing who the children affected are, where they are and what happened to them, enables us to provide child-centred care and protection, to advocate on behalf of children and to engage with parties to conflict to prevent further violations.

In addition to providing emergency and longer-term assistance to children, we work with our partners to train governmental officials and parties to conflict on child protection, and continue to raise awareness with governments, communities, and families on the risks that may arise for children in situations of armed conflict.

UNICEF's emergency preparedness and response efforts, combined with our multi-year approach to strengthen systems before, during and after conflict, work hand in hand to help prevent future grave violations against children. Repairing water infrastructure, restoring spaces for safe learning, providing mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) as well as the wide array of partnerships we engage in to help strengthen the capacity of national institutions and systems, are all part of UNICEF's efforts to sustain functioning child protection systems for children across the world.

UNICEF is committed to ending and preventing grave violations against children. We call on governments, all parties to conflict and those that support them, to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, take concrete measures to prevent and end grave violations and hold perpetrators to account.

UNICEF preventing and responding to the killing and maiming of children

Explosive weapons are the leading cause of child casualties in conflict, and the toll is rising. Airstrikes, armed drones, barrel bombs, cluster munitions and white phosphorus attacks kill and maim civilians, including children, with devastating regularity, revealing how modern warfare shows little regard for children's lives. In 2025, more than 9,700 children were killed or maimed by explosive weapons, representing almost 70 per cent of all child casualties verified by the United Nations.



Children in Gaza City join a UNICEF-facilitated Explosive Ordnance Risk Education session that uses a puppet show to raise awareness about the dangers of explosive remnants of war.



SUDAN

Sudan is one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in the world. More than 5 million children have been forced from their homes – many of them repeatedly, with attacks following them as they flee. Children in Sudan are being killed and maimed by airstrikes, artillery fire, shrapnel and crossfire as part of a relentless pattern of never-ending violence. Nowhere is safe for children as attacks occur in broad daylight, during routine, daily activities, erasing any distinction between frontlines and civilian life. In 2025, 847 children were killed and 484 maimed. Children became casualties of war mainly through shelling, bombardment and the use of mortars and rockets, pointing to a collapse of child protection safeguards. At least 70 per cent of verified violations in 2025 involved the killing or maiming of children.

Al Fasher in North Darfur state is just one location that remains heavily cut off from aid, with severe protection risks for children, and shortages of food, water, healthcare and essential supplies. When Ibrahim arrived at the UNICEF-supported child-friendly space in Tawila, Sudan, he moved slowly. A white bandage was wrapped around his injured knee, and his limp revealed the pain he still carries. At just 11 years old, Ibrahim has seen more than many adults in his short life. He remembers clearly the day Al Fasher fell – but the days that followed were even worse. While resting by the roadside during their escape, a shell landed beside Ibrahim and his brother, killing his brother instantly and riddling Ibrahim's legs with shrapnel. "We left him behind," he says quietly speaking of his brother. "We had to run for our lives." Ibrahim's journey to safety took weeks.

Now in Tawila he hopes for surgery and in the meantime receives support from counsellors, has his wounds cleaned and dressed and has received a school bag with learning supplies – all through the UNICEF-supported child-friendly space. In emergencies, UNICEF and partners establish safe, protective spaces where children can play, learn, and receive psychosocial support from trained counsellors. In Tawila, these spaces are a lifeline for children.



At the Tawila UNICEF-supported safe space, Ibrahim is preparing to have surgery on his injured legs.

UNICEF's approach in Sudan integrates health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, child protection and social protection to provide a comprehensive package of life-saving assistance for children and their families. We work to protect children's right to learn and heal by providing safe and inclusive temporary learning spaces that serve as protective environments for recovery and psychosocial support. We provide support to teachers, accelerated, remote learning, and flexible education modalities that help children regain a sense of normalcy and continuity. As part of our broader work on child protection, UNICEF is strengthening case management, family tracing and reunification and expanding MHPSS as well as addressing gender-based violence and the risks posed by explosive ordnance.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN SUDAN

\$400,000 provides 150,000 children with life-saving **mine risk education** in conflict-affected communities and helps prevent the killing and maiming of children.

\$200,000 provides 50,000 children and caregivers in conflict-affected communities with **MHPSS to cope with the severe distress** resulting from a devastating conflict.



STATE OF PALESTINE

Since the escalation of the conflict in October 2023, Gaza's children have been spoken about endlessly, their deaths and injuries reported, their suffering described. In 2025, the United Nations verified 12,436 grave violations against 5,549 children in the State of Palestine, including 5,452 violations in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and 6,984 violations in the Gaza Strip. Explosive weapons are the main cause of children being maimed, and an estimated 11,000 children in the Gaza Strip have sustained severe, life-changing injuries, including permanent disabilities that require long-term care and rehabilitation. Despite the ceasefire announced in October 2025, children in the Gaza Strip and across the State of Palestine continue to be subjected to killing and maiming because of the ongoing conflict and violence.

