A child attends a class at a UNICEF funded child-friendly space within the Nyumazi refugee settlement, Adjumani District, northern Uganda in October 2014. Since conflict broke out in neighbouring South Sudan, over 90,000 people have fled their homes for safety in Uganda. Spaces such as these offer protection and education in a safe, controlled environment.
Violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect cut across all boundaries, including age, gender, religion, ethnic origin and socio-economic status. Evidence shows children with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable. These violations happen at home, at school, at work, in care and justice institutions, online or in the community. Children may be more at risk when separated from their families, when migrating within or across borders or when placed in non-family care.
**1. Situational analysis/context**

The protection of children from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional human rights treaties and standards. Yet, violence remains an all too real part of life for children around the globe.

Data from a range of low- and middle-income countries show that around 120 million girls under 20 years of age (about one in 10) have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. On average, four in five children between the ages of 2–14 years experience some form of violent discipline – either psychological and/or physical violence – at home. Globally, an estimated 230 million children currently live in countries and areas affected by armed conflict and tens of thousands of children each year are recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups. An estimated 168 million children (representing 11 per cent of all children) are engaged in child labour with 50 per cent working in hazardous conditions.

About one third of women aged 20–24 years in the developing world were married as children and approximately 30 million girls are at risk of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Approximately 2 million children continue to live in residential care instead of with families.

Violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect cut across all boundaries, including age, gender, religion, ethnic origin and socio-economic status. Evidence shows children with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable. These violations happen at home, at school, at work, in care and justice institutions, online or in the community. Children may be more at risk when separated from their families, when migrating within or across borders or when placed in non-family care. These vulnerabilities and risks are further exacerbated in situations of fragility and armed conflict and in natural disasters.

Overall, the impact of violence against children, depending on its nature and severity, can lead to devastating short- and long-term consequences for children. Research has shown that violence is detrimental to all aspects of a child’s growth, including physical, psychological and social development. Children who have been severely abused or neglected often experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school. They may have low self-esteem and suffer from depression, which can lead, at worst, to risky behaviours and self-harm. Children who grow up in a violent household or community tend to internalize that behaviour as a way of resolving disputes, later repeating the pattern of violence and abuse against their own spouses and children. Beyond the toll on individuals, child protection violations inflict damage at the societal level, including direct and indirect costs due to increased social spending and lost economic productivity.

There is growing evidence that the economic costs of doing nothing to prevent violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children are significant. A UNICEF study to estimate the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment in East Asia and the Pacific found that the economic burden of child maltreatment in this region in 2004 was around US$160 billion (about 2 per cent of the region’s gross domestic product). From a cost-benefit perspective alone, such findings highlight the critical importance of investing in prevention.

**2. Problem statement**

While often regarded as an individual problem, violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children are societal problems, driven by economic and social inequities. They are fuelled by social norms that condone violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts and discipline a child and social norms that encourage discrimination. They are enabled by systems that lack adequate policies and legislation, effective governance and rule of law.

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1 Some forms of violence are specific to children with disabilities. For example, they may be subject to violence administered under the guise of treatment for behaviour modification. Girls with disabilities endure particular abuses, and in many countries are subject to forced sterilization or abortion.


law to prevent violations, investigate and prosecute perpetrators, and provide follow-up services and treatment for victims. Also, they persist when undocumented and unmeasured as a result of inadequate investments in data collection and poor dissemination of findings. Indeed, one of the major challenges inherent in any attempt to address violence and abuse of children is the presumably large numbers of children unable or unwilling to report their experiences.

Over the past two decades, there have been significant improvements in data collection on the nature and impact of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children, as demonstrated by the UNICEF report ‘Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis on violence against children,’ the first of its kind. However, a full understanding of violence against children requires many types of information. Prevalence estimates are needed to draw the ‘big picture’ – the magnitude of the problem – while information on the family and the social environment and social norms, attitudes and beliefs are important to understand factors that may increase or mitigate risk. Solid evidence of what works in terms of prevention and response is also necessary in developing and implementing successful strategies to address the problem. Finally, records from the police department, child welfare agencies, the criminal justice system, doctors and hospital emergency rooms provide important accounts of the outreach of entities in charge of service delivery as well as basic information on the circumstances related to incidents of abuse.

