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# CHILD PROTECTION

## UNICEF Country Programme 2016-2018

### Situation

All children have the right to be protected. Yet in Cambodia, the situation is dire for many. One in two children have experienced severe beating, one in four children have experienced emotional abuse, and 1 in 20 girls and boys have been sexually assaulted. Many children are trafficked, forced to work, separated from their families or unnecessarily placed in residential care institutions.

Violence cuts deep into children’s physical and mental health. In addition to short-term impacts, such as physical injury and emotional trauma, experiencing violence in childhood can also lead to a number of emotional and behavioural problems in adolescence and adulthood.

Family separation is one of the leading challenges to protecting children. It is caused by poverty and parents’ lack of knowledge of the negative consequences of placing children in residential care. Three in four children living in residential care institutions have at least one parent who is known to be alive.

Children from broken families are at great risk of becoming one of the many thousands of children living or working on the streets. Children on the streets are at risk of violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, dangerous child labour and exploitation, and have heightened exposure to drug use, unsafe sexual activities and gang crime. It is estimated that 1 in 10 children are engaged in child labour and 4 in 10 cases of trafficking are linked to sexual exploitation.

Despite the vast number and severity of protection issues children face, Cambodia’s child protection

system is largely underfunded and understaffed. The Government’s budget for child protection is limited and relies heavily on donor funding.

### Key Partners in Child Protection

UNICEF’s main implementing partners are: Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation; Ministry of Justice; Cambodian National Police; Ministry of Women’s Affairs; Ministry of Cults and Religion; Cambodian National Council for Children; Friends International; the Partnership for the Protection of Children (3PC); Improving Cambodia’s Society through Skillful Parenting (ICS-SP); National Community-based Disability Rehabilitation; and the NGO Network for Child Protection.

UNICEF’s donors and development partners are: USAID and the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund; the Government of Canada and the Together for Girls Partnership; the Global Partnership for Ending Violence Against Children; 7: The David Beckham UNICEF Fund; UNICEF National Committees in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Norway and the Netherlands; UN Women; the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime; the United Nations Population Fund; the World Health Organization; the International Labour Organization; and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Family Care First Cambodia.

# 1

## Keeping Children in Families

Despite government policy that residential care should be a last resort and temporary solution for children, the number of children in residential care almost doubled from 6,254 in 2005 to 11,453 in 2014. The actual figure is estimated to be much higher as institutions in Cambodia often operate without registration or inspection by government authorities.

Decades of research show that living in residential care can harm children's social, physical, intellectual and emotional development. In particular, children who are placed in residential care institutions in their early childhood are at risk of being deprived of critical social and emotional development, which can affect their future learning abilities.

Many children in residential care institutions come from families who cannot afford to feed, clothe or educate them. Poor families are sometimes coerced or manipulated into giving up their children by operators who hope to profit from the residential care home or by trafficking children. Despite their best intentions, some donors and foreign volunteers have unwittingly increased the number of profit-seeking residential care homes by funding their operations and paying high fees to conduct altruistic activities—a practice known as “orphanage tourism” or “voluntourism.”

UNICEF aims to strengthen the capacity of national and provincial level authorities to develop and implement institutional and legal frameworks, and action plans for child protection interventions. The plans also include deinstitutionalizing and reintegrating children in residential care back to their families or communities.

### What We Do

- Support NGOs to return one in three children in residential care back to their families or communities and promote more child-friendly and community-based alternative care practices
- Provide technical advice to the Government to reform key policies, plans and procedures related to alternative care
- Train social workers to support effective case management, family-preservation approaches and alternatives to institutional care

# 2

## Protecting Children from Violence

Violence against girls and boys in Cambodia is rooted in social traditions and norms that have been negatively affected by the recent civil war, which fractured families and communities, and destroyed many positive child care practices. As a result, perpetrators of violence often find it difficult to change their behaviour when the norms and behaviours that prevail in their community remain unchallenged.

Violence against women is another factor that propels violence against children and transmits violence from one generation to the next. Girls and boys who grow up observing women subjected to physical violence are more likely to justify the replication of violent behaviour as victims or perpetrators.

Child victims of violence suffer adverse life-long consequences. This includes developing learning difficulties and a tendency to engage in high-risk behaviours, such as drug and alcohol abuse, which can impact negatively on their physical health.

