

Children, Victims and Women's Issues

It is important to ensure that the human rights of vulnerable groups that may be subject to marginalization, such as women, children, minorities, refugees, and displaced persons, are addressed in the context of crime prevention and criminal justice reform. The United Nations is responsible for establishing the rule of law on the basis of equality, with particular attention to gender equality and to the rights and vulnerabilities specific to children.

Justice for Children

The goal of the justice for children approach is to ensure that children, defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child as all persons under the age of eighteen, are better served and protected by justice systems, including the security and social welfare sectors. It specifically aims to ensure the full application of international norms and standards for all children who come into contact with justice systems as victims, witnesses and alleged offenders, or for other reasons where judicial, state administrative or non-state adjudicatory intervention is needed, for example regarding care, custody or protection.

Children in conflict with the law

The number of children deprived of liberty as a result of conflict with the law is estimated to be at least one million worldwide. In countries that do not fully understand the unique situation and vulnerabilities of children, children in conflict with the law are treated similarly to adults. Both adult criminal justice systems and juvenile justice systems may frequently use deprivation of liberty as the primary sentencing option. Both may also fail to consider the needs and best interests of the child and address the root causes that bring them into conflict with the law. Indeed, whilst a country may implement specialised procedures for children in conflict with the law, an effective juvenile justice system requires that the varying needs of children be assessed, that children in conflict with the law are referred to appropriate services, and that they are offered care and assistance with reintegration into the community. Moreover, a juvenile justice system should embody a child-friendly environment, using appropriate language and the minimum possible use of physical restraints.

Once in contact with a justice system that is unresponsive to children's needs, children deprived of liberty are at a heightened risk of abuse, violence, exploitation, and health related concerns, such as injury and HIV/AIDS infection. They also risk becoming further isolated from society, particularly where children's welfare, education, and reintegration are not fully promoted within the formal justice system.

Child victims and witnesses

Millions of children throughout the world suffer harm as a result of crime and abuse of power, and as a result, come into contact with the criminal justice system. The vulnerabilities of children in criminal justice processes, due to their age and still developing levels of maturity, require that special measures be taken to ensure their rights are adequately protected.

Services

UNODC offers assistance in:

- Conducting technical assistance needs assessments in the area of child justice reform;
- Providing legal assistance and legal advisory services to review legislative and regulatory frameworks, identify gaps and recommend action to comply with the requirements of the international legal framework in the area of justice for children;
- Conducting research and analysis in relation to children in contact with the law, as a basis for the development of prison reform strategies and policies;
- Developing national and local professional capacities and skills relevant to child justice reform;
- Providing advisory services and technical input to design, implement and monitor child justice reform strategies and action plans at national and local levels;
- Developing communication strategies, public information and education programmes to raise awareness on the rights of children in contact with the law (victims, witnesses, and alleged offenders);
- Training law enforcement and justice officials in child-sensitive intervention techniques.

For more specific information on justice for children, please follow the links below:

Relevant international legal framework on justice for children:

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice \(Beijing Rules\)](#)
- [UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency \(Riyadh Guidelines\)](#)
- [UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty \(Havana Rules\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System \(Vienna Guidelines\)](#)
- [Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime](#)

The following instruments, although not exclusively applicable to children, are of direct relevance to issues related to child justice:

- [UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners](#)
- [UN Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures \(Tokyo Rules\)](#)
- [UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders \(Bangkok Rules\)](#)

Reports of the Secretary General:

- [Child Justice Reform \(Report of the Secretary-General on Support of National Efforts for Child Justice Reform, in particular through Technical Assistance and Improved United Nations System-wide Coordination \(E/CN.15/2009/12\)\)](#)
- [Guidelines on Child Victims and Witnesses \(Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime \(E/CN.15/2008/11\)\)](#)
- [UNICEF and UNODC partner to promote justice for children](#)

Other Relevant Information:

- [UNICEF and UNODC partner to promote justice for children](#)

- [Free online course for justice professionals dealing with child victims](#)

Support and Assistance to Victims

A fair, effective and efficient criminal justice system is a system that respects the fundamental rights of victims, suspects, and offenders. It focuses on the need to prevent victimization, to protect and assist victims, to treat them with compassion, and to respect their dignity. Victims should also have access to judicial and other mechanisms, to seek prompt redress for harm they have suffered. Additionally, victims should have access to specialized assistance in dealing with any emotional trauma and other problems caused as a result of victimization.

Crime takes an enormous physical, financial, and emotional toll on victims. However, in many criminal justice systems, victims of crime are often forgotten and sometimes even re-victimized by the system itself. They are rarely allowed to fully participate in decisions that concern them and do not always receive the assistance, support, and protection they need. Redress for the harm they have suffered as a result of victimization is often not available and, when it is, it is too often insufficient or comes too late.

Services

UNODC offers assistance in:

- Reviewing and enhancing the legal framework and how it addresses the rights of victims;
- Developing national policies with respect to victim assistance, victim protection, and witness protection;
- Developing the capacity of existing institutions and agencies to offer victim assistance services;
- Conducting victimization surveys to understand existing victimization patterns and monitoring the experiences of victims who come into contact with justice systems.

For more detailed information on victims and witnesses, please see:

- [Basic principles of Justice for Victims \(Implementation of the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power \(Council resolution 1989/57\)\)](#)

Gender in the Criminal Justice System

Violence against women represents a violation of dignity, safety, and human rights. The issue of violence against women is immense, particularly in the context of domestic violence, conflict and war, and human trafficking. Yet it is often seen as a private matter, something that goes on behind closed doors. It is not - it is a crime, and the state has a responsibility to protect women that are victims of violence.

Some countries lack laws that criminalize violence against women. Others have the laws, but fail to implement them. In order to assist Member States to enact and implement laws in this area, the United Nations has produced the *Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice* services. [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#) **NEW!**

UNODC offers assistance in:

- Strengthening women and girls' access to justice;

- Supporting the development of legislation that protects the rights of women and girls and reflects regional and international law and human rights standards;
- Developing training programmes on how to apply international and regional laws and human rights standards on criminal justice in the domestic setting; and
- Building the capacity of women to serve at all levels of the criminal justice system, including positions of authority.

For further information on gender in the criminal justice system, please follow the links below:

- [Strategies and measures on the elimination of violence against women \(Report on the meeting of the intergovernmental expert group to review and update the Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held in Bangkok from 23 to 25 March 2009 \(E/CN.15/2010/2\)\)](#)
- [Responses to violence against women and girls \(Report of the Secretary-General on crime prevention and criminal justice responses to violence against women and girls \(E/CN.15/2008/2\)\)](#)
- [Violence against women \(Note by the Secretariat on Aspects of violence against women that pertain directly to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice \(E/CN.15/2008/CRP\)\)](#)
- [Elimination of violence against women - workshop \(Background paper by the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme Network \(PNI\) - Workshop on Eliminating Violence Against Women: Forms, Strategies and Tools \(E/CN.15/2008/CRP.3\)\)](#)
- [United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders \(the Bangkok Rules\) \[English\]\(#\), \[Arabic\]\(#\), \[Chinese\]\(#\), \[French\]\(#\), \[Russian\]\(#\), \[Spanish\]\(#\) **NEW!**](#)

See also the [Tools and publications](#) page for further information regarding the abovementioned issues on children, victims, and women's issues.