

Child Protection in Timor-Leste

An investment opportunity for private and public donors

unicef 
for every child

The opportunity

The public and private sectors have a major opportunity to enable safe, protective environments that support children's development and well-being in Timor-Leste. This contributes to improving children's health, education and protection, and ensures that they develop and thrive throughout their lives.

Every child has the right to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. To uphold this right, continued investment in protecting children, especially the ones in vulnerable situations, is critical. Child protection systems need to be strengthened to improve capacity building, data collection and analyses, and promote positive social norms among parents, caregivers and communities. Such intensified efforts require expertise, innovation and financial resources to ensure children grow up in safe and protective environments. When they do, entire societies and economies will benefit from healthy, empowered and more productive individuals, families and communities.

Return on investment

- A 2015 study of the social burden and economic impact of violence against children in East Asia and the Pacific found that child maltreatment costs 2 per cent of the region's GDP.¹
- Programmes to reduce child marriage, at about \$3.80 per person, can bring an almost sixfold return on investment and cut child marriage by around a third.²
- Eliminating child marriage could lead to welfare benefits of \$566 billion globally by 2030.³

- An early response of trained social service and welfare officers has a cost-benefit ratio of about 13–14 to 1.⁴
- Home nurse visits to at-risk mothers and newborns offer a cost benefit ratio of about 2.75 to 1, demonstrating the central importance of investing in prevention.⁵

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

UNICEF's child protection programme contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions. People everywhere need to be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives, whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. Conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice remain threats to sustainable development.



¹ Estimating the Economic Burden of Violence against Children in East Asia and the Pacific, UNICEF, June 2015.

² <<https://www.unicef.org/media/59011/file>>

³ <<http://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EICM-Global-Conference-Edition-June-27-FINAL.pdf>>

⁴ <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/icon-pfb/partnerships-and-advocacy/programmes/Documents/Goal%203_Stage%201_ChildProtection_InvestmentCase_web.pdf>

⁵ <<https://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/publication/post-2015-consensus-conflict-and-violence-assessment-hoeffle>>

The challenges

While Timor-Leste has made significant improvements in protecting its children since independence, several challenges continue to negatively impact children's lives.

Many children experience physical, emotional and sexual violence in families, schools and childcare institutions, and adolescent girls by intimate partners:

Around 24 per cent of women (aged 15–49) have experienced sexual violence by age 18, and 31 per cent have experienced it in the past 12 months. In relation to physical violence by a teacher at school, 75 per cent of boys and 67 per cent of girls reported that in the past 12 months, they had experienced being hit, slapped, kicked, pinched or pulled by a teacher.

Child-sensitive justice system is not in place: Children can encounter the law in three ways: as defendants, as victims and/or witnesses, and as persons with a direct interest in proceedings, such as family disputes that might include custody hearings. In the absence of diversion and alternative sentencing measures, many children under 18 end up in detention. The continued absence of a law for a child justice system remains a concerning gap in the government's child rights commitments.

Children deprived of family care: In 2016, an estimated 9 per cent (or 41,000 children) of under-15-year-olds were not living with either biological parent. Nearly one in four households (23 per cent) is providing kinship care, which is a culturally accepted practice. There are 37 institutional care facilities in the country, 22 of which are orphanages. Most children are removed from their families without any formal assessment by the government's child protection authority due to limited coordination with government-mandated social services and weak referral pathways.

Many girls are married before they are 18 years old:

There has been a reduction in the proportion of young women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 18, from almost 19 per cent in 2009 to around 15 per cent in 2016. However, this rate is still quite high.

Too many children are without legal identity: The right to identity is an important human right and is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Birth registration rates are increasing but remain low. Around 60 per cent of children under 5 years of age have their birth registered, but only 29 per cent of children have a birth certificate. The government has identified birth registration as a priority in reducing discrimination, trafficking, statelessness and sexual exploitation.