By amplifying children's voices, UNICEF's [‘The Gaza We Want’](#) initiative is reminding the world that Palestinian children are more than numbers. In the Gaza Strip, children tell UNICEF that they crave shelter and safety. Their deepest wish is simply to be able to sleep through the night and to walk to school without fear. Yet since the start of the ceasefire until June 2026, 265 children have been killed as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, demonstrating the continued violence against children.

“Once, I looked up at the sky and spoke to a star about what I want. I told it, ‘I dream of living in peace and safety.’” Mohamed, 16 years old, the Gaza Strip.



Drawing by Aya, 13 years old and from the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine, as her contribution to UNICEF's [‘The Gaza We Want’](#) initiative.

Samar, from northern Gaza was just 15 years old when a strike hit and killed her mother in December 2023. Samar and her five brothers and sisters – who were then aged between 6 and 12 years old – were

also injured. “My father passed away before the war,” says Samar. “My mother was our caretaker.... I lost her too, and her fate is still unknown to this day. Since then, I have become responsible for my siblings. I am no longer a child. I lost my childhood. My little brothers and sisters now call me ‘Mama’.” War has forced all six children to grow up long before their time. UNICEF has provided the family with emergency cash assistance, enabling them to buy food and essential items for survival. But what is really needed beyond this emergency support is an end to the attacks, and an end to the killing and maiming of children.

In 2024 and 2025, UNICEF provided child protection case management support to 17,698 vulnerable children in the Gaza Strip and continues to prioritize children with conflict-related injuries as one of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups. We provide injured children and affected family members with specialized MHPSS. We also provide multi-purpose cash assistance to injured children and their families, and cash top-ups to children with disabilities as part of our State of Palestine-wide efforts to address the long-term impact of protracted conflict. Protecting children is multifaceted in this part of the world, which is why UNICEF prioritizes urgent needs in WASH, health, nutrition, education, child protection and social protection while strengthening systems and preparedness.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN THE STATE OF PALESTINE

\$450,000 provides **protection case management** to 1,000 highly vulnerable children, including injured children, in the Gaza Strip.

\$230,000 provides 1,000 highly vulnerable children, including injured children, with **structured psychosocial support**.

\$41,500 provides **a round of cash assistance** to 100 children with conflict-related injuries and their families.



MYANMAR

Child protection needs in Myanmar are rising sharply. In 2025, a total of 2,203 grave child rights violations against 1,746 children were verified, with an additional 1,072 recorded violations pending verification, underscoring the staggering scale of violence experienced by children. Explosive weapons used in populated areas disproportionately impacted children and were responsible for 1,140 out of 1,227, (93 per cent), of all killings and maiming of children in 2025. In Myanmar, this alarming trend is leaving an increased number of children with permanent disabilities.

Landmines are no longer hidden in distant battlefields. They lie on paths to school, near water sources, homes and farmlands – anywhere a child might take a step. With no formal demining operations in place in Myanmar, risk education is the only protection children have from being injured by explosive ordnance. UNICEF and its partners are working to expand efforts across conflict-affected areas, but the need far outpaces current resources.

Despite being extremely vulnerable to landmine risk, children in Myanmar are also taking the lead to educate each other about the dangers. Lar Luu from the northern state of Kachin is just 8 years old and already his life has changed forever after being hit by a landmine. “It happened while I was playing,” says Lar Luu. “It was because we went to pick up a disc from the ground. It exploded.” Not knowing that there were landmines in the area, Lar Luu and his two friends found the landmine buried in the ground and so they dug it up, at which point it exploded, killing one friend and seriously injuring Lar Luu and his other friend.



© UNICEF Myanmar/2023/Naing Lin Soe

Lar Luu with his mother, at home in Kachin.

Not only did Lar Luu experience physical injuries like losing several toes, but he also experienced severe psychological distress, leading to selective mutism for two weeks. His family, who are farmers, are particularly grateful for the financial assistance provided by UNICEF and its partners during this difficult time as it enabled them to support Lar Luu during his month-long stay in hospital as he recovered from his injuries. Today, Lar Luu is raising awareness with his friends about the dangers of touching objects that might be explosive devices.



© UNICEF Myanmar/2025/Nyan Zay Htet

Simon holds up an explosive risk education booklet while engaging children in a displacement camp in Shan state. Despite his own displacement, Simon is driven to protect others from the deadly threat of landmines.

Simon, aged 25, was forced by the conflict to flee his home in Shan state in late 2023. Today he is one of more than 30 youth leaders who were trained by UNICEF in Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in March 2025. The trainees, U-Reporters from the country's most conflict-affected and contaminated regions, were equipped by UNICEF with tools to educate their communities on how to stay safe from landmines and explosive remnants of war. “I’ve seen how landmines have affected people returning to my hometown and heard firsthand accounts from displaced people across Myanmar who have been affected by landmines,” says Simon. “And now, for the first time, I feel empowered to do something about it. I am homeless but not hopeless – I’ve never felt more useful in my entire life.”

