

Spotlight on the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund

2025

Cover: In the Assayta refugee camp where she lives, 9-year-old Eritrean Asiya dreams of becoming a doctor. However, in the drought-stricken Afar region of north-eastern Ethiopia, water scarcity and loss of livelihoods are threatening the future of girls who are increasingly forced into child marriage.



UNICEF works across 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring about positive change for children. The Global Child Protection Thematic Funding Pool makes vital contributions to multiple SDGs: SDG3, SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 16.

1. UNICEF's Global Child Protection Thematic Fund: protecting every child's right to live free from violence, exploitation, abuse and harmful practices

Every child deserves to be safe, to be heard, and to grow up with dignity

Yet for millions of children, that right remains under threat. In 2025, more than one in five children lived in a conflict-affected area, an estimated 90 million children alive today had experienced sexual violence, and roughly two in ten children globally still lacked a birth certificate. Progress against harmful practices continued to lag behind population growth: there were 30 million more survivors of female genital mutilation in 2025 than eight years earlier.

Child protection is not a stand-alone service – it is the safeguard that makes every other right a child holds meaningful. When children are protected, they are more likely to survive, learn and thrive. When protection systems fail or go unfunded, the costs ripple outward, touching health, education, social cohesion and economic growth for generations.

UNICEF's response is to build durable national systems rather than one-off interventions: strong laws, a skilled and professionalized social service workforce, robust

data and case-management platforms, sustained public financing, and communities that actively uphold children's rights. In 2025, UNICEF supported child protection programming in 156 countries, even as conflict, a global normative pushback against children's and women's rights, and severe humanitarian funding cuts placed growing strain on the systems meant to protect them.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund is what makes this systems-level work possible. With flexible, multi-year funding, UNICEF partners with governments, civil society and communities to embed child protection durably within national systems – including in fragile and humanitarian settings where earmarked funding rarely reaches. Child protection underpins the Sustainable Development Goals and remains central to Impact Result 4 of UNICEF's new Strategic Plan 2026–2029, which aims for 350 million children to be better protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and harmful practices by 2029.

2. Financial results

Investment catalysing progress for generations

Over the past two decades, the world has seen a steady, if uneven, expansion of children's rights – from rising birth registration to a halving of child labour since 2000. These gains are not accidental. They are the product of sustained investment by partners willing to fund the underlying systems that protect children year after year, not just single projects.

In 2025, the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund received US\$9.2 million in flexible, catalytic contributions from committed public and private partners, at a moment when many of the world's largest donor governments announced sharp cuts to development and humanitarian assistance. UNICEF extends its sincere thanks to the Governments of Sweden and Germany, and to private-sector partners including the Japan Committee for UNICEF, the Korean Committee for UNICEF, the United States Fund for UNICEF and the Spanish Committee for UNICEF, among others who contributed through National Committees.

Thanks to the vision of these partners, UNICEF supported 48 countries in 2025 to strengthen child protection systems and improve children's safety and well-being at the individual, community and national level. Every dollar of flexible funding is an investment in a child's future free from violence.

"Every child has the right to grow up safe from violence and exploitation. Protecting children also helps ensure that they can enjoy all their other rights. We are grateful to our partners for their continued commitment to child protection. Your support is helping to strengthen systems around the world to prevent violence and better protect children when they need help. As needs grow and children and families face increasing pressures, flexible, multi-year funding allows us to build lasting solutions and help more children live in a safe, supported, and protected environment."

Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF



Child Protection Global Thematic Fund Pool, Contributions Received in US\$, 2025

Resource Partner	Donor	Contributions Received
Public Sector	Sweden	8,449,514
	Germany	586,854
Private Sector	Japan Committee for UNICEF	68,609
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	53,314
	United States Fund for UNICEF	16,260
	Spanish Committee for UNICEF	13,518
Grand Total		9,188,069

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Mozambique

UNICEF, with the support of the Global Programme to end Child Marriage, produced and painted a graffiti on the walls of a secondary school in Monapo district, Nampula province, to sensitize the community on the negative impact of child marriage.



Why flexible funding matters

Protecting children's rights is not a short-term project – it is a long-term commitment. Flexible, multi-year funding lets UNICEF think beyond emergency response or single-issue interventions, helping governments build comprehensive child protection systems that prevent harm, respond to violations and sustain resilience over time. It also lets UNICEF direct resources to the countries and crises furthest behind, and least likely to attract earmarked funding – in 2025, 90 per cent of Goal Area 3 contributions remained strictly earmarked, underscoring how scarce this flexibility is.

