



# Invisible Children

## Children risk becoming 'invisible' if their right to protection is unmet

The root causes of exclusion – extreme poverty, poor governance, armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, inequalities and discrimination – have pernicious consequences beyond excluding children from essential services. They also foster conditions that heighten the risk of children being exploited, neglected, trafficked or abused. The breakdown in the rule of law that often accompanies armed conflict, for example, can leave children exposed to sexual violence or exploitation. Children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS are not only at greater risk of missing out on an education, they may also face stigmatization and neglect in their communities. Those who traffic children look not in the rich suburbs but in the slums and among the most destitute for their victims.

By ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments pledged to safeguard children from harm, abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. Yet for millions of children, the violation of this right to protection is the main cause of their exclusion. Many of them could claim membership in more than one of the groups considered in this chapter. For example, many children engaged in forced, hazardous and exploitative labour have been trafficked, while large proportions of all the children considered will not have been registered at birth. Marginalized and excluded, children suffering from violations of their right to protection have collided with the very worst elements of adult experience, from prostitution to hazardous labour, so that the only element of their childhood that remains is that which makes them more vulnerable, more exploitable.

Children are visible in their families, communities and societies when their rights are

## SUMMARY

**ISSUE:** At the extremes, children can become invisible, in effect disappearing from view within their families, communities and societies and to governments, donors, civil society, the media and even other children. For millions of children, the main cause of their invisibility is violations of their right to protection. Firm evidence of the extent of these violations is hard to acquire, but several factors appear central to increasing the risk of children becoming invisible: the lack or loss of formal identification; inadequate State protection for children without parental care; the exploitation of children through trafficking and forced labour; and premature entry of children into adult roles such as marriage, hazardous labour and combat. Children affected by these factors include those not registered at birth, refugees and displaced children, orphans, street children, children in detention, children in early marriages, hazardous labour or combat, and trafficked and indentured children.

**ACTION:** Making children visible requires creating a protective environment for them. The key elements of a protective environment include:

- Strengthening the capacity of families and communities to care for and protect children.
- Government commitment to child protection by providing budgetary support and social welfare policies targeted at the most excluded and invisible children.
- Ratification and implementation of legislation, both national and international, concerning children's rights and protection.
- Prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against children, and avoidance of criminalizing child victims.
- An open discussion by civil society and the media of attitudes, prejudices, beliefs and practices that facilitate or lead to abuses.
- Ensuring that children know their rights, are encouraged to express them and are given vital life skills and information to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.
- Availability of basic social services to all children without discrimination.
- Monitoring, transparent reporting and oversight of abuses and exploitation.

Key to building the protective environment is responsibility: All members of society can contribute to ensuring that children do not become invisible. While families and the State have the primary responsibility for protecting children, ongoing and sustained efforts by individuals and organizations at all levels are essential to break patterns of abuse.

fully met, and they are provided with essential services and protection from harm. Their visibility diminishes, however, when they are deprived of parental care or face violence or abuse within the home. They also risk becoming less visible within their communities and societies when they do not attend school, are locked away in a workplace or are otherwise exploited, suffer abuse or violence outside the family environment, or are simply not viewed or treated as children. Children may effectively disappear from official view if their very existence and identity is not legally or formally acknowledged and recorded by the state or if they are routinely omitted from statistical surveys, policies and programmes. But we can also be blind to children's plight even when they are right in front of our eyes, as is the case with children living and working on the streets. All of these children, without exception, require a level of protection that the world, until now, has manifestly failed to deliver.

At the extremes, these children in effect disappear from everybody's view – they become invisible in their communities and societies. Firm evidence on the extent of the protection violations that increase the risk of children becoming invisible is hard to acquire, but four factors appear central to many of them: the lack or loss of a formal identity; inadequate State protection for children without parental care; the exploitation of children through trafficking and forced labour; and children's premature entry into adult roles, such as marriage, hazardous labour and combat. While these factors are not the only ones that cause children to become invisible, they are certainly among the most significant, with consequences that often extend far beyond the years of childhood.

### **Loss or lack of a formal identity or documentation**

Every child is entitled to a formal identity, including birth registration, the right to acquire a nationality and the right to know and be cared for by their parents. The Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear, in Articles 7 and 8, that it is the duty of governments to ensure that these rights are respected and enforced.

Without formal registration at birth or identification documents, children may find themselves excluded from access to vital services, such as education, health care and social security. Reuniting families separated from their children through natural disaster, displacement or exploitation, such as trafficking, is often complicated by a lack of formal documentation. Though many children may face exclusion because they do not possess identity documents, the two groups that appear most at risk are those unregistered at birth and those who have been displaced or separated from their families.

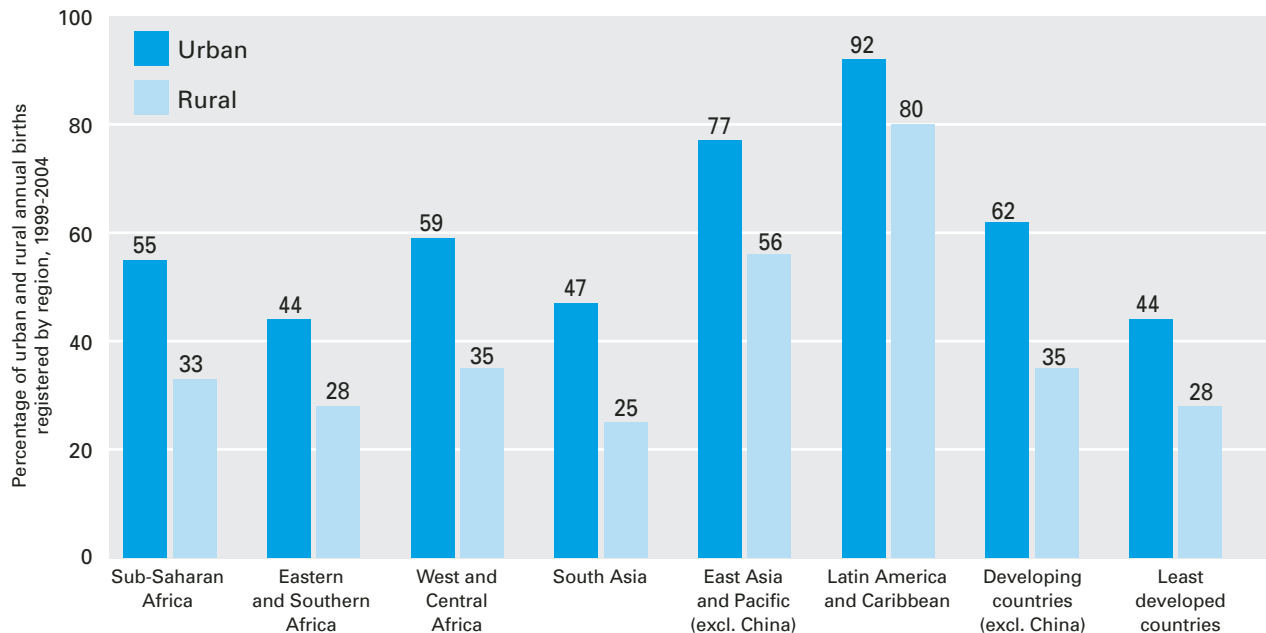
### **Without birth registration, children are invisible in official statistics**

Exclusion operates from the very beginning of life for the estimated 48 million children in 2003 – 36 per cent of total births that year – whose birth went unregistered.<sup>1</sup> Having a child's identity officially acknowledged and registered is a fundamental human right, as stipulated by Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Registration enables a child to obtain a birth certificate, which is the most visible evidence of a government's legal recognition of the child as a member of society. A birth certificate is also proof of the child's fundamental relationship with parents and, generally, also determines nationality.

Birth registration may be needed for access to services later in life, from a place in school to treatment in a hospital. Cases of child marriage where the spouse is believed to be underage but the exact age cannot be firmly established are almost impossible to prosecute. Children who are unregistered at birth may also miss out on any protection that exists against premature conscription into the armed forces or, if they come into conflict with the law, against prosecution and punishment as adults. When they grow up, they may be unable to apply for a formal job or a passport, open a bank account, get a marriage license or vote. A birth certificate may also be needed to obtain social security, family allowances, credit and a pension.<sup>2</sup>

Although most countries have mechanisms for registering births, the number of births actually registered varies from country to

**Figure 3.1: Birth registration\* in the developing world**



\* **Birth registration:** Percentage of children under 5 years of age who were registered at the time of the survey. The numerator of this indicator includes children whose birth certificate was seen by the interviewer or whose mother or caretaker says the birth has been registered.

