



A girl smiling in an informal makeshift settlement in Idlib, Syria.

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Spotlight on the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund 2024



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UNICEF works across 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring about positive change for children. The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund makes vital contributions to multiple SDGs: SDG3, SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 16.

1. UNICEF's Global Child Protection Thematic Fund: Protecting every child's right to live free from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

Every child deserves to be safe, to be heard, and to grow up with dignity. Yet for millions of children, that right remains under threat from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices that rob them of their childhoods and their futures.

Child protection is not just a service – it is a safeguard for every other right a child holds. When children are protected, they are more likely to survive, learn and thrive. When protection fails, the costs ripple across societies, harming health, education, economic growth and social cohesion.

UNICEF is leading the charge to strengthen child protection systems – not through one-off projects, but by building national frameworks and structures that can prevent harm, respond to violations and ensure that no child falls

through the cracks. This approach demands more than good intentions. It requires strong laws, a skilled workforce, robust data systems, sustained public financing, and communities that uphold children's rights at every level.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund powers this work. With flexible, multi-year funding, UNICEF partners with governments and communities to embed child protection across national systems, delivering durable solutions that stand the test of time, including in fragile and humanitarian settings.

Child protection is foundational to achieving the SDGs and to fulfilling every child's right to a life free from fear.

2. Financial results

Investment catalysing progress for generations

Over the past three decades, the world has seen a steady strengthening of child protection, from increased birth registration to declining rates of child labour, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

These achievements are not accidental. They are the result of sustained investments by partners who chose to build national systems capable of protecting children generation after generation.

In 2024, the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund mobilized US\$10.9 million in flexible, catalytic funding, from committed public and private partners. UNICEF extends sincere thanks to the Governments of Sweden, Spain, and Hungary, and private sector partners ABBA, BTS and others who contributed to the Fund, including through National Committees.

Progress is never inevitable. But thanks to the vision and leadership of our partners, UNICEF is helping countries move faster, strengthen protection systems, and close the equity gaps that leave too many children vulnerable. Every investment in child protection is an investment in safer childhoods, stronger societies and a more just future.

“Every child deserves protection, and every contribution from our partners helps make that a reality. Your support enables UNICEF to strengthen child protection systems, respond early and build a safer and more equitable future for every child everywhere.”

Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF

Top Global Child Protection Thematic Fund partners by contributions received, 2024¹

Sector	Donor	Amount (US\$)
Public	Sweden	7,710,100
	Spain	809,061
	Hungary	300,000
Private	Korean Committee for UNICEF	1,617,767
	Swedish Committee for UNICEF	390,034
	Japan Committee for UNICEF	81,901
	United States Fund for UNICEF	17,069
	Italian Committee for UNICEF – Foundation Onlus	9,913
Grand Total		10,935,846

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

¹ The thematic funding contributions relate to the Strategic Plan 2022–2025.



Children from the haor areas gather at the Child Protection Hub in Sadarpur, Bangladesh, where they engage in various activities such as paper crafting, drawing, and playing indoor games. This hub serves as a safe and nurturing space for children to develop their creativity and socialize with their peers while receiving vital support in their development.

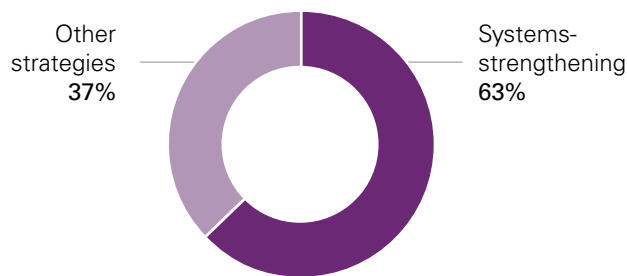
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Why flexible funding matters

Protecting children’s rights is not a short-term project – it is a long-term commitment. That is why flexible, multi-year funding invested over the four-year period of UNICEF’s Strategic Plan (2022–2025) through the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund is so critical. It allows UNICEF to think beyond emergency responses or single-issue interventions and to help governments build comprehensive child protection systems that prevent harm, respond to violations and promote resilience over time. Flexible funds also help UNICEF invest where the needs are greatest and the funding is missing.