In 2025, UNICEF spent US\$8.9 million in flexible thematic funding from the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund pool, allocated across 48 countries. These investments expanded access to birth registration, embedded child protection priorities in national laws and budgets, strengthened the social service workforce, and sustained services in some of the most underfunded emergency responses.

Global Child Protection Thematic Fund expenses by region, 2025

Region	Expenses (US\$)
Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR)	1,716,527
Europe and Central Asia (ECAR)	1,441,810
West and Central Africa (WCAR)	1,419,107
South Asia (SAR)	1,107,402
East Asia and the Pacific (EAPR)	1,034,455
Middle East and North Africa (MENAR)	1,008,819
Latin America and the Caribbean (LACR)	1,004,620
Headquarters (HQ)	179,829
Grand Total	8,900,000

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.



The UNICEF's Transparency Portal

UNICEF has a strong financial transparency record, including for thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund to visit the [Transparency Portal](#) and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.

A call to scale what works

Ending violence against children is not a dream – it is a choice, and it is within reach. Achieving the SDGs will require transforming the systems that safeguard children's rights, not just addressing symptoms after harm has occurred.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund is UNICEF's most strategic vehicle for making that transformation possible. By investing flexibly and systemically, partners help drive durable change – not only in the lives of individual children, but across entire communities and countries. UNICEF invites more partners to join this effort: to move beyond reacting to crises and start building the structures that will protect children for generations to come.



Flexible funding.
Direct reach.
Real results for children.



Ukraine

A young girl takes part in a drawing activity at a humanitarian transit centre after being evacuated with her family from the frontline. UNICEF and partners provide psychosocial support and safe spaces for displaced children across Ukraine, alongside emergency assistance and financial aid.

3. The global footprint of the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund

The reach of the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund spans all seven UNICEF regions, delivering impact across three interconnected levels:

- At the **country level**: investments strengthen national systems, expand front-line services and ensure support reaches the children and families who need it most.
- At the **regional level**: investments build technical expertise, foster cross-border collaboration and accelerate the adoption of promising practices – including through the 2025 regional Ministerial Conferences on Ending Violence Against Children held in the Middle East and North Africa and in Romania.
- At the **global level**: investments support UNICEF's technical and thought leadership, developing the tools, guidance, data frameworks and innovations that help scale results for children everywhere.

Each level reinforces the others, creating a global architecture of protection that grows stronger, faster and more resilient with every investment.

The **Global Thematic Fund for Child Protection** contributed to:



Nearly **61 million children** were enabled to be birth registered



Over **18 million parents and caregivers** were reached through parenting programmes



Over **10 million girls** were engaged in efforts to eliminate harmful practices, and 74 million people gained access to safe, community-based sexual exploitation and abuse reporting channels



Zambia

Mercy and her child outside the Chainda Health Centre.

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Child Protection Global Thematic Fund Pool, Top Allocations by Country, 2025

1 Philippines \$97,000

In partnership with the local government and the University of the Philippines, UNICEF designed and tested the Executive Course on Child Protection for local chief executives and multi-disciplinary teams, which seeks to increase understanding for the need for child protection systems and catalyze greater prioritization and budget allocation.

2 Ethiopia \$73,360

An integrated GBV and nutrition service delivery model, piloted with International Medical Corps, is reshaping how UNICEF reaches vulnerable women and children. In 2025, Case management of gender-based violence climbed 17 per cent and more than 213,000 adolescents – including children with disabilities – gained life skills and accessed targeted protection services.

3 Mozambique \$67,491

A structured positive parenting course reached over 1,500 parents and caregivers, while school-based violence-prevention mechanisms generated more than 11,000 reports of violence and referred thousands of children to support services.

