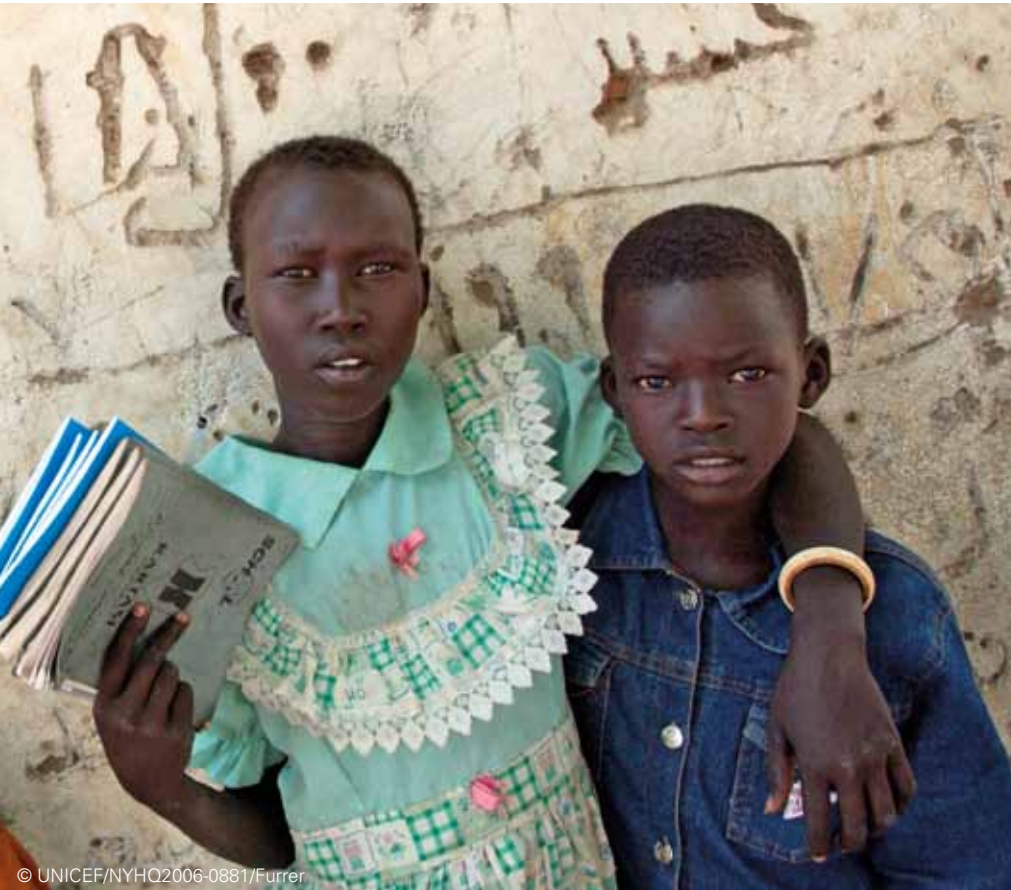


Child Protection



“I want protection if I am less than 18 years old. I should not be forced to marry, but to concentrate on my education.”

Name protected,
16-year-old girl

ISSUE

Children in South Sudan continue to be at risk of many violations, stemming from the impact of the armed conflict that ravaged the country for more than 20 years. The civil war has destroyed the social fabric of communities and many children have been left without the protection of caring adults. This is exposing them to high levels of violence, including gender-based violence, exploitation, abuse and deprivation.

Thousands of children in South Sudan do not have parents, and some of them have been targeted for recruitment by armed forces and groups. Around 1,500¹ of these children are yet to be released. There are also increasing reports of children without appropriate family care working and living on the streets in major cities and towns; many of these children are at risk of getting into contact with the law. Child abduction is particularly common among some nomadic and pastoral communities, and remains one of the major reasons for inter-communal clashes.

¹ According to the South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission.



The heavy presence of landmines means that many children are in danger of severe injury or death on a daily basis. Displacement, increased poverty, reduced opportunities for socialization, play and education, coupled with uncertainty, all undermine the protective environment for children and young people.

The enactment and dissemination of the Child Act has been a major achievement for the Government of South Sudan in protecting and promoting child rights in the past three years. However, putting the Child Act into practice remains a challenge and the Independent Child Commission, responsible for overseeing implementation, is yet to be formed.