**Regional averages:** These aggregates do not include all countries in each region. However, sufficient data covering more than 50 per cent of the target population was available to generate the averages for the regions shown. Averages for East Asia and Pacific and the developing countries do not include China.

**Data range:** Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

**Source:** Multiple Indicator Clusters Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys.

country based on infrastructure, administrative capacity, available funds, access to the population and technology for data management. The value of birth registration is often overlooked due to the continuing lack of awareness that registration is a critical measure to secure the recognition of every person before the law, to safeguard their rights and to ensure that any violation of these rights does not go unnoticed.<sup>3</sup>

Registration may not be seen as important by society at large, by a government facing severe economic difficulties, by a country at war or by families struggling with day-to-day survival. It is often considered to be no more than a legal formality, unrelated to child development, health, education or protection. Other factors that influence birth registration levels include the existence of an adequate legislative framework, enforcement of existing legislation on birth registration, sufficient infrastructure to support the legis-

tical aspects of registration and the barriers that families can encounter during registration, such as fees and distance to the nearest registration centre.<sup>4</sup>

According to the latest UNICEF estimates, on average over half – 55 percent – of births in the developing world (excluding China) each year go unregistered, a proportion that rises to 62 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup> In South Asia, the share is higher still, at 70 per cent. Almost half the children in the world who are denied their right to a legal identity at birth live in this region: In Bangladesh, only 7 per cent of all children are registered at birth. There is wide variation in levels of birth registration, from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, where virtually 100 per cent of births were registered in 2004, to Afghanistan, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania, where the rate is less than 7 per cent.<sup>6</sup>



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During the same year, the total number of people displaced within their own countries by conflict or human rights violations amounted to roughly 25 million.<sup>10</sup>

Refugee and internally displaced children face many risks, given the violence and uncertainty surrounding both their flight and their lives in the country and/or place of asylum. They may become separated from their families, lose their homes and find themselves living in poor conditions that jeopardize their health and education.

Displacement complicates birth registration and the issuance of travel documents, thereby compromising displaced persons' right to an identity. Both refugees and internally displaced people may have been forced to leave their homes without proper documentation, making it difficult to establish their identities. They may, therefore, be unable to prove their right to receive basic social services, such as education or health care, or to work in a different part of the country.<sup>11</sup>

The loss of family protection, and inadequate resources to address the needs and challenges that refugee and internally displaced children face, can leave them at significant risk of military recruitment by armed groups and forces, abuse and sexual exploitation. Girls are especially at risk of abduction, trafficking and sexual violence, including rape used as a weapon of war.

Where the displacement is long term and the affected children have a different ethnic or linguistic background from people in the host locality, they may face discrimination and be deterred from school attendance as a result.<sup>12</sup> Upon return, both internally displaced people and refugees may find their homes and their land taken over by others, including local authorities, and may not be able to prove their ownership of their property. They may also be rejected by their own communities because they fled during the crisis or violence while others remained.<sup>13</sup>

Primary responsibility for both refugee and displaced children lies with national governments. However, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a mandate to assist

Unregistered births can serve as an indicator of other forms of social marginalization and disparity within countries or territories. Unregistered children are more likely to be the children of the poor: According to household surveys from 2003, in the United Republic of Tanzania children born into families in the richest 20 per cent of the population are over 10 times more likely to be registered than those living in the poorest 20 per cent of households.<sup>7</sup> Location is also an important constraint on registration: Rural children are 1.7 times more likely to be unregistered than their urban peers. Other factors that contribute to disparities in birth registration include mothers' education, loss of parents, religion and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Refugee and displaced children and women often lack visibility in their place of refuge**

At the end of 2004, roughly 48 per cent of all refugees worldwide were children.<sup>9</sup>

and protect refugees, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has a mandate to assist internally displaced people if displacement is a result of armed conflict and internal violence. Unlike refugees, however, internally displaced persons are not protected by specific international conventions but only by a set of guiding principles that are morally, not legally, binding.

The international community and UNHCR have developed a wealth of international norms, policies and guidelines to improve the protection and care of refugee women and children. In practice, however, there is still a gap in their application and implementation, due to resource constraints (both financial and human) and to uneven priorities and accountability at the level of institutions, as well as within the international community.<sup>14</sup> When governments (both of donor countries and countries that have internally displaced people or host refugees) and the collaborative international response fail to allocate resources and implement effective interventions targeted at displaced women and children, these groups risk being excluded and becoming invisible within their place of refuge.

### **Inadequate state protection for children requiring special assistance**

Families have the primary responsibility for caring for and protecting their children. But for numerous reasons – the loss of parents, separation related to displacement, domestic violence and abuse, extreme poverty, among others – many children are deprived of a loving, caring family environment. When, for whatever reason, family protection for children breaks down, States parties are obliged under Articles 20 and 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide them with special protection and assistance.

### **State failure to protect children without parental care leaves them vulnerable and, often, invisible**

For all too many children, this assistance is not forthcoming. Instead, they have to fend for themselves in the adult world. It is no

surprise, then, that they often find themselves at risk of exclusion from essential services and of being exploited.

Children who lack family protection, on a temporary or permanent basis, are not the only groups of children that States parties have pledged to provide with special care and attention. States are also bound under Articles 20 and 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children who are already in their care, for example, in institutions or detention. In the latter case, it is the government's duty to preserve the dignity and worth of children who have infringed the law. Again, the evidence available suggests that children in detention risk being underserved by governments.

This section examines the risk of invisibility for three key groups of children who require special assistance from State parties and who often lack that protection: orphaned children, street children, and children in detention.

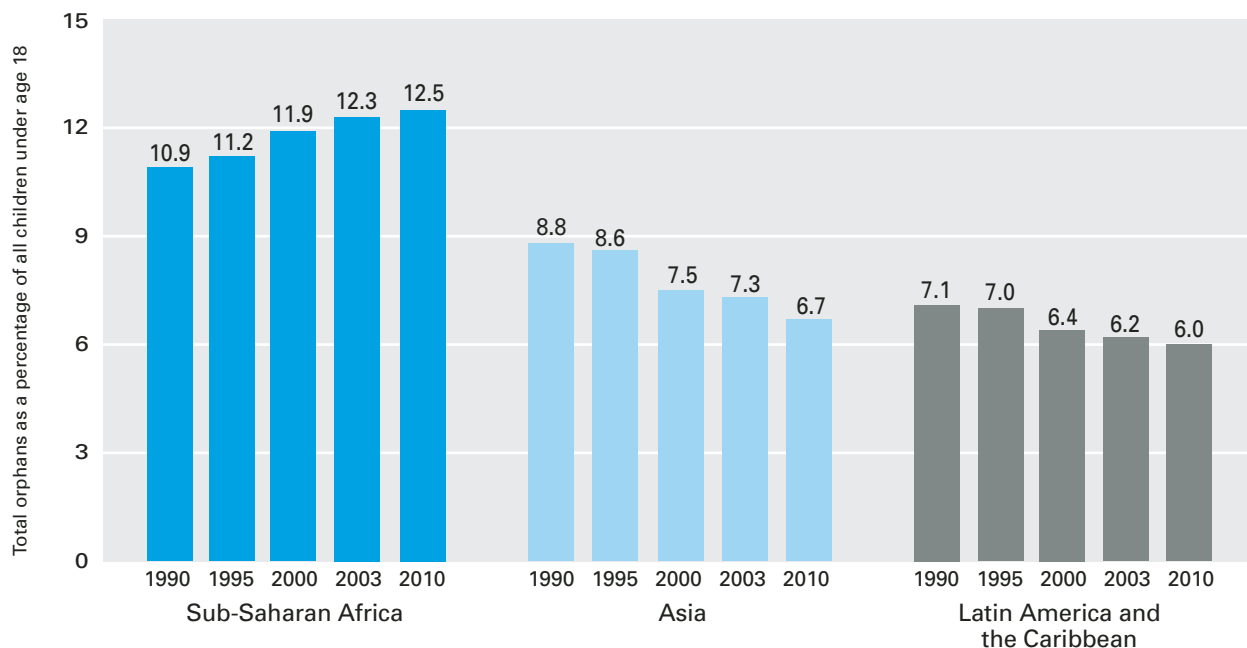
### **Loss of parents can leave children less visible and less protected**

Increasing numbers of children are forced by the death of one or both parents to assume responsibility, not only for their own lives, but also for those of their younger siblings, often with tragic consequences for their rights and development.

