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PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH UNICEF-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMING IN CHILD PROTECTION

UNICEF's 2010 Gender Policy mandates that all UNICEF-assisted programming, including in emergencies, contribute to gender equality in clearly defined, measurable ways. This brief provides basic information on why gender matters to the Medium-Term Strategic Plan for Focus Area 4, Child Protection, and offers practical tips on how to advance gender equality through programming in this area. For a more detailed treatment of this topic, see Operational Guidance on Focus Area 4. For an overview of key concepts related to gender equality, see *Promoting Gender Equality: An Equity-Focused Approach to Programming (Operational Guidance Overview)*.

Key issues

Gender inequalities reflect, and can increase, vulnerabilities. There are many variables that affect a child's protection risks, including ethnicity, the existence or absence of effective child protection legislation, war or peace, and access to educational opportunities. Yet one of the most significant factors is the sex of the child and related gender norms. Boys and girls, including adolescents, may face different protection risks, may have different needs and choices, and may possess different skills, knowledge and coping strategies.

Empowerment is critical to effective child protection. Women, girls and boys are not powerless victims or passive recipients of assistance, but rights holders who can play an active role in advocating with duty bearers and international organizations such as UNICEF, even in humanitarian settings. Respecting the autonomy, agency and self-determination of programme beneficiaries can improve the impact of protective measures and increase empowerment opportunities, and is an integral part of the human rights-based approach.

Protecting girls and boys from violence is key to the realization of their human rights. Boys and girls may be at risk of different forms of violence throughout the life cycle. The protection of girls

and boys from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and development. For females, gender-based violence includes sex-selective abortion, differential access to food and services, sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, sexual harassment, dowry/bride price abuse, so-called 'honour killing' and deprivation of inheritance. For males, gender-based violence is largely characterized by recruitment to armed groups, sexual exploitation and abuse; socialization to become violent; and exposure to harmful gender norms.

Key opportunities across child protection themes

In every context, the specific protection needs of boys and girls and the strategies to address them are distinct; these strategies should take into account not only gender, but also differences based on age, wealth, ethnicity and other variables that increase risk and resilience. Below are several child protection themes that UNICEF country programmes cover, with a brief description of key gender considerations in each area as well as potential solutions for addressing them:

- **Birth registration:** Parents may be less inclined to register girls than boys. As in parts of Asia, female fetuses may be aborted and baby girls may be victims of infanticide because of a preference for boys. A gender analysis of birth registration trends can identify disparities.
- **Children in conflict with the law:** Ensure that boys and girls are detained in separate facilities from each other and from adults and that facilities appropriately meet their needs. A gender analysis can reveal different patterns and root causes of detention between boys and girls, which can be used to help inform strategies to keep children out of prison.
- **Children with disabilities:** Ensure that assessments ask families questions about children with disabilities. Explore whether certain types of disabilities are more frequent among boys or girls. Identify strategies to assist disabled children in a non-stigmatizing way.
- **Children without parental care, and separated and unaccompanied children:** Children without parental care are at high risk of abuse and exploitation. A gender analysis of the risks posed to girls and boys in foster and spontaneous care situations is required. Assessments should identify prevailing reasons why children are without parental care and if these reasons differ between girls and boys. In the case of unaccompanied and separated children, identify the causes and risks for separation among girls and boys, as well as discrete strategies to address these risks.
- **Violence against children:** Training of male and female police on gender sensitivity and the unique child protection needs of both girls and boys, and recruiting of female police officers and counsellors may encourage case reporting not just by girls but also by boys.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Successful programmes dealing with commercial sexual exploitation include sex-disaggregated data on perpetrators and survivors and address the gendered-nature of institutions that deal with the sexual exploitation of boys and girls. For schools, a gender analysis will reveal disparities in terms of the sex ratios of male and female teachers, as well as their place in the hierarchy. School curricula and teaching materials provide entry points for countering negative norms and opportunities to prevent sexual exploitation.
- **Harmful practices:** Programming focused on female genital mutilation/cutting must take into account the gender dynamics of societies. The

most effective strategies for the abandonment of harmful practices are movements that involve all members of the community, from young girls to circumcisers to male community and religious leaders. While the parents of girls may be responsible for the early marriage of their daughters, they are, in turn, subject to prevailing cultural sentiments which place value on young brides and contribute to early marriage. These drivers should be identified in assessments, along with more specific information about the types of girls who are more likely to marry early.

- **Child labour:** Understand what drives boys and girls into labour, as well as the different types of labour in which they engage, and programme accordingly. Strategies designed to reduce boys' engagement in child labour must not increase the number of girls in child labour.
- **Trafficking:** Child protection actors must carry out in-depth research and analysis to identify the different risk factors for trafficking of boys and girls, why they are different, and strategies to address these risks. This can include social and economic disincentives to those who sell their children, those who traffic children, and those who abuse and exploit children.
- **Children associated with armed forces:** Demobilization and social reintegration must consider the variety of roles boys and girls play in armed groups, particularly those who have been part of armed forces without carrying arms. It is critical that these programmes include a gender analysis of the challenges that boys and girls, may have borne as a result of their recruitment or may face upon return to their communities.
- **HIV and AIDS in emergencies:** In emergencies, threats of HIV infection may be higher and specific outreach may be required to provide services where existing services have been destroyed. Programming must take into account stigmatization of those with HIV and AIDS and how this might affect different groups in accessing services.
- **Landmines:** Strategies for minimizing the risks and effects of landmines and explosive remnants of war must consider the different roles of boys and girls within society and their ability to participate in mine-risk education activities. Some activities might include clearing football pitches and play areas, organizing safer water collection points closer to residences, and ensuring that both boys and girls have access to mine-risk education.