Children are at risk of being trafficked or exploited:

Timor-Leste is becoming a destination country for women and girls to be subjected to sex trafficking and a source country for adults and children for forced labour. Although the exact numbers are unknown, the main areas of vulnerability are sex trafficking and domestic servitude, commonly due to a promise of better employment or education opportunities.



Say "No" to violence against children.

The solutions

Child protection is the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children.

To provide child protection, local, national and international child protection actors must carry out specific activities that prevent and address all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against all children.

① National laws and policies provide a framework for an effective, adequately resourced child protection system

UNICEF will support lead government agencies to create an enabling legislative, policy and financing environment, and to formulate and implement institutional and legal frameworks to strengthen child protection, prevention and response interventions.

UNICEF is supporting the government in Timor-Leste to strengthen legal reform. UNICEF is providing technical assistance to draft several laws such as the Child Protection Law, the Juvenile Justice Law and the Adoption Law. UNICEF is also supporting the finalization and approval of the Children Code and the National Policy for Alternative Care for Children. Once these laws and policies are drafted, UNICEF will advocate for their approval in the National Parliament.

② Child protection services are increasingly available, adequately staffed and resourced, coordinated and quality-assured

UNICEF will support the broader child protection workforce (social work, welfare, justice, health and social protection), including religious leaders, to gain the knowledge, skills, tools and resources to identify vulnerable children and provide prevention and response services. These services will reach all municipalities, prioritizing urban poor communities and rural poor centres. This will include supporting justice sector agencies to apply principles of child-friendly justice and juvenile crime prevention, while supporting communities to demand and support legal protection for victims and alternatives to detention.

UNICEF is supporting the Government of Timor-Leste to strengthen the social welfare workforce through capacity development programmes that provide social and justice sector staff with internationally accredited and certified tools.

UNICEF is also supporting the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion in strengthening the referral mechanism for child survivors of violence and developing a standard

operating procedure for case management to prevent and respond to violence. As a next step, PRIMERO – an online case management application for social workers, supported globally by UNICEF – will be rolled out in the country.

In addition, new services are being piloted to provide the government and civil society organizations with tools and knowledge to better protect children. For example, the empowered girls' programmes will be scaled up. This programme consists of a life skills curriculum including sexual education, healing activities and safe spaces for survivors of violence.

UNICEF will continue its focus on family reintegration and will work closely with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion and the Institutional Care Facilities to develop capacity building strategies in support of family reintegration.

③ Children, families and communities promote positive social norms and adopt practices that prevent violence and enable effective responses

UNICEF will support government agencies and civil society organizations to gain the knowledge, tools, resources and authority they need to strengthen families by taking to scale the life skills approach in the education curriculum: non-violence in schools, positive parenting interventions and adolescence engagement, as well as other community initiatives.

UNICEF is working closely with the government and civil society organizations to strengthen communities and their capacities to prevent and respond to violence against children. In this regard, UNICEF is supporting the development of the Community-based Child Protection Strategy that will be piloted in the country. This strategy will be a guide for stakeholders to implement community-based child protection interventions. In addition, UNICEF is developing different materials and resources to be disseminated in communities with behaviour change approaches to prevent violence against children.

Furthermore, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion to develop and implement the parenting programme Hametin Familia, reaching thousands of parents around the country by promoting positive parenting and preventing violence. This programme has been integrated in community-based mental health and psychosocial support interventions as part of the Child Friendly Spaces initiative in communities affected by flooding in April 2021.