At the end of 2003, there were an estimated 143 million orphans<sup>15</sup> under the age of 18 in 93 developing countries.<sup>16</sup> More than 16 million children were orphaned in 2003 alone. A major contributing factor to these alarming figures is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, without which the global number of orphans would be expected to decline.<sup>17</sup>

Education is often among the first casualties for an orphan. Children may drop out of school because the domestic burdens upon them become too great or because new caregivers within their community or extended family are unprepared to meet the costs attached to education. If that happens, they also become more exposed to exclusion from other services, including vital information about health, nutrition and life skills,

**Figure 3.2: Orphaned children under age 18 in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean**



**Note:** Total orphans are children under age 18 whose mothers or fathers (or both) have died. The figures for 2010 are projections.

**Source:** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Children's Fund, United States Agency for International Development, *Children on the Brink 2004: A joint report of new orphan estimates and a framework for action*, UNAIDS/UNICEF/USAID, New York, July 2004.

such as how to help protect themselves from violence and abuse.

Orphaned children are much more vulnerable to protection violations. The death of a parent, in situations where no adequate alternative care systems are in place, opens up a protection gap. Children living on their own are at much greater risk of abuse and exploitation. Assessments by the International Labour Organization (ILO) have found that orphaned children are much more likely than non-orphans to be working in commercial agriculture, as street vendors, in domestic service and in the sex trade. In the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, for example, 28 per cent of the child domestic workers interviewed in one study were orphaned.<sup>18</sup> A study of children working – many in prostitution – in Zambia found that one third were single or double orphans.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Though physically visible, street children are often ignored, shunned and excluded**

Street children are among the most physically visible of all children, living and working

on the roads and public squares of cities all over the world. Yet, paradoxically, they are also among the most invisible and, therefore, hardest children to reach with vital services, such as education and health care, and the most difficult to protect.

The term 'street children' is problematic as it can be employed as a stigmatizing label. One of the greatest problems such children face is their demonization by mainstream society as a threat and a source of criminal behaviour. Yet many children living or working on the streets have embraced the term, considering that it offers them a sense of identity and belonging. The umbrella description is convenient shorthand, but it should not obscure the fact that the many children who live and work on the street do so in multifarious ways and for a range of reasons – and each of them is unique, with their own, often strongly felt, points of view.<sup>20</sup>

The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that the numbers are

increasing as the global population grows and as urbanization continues apace: 6 out of 10 urban dwellers are expected to be under 18 years of age in 2005.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, every city in the world has some street children, including the biggest and richest cities of the industrialized world.

Most street children are not orphans. Many are still in contact with their families and work on the streets to augment the household income. Many others have run away from home, often in response to psychological, physical or sexual abuse. The majority are male, as girls seem to endure abusive or exploitative situations at home longer (though once they do leave their home and family, they are generally less likely to return).<sup>23</sup>

Once on the street, children become vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse, and their daily lives are likely to be far removed from the ideal childhood envisioned in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In some cases, those who are entrusted to protect them become the perpetrators of crimes against them. Street children often find themselves in conflict with the police and other authorities and have been harassed or beaten by them. They have been rounded up, driven outside city limits and left there. And they have been murdered by vigilantes in the name of ‘cleaning up the city’, often with the complicity or disregard of local authorities.

**Children in detention should be among those most visible to national authorities, but they are often not treated like children**

Logic would suggest that children held within the criminal justice system should be among the most visible children of all, readily accessible to interventions that ensure their access to health care, education and protection. But often children in conflict with the law effectively cease to be regarded as children. Instead, their perceived transgression is considered to remove them from childhood protection, exposing them to treatment either in exactly the same way as adult offenders or, worse, to having their vulnerability as children abused.



Data on children in detention are scarce, but estimates indicate that more than 1 million children are living in detention as a result of being in conflict with the law.<sup>24</sup> Yet in this area there is no excuse for the lack of information. Unlike many of the other children considered in this report, children caught up in the criminal justice system in most countries have been processed and are available to official scrutiny.

Nevertheless, it is clear that violent abuse of children in detention is a widespread and serious problem. In its 37th session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child raised a number of concerns about the procedures for and protection of children caught up in the justice system in Brazil, among other countries, including reports of torture and extrajudicial killings in detainment facilities.<sup>25</sup>

Children are at risk of violence while in detention both before and after any trial they may undergo. This can include physical and sexual violence by adult detainees, guards, police or other juvenile inmates. The correctional regime is itself at times excessively violent, involving indefinite detention, long periods of isolation or, alternatively, co-mingling with adult prisoners in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. In a small number of countries, the death penalty is still applied to juvenile offenders. The

## Children of the streets by Elena Poniatowska

According to the 'Estudio de Niños Callejeros' – an official study of street children – there are 11,172 children living and working on the streets in Mexico City, the world's largest city. They wash cars and buses, run errands and carry soft drinks. Boys hate being loaders. Either they end up with spinal injuries or are run down by cars. Underlying it all is smog, heavy traffic and extreme poverty in addition to violence, social disintegration and environmental deterioration. Drugs and delinquency are commonplace.

In the street the children wash windshields and swallow fire. Almost all the passers-by are indifferent to the magic in their faces and hands. They wait for clients with their instruments in their hands, and in the darkness the studs on their *charro* outfits sparkle, their wide-brimmed hats glitter. They are guitars, violins, trumpets of Jericho, voices in search of a listener, jugglers, clowns, magicians. The red light never stops for them, and the show goes on until three or four in the morning, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, when couples feel romantic and give them a few more pesos.

All those who pass by see them, but they are invisible. They do not exist. The police look at them without seeing them. Everything isolates them, denounces them.

School can bring further anguish for these children, even the most innocent ones. It is hard for them to retain what they are taught: They have lost their capacity for concentration. Besides, they do not want to know anything about roofs or walls: What can compare to the street? The street is an addiction.

In the street, everything is raw: reality, food, eyes, solidarity. Nothing has to be elaborated. Everything is thrown in their faces: aggressive nicknames, ruthless laughter, plunder, sneering, ridicule, the scar that never heals, the man-handling, the crudeness.

Only the street is theirs. It compensates for loneliness, rejection, lack of love. It lures them. It gives them the money they never got at home. It gives them rhythm, tempo and immediate retribution. "I'm someone, I'm something, I just earned my dinner."

Time is different for these children. They do not care what day it is. The days of the week trap them. The hours are the hours of their disaster. They know only two seasons, dry and rainy. The rainy season (from June to September) is the bad one because afternoon paralyzes all street activities. It is also impossible to play ball, and that is one thing they love.

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*Elena Poniatowska is a writer, journalist and professor, who, though born in Paris, has lived in Mexico since she was a child. She has written several celebrated books and is the recipient of numerous awards and honours, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Emeritus Fellowship from Mexico's National Council of Culture and Arts, and the Mexican national award for journalism.*

problem of violence against children in detention is being addressed in the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children, the report of which is due to be released in 2006.

According to a group of international experts convened in April 2005 as part of the UN Secretary-General's study, the key factors that facilitate violence against children in the justice system are:

- Impunity and lack of accountability by law enforcement agents, institutions and staff that are responsible for violence against children.
- The overuse of detention, particularly pre-trial detention, including the detention of non-offenders.
- The lack of community-based alternatives to the formal justice system and of alternatives to detention, including care and protection systems.
- The lack of appropriate juvenile justice systems, including appropriate facilities and separation from adults.
- The lack of external controls on institutions, including effective independent complaints and investigation procedures,

independent monitoring and access by non-governmental organizations.

- The ‘acceptability’ of violence in society, leading to tolerance of violence at all levels: family, school and community.
- The lack of training and sensitization of law enforcement and juvenile justice personnel.
- ‘Tough on crime’ policies, negative media and discriminatory images of street children and other socio-economically disadvantaged children.<sup>26</sup>

Governments have a clear responsibility to protect children in detention from abuse and harm. But they must also question whether a child should be in detention at all. Detention should always be a last resort: In many cases it is too readily adopted as an immediate response to antisocial or disruptive behaviour by children and adolescents, as if removing them out of sight and out of mind is a goal in itself, rather than an unintended consequence.

### **Premature entry into adult roles**

Childhood should be a separate space from adulthood, a time when children can grow and play, rest and learn. This distinction embodies the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which delineates rights that are particular to children as distinct from adults.

### **Children engaged in adult roles are often no longer viewed as children**

In its Preamble, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that children’s bodies and minds are less mature than those of adults;<sup>27</sup> consequently, roles appropriate for adults may not be suitable for children. Performing adult roles will inevitably result in children missing out on their childhood, and therefore facing a higher risk of exclusion and invisibility.