Violence against children not only causes emotional and physical harm to children, but also a financial burden on Cambodia's economy. The annual economic burden of some of the health consequences of violence against children in Cambodia is estimated to be at least US\$168 million—more than 1 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Annual productivity losses due to childhood violence is estimated to be around US\$83.3 million.

UNICEF aims to strengthen the child protection system to prevent and respond to violence against girls and boys. At the national level, UNICEF provides technical support to a coordinating committee on violence against children—comprised of 13 government agencies and NGO partners—to develop and implement a five-year action plan, which will be implemented in five provinces.

### What We Do

- Support NGOs to provide essential violence prevention and response services to around 8,000 children per year
- Strengthen the child protection system to develop and implement a costed inter-ministerial action plan to prevent and respond to violence against girls and boys
- Establish and roll out a national Child Protection Information Management System

# 3

## Strengthening Child Protection and Broader Social Services

Limited government financing for child protection, including for alternative care and child justice, are compromising efforts to protect children in Cambodia. The number of children in jail has increased despite efforts to promote alternatives to detention and child-friendly justice procedures.

Low budget allocations for child protection have resulted in a very thin spread of social services at the sub-national level. The Ministry of Interior estimates that Cambodia has a ratio of 1 social worker to 25,000 people. Many districts do not have any social workers.

NGOs have worked to fill some of these gaps. However, their coverage is limited and coordination needs to be improved to meet the varying needs in different provinces.

UNICEF works with the Partnership Programme for the Protection of Children (3PC)—a network of 10 NGOs, 5 technical partners and 40 network partners to expand and strengthen child protection services through capacity building and knowledge sharing. Working under government oversight, 3PC recognizes the different roles that NGOs, the Government and development partners can play to protect the most vulnerable children in Cambodia.

UNICEF aims to strengthen the capacity of social service providers in the areas of health, education, justice and child protection to provide quality services that protect girls and boys who are vulnerable and exposed to violence, those separated from their families or at risk of separation, and those being deinstitutionalized from residential care and reintegrated back to family- or community-based care.

Under 3PC, between 2012 and 2015, some 40,000 children and 20,000 families were reached with essential services to prevent and respond to violence. In addition, more than 2,000 members of the public have been trained and equipped with the skills and knowledge to protect and respond to violence against children. They have been certified as “Child Safe.”



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### What We Do

- Strengthen 3PC and community-based rehabilitation for children with disabilities to provide child protection services, including in emergencies, and to reintegrate children back to their communities
- Advocate for law reforms to protect children, including children in conflict with the law
- Train the police and NGOs in child-friendly justice mechanisms for reporting, referring and responding to child survivors of violence and children in contact with the law
- Protect children affected by disasters such as floods, droughts and unexploded remnants of war (landmines and bombs), and build children’s resilience to disasters through improved disaster preparedness and response plans
- Train teachers to implement positive discipline practices and protect girls and boys from abuse in at least 800 primary schools
- Train health workers to screen, treat, report and refer children subjected to violence and sexual abuse

# 4 Empowering Communities to Protect Children

Children can be exposed to violence in all spheres of their lives, even in spaces where they should feel safe and protected, such as at home, school and in the community. Parents and caregivers have the greatest potential to protect children and ensure their physical and emotional safety. Yet many lack the capacity and resources to fulfil their duty of care.

Children who experience violence are often afraid to speak out or look for assistance because of shame or fear of being blamed by adults, including their parents and caregivers. Neighbours often turn a blind eye and believe that the violence is a family or 'private' matter, not a crime.

Communities play a critical role in keeping families together, protecting children from violence and ensuring that they thrive in a safe environment. Caregivers who are introduced to positive parenting approaches can promote positive social norms and values and non-violent behaviour. Communities that are informed about the importance of keeping children out of residential care institutions are more likely to support families to raise their children in the community. Similarly, well-respected religious figures who are uniquely positioned to challenge existing social norms and behaviours can prevent violence against children and unnecessary family separation.

UNICEF aims to strengthen the capacity of commune councils and religious leaders to protect girls and boys vulnerable to and exposed to violence, and those separated from their family, or at risk of separation.

## What We Do

- Conduct behavioural change campaigns to prevent and respond to violence against children and unnecessary family separation
- Train key caregivers and community leaders to promote the protection of children from violence and unnecessary family separation, including in emergencies
- Support the implementation of the national strategic framework on positive parenting practices to prevent violence and unnecessary family separation
- Design the Child Protection Pagoda Programme to make pagodas safe for children, and equip monks with the knowledge to prevent and respond to violence against children in communities and prevent children from unnecessarily being placed in residential care

The Child Protection programme addresses Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



# 5

## Action for Adolescents

More than 60 per cent of Cambodia's population is below 25 years of age, with 22 per cent between the ages of 15 and 24. While Cambodia's young population provides great potential for the country to benefit from a young work force, in reality, many adolescents face multiple threats to their safety and wellbeing that arise from socio-economic barriers and exposure to various risks.