The protracted and complex nature of the multilayered crises impacting Myanmar requires UNICEF and partners to address acute humanitarian needs while investing in strengthening community resilience, hence UNICEF supports early recovery and efforts to sustain resilient social systems to withstand further shocks.



YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN MYANMAR

\$2,850,000 provides 467,000 people, including 145,000 children, in areas affected by landmines and other explosive weapons, with **relevant prevention and/or survivor-assistance interventions**.

\$145,000 supports 570 child survivors and other victims of explosive weapons **to access supportive services** from UNICEF and its partners.

UNICEF preventing and responding to the recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups

Thousands of boys and girls are used by warring parties as fighters, scouts, cooks, spies, guards and more in armed conflicts around the world. Previously referred to as 'child soldiers', these boys and girls suffer extensive forms of exploitation and abuse that are not fully captured by this term. Many children who are recruited, especially girls, are also subjected to gender-based and sexual violence. In 2025, more than 6,600 children were recruited to and used by armed forces and armed groups. Contexts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria and Nigeria saw particularly high numbers of children being recruited. In 2025, UNICEF and its partners provided support to 13,112 children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, ensuring they received protection or reintegration support.



SOMALIA

Since 2019, over 7,500 children have been recruited or used by armed forces and armed groups in Somalia, exposing them to further abuse, harm, and exploitation. Without any formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for children in Somalia who have been rescued, released or escaped recruitment situations, UNICEF's approach to programming for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) is delivered from a child rights perspective. We therefore consider all children as survivors of grave violations and provide care, protection and reintegration to help them rebuild their lives. Our work is further supported by the Government of Somalia's commitment to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In December 2025, the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and the Ministry of Defence signed a roadmap to deliver the government's child protection commitments, and UNICEF is supporting the Federal and State Governments of Somalia to implement these.

UNICEF also works closely with the Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs and civil society organizations to create CAAFAG programmes for affected children including in Puntland. Through this programme, UNICEF supports children transitioning from armed groups back to the community. Since 2022, over 4,400 children formally associated with armed forces and armed groups and other vulnerable

children at risk of recruitment were enrolled in UNICEF-supported reintegration programmes. Individualized case management and social work support children and help address the psychosocial distress caused by their experiences within the armed forces and groups, as well as the stigma from communities that children often experience for being associated with such groups.

Mohamed (not his real name), whose parents died when he was young, was 17 years old when he joined an armed group in Galkayo – a choice that seemed like his only means of survival at the time. He cooked meals, gathered firewood, and bought groceries at the market. In exchange, Mohamed was given food and a place to stay.

Mohamed's life took a more positive turn when he was identified in Galkayo as a child in need and enrolled in a rehabilitation programme in 2019. Mohamed was able to receive interim care from the UNICEF-supported CAAFAG programme. Here, he joined other boys at the centre, which has the capacity to support 60 children. "I am different and stronger now than I was before the programme. The psychological support sessions helped me so much from the onset, and I have since learnt better ways of controlling my feelings and now avoid hitting and quarrelling with others," Mohamed says.

Through the CAAFAG programme, UNICEF supports children like Mohamed in transitioning from armed groups back into the community. Through individualized case management, social workers interact with children and support them by addressing the psychosocial distress and stigma caused by the recruitment experience.



Mohamed attended the basic electricity course at the Garowe CAAFAG reintegration centre in 2019.

In Somalia, UNICEF collaborates with federal and state governments, civil society, the private sector and United Nations agencies to maximize the reach and impact of humanitarian assistance and protection to the most vulnerable children, women and adolescents. Through strategic partnerships, we deliver essential services and protection for vulnerable children, strengthen local systems, and ensure an integrated response.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN SOMALIA

\$1,600,000 supports UNICEF to continue **monitoring and reporting on grave violations** against children for an entire year.

\$100,000 trains **50 government officials** on child rights and protection.

\$2,500 supports a child to reintegrate over the course of a year with the **support of the CAAFAG programme**

\$100,000 also contributes to the **establishment of the Global Initiative for Child Reintegration** to improve the quality and accessibility of child reintegration programmes globally, using sustainable, multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive and contextualized approaches.

\$50,000 contributes to the development of the Global Initiative for Child Reintegration to create a programme **that supports children recruited by armed forces and groups with reintegration assistance including medical care, family tracing, education, livelihood and psychosocial care.**

UNICEF preventing and responding to attacks on schools or hospitals

Attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, remain widespread, a continuing and alarming trend that significantly impacts children's health and their futures. Between 2005 and 2025, the United Nations verified more than 23,000 attacks on schools and hospitals in conflict situations and over 4,000 cases of the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes. In fact, attacks on schools and hospitals in conflict zones have more than doubled over the longer-term—rising from 947 in 2019 to an alarming 2,493 in 2025—resulting in death, abduction, and severe psychological distress for thousands of students and teachers.