In 2024, UNICEF incurred US\$11.4 million in flexible thematic funding expense from the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund. These investments expanded access to vital services such as birth registration, embedded child protection priorities within national laws and budgets, and supported emergency responses. Every dollar moved UNICEF closer to its goal: protecting the right of every child to live free from violence, exploitation and abuse.

UNICEF expense by programme strategy, 2024



In 2024, **63 per cent** of Child Protection thematic funding was spent on strengthening systems for child protection.

Note: The category ‘other’ consists of strategies which enable systems-strengthening, including advocacy and communications; social and behaviour change; data and research; digital transformation; innovation; partnerships and engagement; and support to programme delivery.

A call to scale what works

Ending violence against children is not a dream – it is a choice. And it is within our reach.

Achieving the SDGs will require far more than addressing symptoms. It demands transforming the systems that safeguard children’s rights – systems that prevent and respond to violence, and create environments where every child can grow up safe, supported and empowered.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund is UNICEF’s most strategic vehicle for making that transformation possible. By investing flexibly and systemically, partners help drive durable change – not only in the lives of individual children, but across entire communities and countries.

We invite more partners to join us. Together, we can move beyond reacting to crises and start building the structures that will protect children for generations to come. Together, we can create a world where no child’s future is stolen by violence, and where every child can realize their full potential.

The solutions are known. The path is clear. Now is the time to scale what works and protect every child’s right to a life free from fear.



Transparency with Thematic Funding

UNICEF has a strong financial transparency record, including for thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund to visit the Transparency Portal and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.

3. The footprint of the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund

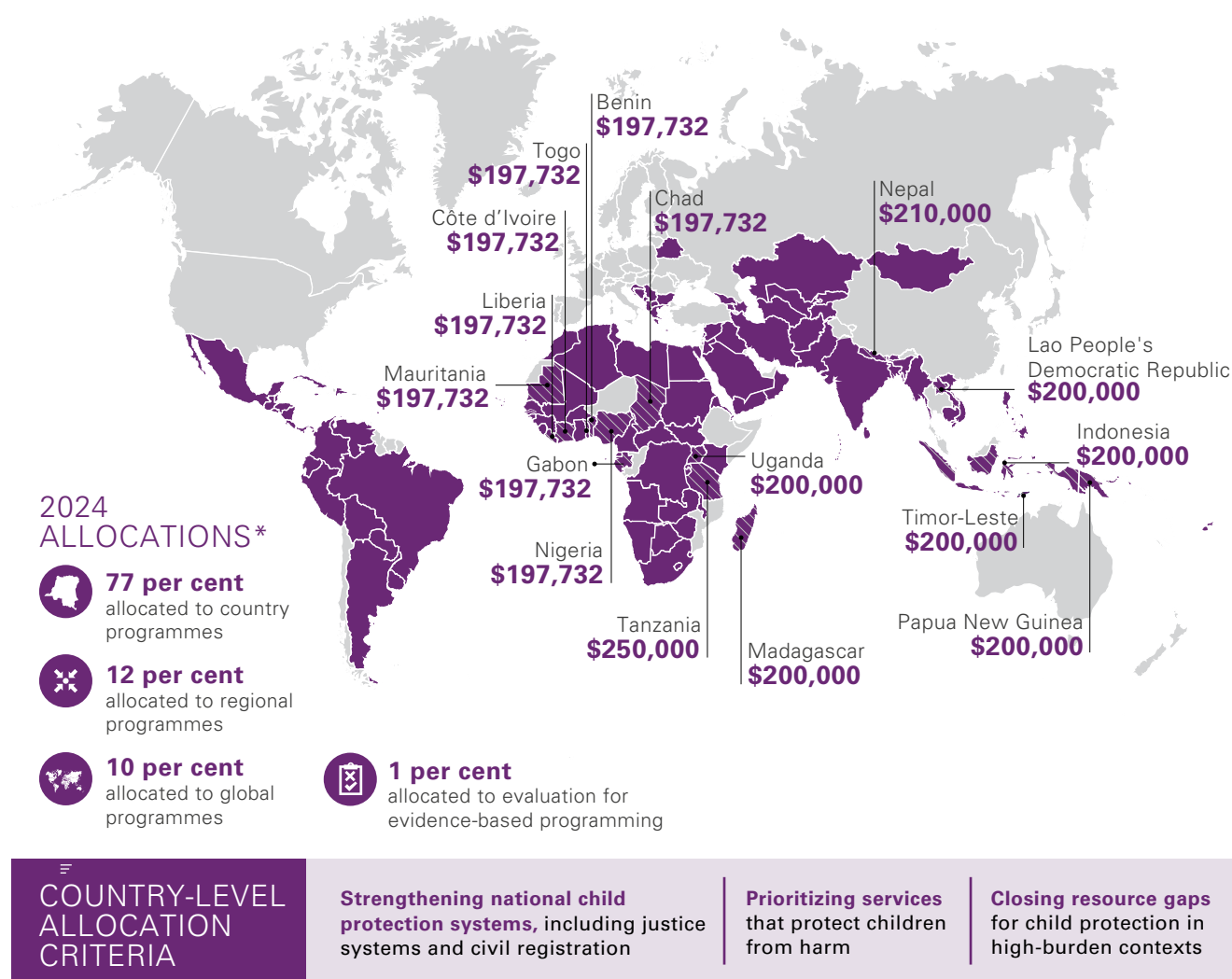
The reach of the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund spans all seven UNICEF regions, delivering impact across three interconnected levels:

- At the **country level**: Investments support the strengthening of national systems, expanding front-line services and ensuring direct support reaches the children and families who need it most.
- At the **regional level**: Investments build technical expertise, foster collaboration across borders, position policy and accelerate the adoption of promising practices.

- At the **global level**: Investments support UNICEF's technical and thought leadership in developing essential tools, guidance, data frameworks and innovations that help scale results for children everywhere.

Each level reinforces the others, creating a global architecture of protection that becomes stronger, faster and more resilient with every investment.

Global Child Protection Thematic Fund allocations around the world²



The map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers

² The map shows all countries that received allocations from the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund between 2022 and 2024. The 10 highest allocations in 2024 are shown with full amounts.

4. From programmes to policy: A systems shift in child protection

Ending violence, exploitation and abuse is not about isolated interventions; it is about transforming the very systems that shape children's lives.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund is driving that transformation. By investing flexibly and strategically, UNICEF helps countries move beyond reactive models towards systems that are preventive, inclusive, and resilient even in times of crisis.

UNICEF's systems-strengthening model is anchored in workforce development, policy and legislative reform, social and behaviour change, data and evidence, infrastructure for service delivery and sustainable financing – and proven in delivering measurable and holistic results.

In 2024, UNICEF worked across 156 countries to strengthen national child protection systems, the social service workforce and justice systems.

In 2024, 50 countries (out of 158 countries) have more mature child protection systems compared to 2021.

Flexible funding has been a catalytic contributor to these results, helping countries move closer to systems that not only respond to harm but also prevent it from happening in the first place.

Every system strengthened is a promise kept: that no child should have to grow up without safety, dignity or hope.

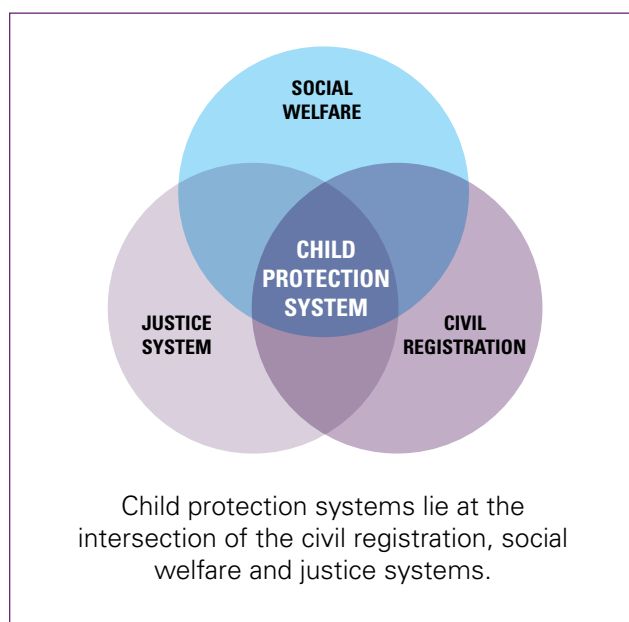
Below are some headline sector results for which Global Child Protection thematic funding, as part of a broader portfolio of funding, was a key contributor.

