

UNICEF is the world's leading agency for children, working in 190 countries to help children realize their rights to survival, development and protection. It was created as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund in 1946 to provide emergency help to children suffering from the aftermath of World War II. In the 1950s, UNICEF's mission grew from a post-war emergency fund to a development agency for children.

UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to help establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children, victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty and all forms of discrimination, violence and exploitation.

UNICEF's history in Iran goes back to 1950, when Iran's Government turned to UNICEF to fight tuberculosis. Opening an office in the country, UNICEF focused its programmes on child health and nutrition in the early years of its activities in Iran. Later on, education, child protection and Juvenile Justice, HIV/AIDS, child rights monitoring and child poverty reduction were added as additional fields of cooperation. UNICEF is also active in providing humanitarian assistance following emergencies and assisting national partners to prepare for, and reduce the risk of, sudden onset disasters.

In association with other UN agencies, UNICEF is committed to assist national stakeholders in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Six out of eight MDGs are directly related to children and women. At the international level, UNICEF has prioritized five focus areas in relation to key elements of the MDGs which guide UNICEF development assistance around the world. These are;

- 1) Young child survival and development, 2) Basic education and gender equality;
- 3) HIV/AIDS and children; 4) Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse;
- and 5) Policy advocacy and partnerships for children's rights.

In doing so, UNICEF seeks to address the rights and needs of children most in need first by applying a so-called equity-based approach. For UNICEF, equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias, or favoritism. This interpretation is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

An equity-based approach to UNICEF's programmes and policies seeks to understand and address the root causes of inequity so that all children, particularly those who suffer the worst deprivations in society, have access to education, health care, sanitation, clean water, protection, and other services necessary for their survival, growth, and development.

The primary role of UNICEF in Iran is as a provider of technical assistance and as a bridge between Iranian policy makers and practitioners and their peers abroad, ensuring knowledge on social development and child rights becomes available in Iran and part of national policies. In addition, UNICEF commits itself to assist national authorities and other partners in response to natural or man-made disasters to help ensure the basic rights and needs of children are met during and following any instance of humanitarian emergencies.

Currently, UNICEF works in Iran under a Basic Cooperation Agreement, operationalized by an agreed five-year programme of cooperation. This programme focuses on reducing regional disparities in child health and nutrition, girls' education and women's empowerment, child protection, HIV/AIDS and Adolescent Friendly Services and monitoring the Convention on the rights of the Child. UNICEF Iran currently implements projects in these areas in three Iranian provinces: Sistan and Baluchistan, Hormozgan and West Azerbaijan. These projects include:

Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD): The Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) works in partnership with the Ministry of Health, State Welfare Organization, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Welfare and Social affairs and Civil Registration Organization. The programme seeks integrated approaches to the development of the young child and consists of three projects: Child Health and Nutrition, Birth Registration and Early Childhood Development.

Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment: The Education Programme works in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Interior, Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrants (BAFIA). It aims to ensure quality primary education services for marginalized and at-risk girls, boys and women and empower women to participate in community development through capacity building activities in 12 selected districts in three disparity provinces. The cooperation with BAFIA comes in the framework of a project designed to advocate for and support Basic Education for Refugee Children and Women.

HIV/AIDS prevention: In close partnership with the Ministry of Health and Iran University of Medical Sciences, the HIV/AIDS programme aims to empower most at risk children, youth and women to protect themselves from HIV and related risk factors by providing information, education, counseling and referral services in Health Centres and also creating an enabling environment in the community. The programme also aims to develop workable models for providing effective HIV prevention interventions.

Child Protection: UNICEF's Child Protection Programme works in partnership with the Judiciary, the State Welfare Organization, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs. It is designed to protect girls and boys of all age groups from abuse, exploitation and violence, within the household, school system and community, and strengthen the protective environment for children in Iran. The programme includes two main projects that intend to ensure a protective environment for all children: 1) Legal Reform and Policy Development 2) Prevention of Child Abuse

Child Right Convention Monitoring: UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, through District Approach project advocates for and supports to strengthen the capacities of the local government and local communities, enabling and empowering them to develop formal mechanisms for child rights monitoring, build alliances and leverage resources for children, generation of knowledge on children's situation, bringing children's best interest to the centre of policy making, and to serve as a possible model to be applied and brought to scale at national level.