The destruction of educational infrastructure and insecurity near schools have exacerbated an already dire situation for children and their education in places like Ukraine, the Gaza Strip and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). When schools are bombed and health facilities destroyed, children lose not only their safety and access to basic life-sustaining necessities but also their chance to play, to learn and to simply be children. Water and sanitation systems are also frequently coming under attack, translating into acute protection risks for children, as communities are deprived of safe water, further exposed to disease, and forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms, particularly in already fragile settings. The interconnectivity of water systems with electricity networks, health services, food systems, and urban infrastructure means damage to a single facility can drastically impact the delivery of essential services including safe learning and education.



UKRAINE

With 7 children killed and 116 injured in June 2026 in Ukraine, it became the highest monthly child casualty figure since 2022. In the first quarter of 2026, United Nations-verified civilian casualties were 20 per cent higher than in the first quarter of 2025. This growing number of grave violations against children, caused by the use of explosive weapons and drones in populated areas, and by attacks on civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, continues to be deeply alarming.

Children's lives continue to be consumed by thoughts of survival, not childhood. Intense strikes persist and devastate vital energy and water systems, disrupting education, healthcare and other essential services for children. This winter children lived through some of the toughest days of the war, amid intense attacks and sub-zero temperatures with severely limited heating, electricity and water supplies.

A third of Ukraine's children – more than 2.5 million – remain displaced in this fifth year of war. This includes some 791,000 children inside Ukraine and nearly 1.8 million children living as refugees outside the country. The services children rely on have been decimated by attacks and are under increasing strain. More than 1,700 schools and other educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed, with 1 in 4 children unable to attend in-person schooling full-time. Children's mental health is increasingly strained. The constant fear of attacks, endless sheltering in basements and isolation at home with limited social connections or access to education and other vital services, mean young people are exhausted. The impact is particularly acute at key transitional moments in young lives, such as children just starting out in life and adolescents preparing to transition into

adulthood. Their lifelong well-being, resilience, the building of meaningful relationships, and the ability to thrive are all impacted. Providing support and space for children and young people displaced from their homes to build new connections and access the services they need is vital for social connection. The situation in Ukraine demands a sustained and urgent response that includes protecting schools and hospitals from attack. If we do not invest in Ukraine's children and young people today, the country faces a much bleaker tomorrow.

When war escalated in Ukraine in 2022, four-year-old Sasha, a child with visual impairment, and her mother Vitalina fled to the city of Zaporizhzhya, where they hoped to find safety. Sasha had never been able to attend kindergarten due to the constant threat of

shelling. Even after they arrived in Zaporizhzhya, her mother struggled to find suitable early learning opportunities, as most available options were online or electronic and therefore not adapted to Sasha's visual needs.

This changed when Vitalina learned about the 'Two by Two' preschool classes, organized by the All-Ukrainian Association of Preschool Education Workers with UNICEF's support, at a kindergarten for children with visual impairments. The classes are conducted in a shelter that was renovated by parents and kindergarten staff using their own resources. UNICEF provided the kindergarten with furniture, play sets, stationery, books and laptops to strengthen the learning space. During classes, children develop age-appropriate skills, including social interaction skills and emotional intelligence. According to teacher Ilona Mykhailova, the classes also help children to manage their stress and anxiety amid the ongoing war.



NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR PRESCHOOLERS

unicef
for every child

I love playing, drawing and making things out of coloured paper. But most of all, I love dancing. I also practice acrobatics and show my friends and teachers everything I've learned.

For the most vulnerable children and families who remain close to the frontline in Ukraine, UNICEF-supported mobile teams provide critical child protection, health and education services, including in the immediate aftermath of strikes. Water network repairs are often conducted under fire, and as a last resort, water is trucked to the most-affected areas. UNICEF and partners also offer group MHPSS, gender-based violence prevention and response, and catch-up learning. In response to the energy crisis, UNICEF supports water, sanitation and heating services along with social infrastructure, such as health, education and social and child protection facilities, with alternative power and heating solutions to ensure children can access critical services.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

\$250,000 deploys **mobile, inclusive education teams**, reaching up to 3,000 children with disabilities or special educational needs with diagnostic, developmental and educational support services.

\$115,000 gives 200 child survivors of explosive ordnance **access to child-focused victim assistance**, including access to medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychological support and social inclusion.

\$80,000 provides **focused MHPSS** for 1,000 war-affected children or their caregivers, including individual or group counseling, by trained specialists.