Legal and policy change

Strong laws are the foundation of strong protection systems. Without legal guarantees of their rights, children are too often left invisible, vulnerable and unheard.

UNICEF works alongside governments to reform national policies, strengthen legal protections and embed child rights into the structures that shape children's lives, from family courts and justice systems to social services, health and education systems.

The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund plays a vital role in advancing this work, ensuring that investments reach not only services but also the legal frameworks that make protection sustainable.



Flexible thematic funding helped countries turn ambition into action:

- In **Timor-Leste**, UNICEF-supported investments – including a new Law on Protection of Children and Youth in Danger, standard operating procedures on case management, and the deployment of **Primeros** – led to a dramatic scale-up of child protection services. Quality case management support expanded from reaching **800 children** in 2023 to nearly **3,150 children** in 2024.
- In **Brazil**, UNICEF supported the city of Recife in developing referral pathways and an integrated protocol to support child victims of violence and trained **1,020 social service workers** on the implementation of the Protective Hearing Law, indirectly benefiting more than **376,340 children and adolescents**.
- In **Equatorial Guinea**, UNICEF supported the development of an evidence-based national child protection strategy. Already under implementation, more than **160 public officers** have been trained across social affairs, human rights, judicial and security sectors – helping embed a culture of child rights at every level of government.
- In **Jordan**, with UNICEF's support, the Ministry of Social Development has increased the number of Early Detection and Early Intervention units for children with disabilities from 15 to 19. This expansion has allowed more than **615 children aged 0–6 with disabilities**, along with their parents, to benefit from these EDEI day-type units across the country.



Migrant and refugee children play at a UNICEF supported child friendly space at the Solidarity Center of the Municipality of Athens, in Greece.

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- The Ministry of Social Affairs in **Lebanon**, with UNICEF policy advice, launched the New Vision for Child and Family Care Services. The policy marks a shift towards inclusive, transparent and effective service delivery – centring decision-making on families and laying the foundation for long-term reforms to protect Lebanon’s most vulnerable children and families.
- In **Bangladesh**, UNICEF advanced the use of diversion and alternative measures to detention for children in conflict with the law by 30 per cent. In 2024 alone, more than **4,500 children** were released on bail or benefited from community-based restorative justice interventions.
- In **Tajikistan**, UNICEF advocacy has led to the country adopting a landmark law banning corporal punishment of children in all settings – at home, in schools and elsewhere. Tajikistan is the 67th country in the world to take this step, creating a safer and more nurturing environment for over **4 million** children across the country.
- In **North Macedonia**, UNICEF’s advocacy and technical guidance led to the adoption of a new Law on Justice for Children, aligning the national legal framework with international child protection standards. This legislation marks a transformative shift in the justice system, ensuring comprehensive safeguards for children in conflict or contact with the law.

Every policy and legal reform brings us closer to a world where protection is not a privilege but a guarantee for every child, everywhere.

Workforce development

Behind every child protected from harm is a trained professional – a social worker, teacher, law enforcement officer, health-care provider or community leader – who stands ready to listen, respond and act.

UNICEF’s Global Child Protection Thematic Fund invests in building this critical human infrastructure: equipping front-line workers with the skills, standards and support they need to deliver quality, rights-based protection services at every level of society.

In 2024, 46 countries supported by UNICEF established quality assurance systems for their social service workforces, embedding standards that ensure children receive consistent, accountable care.

At the country level, flexible funding helped turn this vision into reality:

- In **Ghana**, UNICEF helped scale up integrated social services from 170 to 180 districts. Through training and support, over **100 district personnel** and **150 probation officers** were equipped with the knowledge and skills to better protect children and juveniles navigating the justice system.
- In **Bhutan**, UNICEF strengthened the child protection knowledge and skills of more than **1,050 social service workers**. With these enhanced capacities, nearly **6,450 children** gained access to child protection, mental health and justice services.