3 Proposed solutions

While gaps remain in terms of what works under what circumstances to protect children from protection violations, there is growing evidence of contextually relevant, cost-effective and evidence-based solutions for prevention and response.4 Know Violence in Childhood is a global learning initiative underway to identify “a more comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of

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violence in childhood, and the means of prevention” in order to inform investments, strategies and interventions moving forward.

Solutions need to be evidence-based, data-driven and context-specific; the mix of interventions will vary by country, depending on the key bottlenecks and barriers that constrain positive protection outcomes in each particular context. In all contexts, programme efforts need to link together both system strengthening and social change to achieve sustained change over time. The following are key areas of intervention to date, based on the latest global evidence:

Providing quality and integrated services for children and families that are supported by an adequate legislative, policy and budgetary framework

• **Birth registration:** This includes modernizing birth registration systems as part of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, supporting legal and policy reform, and strengthening the links between birth registration and other services, such as health and education. Birth registration is also an area in which innovative strategies have been scaled up, such as using mobile technology to reach disadvantaged population groups.

• **Social welfare services:** Specific services are needed that help to prevent violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect and to provide care, support and reintegration assistance when these violations occur. Such services may include reporting mechanisms whereby children and families can report cases; identification, referral, response and follow-up to cases of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect by a professionalized social welfare workforce; provision of parenting education programmes; life-skills education programmes for adolescents; and social protection schemes that target vulnerable families and prevent children from being involved in risky activities, such as those resulting from sexual exploitation, as well as separation from families due to economic distress and poverty.

• **Basic social services:** Children have a right, without discrimination, to basic services such as health and education. The protection roles and mandates of professionals within these sectors need to be strengthened through development and implementation of professional standards as well as referral mechanisms and coordination with the social welfare and justice sectors.

• **Services for children in contact with the law:** The capacity of the justice system needs to be strengthened so that children in contact with the law – including child victims and witnesses – are dealt with in a manner consistent with their rights and international standards and norms. This requires the justice system to recognize the specific needs of children and emphasize diversion and non-custodial measures, rather than the detention of children. Training of justice officials and inter-sectoral work among the justice, security and social sectors (health, education and social welfare) for support to children in justice processes and reintegration into society is also key.

Changing social norms and attitudes that contribute to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children

Violence against children is significant in its scale, scope and under-reporting, all of which are exacerbated by societal acceptance. Some forms of violence are rooted in discriminatory and unequal societal gender dynamics, and many harmful practices are deeply anchored within societies, making the involvement of all stakeholders in society crucial to bringing about change. Social norms and attitudes that condone violence against children need to be adequately analysed and addressed through community-based approaches that involve all relevant actors, including community and religious leaders, parents, service providers and children themselves.

Investing in data

Critical data gaps hamper progress in child protection. This includes information on the situation and environment of the most vulnerable children, particularly those who cannot be captured through household surveys. Ongoing monitoring and assessment of child protection programmes needs to be strengthened to identify interventions that will have maximum impact in preventing child protection violations and responding when they do occur, which will inform government planning and budgeting.
UNICEF’s role

UNICEF has amassed considerable experience in child protection programming across low income, middle-income and humanitarian contexts. Together with partners, UNICEF has contributed to the development of minimum standards and guidelines to inform legislation, policies, services and strategies. Lessons learned from evaluations of UNICEF-supported efforts inform policies and programmes in order to continuously improve UNICEF’s strategic approach and performance.

UNICEF’s comparative advantage in child protection is defined by several factors:

- **Strong country presence**: UNICEF’s strong country presence that enables close working relationships with government counterparts at national and sub-regional levels and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, communities, and faith-based organizations, and enables evidence generation across countries to inform global practice. UNICEF has approximately 600 staff working on child protection programmes at any one time. The majority of staff are deployed at the country level, including in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

- **Strong programming and technical capacity**: With over 20 years of experience in child protection programming, UNICEF works with partners to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate child protection programming. This includes developing country-level capacity; strengthening legislation, policies and service delivery; and promoting social change efforts. By generating evidence, developing technical guidance and sharing knowledge, UNICEF brings strong technical leadership to its national, regional and global programming efforts.