Children, especially girls, often take on adult roles by caring for family members, often siblings, or by working to contribute to the family income. Being orphaned and

living in extreme poverty are two clear examples of circumstances where children may have little choice but to adopt these roles. These children risk exclusion from protection and essential services.

Adult roles often carry a high risk of injury to children’s physical and mental well being. This is particularly true of three types of roles: combat, marriage and hazardous labour. Children engaged in these activities are not only prevented from having a childhood, but also often risk death or serious injuries that can have lifelong consequences.

### **Obstacles to the reintegration of former child soldiers can lead to their isolation**

Hundreds of thousands of children are caught up in armed conflict as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks and sex slaves for armed forces and groups.<sup>28</sup> Some are abducted or forcibly recruited; others are driven to join by poverty, abuse and discrimination, or by the desire to seek revenge for violence enacted against them and their families.<sup>29</sup> While under the control of the armed groups, these children are excluded from essential services and protection.

Ending the recruitment of child soldiers and returning them to their families and communities is an obvious prerequisite for them to gain inclusion and prevent further violations of their rights. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes use a variety of interventions, ranging from back-to-school initiatives to psychosocial support. Stigmatization can be reduced when reintegration support targets the community as a whole. But despite these initiatives, many obstacles to the full reintegration of child soldiers remain.

Girls, in particular, may benefit less from DDR initiatives. Save the Children reports that since it began working with children associated with armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fewer than 2 per cent of children passing through their programmes and interim care centres have been girls, though they estimate that 40 per cent of all children involved with armed groups are female. Similarly, in Sierra Leone, less than 5 per cent of girls known to

have been involved in militias benefited from DDR initiatives.<sup>30</sup>

Numbers of girl soldiers are routinely underestimated, and girls are often not considered real soldiers because they perform mainly non-combat functions. As a result, most of them return to their communities without any formal assistance or counselling, leaving them with a host of unresolved psychosocial and physical issues. Moreover, girls abducted or forcibly recruited who return with babies born in captivity may be rejected by their families and communities because of the stigma attached to rape and to giving birth to so-called 'war babies' or 'babies born of rape'. For these girls, being marginalized by DDR programmes represents an additional layer of invisibility to those imposed by their involvement in conflict and with militias.

## Early marriage robs girls of their childhood

Every year, millions of girls disappear into early marriage – defined as formal marriages, or customary and statutory unions recognized as marriage, before the age of 18. On marrying, a girl is expected to set aside her childhood and assume the role of a woman, embarking immediately upon a life that includes sex, motherhood and all the household duties traditionally expected of a wife.

Although early marriage sometimes extends to boys as well, the number of girls involved is far greater. According to an analysis of household survey data for 49 developing countries conducted by UNICEF in 2005, 48 per cent of South Asian females aged 15 to 24 had married before age 18. (At 18, a girl is still considered a child under the

## Children and young people in detention in Nigeria

Her eyes welled up as she struggled to hold back the flood of tears that threatened to ruin her neatly pressed coveralls. Soon the floodgates opened as she recounted the details of the past five and a half years spent in jail. Nkeiruka became pregnant while unmarried, which is considered a taboo among the Igbo community in Nigeria to which she belongs. In December 1999, the then 15-year-old Nkeiruka gave birth unassisted at home, and her child died as a result of complications. Her uncle accused her of killing her newborn, and Nkeiruka and her mother Monica were arrested and taken to prison in Anambra state. Now 21, Nkeiruka faces an uncertain future: Deprived of a formal education while in prison and possessing few skills, she is uncertain of the reception she and her mother will receive from the community and family when they return home.

A proper investigation was never conducted, no evidence of the alleged crime was found and the original case

file disappeared. Nkeiruka and her mother slept in a cell with up to 37 women for around 1,971 days. "Much like the many other children and young people who are incarcerated in Nigeria, they were forgotten," says Nkolika Ebede of the International Federation of Women Lawyers in Anambra, who, in a UNICEF-supported project, helped secure their release.

Nkeiruka was one of over 6,000 children and teenagers in Nigeria who are in prison or juvenile detention centres.<sup>a</sup> About 70 per cent of them are first-time offenders,<sup>b</sup> usually arrested for misdemeanours such as vagrancy, petty stealing, truancy or simply wandering or hanging around the streets. Others are detained at the request of their parents or guardians, who say that they are out of control. Many of these children come from broken homes and large poor families, or are orphans. According to Uche Nwokocha of the Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners in

Enugu, children – some still quite young – have been held in custody by the police in the place of their parents.

Young people, especially girls, are also victims of criminal acts such as domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation and trafficking. However, due to aberrations and delays in the administration of justice, especially during investigations leading to trial, these child victims can find themselves in jail. Their parents are denied access to them and they are deprived of due process, detained under deplorable conditions, put in contact with adult criminals, at risk of physical and sexual abuse, and often denied their right to bail. Many children are forced to admit to being older than they are or the police change their ages on arrest warrants in order to prosecute them as adults.

Prisons in Nigeria offer little educational or vocational training or recreational facilities. For a while, Nkeiruka was

Convention on the Rights of the Child, except in countries where the age of majority is lower.) The corresponding figures in the 29 countries surveyed for Africa and 8 countries for Latin America and the Caribbean are 42 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively.<sup>31</sup> The incidence varies widely between countries as well as continents: In sub-Saharan African countries surveyed, for instance, Niger had the highest rate of women between 20-24 who were married by age 18 (77 per cent); in contrast, this rate dropped to 8 per cent in South Africa.<sup>32</sup>

Some of these girls are forced into marriage at a very early age, while others may accept the marriage while being too young to understand its implications or play any active part in the choice of partner. Where early marriage is practised, it is usually a long-established tradition, making protest not just difficult but barely possible. Early

marriage tends to ensure that a woman is firmly under male control, living in her husband's household, and also supposedly guards against premarital sex for women. In many societies, the independence that can emerge during adolescence is seen as an undesirable attribute in women, who are expected to be subservient: Early marriage is therefore convenient because it effectively cancels out the adolescent period, quenching the sparks of autonomy and strangling the developing sense of self.

Poverty is another factor underpinning early marriage. Marriage can be seen as a survival strategy for a girl – particularly if she marries an older and wealthier husband. In West Africa, for example, a UNICEF study in 2000 showed a correlation between economic hardship and a rise in early marriage, even among some population groups that do not normally practise it.<sup>33</sup> There are also

taught soap-making and knitting, but she says the classes abruptly stopped in 2003. Limited or no counselling services are available to detained juveniles. While in detention, about 90 per cent of young people do not get proper meals, bedding or access to toilets and bathing facilities, making them vulnerable to sickness and disease. Nkeiruka and her mother were lucky to share the cell with women. Many other female prisoners are housed in mixed cells, increasing the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Where juvenile courts do not exist, children and youths are tried in adult courts. Lacking the means to secure legal representation, or to pay bail, they often languish in jail for long periods. Juveniles in prison are often cut off from family and friends, as a deep-seated fear and distrust of the police and justice system leads people to shun those who come in contact with the law, whether as perpetrators or victims. Stigmatization and rejection by

society further affect the reintegration of victims. During the five and a half year incarceration, Nkeiruka received only one visitor, a sibling, in the week before her scheduled release date.

Since 2003, UNICEF Nigeria has helped to promote improved treatment and legal aid for juveniles in conflict with the law. As part of the Juvenile Justice Administration project – undertaken in partnership with the National Human Rights Commission, the Nigerian Bar Association and local non-governmental organizations – a pro bono service was introduced and institutionalized for lawyers renewing their licences with the association. UNICEF has assisted in supporting the training of magistrates, police, prison officers, lawyers and social workers in juvenile justice administration, which has strengthened the provision of free legal services for children, young people and women.