- In **Mongolia**, UNICEF's advocacy for amendments to the Law on Child Protection (2016) secured the creation of nearly **930 new social work posts**. This has expanded the coverage of child protection services to every province – securing faster access to child protection and family services and ensuring that no child is left behind.
- In **the Bangsamoro Region of the Philippines**, targeted training and supervision helped local social workers deliver interventions aligned with national child protection laws. In 2024 alone, **63 cases of children** in conflict with the law were managed with a rights-based, child-sensitive approach under the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act.
- In **Cambodia**, UNICEF supported the creation of the National Social Service Work Board, closing critical legislative gaps by formally defining professional roles, standards of practice and institutional accountability – a milestone that will transform protection outcomes for vulnerable children nationwide.



These investments are not only growing the workforce but are also professionalizing it, ensuring that wherever a child turns for help, a trained and trusted adult is ready to protect their rights and restore their hope.

Social and behaviour change for lasting impact

Lasting protection for children starts with changing the beliefs, behaviours and norms that put them at risk.

UNICEF's social and behaviour change programming is at the heart of that transformation – shifting harmful attitudes, empowering communities, and creating environments where children's rights are understood, upheld and championed.

In 2024, UNICEF-supported initiatives engaged 27.6 million people in community dialogues designed to challenge discriminatory gender norms, harmful practices and social stigmas that perpetuate violence and exploitation.

Flexible thematic funding played a crucial role in supporting this work at the country level:

- In **Indonesia**, UNICEF expanded the Safe and Friendly Environment for Children model, focusing on positive parenting, child participation, village-level mobilization of human and financial resources, and the establishment of strong referral pathways. As a result, **95,100 children** across 300 villages in six provinces now benefit from improved access to integrated protection services at the district level.

Social and behaviour change is not an 'add-on' to child protection; it is a driver of sustainable, systemic impact. When communities are empowered to protect children, the effects ripple outwards: fewer harmful practices, stronger families, and safer environments where every child can grow, thrive and fulfil their potential.

Data, research and evidence for child protection solutions

Without data, child protection violations remain hidden. Without evidence, solutions fall short.

Reliable data and evidence are the backbone of effective child protection. As the global custodian of child protection data, UNICEF works alongside governments to build strong national and subnational data systems, ensuring that information is disaggregated by age, sex and other key factors so that no child is left unseen or unsupported.

Where data gaps exist, UNICEF supports countries to strengthen their systems by helping governments gather, analyse and use evidence to design smarter, more responsive child protection programmes.

In 2024, UNICEF made major strides in accelerating the digital transformation of child protection case management by expanding the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) as the leading digital solution for front-line workers.

- Primero, UNICEF's flagship child protection case management platform, was rolled out in 12 additional countries: Benin, Cameroon, China, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mauritania, the Niger, Pakistan, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Ukraine.
- In humanitarian contexts, 79 per cent of children targeted by UNICEF programmes received individual case management support in 2024, driven by these strengthened digital systems.

In parallel, UNICEF developed standardized child protection case management categories and launched new Guidance on Data Protection and Information Sharing, helping ensure that children's personal information is handled with the highest standards of safety and confidentiality.

The following are examples of how flexible thematic funding supported better child protection data in countries:

- In **Bangladesh**, UNICEF helped register over **7.29 million births** in 2024 alone – a major leap from just 4.17 million in 2020. This achievement was driven by an enhanced digital birth registration system integrated with health services, ensuring that millions of children now have improved access to essential social services and legal protection.
- In **Tunisia**, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors to collect, analyse and report data on the caseloads of social workers managing child protection cases, highlighting critical workforce gaps. This evidence-based advocacy led the Ministry to recruit **39 per cent more social workers**, growing the cadre from 77 to 107, thereby strengthening the national child protection system and expanding timely support and protection services for vulnerable children across the country.
- In **India**, the rights and protection of children with disabilities are being upheld through the establishment of the first-ever information and monitoring system. Data collected through the system are being used to inform policy reviews. As a result, every state now has an action plan on the protection of rights and access to justice and other services for children with disabilities.