- **Expertise across sectors related to child protection**: UNICEF’s comprehensive child rights mandate enables it to draw on the expertise and experience from communication for development (C4D), early childhood development, education, health, nutrition, HIV, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to support child protection outcomes. UNICEF’s broad child rights mandate also enables programming to address risks across the life cycle from early childhood to adolescence.

- **Global standard setting**: UNICEF provides global leadership, advocacy and technical support for global standard setting in the sector, for example the *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery*; *A Passport to Protection: a guide to birth registration programming; Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*; and the United Nations-welcomed *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*.

- **Global and national partnerships**: Partnerships are critical to catalyse and leverage results for children. In addition to work with the United Nations Special Representatives of the Secretary General whose mandates encompass elements of child protection and other United Nations agencies, UNICEF engages with civil society, faith-based organizations and donors, including through the Better Care Network, the Day of Prayer and Action for Children and the Together for Girls initiative to end violence against children. In humanitarian contexts, UNICEF is the designated lead agency for the global Child Protection Working Group, co-lead of the global Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (with United Nations Population Fund), co-chair of the global Paris Principles Steering Group on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (with Save the Children), a leader of the cross-cutting Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, and the lead and coordinating agency for explosive remnants of war/mine risk education.

- **Data and evidence building**: UNICEF supports the collection of nationally representative data on child protection through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and has played a ground breaking role in the development of new data collection and monitoring tools on child protection violations. Examples of recent methodological work include the
UNICEF’s comparative advantages include:

- **A strong country presence that enables close working relationships with government counterparts and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, communities and faith-based organizations;**

- **Approximately 600 staff working on child protection programmes at any one time;**

- **Over 20 years of experience in child protection programming;**

- **Expertise and experience across sectors related to child protection i.e., in communication for development (C4D), early childhood development, education, health, nutrition, HIV, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH);**

- **Global, regional and national partnerships that are critical to catalyse and leverage results for children;**

- **Role in supporting the collection of nationally representative data on child protection through Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and a ground breaking role in the development of new data collection and monitoring tools on child protection violations.**

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**South-South and triangular cooperation:**

Given its expansive presence across all regions, UNICEF plays a key role in facilitating cooperation and exchanges among governments, regional political bodies, NGOs and faith-based organizations in order to enhance national capacity on child protection. For example, to strengthen CRVS systems across Africa, Member States have defined a regional road map known as the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, and its implementation is guided by a steering group composed of a number of intergovernmental bodies and multilateral organizations. In 2014, 200 partners from 20 countries and three regions came together in Swaziland to review programme responses to violence against children and establish a framework for action.

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**Areas of focus and expected results**

Achieving the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014–2017 outcome of ‘improved and equitable prevention of and response to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children’ requires actions at global, regional, national and community levels. As elaborated above and outlined in UNICEF’s Child Protection Strategy, this necessitates a coordinated and integrated approach in both development and humanitarian contexts that addresses risks at all stages of children’s lives, strengthens the protective capacities of systems across sectors and addresses harmful social norms that condone violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. To that end, UNICEF will focus on the following programme areas:
Achieving the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014–2017 outcome of ‘improved and equitable prevention of and response to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children’ requires actions at global, regional, national and community levels. This necessitates a coordinated and integrated approach in both development and humanitarian contexts that addresses risks at all stages of children’s lives, strengthens the protective capacities of systems across sectors and addresses harmful social norms that condone violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.

**Prevent violence, exploitation and abuse**

To prevent violence, exploitation and abuse, UNICEF will:

- Support countries such that at least 75 per cent of the target population of children at risk are reached by programmes to prevent interpersonal violence (baseline: sexual violence: 9 countries; physical violence: 5 countries; more than one form of violence: 7 countries. Target: sexual violence: 12 countries; physical violence: 8 countries; more than one form of violence: 10 countries).

