THE SITUATION

Around half of Timor-Leste’s population is under the age of 18. This presents an enormous opportunity for adolescent and youth engagement and a significant challenge for protecting the country’s most vulnerable people.

Timor-Leste has made significant progress towards establishing a child protection system and enhancing the participation of children and adolescents. Nonetheless, challenges remain to enhance protection and to increase opportunities for meaningful participation of children in realizing their rights.

Ensuring birth registration of all children remains a challenge with 3 out of 10 children (under 5-year of age, DHS 2016) received birth certificate.

Violence against women and children, including physical and sexual violence, remains an issue. According to the Census 2015, 29 per cent of girls (15-19) have experienced physical or sexual violence since age. Number of physical violence among children is very high, 70 per cent of school children surveyed had reported that they experienced physical violence by a teacher at school in the last 12 months and nearly 99 per cent of these children reported being ‘hurt’ and more than 22 per cent reported being ‘badly hurt’ (Violence against children in and around school settings, (UNICEF Timor-Leste 2015)).
Nearly a quarter of adolescents and youth in Timor-Leste between the ages of 15 and 24 (DHS 2016) are neither working nor at school, and the current support to youth-focused programmes in the country does not adequately address the need of these young people for positive engagement.

**WHY CHILD PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION?**

**Enhancing the protective environment for children:** National child protection systems, protective social practices and children’s empowerment are among the elements that enable countries, communities and families to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

**Founding a democratic future:** Access to civic education and to mechanisms that give adolescents a voice in decision-making make them more likely to engage constructively in democratic processes. When adolescents are included in social and development processes, they can make a greater contribution to building the nation.

**UNICEF’s CONTRIBUTION**

UNICEF has been the key partner to the Government of Timor-Leste in the development of the child protection system in the country. This includes the development of a legal regulatory framework, capacity-building of child protection actors, development of preventive and response services to child victims of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation and raise awareness among children, families, teachers, community-leaders and society at large on child protection issues.

**Policy development**

UNICEF has supported the government in the mapping and assessment of the current child protection system, leading to development of key recommendations and a policy paper to guide the development of a comprehensive, integrated child and family welfare system that was operationalised in 2014.

**Capacity-building for child rights actors**

UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Social Solidarity to build the capacity of child protection actors, including social welfare workers and frontline case workers, to engage with youth offenders and victims in child-sensitive ways. UNICEF has also supported the National Police of Timor-Leste to develop child-friendly investigation materials including the development and integration of modules on child rights and child friendly procedures for judges and magistrate into Legal Training Centre curriculum. In each municipality, UNICEF has assisted the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) to establish child-friendly interview rooms.

**Child rights advocacy**

UNICEF is working in partnership with the Ministry of Social Solidarity to raise awareness of parents, caregivers and local leaders through social mobilisation, contributing to an increased knowledge of child protection issues including supporting for birth registration of children.

**Adolescent Participation and Development**
UNICEF supported the Secretariat of State for Youth and Sport to launch the National Youth Parliament in 2010, providing an opportunity for young people to contribute to national development.

The Ministry of Social Solidarity has worked closely with the alumni of the National Youth Parliament to facilitate the Life Skills Basic Education courses, supported by UNICEF. UNICEF has been working to reach adolescents and young people with essential life skills required to deal with everyday challenges and develop themselves.

PRIORITIES

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provided specific focus on the importance of the engagement of children and youth. UNICEF is working in partnership with government and other stakeholders and faith-based organisations to:

- Boosting completeness of birth registration to more than 90 per cent;
- Further strengthen the child protection systems to provide effective preventive and response services to child victims of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation;
- Improve child-friendly investigation and court services for children in contact with law, in line with international norms;
- Provide young people (in and outside of schools) life skills; and
- Increase opportunities for children and adolescents to participate in decision-making processes that that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard – within the family, the school or the community.