By making children's needs visible and actionable, UNICEF is helping governments and communities design interventions that are smarter, faster and more equitable, so that every child receives the protection they deserve.

Infrastructure for service delivery

Strong systems save lives, but only if built to reach every child, everywhere.

UNICEF's work on child protection infrastructure focuses on making essential services – from psychosocial support to case management and early intervention – available, accessible and responsive, even in the hardest-to-reach communities.

In 2024, flexible thematic funding helped UNICEF strengthen both the services and the delivery platforms that facilitate them:

- In the **Eastern Caribbean Area**, UNICEF developed the U-Matter Text-line, offering culturally relevant, confidential, text-based psychosocial support and referral services to children and adolescents. The platform was expanded to **10 Caribbean countries**, bridging the gap for children who previously had no safe way to seek help.
- In **Jamaica**, UNICEF supported the creation of a pioneering **Child Protection Early Warning System**, which enabled front-line workers and community organizations to identify and respond to risks before harm escalates. Jamaica is laying the groundwork for a more resilient, child-centred protection system by shifting the focus from crisis response to early intervention and prevention.
- In **Nepal**, the establishment of the **first Children's Court** in the country in 2024 marks a significant milestone in Nepal's commitment to ensuring that every child has access to justice, legal protection and a fair chance for a promising future.
- In **Bolivia**, the 'Asistente DNA' app, which was successfully piloted and rolled out in 2023 to support child protection service delivery, has been upgraded with new features and is now actively used by **572 social workers** from 110 municipalities. It facilitates inquiries, legislation reviews and information exchange, particularly in municipal child protection offices.

Building infrastructure is not just about expanding services; it is about ensuring that help is accessible when and where it is needed most, empowering children to seek support safely, and enabling communities to act before crises unfold.

Financing the future of child protection

Without sustainable financing, child protection systems cannot grow, and children pay the price.

UNICEF works with governments to ensure that child protection is not only prioritized in law and policy, but also in national budgets. By improving public finance management, advocating for increased domestic investment and supporting costed plans, UNICEF helps countries build child protection systems that are resilient, scalable and built to last.

In 2024, flexible thematic funding enabled UNICEF to support governments in driving meaningful public investment in child protection:

- **In Malawi**, amidst climate shocks and economic instability, UNICEF successfully advocated for a **52 per cent increase in the national child protection budget** – from US\$502,000 in 2024/25 to nearly US\$979,000 in 2025/26 – ensuring a stronger safety net for vulnerable children.
- **In Mongolia**, a decade of sustained UNICEF support for public finance management has paid off. National investment in child protection and the social service workforce surged from US\$260,000 in 2016 to US\$2.3 million in 2023 and is projected to reach US\$5.85 million by 2025 – a **22-fold increase**.
- **In Zambia**, UNICEF used data-driven advocacy and an investment case for the social service workforce to secure a landmark government commitment: recruiting **5,000 new social workers** by 2027, alongside increased budget allocations for child protection and welfare programmes.
- **In Cambodia**, UNICEF's systems-strengthening efforts contributed to a major breakthrough, securing government funding for **20 provincial social workers** for the first time in the 2025 national budget.

Sustainable financing is not just about numbers; it is about building a future where child protection systems do not collapse under pressure but continue to serve every child, in every context, for generations to come.

Results that last

Strengthening child protection systems is a long-term investment, but one with transformative returns.

In 2024, flexible thematic funding played a catalytic role in helping UNICEF expand the quality, reach and sustainability of child protection systems across the globe. The Global Child Protection Thematic Fund helped turn ambition into action, contributing to meaningful progress at scale:

- **1.5 million children – 65 per cent of those in formal alternative care across 87 countries – are now in family-based settings**, a dramatic rise from just 27 per cent in 2021. This shift marks a global movement away from institutional care towards solutions that prioritize family, stability and belonging.
- **61 per cent of children in conflict with the law received non-custodial measures** in 2024 – a 15 percentage points increase since 2021. These child-sensitive justice reforms are helping protect rights, reduce recidivism and restore futures.
- **60.9 million births were registered** in more than 70 countries, bringing the cumulative total since 2021 to 205 million. Each registration is a gateway to protection, identity, and access to services that can shape a child's entire life.