Adolescents (aged 10 to 19) who are removed from the safety net of their families and communities are more inclined to adopt unsafe practices, such as substance abuse, criminal behaviour and unprotected sex. They are also more likely to become victims of sexual abuse, exploitative and dangerous labour, trafficking, health problems, and communicable diseases, such as HIV and AIDS. Approximately 39,000 adolescents are living with HIV.

Socio-economic factors have resulted in low education achievement among adolescents, with only 4 out of 10 people in Cambodia having completed lower-secondary school. Low education attainment presents a challenge for Cambodia to build good human capital, while its social consequences have life-long impacts for adolescents.

Child marriage and teenage pregnancy is a major health concern that puts both mothers and children at high risk of illness and death. Research shows that the chances of child marriage and teenage pregnancy increase with lower education attainment among women, with the rate higher among girls from ethnic minorities. In Cambodia, one in three women, aged 15 to 19, who have never attended school have begun childbearing. Childbearing during teenage years curtails education and employment opportunities for women and passes on poverty to the next generation.

UNICEF is working to implement age and gender-appropriate interventions to reduce child marriage and promote safe behaviour among adolescents. Education



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programmes are giving adolescents in urban poor communities and out-of-school adolescents a second chance to enter back into the formal education system. UNICEF also works closely with adolescent and youth organizations to equip them with the knowledge to participate in discussions and policy dialogues on issues that affect them.

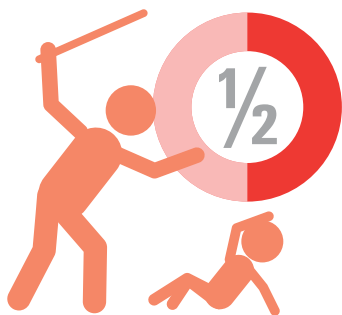
### What We Do

- Conduct community-based life skills and peer education programmes to reach adolescents with messages that promote safe and protective behaviours and practices
- Work with 3PC to scale up remedial education activities to reach more out-of-school adolescents and facilitate their entry back into the formal education system
- Mobilize civil society and community-based interventions and coordinate action with local authorities to reduce teenage pregnancy and early marriage in minority communities
- Work with the Adolescent and Youth Reference Group to contribute to policy dialogue and programme development for child protection and broader child rights

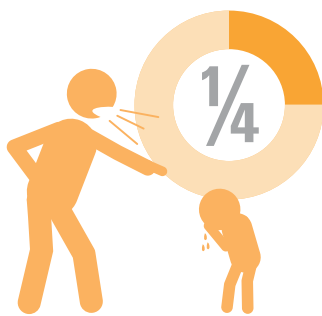
### Estimated Budget Required for the Child Protection Programme

<b>3,934,000</b> US\$	<b>3,933,000</b> US\$	<b>3,933,000</b> US\$	<b>11,800,000</b> US\$
2016	2017	2018	<b>Total</b>

## Fast Facts: Child Protection



1 in 2 children have experienced **severe beating**.



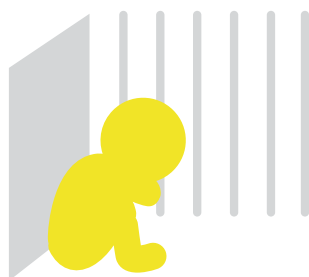
1 in 4 children have experienced **emotional abuse**.



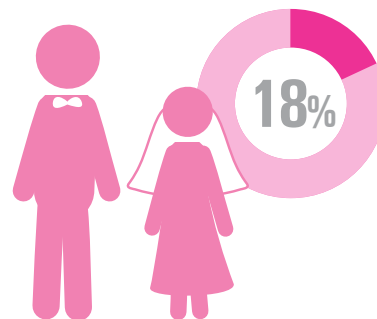
1 in 20 girls and boys under the age of 18 have been **sexually assaulted**.



3 out of 4 children living in **residential care** institutions had at least one parent who was known to be alive.



9 in 100,000 children (aged 14-17) are in **detention**.



18 per cent of women (aged 20-24) were **married** by the age of 18.

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