UNICEF preventing and responding to rape and other forms of sexual violence against children

Sexual violence against children is pervasive – crossing borders, cultures and economic status – and in conflict settings it occurs at nearly twice the global average. Globally, more than 370 million girls and women alive today have experienced rape or sexual violence during childhood. For boys and men, the figure is between 240 and 310 million. The scale of the issue and the reach of this grave violation into children's lives is so vast that increased and sustained investment in expanding child protection services and community-based prevention efforts are both vital and urgent. UNICEF is working around the clock to scale up gender-based violence response services equipped to meet the specific needs of child survivors, including safe spaces, clinical care and mental health support. Strengthening accountability by supporting investigations, prosecuting perpetrators, and strengthening data collection and reporting are much needed elements of protecting children from rape and other forms of sexual violence.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In the DRC, cases of sexual violence in conflict-affected eastern provinces have been showing a constant increase since 2022, with a sharp rise in cases involving girls. Despite decades of persistent national and international efforts, sexual violence against children and women continues at alarming levels across DRC. The crisis extends far beyond areas affected by conflict. Cases are reported across the country, revealing major gaps in protection mechanisms and legal accountability. In 2025, more than 35,000 cases of sexual violence against children were recorded across the DRC. These figures point to sustained and widespread harm, with the true toll likely far higher due to under-reporting, as fear, stigma, insecurity, and limited access to services prevent many survivors from ever reporting or seeking help.

Throughout the country, survivors struggle to access care. Distance, financial constraints, insecurity, lack of trained staff and shortages of essential supplies further limit access, while funding cuts have forced the closure of several safe spaces and community protection services. The consequences for children are particularly profound. Child survivors face lifelong physical injuries, serious emotional distress, school drop-out, early marriage, and economic hardship. Families say that fear of stigma and retaliation often keeps them from reporting the abuse, which also creates barriers to children receiving the critical care and support they need. Immediate, coordinated, and long-term action is essential to end sexual violence and protect future generations.

UNICEF, along with the government and other partners, is working to reach children through survivor-centred services, including clinical care, psychosocial support, safe spaces and case management. Between 2022 and 2024, the number of child survivors assisted by UNICEF rose by 143 per cent, reaching more than 24,200 children across the most affected provinces in 2024. In 2025, UNICEF

accelerated efforts to strengthen child protection systems and prevent violence and exploitation. A total of 963,060 vulnerable children received direct assistance, reflecting UNICEF's dual focus on system strengthening and humanitarian response.

Nathalie Uyera-Malosi (Lusi for short) is both a mother of seven and head of a temporary foster family that includes 15-year-old Jaelle, (not her real name). When Jaelle was just 12 years old, she was raped outside her home in Bunia, Ituri province, after being separated from her parents when the conflict arrived in her village. For the past four years, Lusi has been looking after children placed in temporary foster care, and Jaelle is currently part of her family. Lusi tells UNICEF how Jaelle hardly spoke when she arrived – “She got angry often and would not apologize even when she did something wrong.” With the help of psychologists, Jaelle's mental health has improved and she progresses every day. Today, Jaelle has fully integrated into family life with Lusi and her other children. “The children consider Jaelle as their biological sister. We are a family,” says Lusi.



Lusi sits with Jaelle outside their home in Bunia Ituri province, DRC.

Insecurity and global funding cuts have forced many UNICEF-supported safe spaces, mobile clinics and community-based protection programmes to scale back or close. By mid-2025, only 23 per cent of gender-based violence interventions were funded, putting hundreds of thousands of children, including 300,000 in conflict-affected eastern regions, at risk of losing access to life-saving support. UNICEF's humanitarian strategy delivers tangible results for children by anticipating risks, rapidly responding with life-saving action and strengthening systems for long-term resilience through child-centred and gender-responsive programming.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

\$350,000 provides **multidimensional support** – focusing on medical, psychosocial and judicial assistance and community integration – to 900 women and girls/child survivors of sexual violence.

\$50,000 engages 10,000 men and community members in behaviour change initiatives to **prevent sexual violence**.

\$50,000 supports the implementation of action plans to **reduce and mitigate risks of sexual violence** in high-risk areas in the community for 5,000 women and girls.



SOUTH SUDAN

The protracted crisis in South Sudan – conflict, displacement, food insecurity, and climate shocks – affects 9.3 million people, including 5 million children. With a significant increase of grave violations against children by parties to the conflict, including sexual violence, and the planned reduction of capacities and geographical coverage of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the rapid deterioration in the protection of children is a major concern.

In early 2026, more than 280,000 people were displaced due to fighting within Jonglei in the east-central region of South Sudan, the majority of whom are women and children. Interagency assessments conducted in Bor, Duk, and Twic East in Jonglei indicate serious protection concerns and findings point to a pattern of conflict-related sexual violence committed by armed actors that significantly affects women and girls. Assessments found that specialized health and response services for survivors of this gender-based violence are almost non-existent in many displacement areas. At the same time, emergency child protection services are critically

overstretched, leaving thousands of vulnerable children without access to life-saving child protection case management.