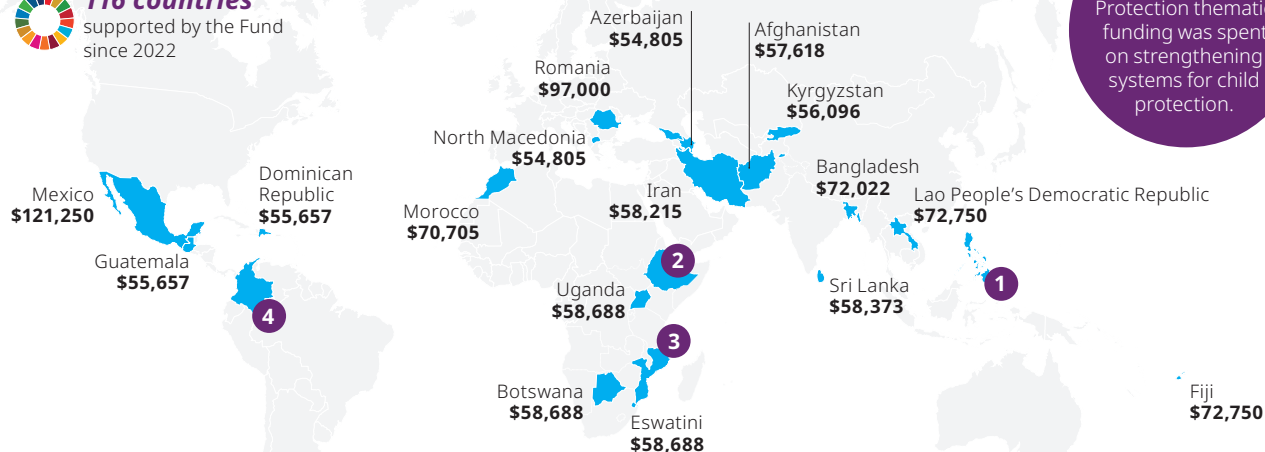
4 Colombia \$55,657

The Caring for Child Survivors package now supports more than 17,000 child survivors of sexual violence. In 2025, 500 teachers, health workers and community leaders were trained to detect and refer cases of gender-based violence.



116 countries

supported by the Fund since 2022



In 2025, **81 per cent** of Child Protection thematic funding was spent on strengthening systems for child protection.



77%

allocated to country programmes



12%

allocated to regional programmes



10%

allocated to global programmes



1%

allocated to evaluation for evidence-based programmes

COUNTRY-LEVEL ALLOCATION CRITERIA

Strengthening national child protection systems, including justice systems and civil registration

Prioritizing services that protect children from harm

Closing resource gaps for child protection in high-burden contexts

Note: These were the largest of 48 country allocations from the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund in 2025. Additional allocations – including to Ghana and Kenya, each featured below – were made at smaller amounts but delivered significant results.



Egypt

Children using the learning passport in Cairo and Sharkeyya Governorates.

4. From programmes to policy: a systems shift in child protection

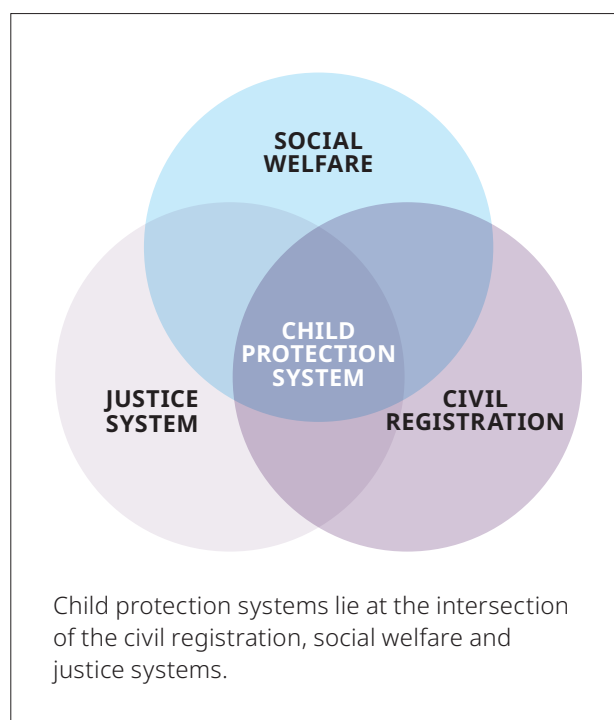
Ending violence, exploitation and abuse is not about isolated interventions; it is about transforming the systems that shape children's lives. The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund drives that transformation by investing flexibly across six pillars: policy and legislative reform, workforce development, social and behaviour change, data and evidence, service-delivery infrastructure, and sustainable public financing.

In 2025, UNICEF monitored the maturity of child protection systems in 158 countries. Seven countries – Botswana, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Ghana, Indonesia, Montenegro and South Africa – had reached full system maturity, a sevenfold increase since the 2021 baseline. Flexible funding was a catalytic contributor to this progress, helping countries move from reactive response towards systems built to prevent harm before it happens.

