

FACT SHEET: The rights of girls

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the rights of all children—without discrimination in any form. It obliges States parties to ensure that each child—boy or girl—within their jurisdiction has all the rights recognized by the Convention. But in many countries and cultures, girls are not always granted equal access to their rights. In fact, despite the near-universal ratification of the Convention, millions of girls today are denied their human rights.

For example, millions of girls are denied a basic education. Millions are subjected to female genital mutilation, early marriage, trafficking and domestic abuse, which in many countries is not even considered a crime. In Bosnia, for example, the rape of girls and women has been documented as a deliberate instrument of war. In Uganda, thousands of girls were brazenly abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, sexually abused and given as wives in payment of debts.

Some 100 million fewer women are alive today than could be expected through the natural patterns of birth and survival in infancy, a reflection of girls' lesser access to nutrition, health care and immunization. Women and girls constitute 70 per cent of the world's poor, a statistic largely attributable to neglect in their access to education. Often kept home to care for the household and younger siblings, girls comprise nearly two thirds of the 130 million children in developing countries not in school. Roughly the same proportion of the nearly 1 billion illiterate adults in the world today are female. It is time to prevent a woman's life cycle from becoming a vicious cycle of neglect, illiteracy and poverty.

UNICEF works to protect and promote the rights of all children, yet in the light of these gender inequalities the organization has developed specific responses to reach girls. In promoting the rights of girls, UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted in 1979). In particular, UNICEF-assisted country programmes seek to ensure basic education for all girls, health care for adolescent girls and the protection of girls from abuse and exploitation. In carrying out its work in this area, UNICEF has collaborated with the NGO Working Group for Girls, an international network of 400 non-governmental organizations for girls, as well as many other community and civil society organizations, specialized agencies and professional and media groups.

UNICEF is firmly committed to the belief that knowledge, above all, is the key to empowering girls, enabling them to become active citizens and strong leaders and to lead productive lives with more choices. UNICEF also believes that education is key in preventing the exploitation of children, including child prostitution and child pornography, contemporary forms of slavery that affect girls in particular. UNICEF supports ratification and implementation of the Convention's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.