Despite considerable operational challenges in Jonglei and throughout South Sudan, UNICEF and its partners have scaled up mobile services, while child protection teams have expanded activities in the identification and registration of unaccompanied and separated children, family tracing and reunification, monitoring of grave child rights violations and the provision of mobile psychosocial support.



Women and children shelter under a tree in Chuil, Nyirol county after being displaced from their homes due to fighting in Jonglei state, South Sudan. Being forced to live out in the open without access to safe shelter is just one of the factors that increases the risk of sexual violence against children.

UNICEF's Communities Care: Transforming Lives and Preventing Violence is an effective prevention and response intervention against gender-based violence in South Sudan. It has been designed to empower people in conflict-affected and other humanitarian settings to create safer and healthier communities by addressing harmful norms that promote violence against women and girls, and fostering dignity, equality, and non-violence. Communities Care follows a well-established, feminist-informed, public health approach acknowledging the need to address multiple factors at the individual, family, community, institutional and societal levels that lead to destructive beliefs, attitudes, and violent acts towards women and girls.

In shaded courtyards and village halls, neighbours in Lokoloko, Wau, South Sudan, gather to mend their community. Relaunched in 2024 across nine

locations in South Sudan, UNICEF's Communities Care programme engages local leaders, including women, teachers, police, youth, and religious figures, in guided dialogue. As Communities Care continues to be rolled out in South Sudan, its impact is already clear, in changed minds, empowered voices and stronger families, all of which help protect children from the grave violation of rape and sexual violence.



"We used to think that if something bad happened, like rape, you just kept quiet. Now, I know I must sit with the victim, advise her, and help her seek justice. This programme opened our eyes." – Rebecca Edward, President of the Women's Association of Lokoloko.

In South Sudan UNICEF is expanding its use of predictive modeling, early warning systems and anticipatory frameworks to act before shocks escalate. We continue to strengthen multi-sector rapid response mechanisms as they remain central to ensuring swift, life-saving interventions. Equitable partnerships with civil society, especially women-led organizations and national non-governmental organizations, are critical to the sustainability of our work.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN SOUTH SUDAN

\$250,000 provides life-saving **gender-based violence case management**, individual and group-based psychosocial support at three women- and girl-friendly spaces in hotspot locations.

\$5,000 provides **10 Communities Care discussion groups** with funds to implement the action plans they develop after 13 weeks of community dialogue. Each action plan turns reflection, agreement and public commitment into visible behaviour change within each community.

\$2,400 provides **dignity kits** for up to 1,000 women and girls of reproductive age with items to meet their feminine hygiene needs and address their safety concerns.

UNICEF preventing and responding to the abduction of children

The taking of a child is every parent's worst nightmare, and yet child abduction is all too prevalent in the conduct of contemporary conflict. The removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, taking or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently, including for the purpose of any form of exploitation of the child by a party to conflict, is a grave violation that must be prevented at all costs. In some parts of the world cases of abductions of children increased sixfold between the end of 2024 and early 2025 and were accompanied by reports of other grave violations against children, including killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence by armed groups against children living on the street. In contexts where villages are raided by armed groups and adults are killed, children are often abducted by the groups and either held captive or forced to join their activities.



NIGERIA

Abuse in all its forms is a daily reality for many Nigerian children and only a fraction ever receive help. Six out of every 10 children experience some form of violence. Child abductions represent a severe and widespread violation of child rights in Nigeria which recorded the highest number of verified cases globally in 2025 with 1,251 children abducted. Abduction highlights the vulnerability of children to predatory actions and the urgent need for protective measures.

Twelve years since 300 girls were abducted by Boko Haram militants from Chibok in 2014, at least 91 remain in captivity or their fate is unknown. Others escaped but were shunned by their families after being forced to bear children with fighters or were confined to internally displaced persons camps designated for so-called repentant Boko Haram fighters, where they remained with the children they had borne in captivity.

In Northeast Nigeria, Azan (not his real name), a 16-year-old boy from Bama Local Government Area in Borno, was abducted from his community by an armed group. During three years of captivity, Azan was used as a personal servant to one of the commandants, forced to carry out menial tasks under harsh conditions, including being taught how to clean weapons used by Boko Haram fighters returning from operations. Throughout his time in captivity, he witnessed unimaginable violence – experiences that left deep emotional scars no child should ever have to endure.

Azan was eventually rescued from the armed group during a government military operation, but Azan's journey did not end there. Haunted by the extreme experiences of living in captivity, it was only at the UNICEF-supported transit camp, through MHPSS, that Azan slowly began to process his pain, eventually

finding joy in sports and art – spaces where he could safely express himself, reconnect with his emotions and begin rebuilding trust.

Azan began to see a future shaped by his own choices, not his past, and today he is a different boy – empathetic, creative and self-assured.



Boys who have experienced a similar situation to Azan benefit from a one-year socio-economic programme to become automobile mechanics, through UNICEF-supported programmes in Mubi, northeastern Nigeria.