Legal and policy change

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund helps ensure investments reach not only services, but the legal frameworks that make protection sustainable. In 2025:

- In **Fiji**, UNICEF supported the costing of the Child Care and Protection Act and the Child Justice Act. This evidence directly informed a 24 per cent increase in the national child protection budget allocation in the 2025/2026 National Budget.
- In **Botswana**, sustained systems investment helped the country become one of only seven worldwide to reach full child protection system maturity in 2025, alongside adopting a national plan of action for ending violence against children.
- In **Uganda**, UNICEF supported the finalisation of the National Strategy to End FGM (2025–2030) and the start of its integration into district-level plans.
- In **Bangladesh**, child marriage prevalence fell to 47 per cent according to the 2025 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, down from 51 per cent in 2022 – among the strongest declines recorded in a country implementing the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.
- In **Morocco**, UNICEF advocacy contributed to the establishment of national Standard Operating Procedures for family- and community-based care of migrant children, moving the country away from institutional and detention-based responses.



Workforce development

Behind every child protected from harm is a trained professional – a social worker, teacher, police officer, health worker or community leader – ready to listen, respond and act.

The Fund invests directly in this human infrastructure. In 2025, 48 countries had a quality assurance system in place for their social service workforce, up from 40 in the 2021 baseline.

- In **Ghana**, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to launch a new accredited diploma in Social Work, strengthening the workforce across 16 regions. The Integrated Social Services approach – which coordinates delivery of child protection services – expanded from 180 districts in 2024 to 210 districts in 2025, now covering 80 per cent of the country.
- In **Georgia**, UNICEF introduced pioneering trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy training for frontline professionals, strengthening the quality of Barnahus-inspired, child-centred services for victims and survivors of violence.
- In **Mexico**, the Supreme Court of Justice and UNICEF launched a new cycle of the Child-Centred Forensic Psychology virtual course for professionals working with child victims or witnesses of crime; more than 12,000 individuals enrolled immediately after its launch.



Social and behaviour change for lasting impact

Lasting protection starts with changing the beliefs, behaviours and norms that put children at risk.

In 2025, UNICEF-supported parenting programmes reached over 18 million parents and caregivers in more than 100 countries to build positive, non-violent parenting skills.

- In **Mozambique**, a structured positive parenting course reached over 1,500 parents and caregivers, while school-based violence-prevention mechanisms generated more than 11,000 reports of violence and referred thousands of children to support services.
- In **Ethiopia**, over 213,000 adolescents, including children with disabilities, gained life skills and protection from gender-based violence, complementing the “Uncut Voices” initiative that engages young people directly in efforts to end female genital mutilation.

Social and behaviour change is not an add-on to child protection – it is a driver of systemic impact. When communities are empowered to protect children, the effects ripple outward into fewer harmful practices and safer environments for every child.

Data, research and evidence for child protection solutions

Without data, violations of children's rights remain hidden. Without evidence, solutions fall short.

UNICEF continued to expand the digital Primero/CPIMS+ case-management platform, maintained across 42 humanitarian and development contexts in 2025, and supported 24 countries to collect and analyse Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey data on violence against children.

- In **Kenya**, strengthened data systems and costed county-level child protection budgets contributed to a 267 per cent increased access to health, social work or justice services by victims of violence compared with 2024.

Infrastructure for service delivery

Strong systems save lives, but only if built to reach every child, everywhere.

- In **Iran**, UNICEF and partners deployed 80 psychologists across five conflict-affected provinces, reaching approximately 175,000 people with mental health and psychosocial support, including children with disabilities.
- In **Colombia**, the Caring for Child Survivors package was adapted and integrated into the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare's e-learning platform, strengthening trauma-informed care for more than 17,000 child survivors of sexual violence.
- In **Afghanistan**, UNICEF sustained water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, child-friendly spaces, psychosocial support and family tracing and reunification services at border reception centres for families returning from Iran, supporting over 23,000 children with case management during the year.



Democratic Republic of the Congo

9-year-old Clément holds the birth certificate he received with support from UNICEF and the European Union at Tuendeyi Primary School in Kabinda.

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Financing the future of child protection

Without sustainable financing, child protection systems cannot grow, and children pay the price.

- In **Kenya**, advocacy grounded in UNICEF's investment case for the social service workforce helped secure a 400 per cent rise in emergency funding and a 6 per cent increase in the operational budget of the Directorate of Children Services for FY2025/26, alongside KES 5.527 billion (about US\$42 million) in wider social-sector allocations.
- In **Fiji**, costed legislation translated directly into a 24 per cent increase in the 2025/2026 National Budget allocation for child protection.

