

What is Child Protection?

UNICEF uses the term 'child protection' to refer to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage. UNICEF's child protection programmes also target children who are uniquely vulnerable to these abuses, such as when living without parental care, in conflict with the law and in armed conflict. Violations of the child's right to protection take place in every country and are massive, under-recognized and under-reported barriers to child survival and development, in addition to being human rights violations. Children subjected to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect are at risk of death, poor physical and mental health, HIV/AIDS infection, educational problems, displacement, homelessness, vagrancy and poor parenting skills later in life.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Approximately 126 million children aged 5–17 are believed to be engaged in hazardous work, excluding child domestic labour¹.
- More than 1 million children worldwide are detained by law enforcement officials.²
- It is estimated that more than 130 million women and girls alive today have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting.³

BUILDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

Building a protective environment for children that will help prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation involves eight essential components: Strengthening **government commitment** and **capacity** to fulfil children's right to protection; promoting the establishment and **enforcement** of adequate **legislation**; addressing harmful **attitudes, customs and practices**; encouraging **open discussion** of child protection issues that includes media

HUMAN RIGHTS

The **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989) outlines the fundamental rights of children, including the right to be protected from economic exploitation and harmful work, from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and from physical or mental violence, as well as ensuring that children will not be separated from their family against their will. These rights are further refined by two **Optional Protocols**, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

and civil society partners; developing **children's life skills, knowledge and participation**; building **capacity of families and communities**; providing **essential services for prevention, recovery and reintegration**, including basic health, education and protection; and establishing and implementing ongoing and effective **monitoring, reporting and oversight**.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

The work of UNICEF and its partners includes:

- International advocacy, often with the use of international human rights mechanisms
- National advocacy and initiating dialogue at all levels – from government to communities, families and children themselves – in order to promote attitudes and practices protective of children
- Inclusion of child protection issues in national development plans
- Law-based approaches, emphasizing the importance of knowing, understanding, accepting and enforcing legal standards in child protection
- Community-based approaches that promote and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to address child protection issues

CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION SHEET: WHAT IS CHILD PROTECTION?

- Partnerships with governments, non-governmental and faith-based organizations, other United Nations organizations, professional associations, children and youth, and the media.

KEY RESULTS EXPECTED FOR 2006–2009

- Ensuring that government decisions are increasingly influenced by better knowledge and awareness of child protection rights and improved data and analysis on child protection issues
- Supporting effective legislative and enforcement systems – along with improved protection and response capacity – to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, including exploitative child labour

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Child protection issues intersect with every one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – from poverty reduction to getting children into school, from eliminating gender inequality to reducing child mortality.

Most of the MDGs simply cannot be achieved if failures to protect children are not addressed. Child labour squanders a nation's human capital and conflicts with eradicating extreme poverty (MDG 1); armed conflict disrupts efforts to achieve universal primary education (MDG 2); child marriage leads to the removal of girls from school and thus prevents gender equality (MDG 3); children separated from their mothers, particularly if they remain in institutional settings, are at greater risk of early death, which hinders efforts to reduce child mortality (MDG 4); female genital mutilation/cutting undermines efforts to maternal health (MDG 5); and sexual exploitation and abuse hamper efforts to combat HIV infection (MDG 6). In addition, environmental disasters make children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, hence the need for environmental sustainability (MDG 7).

Overall, protecting children requires close cooperation between different partners, which consolidates the need for a global partnership for development (MDG 8).

- Improving mechanisms to protect children from the impact of armed conflict and natural disasters
- Addressing national justice systems to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide protection for children and adolescents as victims, witnesses and offenders
- Reducing the number of children separated from their families and strengthening national capacities to ensure access by poor families to services and safety nets needed to protect and care for their children.

EXAMPLES OF UNICEF IN ACTION

- Working closely with parliamentarians on the regional and country levels, including the launch of handbooks for parliamentarians about child protection (2004) and child trafficking (2005)
- Providing support to legal reforms of Criminal Codes and the implementation of national plans of action for the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Taking part in the development of juvenile justice systems in at least 13 of the 20 countries of the CEE/CIS region by assisting in legal reforms in line with international standards, piloting service models in the restorative justice approach, and training specialized police units, judges and lawyers to apply new principles and standards for children in conflict with the law.

Notes

¹ International Labour Office, *The End of Child Labour: Within reach*, Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, International Labour Conference, 95th Session 2006, Report I (B), ILO, Geneva, 2006.

² Defence for Children International, 'No Kids Behind Bars: A global campaign on justice for children in conflict with the law', <www.kidsbehindbars.org>.

³ United Nations Children's Fund, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical exploration 2005*, UNICEF, New York, 2005, p. 1.

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