**Justice for children**

UNICEF will continue to support strengthening of justice systems to operate in the best interest of the child. Specifically, in this area, UNICEF will:

- Support countries so that procedures and services for children in contact with the law are applied and delivered in line with international norms (baseline: 26 countries; target: 50 countries).

**Birth registration**

Birth registration is the single most important building block of an effective civil registration system required to provide the vital statistics necessary to accurately measure progress towards the achievement of international development goals. Specifically, in this area, UNICEF will:

- Support 135 countries to carry out free and universal access to birth registration (baseline: 114 countries; target: 135 countries).

**Strengthening families and communities**

UNICEF will focus on promoting positive parenting skills and integrating services into the lives of families either through regular home visits or at community-based centres, by nurses, social workers and other trained professionals. Additional support to families will be provided through social protection programmes that can address some of the underlying risk factors of abuse, violence and exploitation, while at the same time increasing families’ and communities’ resilience and capacity to respond to external stresses. Specifically, UNICEF will:

- Support 71 countries so that 75 per cent of targeted parents are reached by programmes addressing child-rearing practices (baseline: 2 countries out of 71; target: 65 countries out of 71);

- Support 12 countries in developing national strategies or plans on child marriage with a budget (among countries with child marriage prevalence of 25 per cent or higher) (baseline: 1 country; target: 12 countries).

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5 The 2014 data point of 80 countries was not used as an adjusted baseline because 57 countries out of these 80 countries provided answers to Strategic Monitoring Questions (SMQ) 18 (Is the system biased towards detention and other custodial remedies?) and SMQ 24 (Does the justice system comply with the minimum standards laid down in the Beijing Rules of Justice?) that indicate that procedures and services for children are actually not applied in line with international norms.
Humanitarian action: child protection in emergencies

On the basis of its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action framework, UNICEF will continue to work in collaboration with implementing partners to minimize the impact of armed conflict and natural disasters on children. Specifically, in this area, UNICEF will achieve the following results:

- Eighty per cent of all UNICEF-targeted children benefit from psychosocial support (baseline: 81.2 per cent; target: at least 80 per cent)
- Between 80–100 per cent of UNICEF-targeted children and women who experience sexual violence in humanitarian situations receive multi-sectoral support services (baseline: 79.2 per cent; target: at least 80 per cent)
- Eighty per cent of UNICEF-targeted children associated with armed forces and groups have been released and reintegrated with their families and/or receive appropriate care and services (baseline: 10,204 children released, 3.3 per cent; 8,390 children reintegrated, 2.7 per cent; 9,577 children receiving services, 3.1 per cent. Target: at least 80 per cent)
- Eighty per cent of UNICEF-targeted children receive appropriate alternative care services (baseline: 39.3 per cent. Target: at least 80 per cent)
- Eighty per cent of UNICEF-targeted children benefit from weapons-related risk education (baseline: N/A; target: at least 80 per cent)
- Countries in humanitarian situations with UNICEF-supported mechanisms to monitor and report on grave violations against children (Baseline: 16 countries, representing 100 per cent of countries in which parties to conflict are listed in the Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict; target: 100 per cent of countries in which parties to conflict are listed in the Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict).

Improved data

UNICEF will make a much-needed investment in the evidence base to ensure that robust and regularly collected and disaggregated data on violence and exploitation of children are part of all countries’ data collection efforts. Specifically, in this area, UNICEF will:

- Support 75 countries in the collection and publication of routine administrative data on violence, exploitation and abuse of children, including violent deaths and injuries, to complement data from large-scale household surveys (baseline: 25 countries; target: 75 countries)
- Support 48 countries in revising their child protection policies on the basis of gender reviews supported by UNICEF (baseline: 33 countries; target: 48 countries).