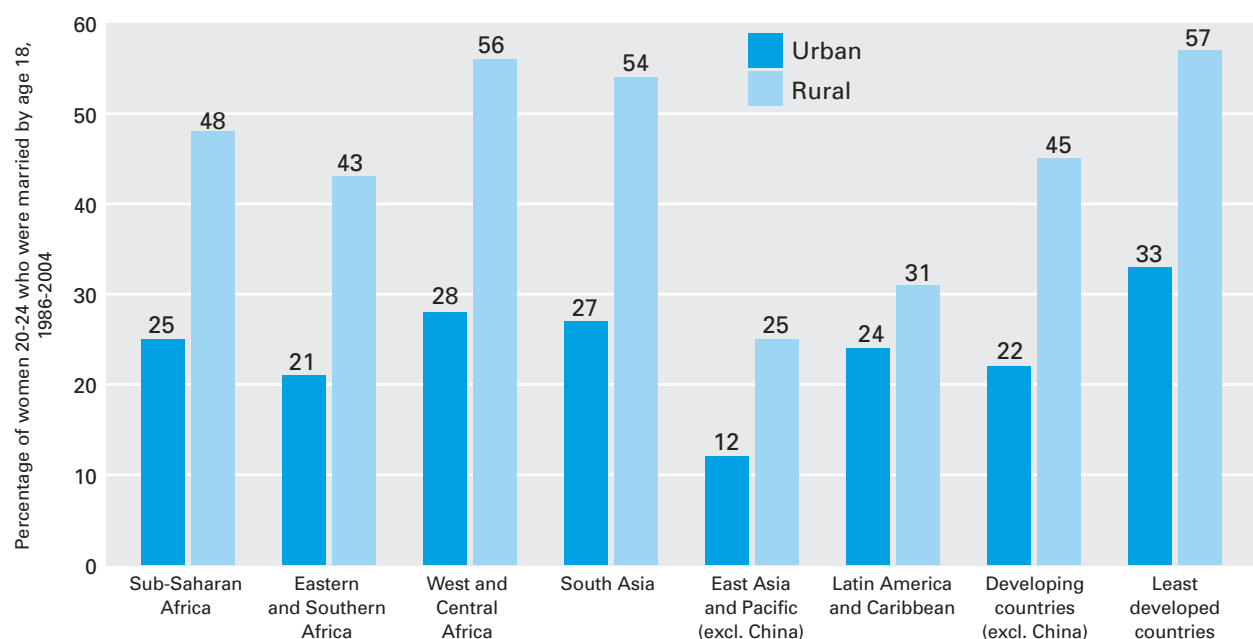
The project, which aims to reduce the number of children being detained,

was started in three pilot states in southern Nigeria. By mid-2005, almost 600 children had benefited from the project in these states, either by being released from prison or detention centres, being granted bail, having their cases dismissed or settled out of court, receiving counselling or having the project handle their ongoing case.

The number of children and young people in detention has decreased as a result of the project. The training of magistrates has facilitated more careful use of custodial sentencing of juveniles to prison terms for minor offences. Police officers are exercising restraint in detaining juveniles in police cells for minor offences and instead immediately take them to court for processing. Given its success, the project is now being implemented in nine additional states throughout the country in a strong partnership with the Nigeria Police Service.

*See References, page 92.*

**Figure 3.3: Early marriage\* in the developing world**



\* **Early marriage:** Percentage of women aged 20-24 that were married or in statutory or customary union recognized as marriage before they were 18 years old.

**Regional averages:** These aggregates do not include all countries in each region. However, sufficient data was available for more than 50 per cent of the target population to generate the averages for the regions shown. Averages for East Asia and Pacific and the developing countries do not include China.

**Data range:** Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

**Sources:** Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys.

reports from East Africa that girls orphaned by HIV/AIDS are increasingly being steered towards early marriage by caregivers who find it hard to provide for them.<sup>34</sup>

However it arises, early marriage jeopardizes the rights of children and adolescents. The right to free and full consent to marriage is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women stipulates that “the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect...”.<sup>35</sup> Early marriage can put an end to all educational development and opportunities for children. All too often it is the gateway to a lifetime of domestic and sexual subservience.

Early marriage also has physical implications for young girls, notably premature pregnancy and childbirth, which entail vastly increased risks of maternal and neonatal mortality. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15- to

19-year-old girls worldwide, whether they are married or not. Those under 15 are five times more likely to die than women in their twenties.<sup>36</sup> Their children are also less likely to survive: If a mother is under 18, her baby’s chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 per cent higher than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19.<sup>37</sup>

### Children engaged in hazardous forms of labour risk serious injury and often miss out on an education

An estimated 246 million children between 5 and 17 are engaged in child labour, according to the latest estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO). Of these, nearly 70 per cent or 171 million children were working in hazardous situations or conditions, such as in mines, with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or with dangerous machinery. Some 73 million of them are less than 10 years old.<sup>38</sup> Their physical immaturity leaves them more exposed to work-related illnesses and

## Early marriage and fistula

At least 2 million young women in the developing world suffer the painful, humiliating and devastating consequences of obstetric fistula. Caused by complications during childbirth, usually because the young woman's pelvis is too small or because the baby is too big or badly positioned, obstetric fistula manifests itself as a hole between a woman's vagina and her bladder, rectum or both, creating a constant leakage of urine or faeces. Girls and young women suffering from fistulas are ostracized by their communities and often abandoned by their families, forcing many to become desperate beggars.

Once widespread in Europe and America, fistulas were eradicated by modern medical care early in the 20th century. They are still common in the developing world, however, where malnutrition and stunted growth make obstructed labour more likely, where cultural practices and poverty lead to early marriages and early pregnancies, and where health care is largely unavailable or extremely limited.

Young girls are often pressured to get pregnant soon after marriage and may face a variety of barriers to

accessing contraceptive services. In spite of laws against early marriage in many countries, 82 million girls in developing countries will be married before they turn 18. Worldwide, some 14 million women and girls between 15 and 19 give birth each year.

Teenage pregnancies are risky, and the younger the girl, the higher the risk. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their twenties. Many of those who survive days of obstructed labour end up with fistula. Thus, delaying a girl's first pregnancy is a critical strategy for reducing fistula and maternal death, as well as an important public health issue.

Fistula is preventable, and also treatable through surgery that costs under \$300. In 2003, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched a Global Campaign to End Fistula in response to emerging evidence of the devastating impact obstetric fistula has on women's lives. The campaign involves a wide range of partners and currently operates in some 30 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and in some Arab States. The long-term goal is to make fistula as rare in

developing nations as it is in industrialized countries today.

The campaign works to prevent fistula from occurring, treat women who are affected and help women reintegrate into their communities once they are healed. In Niger, 600 community health agents have received basic training on fistula prevention. In Nigeria, 545 women have received surgery and dozens of doctors and nurses have been trained in fistula care. In Chad, hundreds of women have been taught new skills and received small grants following surgery through an income-generation project.

Each country that joins the campaign passes through three steps. First, national needs are assessed to determine the extent of the problem and the resources required. Next, a national response is formulated based on needs identified. Finally, programmes focusing on prevention, treatment and reintegration of cured patients into their communities are implemented.

*See References, page 92.*

injuries than adults, and they may be less aware of the risks involved in their occupations and place of work. Illnesses and injuries include punctures, broken or complete loss of body parts, burns and skin disease, eye and hearing impairment, respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses, fever and headaches from excessive heat in the fields or in factories.

Although the numbers of illnesses and injuries from hazardous child labour are highest by far for children working in the agriculture sector – which employs two thirds of all working children – the incidence of

injuries for children is highest in construction and mining. One boy in every four and more than one in every three girls working in construction suffers work-related injuries and illness; the corresponding incidences for mining are a little more than one in every six boys and one in every five girls.<sup>39</sup>

But it is not only injury, sickness and even death that children risk when involved in hazardous labour. They also often miss out on an education that would provide the foundation for future employment as an



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**Figure 3.4: Total economic costs and benefits of eliminating child labour over the period 2000-2020**

	US\$ billion, at purchasing power parity
<b>Economic costs</b>	
Education supply	493.4
Transfer implementation	10.7
Interventions	9.4
Opportunity costs	246.8
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>760.3</b>
<b>Economic benefits</b>	
Education	5,078.4
Health	28.0
<b>Total benefits</b>	<b>5,106.4</b>
<b>Net economic benefit (total benefits – total costs)</b>	<b>4,346.1</b>
Transfer payments	213.6
<b>Net financial benefit (net economic benefit – transfer payments)</b>	<b>4,132.5</b>

Source: International Labour Organization, *Investing in Every Child: An economic study on the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour*, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO, Geneva, 2004.

adult in less dangerous occupations. As Figure 3.4 clearly attests, the net economic benefits of eliminating child labour, hazardous or not, for individuals and societies would heavily outweigh the economic costs.

The scale of the worst forms of child labour makes it an urgent issue for the Millennium agenda, especially in the area of education. Unless millions of children currently working in hazardous conditions are reached, the goals of attaining universal primary education (MDG 2) and gender parity in primary and secondary education (a key indicator for MDG 3) will not be reached. A key starting point will be to step up efforts to eliminate immediately the worst forms of child labour, as stipulated by the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 182. Education that is safe, accessible and of a high quality is the best way to encourage families to send their children to school and to prevent children from engaging in hazardous labour.