Impact

By 2025, working with partners in the public and private sectors, UNICEF in Timor-Leste will contribute to the achievement of these key results:



The proportion of children aged 1–17 who experience any **physical punishment and/or psychological aggression** by caregivers is reduced to 10 per cent from the current 71 per cent



The percentage of **men and women** who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise and educate children is reduced to 10 per cent from the current 47 per cent



Child-friendly procedures for **children in contact with law** are in place



70,000 mothers, fathers and caregivers and **140,000 children** are reached through parenting programmes



600 children who have experienced violence are supported with health, social work or justice enforcement services



The number of **social welfare workers** is increased to 700 from the current 222



How to help

UNICEF's work in child protection requires a budget of US\$7.125 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$1.125 million from its resources. Now, UNICEF is seeking partners from both the private and the public sector to financially support its crucial child protection programme with a total amount of US\$6 million. Donors can contribute in two ways:

- 1. Contribute to thematic funds and other flexible funds** – This type of funding targets a specific goal area of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, such as child protection, while enabling the Country Office to direct the investments to activities that are most needed within this thematic area. This gives UNICEF's experts the flexibility to focus on interventions that will have the most impact in accelerating results for children.
- 2. Contribute to specific activities** – If you are interested in contributing to specific solutions, UNICEF is ready to partner with you. UNICEF has developed the following budget for its child protection work for 2022–2025 and can provide more details on any of the interventions listed below.

| SOLUTIONS | BUDGET (US\$) 2022–2025* |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. National laws and policies provide a framework for an effective, adequately resourced child protection system | 1 million |
| 2. Child protection services are increasingly available, adequately staffed and resourced, coordinated and quality-assured | 3 million |
| 3. Children, families and communities promote positive social norms and adopt practices that prevent violence and enable effective response | 2 million |

*Detailed budgets for each solution are available.

UNICEF's work in child protection requires a budget of US\$7.125 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$1.125 million from its resources.

Strategies deployed under each solution focus on child protection system strengthening and include:

- **Capacity development:** Technical assistance, development of materials, training aids, information, education and communication materials, workshops, social mobilization and community empowerment
- **Institution building:** Technical assistance, development of plans, institutional mechanisms and tools, guidelines, protocols and standards, coordination, oversight strengthening, management information systems, resourcing and budgeting
- **Evidence generation:** Situation analysis, research, studies, surveys, evaluation, assessments, generation of profiles, and knowledge management
- **Policy dialogue and advocacy:** Strategy and policy formulation, promotion of partnerships, study visits and exchanges, South/South cooperation, partnership building and media outreach
- **Service delivery:** Procurement, distribution of supplies and equipment, logistics, transportation, warehousing, infrastructure, direct assistance, cash grants, monitoring and innovations





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Preventing violence and child abuse through play in Timor-Leste

UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Spaces ensure psychosocial well-being for children

The sound of children singing echoes in the still mid-afternoon in a suburb of Timor-Leste's capital, Dili. The children, aged 2 to 14 years, clap, stomp their feet, dance and sing on the porch of a small house down a winding street in the Tasi Tolu (Three Beaches) area of the city.

The children are taking part in mental health and psychosocial support activities under the Child Friendly Space (CFS) initiative organized by the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion, UNICEF and the non-governmental organization Ba Futuru (For the Future).

A year ago, the neighbourhood was hit by devastating floods, the worst Timor-Leste has experienced in several decades. Some gang-related violence had also been reported in the area, and COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions meant children were unable to move outside the community to meet friends. Children were traumatized during these times, according to parents.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not go far, and we had to escape the floods, too," says Angelina Menes, who has children aged 5 and 9. "But now my children look forward to the CFS activities. They sing, dance, are safe and happier."

UNICEF has supported the establishment of 15 such child-friendly spaces across Dili Municipality. In total, over 1,600 children between the ages of 2 and 14 years take part in these community-based mental health and psychosocial support activities.

The CFS plays an essential protective role for children in adverse circumstances, providing children a safe place to gather for play, self-expression and learning, ensuring their mental health and psychosocial well-being. In Dili, the children participating in the community-based CFS perform daily psychosocial activities, such as breathing, grounding, expressing with art, dancing, singing and playing, and learning how to cope with difficult situations, to be thankful and to feel safe.

We hope you are inspired to join us and take a leading role in protecting all Timorese children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. If you have any questions or would like more details, please contact:

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