Strengthening the ‘systems’ approach to child protection

For more effective prevention and protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children, UNICEF will focus on strengthening the necessary human resources, finances, laws, standards, governance, service delivery and data collection and analysis (all components of child protection systems). Specifically, in this area, UNICEF will:

- Support 100 countries so that their child protection systems offer preventive and response services (baseline: 33 countries; target: 100 countries)
- Support 100 countries to make national legislation on child protection consistent with or better than international standards (baseline: 33 countries; target: 100 countries).

Evidence generation, cross-cutting programming and advocacy

Complementing the focused programme areas described above, UNICEF recognizes that progress in child protection also requires investment in relevant cross-cutting issues and systems. Robust evidence and data are critical to achieve the results outlined in this case for support. National statistics organizations require support from UNICEF in their data collection efforts including household surveys, as well as support in the analysis and use of such data advancing the understanding of correlations between

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6 One country mistakenly reported that 77,300 children associated with armed groups and forces received services (SMQ 32k) while there are zero children associated with armed groups and forces in that country. Thus, the figure of 77,300 was subtracted from the total of 86,877, resulting in a total of 9,577 children.

7 Figures include children who are registered as unaccompanied or separated only.

8 The number of UNICEF-targeted children reached by weapons-related risk education in 2014 – the first time this data was collected globally – was 2,208,912, but data on targeted population were not available. This will be collected in the remaining life cycle of the Strategic Plan in order to calculate the percentage of targeted children reached.
different outcomes and sectors. Some key research and evaluation efforts to strengthen the evidence base for child protection programming must focus on the cross-cutting needs of particular regions or social groups, rather than on child protection alone. Focusing on the critical stages of a child’s life – in early childhood and the adolescent period – and on cross-cutting issues such as gender, disability and social or ethnic origin emphasize the need to work on a multi-sectoral basis to enhance results for the most excluded children. Most of the programme areas described above will include specific C4D and/or advocacy efforts, but progress in child protection also requires cross-cutting C4D and advocacy, such as efforts to strengthen community dialogue, catalyse child participation in community decision making or to increase the overall focus on children in national budgeting.

6 Key assumptions, risks and mitigation measures

Governments and other stakeholders support goals, targets and indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2016–2030) that relate to preventing and addressing all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse of children, including harmful practices, as well as the promotion of free and universal birth registration within civil registration and vital statistics. UNICEF will work with partners to strengthen evidence-informed advocacy, social mobilization, monitoring, programming and results reporting at global, regional, national and local levels, involving national and local leaders, communities and families for full and effective implementation of the agreed goals, targets and indicators (notably those contained in Goals 5, 8 and 16).

Governments are willing and able to make meaningful financial investments in child protection. The holistic approach to child protection requires investments in human resources and the supply of many different types of services, without which there are gaps that weaken the entire system. For this to occur, political priority must continue to be accorded to children, accompanied by a sufficient budget. To support adequate financial investment in child protection, UNICEF will continue to build the evidence base on the long-term effects of violence and on ‘what works’ to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse in order to strengthen the investment case for child protection. A global partnership for child protection is being discussed among civil society partners, foundations, United Nations Member States and others in the United Nations system to explore ways to build a multi-stakeholder global partnership to support the achievement of draft SDGs related to the protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. It is envisaged that a new global partnership will support nationally led plans.

National and local actors respond positively to efforts to change long-standing social norms and practices that may be culturally sensitive. Many of the issues that UNICEF addresses in its child protection work are sensitive and/or controversial. The organization is broadly recognized as having the legitimacy to tackle topics such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and sexual violence against children, but there have occasionally been efforts to argue that the United Nations and other international actors should not engage on issues that are deemed ‘culturally specific’. UNICEF will continue to advocate for the rights of all children to be respected in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international norms and will continue to work in partnership with local actors to apply culturally relevant solutions aimed at ensuring that all children are protected from violence, exploitation and abuse.
## Overall funding gap for child protection (in US$):

![Bar chart showing resource requirements, estimated funded, and estimated funding gap for child protection (2014–2017)](chart)

### Details of funding gap by programme area 2015–2017 (in US$):

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<th>Programme Area</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Data and child protection</td>
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</table>
Background and additional information


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