## Exploitation of children

In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami that struck in late December 2004, there were fears that children, particularly those separated from their parents, were at risk of being trafficked and exploited. Protection measures were immediately adopted by international agencies and national governments to prevent widespread abuse. Nonetheless, incidents of exploitation were reported, including a growth in the recruitment of child soldiers. These incidents underline the increased vulnerability of children to exploitation when they are deprived of family protection.

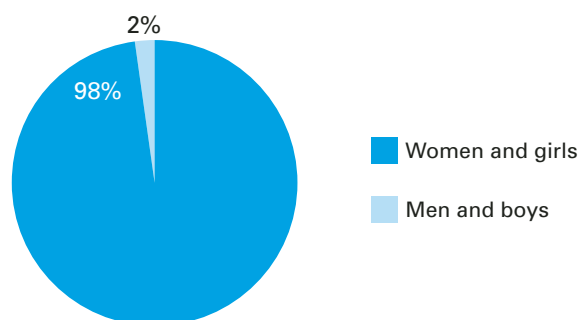
Preventing the exploitation of children and bringing the perpetrators to justice is one of the most pressing issues on the international agenda, but one that is not being given sufficient attention. In particular, the trafficking of children – who are then often forced into commercial sex work, hazardous labour or domestic service – is a widespread aspect of the problem and merits special attention by both national governments and the international community. Children who are victims of exploitation are arguably among the most invisible, as their abusers will prevent them from accessing services even if these are made available.

### Trafficking causes multiple rights violations for children

Trafficking of children takes many different forms. Some children are forcibly abducted, others are tricked and still others opt to let themselves be trafficked, seduced by the promise of earnings but not suspecting the level of exploitation they will suffer at the other end of the recruiting chain. Trafficking always involves a journey, whether within a country – from the rural areas to a tourist resort, for example – or across an international border. At the final destination, trafficked children become part of an underground world of illegality into which they effectively disappear.

The relocation takes children away from their families, communities and support networks, leaving them isolated and utterly vulnerable to exploitation. Often they are even

Figure 3.5: Forced commercial sexual exploitation



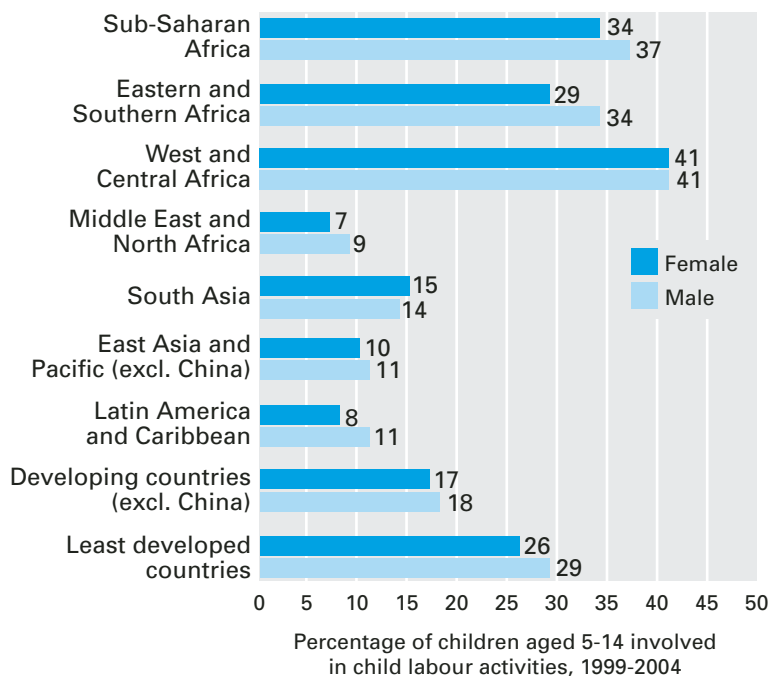
Source: International Labour Organization, 'A Global Alliance against Forced Labour', ILO, Geneva, 2005.

more disempowered by being transported to a place where they do not speak the local language, making it much more difficult for them to seek help or escape. Because they are there illegally and without documents, they may feel unable to trust the police or other officials or to access the rights of citizens that entitle them to services.

Trafficked children are also almost invisible to the eye of the statistician. Collecting data



**Figure 3.6: Child labour\* in the developing world**



\* **Child labour:** A child is considered to be involved in child labour activities under the following classification: (a) children 5 to 11 years of age that during the week preceding the survey did at least one hour of economic activity or at least 28 hours of domestic work; (b) children 12 to 14 years of age that during the week preceding the survey did at least 14 hours of economic activity or at least 42 hours of economic activity and domestic work combined.

**Regional averages:** These aggregates do not include all countries in each region. However, sufficient data was available for more than 50 per cent of the target population to generate the averages for the regions shown. Averages for East Asia and Pacific and the developing countries do not include China.

**Data range:** Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified.

**Source:** Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).

about these children is notoriously difficult. Although reliable global statistics are impossible to compile, it is estimated that trafficking affects about 1.2 million children each year.<sup>40</sup>

Though the trafficking of children is a shadowy practice with neither particular rules nor predictable sequences, some dominant regional patterns are identifiable:

- In West and Central Africa, the most common form of trafficking is an extension of a traditional practice – often a survival strategy – whereby children are ‘placed’ in marginal positions within other families. Increasingly, this practice is being used to exploit children’s labour, both within and outside the home. Children are also trafficked into plantations and mines, and in

those countries affected by conflict, they can be directly abducted by militias.

- In East Asia and the Pacific, most trafficking is into child prostitution, though some children are also recruited for industrial and agricultural work. It is largely driven by poverty and especially by the pull of the wealthier countries in the region. Girls are also recruited as mail-order brides and for domestic service.
- In South Asia, trafficking forms part of the immense child labour problem in the sub-continent, often related to debt bondage, whereby a child is in effect ‘sold’ to pay off a debt, frequently a debt deliberately imposed by the exploiter with this in mind. In addition, significant numbers of children are trafficked for other purposes, including into prostitution, carpet and garment factories, construction projects and begging.
- In Europe, children are mainly trafficked from east to west, reflecting the demand for cheap labour and child prostitution in the richer countries of the continent. There are organized criminal gangs exploiting the open borders to channel children into unskilled labour, work in the entertainment sector and prostitution.
- In the Americas and the Caribbean, much of the visible child trafficking is driven by tourism and focused on coastal resorts, again feeding a demand for child prostitution and easily exploitable labour. Criminals who move drugs across borders are reportedly becoming involved in human trafficking as well.<sup>41</sup>

Often children trafficked into one form of labour may be later sold into another, as with girls from rural Nepal, who are recruited to work in carpet factories or hotels in the city, but are then trafficked into the sex industry over the border in India. In almost all countries, the sex trade is the predominant form of exploitation of trafficked children, a practice that entails systematic, long-term physical and emotional abuse.<sup>42</sup>

### Children in forced labour and domestic service are among the most invisible

An estimated 8.4 million children work under horrific circumstances: They are

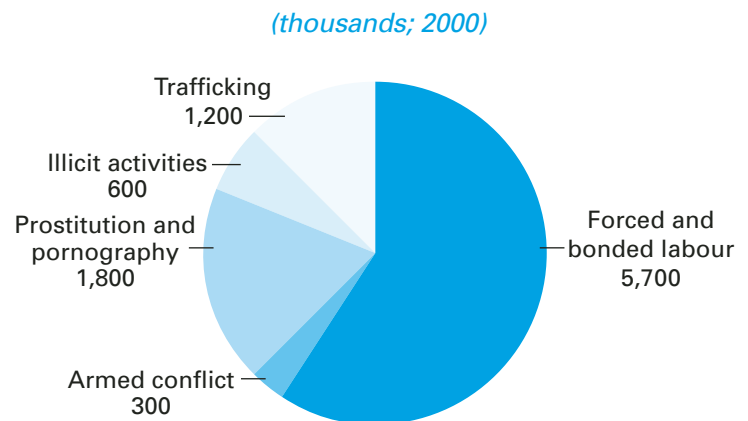
forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery, into prostitution and pornography or into participation in armed conflict or other illicit activities.<sup>43</sup>

According to the ILO, “forced labour is present in all regions and kinds of economy.... The offence of exacting forced labour is very rarely punished.... For the most part, there is neither official data on the incidence of forced labour, nor a widespread awareness among society at large that forced labour is a problem. It remains, with very few exceptions, one of the most hidden problems of our times.”<sup>44</sup>

Debt bondage, whatever the origin of the debt, leaves children under the complete control of a landowner, entrepreneur or moneylender in a state little distinguishable from slavery. They may be making gravel in Latin America or bricks in South Asia, or quarrying stone in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>45</sup> The work is often hazardous and much too heavy to be appropriate for children; the conditions of service betray every aspect and principle of human rights, let alone any conception of childhood.