These are not just statistics; they are powerful proof of what is possible when investments are flexible, systems-focused and rooted in children's rights. Behind every number is a child whose future is brighter, safer and more secure, and a system that is stronger because of it.



Scan the QR code or click on the image to read UNICEF's Data Companion and Scorecard for more information on progress against SDG and Strategic Plan targets. Thematic Funding as part of UNICEF's overall funding portfolio contributes to this progress.

5. Impact story

Cambodia: A community united to protect one girl – and every child

When a 12-year-old girl was assaulted during a religious festival in Kandal Province, it sent shockwaves through her close-knit community. The trauma was devastating not only for the child but for her family, neighbours and the very people tasked with protecting children. What followed became a powerful example of what is possible when trained front-line responders and a coordinated child protection system are in place.

The case was first reported by the girl and her sister. The police immediately contacted Mrs. Wen Chenda, the commune's trained focal point for child protection. As she learned the details, including that the perpetrators were men she knew personally, she turned to the network of trained social workers and child protection specialists supported by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth.

With the support of UNICEF's digital case management platform (Primer), the case was confidentially documented and shared among authorised responders, enabling a coordinated, trauma-informed response. The team, including government social workers and a local non-governmental organization, Krousar Thmey, worked quickly to provide psychosocial support to the girl while helping the family launch a small fish-selling business and secure education materials for the children.

The girl, who had never been to school and could not read or write, is now being supported to explore vocational training and imagine a future beyond her trauma. Her parents are attending positive parenting classes, while community outreach continues to raise awareness of children's rights.

Critically, the family, despite financial hardship, refused a bribe from the accused, choosing instead to pursue justice so other girls would be safe. The case is now moving forward, supported by the Child Protection Unit, and the girl continues to receive psychosocial care to prepare her for trial.

"This tragedy should never have happened," said one of the lead social workers. "But what gives us hope is how the system worked – and how the community chose to stand up for this child and all children."



Chor Mai, a social worker, trained by UNICEF in case management helps to identify and manage the needs of some of Cambodia's most at risk children.

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A boy in the village of Okabo, in the Southwest of Côte d'Ivoire. The village benefits from efforts to combat child labour.

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6. Hearing from our donors and partners

SIDA-Sweden and UNICEF: A strategic partnership for child protection

UNICEF deeply appreciates the Government of Sweden's steadfast commitment as the largest and longest-standing supporter of global child protection. In 2024, SIDA-Sweden was the leading contributor to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund, providing over 70 per cent of total investment and reinforcing Sweden's legacy of leadership through reliable, multi-year and flexible funding.

This partnership allows UNICEF to address urgent needs while driving sustainable, systemic change to protect children's rights worldwide – particularly in fragile and underfunded contexts. Sweden's support has been instrumental in advancing critical initiatives, including children's rights advocacy, digital case management tools, and the prevention of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Through this funding, millions of children, adolescents and caregivers have been reached, accelerating progress towards the SDGs and UNICEF's Goal Area 3.

UNICEF greatly values SIDA's leadership in advancing child rights and calls on more partners to follow its example. This type of flexible funding is not just important – it is game-changing.

BTS and BIGHIT MUSIC: Advancing child protection through global influence

Since 2017, BTS and BIGHIT MUSIC have been pivotal private sector partners for UNICEF's Child Protection Thematic Fund, delivering flexible, impactful support to end violence against children and promote mental well-being worldwide. Their alignment with UNICEF's mandate and global cultural influence has driven systemic change for the most vulnerable, inspiring us all with their commitment to child protection.

Their sustained contributions have been catalytic in strengthening UNICEF's capacity to prevent and respond to violence, tackle bullying and online abuse, and scale adolescent mental health initiatives. Through innovative public engagement, BTS mobilizes millions, amplifying critical messages of self-love, kindness and inclusion.

As UNICEF advances its Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, the BTS and BIGHIT MUSIC partnership is an innovative way to leverage music to support children's rights. Their commitment demonstrates how the private sector can champion flexible thematic funding to achieve lasting impact across child protection, mental health and youth empowerment.

Spotlight on the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund

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