In Nigeria, UNICEF delivers assistance to those that need it most – women, children and adolescents – based on evidence-based needs assessments, both in protracted situations of violence and conflict, as well as in areas affected by infectious disease outbreaks and floods. This multisectoral response deploys an integrated package of interventions in prioritized

locations, including nutrition; WASH facilities in primary health care centres; integrated WASH and social and behaviour change responses to infectious disease outbreaks and flooding; and integrated education/protection interventions to meet needs related to abductions of students or attacks against schools and health facilities. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse remains central to all interventions.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

\$1,550,000 provides up to 1,000 children formerly associated with armed groups with comprehensive reintegration into their communities, through **case management, social and economic integration** and the provision of start-up kit.

\$350,000 provides up to 1,000 unaccompanied and separated children with **family tracing and reunification services** to restore family unity and ensure they are protected and cared for within their communities.



HAITI

The situation for children in Haiti remains critical. More than 1.45 million people are internally displaced; over half of them are children facing overlapping crises, including armed violence, natural disasters, and extreme poverty. These conditions have fueled the growth of armed groups, increasingly forcing children into recruitment. As the security situation continues to deteriorate, sexual violence, which is often combined with the abduction of children, has emerged as one of the most extreme and least visible forms of harm. In 2025, a total of 8,093 cases of gender-based violence were reported against children, which is an increase of 25 per cent on figures from 2024. Girls under 18 accounted for 16 per cent of reported cases while boys represented 2 per cent.

“It was a Saturday,” recalls Ali (not his real name). “I was walking around with my friends when a black car stopped near us. Men got out and offered us a lot of money.” Earlier that year Ali had lost his mother during a wave of violence in their Léogâne neighbourhood. A stray bullet killed her, and Ali was suddenly alone, without a caregiver and acutely vulnerable to abduction and recruitment by armed groups.

Separated from everyone he had known, Ali found himself sleeping in the streets trying to survive. He soon met five other boys like him, all trying to survive. As the black car stopped abruptly beside the boys, men stepped out and handed out bundles of cash. But what looked like generosity quickly shifted into a recruitment attempt as the men placed weapons into the hands of the boys who had accepted the money. Ali refused but for many children in Haiti this is how violence enters their lives: not all at once, but through fear, exploitation and the absence of protection.



Ali's story is sadly not unique. So many children in Haiti are alone having lost their parents to violence. UNICEF's child protection work is vital in preventing their abduction and recruitment as well as supporting children's reintegration when they escape or are released.

UNICEF works across multiple ministries within the Government of Haiti and other partners to support children affected by violence. Together we provide psychosocial and education support, case management, family tracing and reunification where needed, and referrals to other essential services.

PREJEUNES, a government-led and UNICEF-supported child protection and reintegration programme helps children, including Ali, who have been recruited or abducted and works to protect those at risk through prevention, care and social reintegration. The broader UNICEF response in Haiti prioritizes life-saving assistance, linking emergency response with recovery efforts and partnering with local actors. Today, Ali speaks not only of fear, but also of recovery. "I really like this space," he says of PREJEUNES. "Here, I found friends to play with, and the social workers take good care of us."

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS CHILDREN IN HAITI

\$1,200,000 provides a full package of holistic and individualized **care and child protection services**, including case management, birth registration, health, legal, alternative care, education, vocational training and family reunification, to over 400 children affected by the conflict, including children impacted by and at risk of abduction by armed groups and others.

\$650,000 helps establish **10 safe spaces** 'Espas Mwen', which offer shelter, protection and a full package of needs-based assistance to over 500 women and girls who have survived or are at risk of gender-based violence

\$169,000 provides **support to the coordination mechanism** to ensure a more adequate, timely and cost-effective child protection response, with robust data collection and sharing to inform programme design and support evidence-based advocacy.

UNICEF preventing and responding to the denial of humanitarian access

The intentional deprivation of, or impediment to the passage of indispensable humanitarian aid, by the parties to the conflict, is a grave violation of children's rights. The percentage of the world's children living in conflict zones has doubled – from around 10 per cent in the 1990s to almost 19 per cent today; that is 1 in 6 children now living in areas affected by conflict.

The obligation of parties to facilitate safe, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access for the provision of emergency aid and long-term support to children remains an enduring challenge. In 2025, the United Nations recorded 8,322 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access. At least 326 humanitarians were killed in the line of duty across 21 countries during 2025, bringing the total number of people killed over three years to over 1,000. Of this total, more than 560 humanitarians died in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, 130 in Sudan, 60 in South Sudan, 25 in Ukraine and 25 in DRC. Staff and volunteers in the humanitarian sector have died supporting children

trapped in the throes of war, carrying out vaccination campaigns, living in violent neighbourhoods and escorting aid to reach millions in need.