Children in domestic service are also among the most invisible child labourers. Their work is performed within individual homes, removed from public scrutiny, and their conditions of life and labour are entirely dependent on the whims of their employer. The number of children involved in domestic service around the world is unquantifiable because of the hidden nature of the work, but it certainly runs into the millions. Many of these children are girls, and in many countries domestic service is seen as the only avenue of employment for a young girl, though in some places, such as Nepal and South Africa, boys are more likely to be domestic workers than girls.<sup>46</sup> Children exploited in domestic service are generally paid little or nothing over and above food and lodging. Many are banned altogether from attending classes or have such restrictions placed on their school attendance that it becomes impossible. All too often domestic service becomes a 24-hour job, with the child perpetually on call and subject to the whims of all family members.<sup>47</sup>

**Figure 3.7: Children in unconditional worst forms\* of child labour and exploitation**



\* **Unconditional worst forms of child labour:** These forms of labour correspond to those outlined in Article 3 of the International Labour Organization Convention No. 182.

**Source:** International Labour Organization, *Every Child Counts: New global estimates on child labour*, ILO, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Statistical Informational and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour, April 2002.

In addition, children in domestic service are especially susceptible to physical and psychological harm. Many are forced to undertake tasks that are completely inappropriate for their age and physical strength. The food they are given is often nutritionally inadequate, vastly inferior to the meals eaten by the employing family. In Haiti, for example, 15-year-old domestic workers were found to be on average four centimetres shorter and 40 pounds lighter than 15-year-olds not in domestic service in the same area.<sup>48</sup> Children frequently suffer physical abuse as punishment for a task performed at a lower standard than demanded or simply as a routine means of ensuring their submission. They are also at extreme risk of sexual abuse. Rapid assessment research in El Salvador found that 66 per cent of girls in domestic service reported having been physically or psychologically abused, many of them sexually, and that the threat of sexual advances from employers was ever present.<sup>49</sup>

### **Making children visible by creating a protective environment**

All children have the right to grow up in a protective environment in which all elements work, individually and collectively, to secure them from violence, abuse and

## The protective environment

The protective environment is made up of interconnected elements that individually and collectively work to protect children from exploitation, violence and abuse. While much of the responsibility for the creation of a protective environment lies with the government, other members of society also have duties. The key elements of the protective environment include:

- **Capacity of families and communities:** All those who interact with children – parents, teachers and religious leaders alike – should observe protective child-rearing practices and have the knowledge, skills, motivation and support to recognize and respond to exploitation and abuse.
- **Government commitment and capacity:** Governments should provide budgetary support for child protection, adopt appropriate social welfare policies to protect children's rights and ratify with few or no reservations international conventions concerning children's rights and protection. Ratification

of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be an important demonstration of the commitment to protect children from armed conflict and exploitation.

- **Legislation and enforcement:** Governments should implement laws to protect children from abuse, exploitation and violence, vigorously and consistently prosecute perpetrators of crimes against children and avoid criminalizing child victims.
- **Attitudes and customs:** Governments should challenge attitudes, prejudices and beliefs that facilitate or lead to abuses. They should commit to preserving the dignity of children and engage the public to accept its responsibility to protect them.
- **Open discussion by civil society and the media:** Societies should openly confront exploitation, abuse and violence through the media and civil society groups.

- **Children's life skills, knowledge and participation:** Societies should ensure that children know their rights – and are encouraged and empowered to express them – as well as give them the vital information and skills they need to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.

- **Essential services:** Services for victims of abuse should be available to meet their needs in confidence and with dignity, and basic social services should be available to all children without discrimination.

- **Monitoring, reporting and oversight:** There should be monitoring, transparent reporting and oversight of abuses and exploitation. Key to building the protective environment is responsibility: All members of society can contribute to protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation.

*See References, page 92.*

neglect, as well as from exploitation and discrimination. Without this, children are at risk of being excluded and becoming invisible. Furthermore, the persistence of child protection abuses threatens to jeopardize every one of the MDGs (*see Panel: The links between child protection and the Millennium Development Goals, page 53*).

There are numerous obstacles to ensuring that children's right to protection is not violated. Traditional practices, lack of national capacity to administer programmes for even those children who are readily reachable and the absence of rule of law are just three examples of impediments to protecting children. Broad and systemic protection strategies are required to both prevent abuses and address the failures that occur.

In an ideal society, children are manifestly protected because all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation against them are considered socially unacceptable and because customs and traditions respect the rights of women and children. However, in the majority of countries and societies, this ideal is not yet fully in place. Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on all States parties to adopt measures that will help modify the social and cultural patterns of men and women, with the aim of eliminating prejudices and customary practices based on gender inequality and stereotypes. The recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also underline the importance of modifying social practices and patterns to safeguard children's rights.<sup>50</sup>

## The links between child protection and the Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Development Goal	Child Protection Consideration
<b>MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Child labour</b> squanders a nation's human capital.</li> <li>• <b>Armed conflict</b> depletes a nation's physical, economic and human resources and leads to the displacement of populations.</li> <li>• Accurate and complete <b>birth registration</b> information is a prerequisite for all economic planning to address poverty and hunger issues.</li> <li>• Poverty and exclusion contribute to <b>child abandonment</b> and to the overuse of formal and informal fostering arrangements or institutional care, leading to poor child development.</li> <li>• Legal systems that do not take into account the child's age and fail to promote reintegration into the community of <b>children in conflict with the law</b> increase the likelihood of their poverty and marginalization.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Armed conflict</b> disrupts education.</li> <li>• <b>Child labour</b> prevents children from attending school.</li> <li>• <b>Violence</b> is an obstruction to a safe and protective learning environment.</li> <li>• <b>Child marriage</b> leads to the removal of girls from school.</li> <li>• <b>Children without parental care</b> must be placed in an appropriate family environment to increase the likelihood they will receive an education.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls are disproportionately engaged in <b>domestic work</b>, which compromises their school participation.</li> <li>• <b>Child marriage</b> leads to the removal of girls from school and may limit their opportunities to participate in the public life of their communities.</li> <li>• <b>Violence and harassment in schools</b> are obstacles to gender equality in education. <b>Sexual violence, exploitation and abuse</b> undermine efforts to empower women and girls.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 4: Reduce child mortality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Violence</b> against children can lead to child mortality.</li> <li>• <b>Child marriage</b> and early childbearing lead to higher risks of maternal mortality and morbidity.</li> <li>• <b>Children separated from their mothers</b> at an early age, especially those who remain in institutional settings for long periods of time, are at greater risk of early death.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 5: Improve maternal health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Child marriage</b> jeopardizes both maternal and infant health.</li> <li>• <b>Sexual violence</b> can lead to unwanted pregnancies and puts women at risk of HIV/AIDS infection.</li> <li>• <b>Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting</b> increases the chance of maternal mortality during delivery and complications thereafter.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the worst forms of <b>child labour</b> are a cause and consequence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.</li> <li>• <b>Sexual exploitation, abuse and violence</b> can lead to the infection of girls and boys.</li> <li>• Children in HIV/AIDS-affected families are particularly at risk of <b>losing the care and protection of their families</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Children in detention</b> are vulnerable to HIV infection, given the high rates of transmission in prisons.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Armed conflict</b> leads to population displacement and potential overuse of environmental resources.</li> <li>• Environmental disasters increase household vulnerability and increase the potential for <b>child labour</b>, as well as for sexual exploitation and child marriage.</li> </ul>
<b>MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Child protection</b> requires inter-sectoral cooperation at the national and international level to create a protective environment for children.</li> </ul>

*See References, page 92.*



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In countries where these discriminating patterns have been challenged, the results have been significant. In Somalia, for example, following a study on sensitive child protection issues in which more than 10,000 children and adults participated, child protection coordination networks have been established in Bari, Nugal, Benadir, Lower Shabelle and Hiran regions, with similar initiatives now under way in other regions, including Somaliland. The networks have agreed on priority areas of focus for their work, such as improving the situation of street children, increased efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation and the protection of internally displaced children.<sup>51</sup>

Children may be able to reduce their own risk of exploitation when they know that they have rights and about the options they have to protect themselves against violations. Health workers, teachers, police

officers, social workers and others who work with children should be equipped with the motivation, skills and authority to identify and respond to child protection abuses. Parents and communities need to be provided with the tools and capacity to protect their children.