UNICEF IN ACTION

UNICEF uses the following four **strategic approaches** to strengthen the protective environment for boys, girls and young people:

1. Promoting Justice for Children – through the provision of accessible, effective and quality protection services to children who are in contact with the law. UNICEF supports those children particularly vulnerable to abuse, neglect and violence by working with Special Protection Units at police stations and by strengthening social welfare services, and actors within the judiciary.

2. Support to Community-based Programmes for the Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict – This includes preventing the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups; supporting the release and reintegration of children who are still associated with armed forces and groups; preventing and responding to violence against children, including gender-based violence; protecting children from harmful traditional practices; protecting children from abduction, including by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); providing psychosocial support services, family tracing and reunification of separated and unaccompanied children; providing family-based care services for children without parental care, including children who live and work on the streets; strengthening community support groups to enhance the protection of children; and supporting the provision of mine risk education to protect children from landmines and explosive remnants of war.

3. Advocacy and support for the implementation of the Child Act; the protection of children associated with armed forces and groups; introduction of social a protection programme as a poverty reduction measure; development of the civil registration system



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with a focus on birth registration; and the protection and fulfilment of children's rights.

4. Capacity development of key actors within the social welfare, legal systems and the judiciary, lawmakers and law enforcement agents at national and state level, community-based child protection workers, children, young people, families and communities.

The programme has contributed to the following **key achievements**:

- **Enactment and dissemination of the Child Act.** More than 200,000 government officials, community members and children have received information on the Act and the use of the framework to enhance the legal protection of children.
- **Strengthened social welfare system** through the training of social workers in the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the State Ministries of Social Development.
- In the last five years, UNICEF has supported the **release and reintegration** of more than 3,500 children who have been associated with armed forces or groups.
- In the last two years more than 50,000 children and young people affected by armed conflict have received **protection services**, including psychosocial support.
- In the last two years more than 275,000 key actors in child protection in the national and state government, UN, international and national NGOs, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and communities have received **information and education** on how best to protect children from landmines, violence, abuse and exploitation.

Challenges

Many challenges hinder the implementation of child protection interventions in South Sudan. For example, the limited number and capacity of professional social workers in nascent government services, with few based on the ground at state and county level, is a key constraint. Conflicts between community and ethnic groups continue to threaten children, while the lack of access to education, extreme poverty, a weak legal and judicial system, and an over-reliance on customary law practices makes children more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Violence and discrimination against women and girls, which is rooted in cultural norms, traditions and practices, and the destruction of traditional community-based protection mechanisms due to the civil war are all factors that continue to pose challenges in the implementation of child protection programmes.



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PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF works in partnership with the Ministries of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Justice and Interior, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the Ministries for Social Development at state level, the South Sudan Police Service, the South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the South Sudan Demining Authority, UNMIS Child Protection Section, UNMAO, UNDP, UNHCR and UNFPA, international and local NGOs, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations.

PLANNED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

Over the period 2012–13, UNICEF aims to build on the achievements of the previous years to continue strengthening child protection policy and legislative framework and programmes in South Sudan.

The overall programme result for the UNICEF Child Protection Programme is to ensure that children and adolescents, particularly those affected by conflict and emergencies, have access to quality child welfare services in a strengthened protective environment.

To achieve this result, special efforts will be made to support the government in the following:

- Development of a policy framework and system for **civil registration with a focus on birth registration**.
- Continued implementation of the Child Act 2008 to promote the **legal and social protection for children and young people**.
- Strengthening **child-sensitive justice systems** for the protection of boys, girls and young people who come into contact with the law.
- Development of **child protection systems** for more comprehensive prevention and response to violence, abuse and exploitation of children.
- More than 350,000 boys, girls and young people affected by landmines, HIV/AIDS, early marriage, abduction, conflict and other emergencies will benefit from **improved and equitable community-based reintegration assistance and child welfare services**.

ESSENTIAL STATISTICS

Orphaned children	17% of children have at least one dead parent.
Birth registration	Overall, the births of 35.3% of children under five are registered and 30% have a birth certificate.
Early marriage	40.1% of young women aged 15–19 are married or in a relationship. 6.9% of girls are married before their 15th birthday; 44.8% between 16 and 18 years of age.

Source: Summary finding of Sudan Health Household Survey (SHHS) 2010 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey



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