Results that last

Strengthening child protection systems is a long-term investment, but one with transformative returns – even in a year marked by funding contraction. In 2025, strategic, catalytic flexible funding contributed to the following results:

- Nearly 61 million children were newly registered at birth in 78 countries in 2025, extending legal identity and access to services to millions more children.
- 41 countries now meet all six criteria for a specialised justice system for children, up from 38 in 2024, even as several countries moved to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility.
- 59 per cent of the 1.03 million children in formal alternative care – across countries reporting data – were in family-based settings rather than institutions in 2025. This remains far above the 27 per cent recorded in 2021, though it is a decline from 65 per cent in 2024, a reminder that this progress is not yet irreversible and depends on sustained investment.

These are not just statistics; they are evidence of what is possible when investments are flexible, systems-focused and rooted in children's rights – and a warning of how quickly progress can stall when that flexible funding disappears.

5. Impact story

Afghanistan: welcoming children home at the border

At the Islam Qala border reception centre in Herat province, four children – Naser, 9; Shakoofa, 7; Elya, 3; and Negin, 4 – sit together inside a tent. They did not know each other before that day. All had just returned to Afghanistan after their families were deported from Iran, arriving with little more than what they could carry.

Mass returns of Afghan families from neighbouring countries accelerated through 2025, straining reception capacity at border crossings and placing children – many of whom had spent most of their lives outside Afghanistan – at heightened risk of separation, distress and loss of access to services. UNICEF and partners maintained a presence at these crossings throughout the year, providing water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, child-friendly spaces, psychosocial support, and family tracing and reunification services for children arriving unaccompanied or separated from their caregivers.

Nationally, more than 23,000 children received case management services in Afghanistan in 2025, and 14,555 unaccompanied and separated children were successfully reunified with their parents or caregivers through UNICEF-supported family tracing. For children

like Naser, Shakoofa, Elya and Negin, that meant more than paperwork: within hours of arriving in an unfamiliar country, they had found a safe space to play, and – in their own words – become fast friends.

Afghanistan is one of the top recipients of the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund in 2025. Flexible funding allowed UNICEF to keep border services running consistently through a year of intensifying returns, rather than scaling them up and down with the availability of earmarked, situation-specific grants.

“Children on the move face some of the highest risks of any group we work with – exploitation, trafficking, family separation, exclusion from services,” said a UNICEF child protection worker at the border. “What we can offer in these first hours and days often determines whether that risk becomes reality.”



Afghanistan

12-year-old Farima plays with her cousin Hanifa at their home in Shahrak Sabz village in Karkh district, Herat province. Poverty and the lack of social safety nets remain as the root causes of violence against and exploitation of children in Afghanistan. UNICEF aims to build a qualified social service workforce of individuals who will provide specialized child protection and gender-based violence services for children in need and their families.

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6. Hearing from our donors and partners

Sida-Sweden and UNICEF: a longstanding strategic partnership

UNICEF deeply appreciates the Government of Sweden's continuing commitment, which places it at the forefront of global child protection leadership. In 2025, Sida-Sweden was again the leading contributor to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund, providing around 92 per cent of the total investment – a level of committed, multi-year, flexible funding that few other partners can match.

This partnership enables UNICEF to address urgent child protection needs while driving systems-strengthening and transformation in countries worldwide, at the individual, community and national level. Sweden's support has been pivotal in advancing systems strengthening, normative frameworks, and social work curriculum development. Thanks to this funding, millions of children, parents and caregivers were reached in 2025, accelerating progress towards the SDGs and UNICEF's Goal Area 3.

German Federal Foreign Office

UNICEF expresses its sincere appreciation to the German Federal Foreign Office for its steadfast support to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund, enabling timely and flexible responses to emerging child protection needs worldwide. Germany's commitment strengthens the systems that prevent and respond to violence, helping ensure that the most vulnerable children are reached. Through this partnership, Germany is contributing to sustainable, long-term improvements in child protection outcomes across diverse contexts.

UNICEF calls on more partners to follow the example of Sweden, and Germany, and the National Committees who contributed in 2025 (Japan, Korea, US, Spain). In a year when earmarked humanitarian and development funding contracted sharply worldwide, flexible thematic funding is not just important – it is what keeps national child protection systems standing.



Colombia

UNICEF has implemented a comprehensive strategy to prevent, mitigate, and respond to violence against children and adolescents, with a special focus on gender-based violence in emergency contexts such as armed conflict, migration, and natural disasters. This strategy is structured around three lines of action: prevention, mitigation, and response, addressing both structural causes and direct support for victims.



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September 2026