



GUIDELINES TO STRENGTHEN THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE FOR CHILD PROTECTION

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Country office
CPD	Country Programme Document
GSSWA	Global Social Service Workforce Alliance
HRIS	Human resources information system
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PSN	Programme Strategy Note
RAM	Results Assessment Module
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

SP	Strategic Plan
SSW	Social service workforce
SSWS	Social service workforce strengthening
ToC	Theory of change
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAC	Violence against children
WHO	World Health Organization

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Overview of the Guidelines

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

recognizes every child's right to protection from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, to access justice and to quality care. In accordance with the Convention, states have the primary obligation to ensure that all children are protected and cared for. To meet this obligation, it is imperative for States to establish strong child protection systems to prevent and respond to all child protection risks and concerns.

The adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goals**^a (SDGs), and, for the first time, specific goals and targets to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children (VAC)(SDGs 5, 8 and 16), represent an unprecedented opportunity to address violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. To meet the ambitious SDG Targets for child protection, and ensure that no child is left behind, Goal Area 3 of the UNICEF **Strategic Plan**^b, 2018–2021 seeks to ensure that *"[g]irls and boys, especially the most vulnerable and those affected by humanitarian crisis, are protected from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and harmful practices."*

These global commitments recognize that violence affects a significant number of children across the world¹ with devastating consequences for their well-being, health and development. VAC places a long-term burden on social services, undermines investment and development across sectors including health, nutrition, early childhood development and education, and constrains economic development. Protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation is thus essential to long-term sustainable growth and development.

¹ A 2016 global meta-analysis estimated that over 1 billion boys and girls aged 2–17 had experienced moderate or severe physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse during 2014 (Hillis, Susan, et al., 'Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence against Children: A systematic review and minimum estimates', *Pediatrics*, vol. 137, no. 3, 2016, pp. e2015407).

UNICEF is the lead United Nations agency on child protection, supporting country, regional and global efforts to protect children from all forms of violence, access justice, and receive quality care through effective child protection systems. A vital element of this system is a strong social services workforce (SSW) with a clear mandate to protect children. A well-planned, trained and supported social service workforce (SSW) plays a critical role in identifying, preventing and managing risks, and responding to situations of vulnerability and harm. Social services workforce strengthening (SSWS) is a programme priority for UNICEF and is key to achieving Goal 3 of UNICEF's Strategic Plan.²

The **Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection 2018 (the Guidelines)**, developed in consultation with UNICEF Headquarters and regional offices and the **Global Social Service Workforce Alliance**^c (GSSWA), are informed by evidence of *'what works'* and lessons learned in the field. They are designed to accelerate UNICEF regional and country offices' programming on social service workforce strengthening, and support work to better plan, develop and support the social services workforce with national and regional partners.

The **Guidelines** are intended to complement the **Programme Guidance on Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents** (Programme Guidance on VAC), recognizing that a qualified social service workforce, paid and unpaid, government and non-governmental professionals and para-professionals are often the first line of response for children and families and the most important *element* of a well-functioning child protection system.

² According to the 2015 evaluation of UNICEF's Strategies and Programmes to address VAC, the SSW remains one of the weakest components of national child protection systems, and recommended that workforce strengthening become a priority for UNICEF.

UNICEF regional and country offices are urged to invest in strengthening the social service workforce. Not only will investment in this area contribute to the achievement of the SDG targets and Goal 3 of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, but more fundamentally, it will significantly enhance the capacity of child protection systems to better protect children. No system can function effectively without the individuals who make that system come to life.



UNICEF has collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international partners to develop a cohesive technical package, **INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children**, which promotes seven evidence-based strategies for preventing and responding to VAC. By investing in social service workforce strengthening (SSWS), a key intervention for enhancing response and support services, UNICEF will make a significant contribution to this global movement. A Handbook for INSPIRE was launched to guide implementation of programmes to address VAC and will be used with an Indicator Compendium to track and monitor the progress made in ending VAC.



Why Invest in Social Service Workforce Strengthening?

THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE plays a central role in supporting children and families in communities by alleviating poverty, identifying and managing risks, and facilitating access to and delivery of social services to enhance child and family well-being. A well-developed social service workforce is also key to promoting social justice, reducing discrimination, challenging and changing harmful behaviours and social norms, and preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation and family separation.

Investing in the social service workforce will yield high returns for child protection. Dedicated and qualified human resources in child protection are essential to

coordinating efforts and resources and providing a system of support for children and families across all sectors, including social protection, justice, health, education, security and disaster risk management. Lack of investment in the social service workforce will undermine all other efforts to strengthen the child protection system in a sustainable manner, including enforcement and implementation of policies and laws, operability and effectiveness of case management systems, and service delivery. A key lesson learned from the implementation of **UNICEF's Strategic Plan, 2014–2017^d** is that a trained social service workforce that is in contact with families and communities is vital to child protection.



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