Monitoring systems that record the incidence and nature of child protection abuses and allow for informed and strategic interventions are also required. Such systems tend to be most effective when they are participatory and locally based. One such example is provided by Benin, where village committees have been set up to combat child trafficking. The first such committees were set up in 1999 in the area in the south most affected by trafficking, and there are now more than 170.<sup>52</sup> Among their activities are raising awareness about child protection issues among parents, children and

the general population, reporting cases of abuse or disappearance and monitoring the reintegration of trafficked children when they return to the village. The committees provide an effective early warning system that genuinely strengthens children's protection by investigating when a child leaves the village and alerting the Juvenile Protection Squad, thwarting the transportation of many children to neighbouring countries.<sup>53</sup>

Another example of where evidence-based risk factors can be used to guide programming is seen in Moldova, where UNICEF has been supporting a life-skills education project for children growing up in residential care institutions. Research indicates that children in these institutions were several times more vulnerable to trafficking than the rest of the child population. The project uses participatory methods and a life-skills-based approach to raise children's awareness of the dangers of trafficking and build their capacity to understand and exercise their rights.<sup>54</sup>

Creating an environment that protects children requires ongoing and sustained efforts by individuals and organizations at all levels of the international community, from the

family to the largest multinational corporation operating in the globalized economy. While families and governments bear the primary responsibility for ensuring that children are included in essential services and protected from harm, they require the support of others – civil society, donors, international agencies, the media and the private sector – to confront and stamp out abuses, challenge attitudes and prejudices and monitor and evaluate exploitation. The roles that these actors play, as discussed in Chapter 4, will be critical to ensuring that all children become visible, not only in official statistics, budgets, programmes and legislation, but also in their societies and communities.

Signing human rights treaties and passing progressive legislation by governments is critical but must be seen as only the beginning: To truly protect all children against violence, exploitation and abuse, behaviour and attitudes that devalue some children must be changed. A partnership across levels of society must be forged to ensure that each child's right to a protective environment is fulfilled, that impunity for abuses against children is challenged, and that each child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

## Making Every Child Count

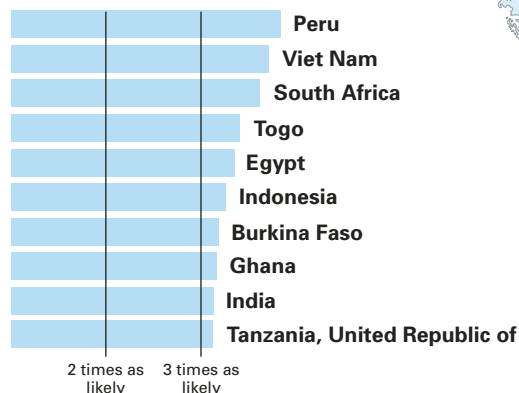
The ability to prove age and nationality is key to guaranteeing a child's rights. Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the right of every child to a name and nationality, stipulating that boys and girls should be registered immediately after birth. Yet in many countries, birth registration is neither accessible nor affordable to large portions of the population.

A formal record of age may help to protect a child's right to a childhood. Children forced into the labour market, who serve as combatants or who enter into marriage take on adult roles. Unable to prove their age, unregistered children and those seeking to assist them often find it difficult to claim their rights as children or prove that these rights have been violated.

Birth registration guarantees the right to be counted in official statistics and acknowledged as a member of society. It also increases the chances that children from poor and marginalized families will be included in national-level planning and decisions. An accurate count of the number of children in a given community, village or region provides a basis on which to demand that resources be distributed to fulfill the rights of children and that proportionate basic services are available. Because those excluded from birth registration tend to be those who are excluded from other essential services, universal birth registration should be seen as the first step towards including all children.

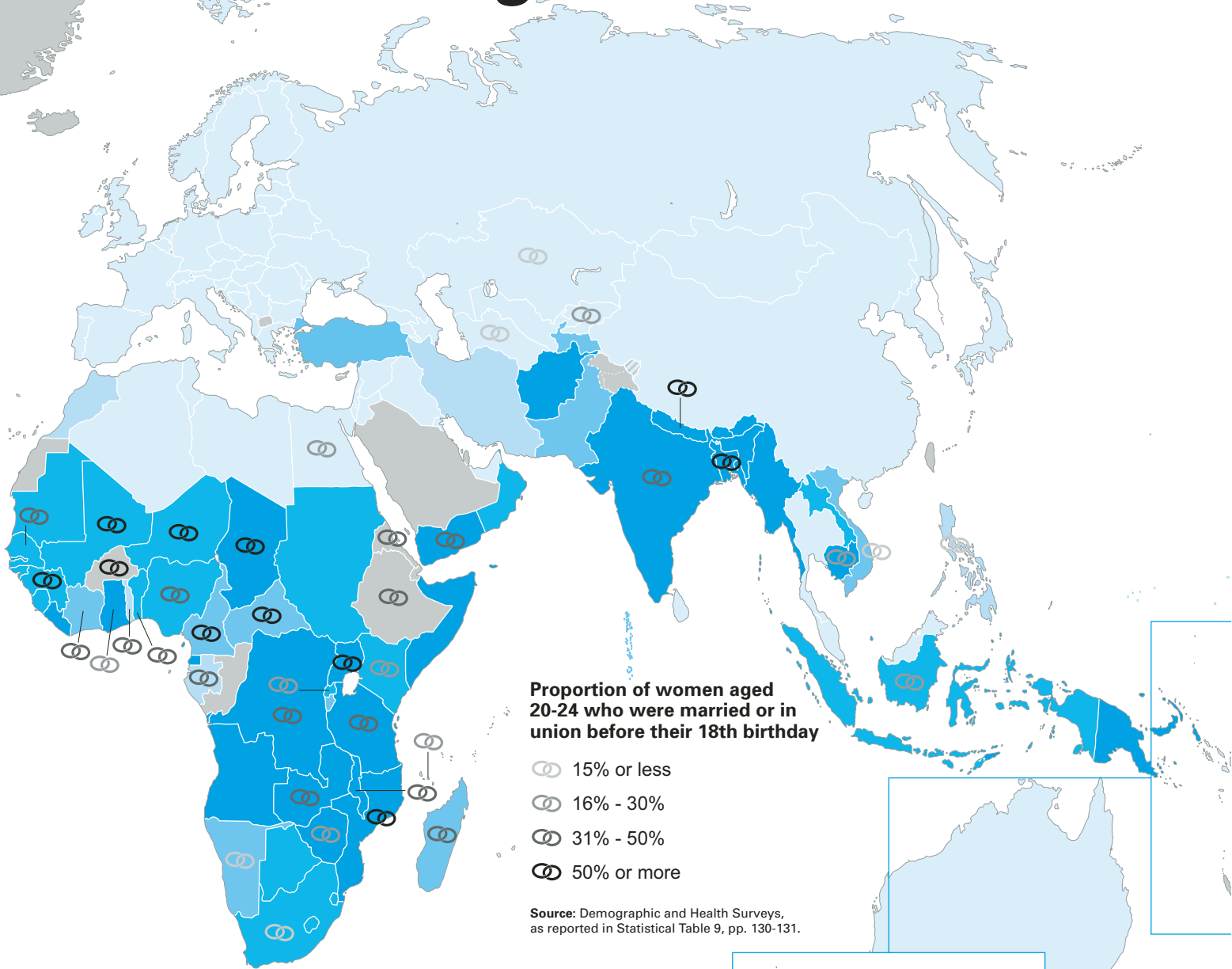


Girls in rural areas are more likely to be married by age 18 than their urban peers

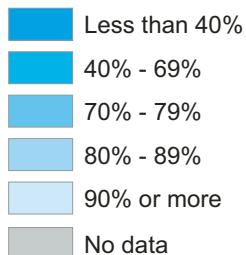


Source: Demographic and Health Surveys.

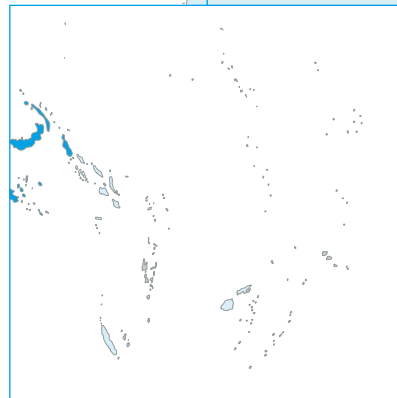
# Protecting Childhood



## Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are registered:



**Sources:** Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, as reported in Statistical Table 9, pp. 130-131.



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.