The denial of humanitarian access, including threats or attacks on humanitarian workers, is a particularly pervasive, multifaceted, and complex grave violation. It can mean parties arbitrarily restrict access, including through the suspension of essential services, restriction of movements of civilians to reach assistance and protection, and create bureaucratic and administrative impediments. It can also mean outright attacks on facilities providing life-saving services, including, for instance, water and sanitation installations, attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, and siege tactics. These actions have devastating humanitarian consequences for children. From Haiti and Myanmar, to the State of Palestine, Sudan, Ukraine and beyond, we cannot allow a generation of children to become collateral damage to the world's unchecked wars.

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS UNICEF MAINTAIN HUMANITARIAN ACCESS FOR CHILDREN

\$250,000 ensures dedicated **deployable expertise** for one year to support UNICEF offices and partners operating in complex and high threat environments to pursue principled humanitarian access to children in need in hard-to-reach areas.

\$200,000 enables **specialized capacity building** of UNICEF staff and partners across complex and high threat environments for one year on civil-military coordination, negotiations and humanitarian leadership.

\$120,000 provides the opportunity to **collaborate with experts** in specialized areas of work relevant to the emerging humanitarian issues UNICEF and partners are faced with - including the use and impact of new technologies in situations of conflict and emergency.

UNICEF advocating to protect children in conflict

Grave violations against children occur because of choices that warring parties make – choices to block and deny life-saving assistance to children, to attack schools and hospitals, to abduct children from their families and force them into conflict, or to use rape and other sexual violence as a weapon against children.

As the United Nations agency mandated to advocate for the protection of children and their rights, UNICEF continues to advocate to protect children in conflict and is scaling its capacity to influence member states and other parties to conflicts that are directly responsible for violations of children's rights.

Through our advocacy work we aim to prevent and end attacks on children, restore and fortify protection systems and drive accountability through strengthening the overall, global political will to protect children. Specifically, we are:



Speaking out and raising the alarm

when children are attacked to mobilize attention in real-time of how current conflicts are violating children's lives, safety, health and well-being.



Amplifying the voices of children

impacted by conflict through child-focused storytelling to build increased public understanding and support of how children experience war.



Conducting humanitarian diplomacy to prevent and end attacks on children,

through proactive and consistent engagement with world leaders, parties to conflict and those supporting them, and by mobilizing partners and coalitions for collective advocacy and a stronger, more unified voice and influence for children.



Leveraging UNICEF's global influence

for changes in legislation, policy and funding that are urgently needed to ensure the protection of children in conflict, alongside their access to services and programmes that support their survival, well-being and recovery.



Collecting and sharing new data and evidence

to increase awareness on the scale and impact of conflict on children and drive decision-making that prioritizes children's best interests.

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS UNICEF MAINTAIN AND SCALE ADVOCACY EFFORTS FOR CHILDREN

\$235,000 provides one year of dedicated advocacy expertise to lead development and deliver a global influencing strategy aimed at mobilizing the political will and public attention needed to protect children in conflict from attack.

\$50,000 supports the **production of new evidence and research** on the changing impact of conflict on children and the evidence-based solutions to strengthen their protection and increase adherence to international norms and standards.

\$20,000 supports the **participation of a child or youth advocate** and their chaperone in global advocacy to protect children in conflict, such as speaking directly with world leaders to strengthen accountability for decisions made in conflict that impact children's survival and protection.

How you can help UNICEF protect children in conflict



Use your voice and influence to consistently draw attention to the impact of conflict on children and to call for strengthened protection of their rights, including the adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, and for governments and parties to conflict to adopt measures to end and prevent grave violations against children.



Engage your networks, communities and employees to raise awareness and advocate for children affected by conflict. Your platforms such as industry coalitions, faith networks, and global or national policy forums have the power to elevate child protection as a priority and drive stronger commitments and accountability for the protection of children's rights.



Provide sustained, predictable and flexible funding or financial, logistical, or in-kind sustainable support for UNICEF's child protection efforts at local, national and international levels and help us maintain, scale and strengthen our work preventing and ending grave violations against children and delivering our response to children who have been affected by these violations.



Access accurate information from credible sources like UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, to strengthen understanding of the realities children face in wars, prioritizing evidence and the voices of children.



In Burkina Faso and other contexts affected by violence, it is possible to restore hope to children's lives, to rebuild family connections and support young people to become productive members of their communities. With continued support, these pathways can be expanded to reach many more children who face similar risks. Edmondine Rakotoherisoa, UNICEF Education Specialist, sits in a classroom with Adjara, 11 years old, who is displaced and living in Dedougou, Burkina Faso. When children have access to education, they are better protected from the risk of grave violations.

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The growing number of grave violations confirms what too many children already know - that the world is failing to protect them from the horrors of war. Each violation against children in every country around the globe represents a moral failure. And each leaves scars that may never fully heal. Ultimately, it is a question of choice of whether we accept a world where children are routinely attacked, displaced, and left to go hungry, or whether we act together to protect them. The true measure of our response is whether children are given a real chance to live, to learn, and to hope for a better future.

- Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director