

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Upper East Regional Profile



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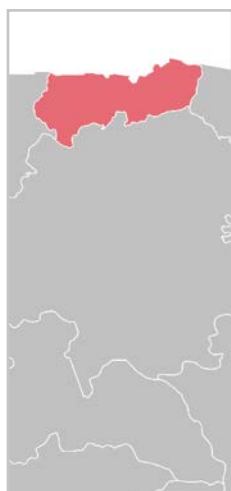
MINISTRY OF GENDER
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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for every child

This profile of the Upper East Region summarizes the situation regarding violence, abuse and exploitation of children. It draws mainly on findings from the Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014¹ and will be a useful tool for evidence-based advocacy to better target resources for child protection, inform policy decision-makers and guide future strategies for community action.

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The regional context

Regional demographics²

TOTAL POPULATION:
1,046,545 (4.2 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
ON AN AREA OF 8,842 KM²
(3.7 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

**41.5 PER CENT
OF THE POPULATION
IS AGED 0–14 YEARS**

Resources

The Upper East Region is the least urbanized region in Ghana, with a rural population of over 79.0 per cent and many living in scattered settlements. The region's economy is based on agriculture, primarily cattle rearing and production of cereals like millet, sorghum and rice.



¹ Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Accra, Ghana. The report also draws on information from the Regional Qualitative Reports, 2013, Government of Ghana/UNICEF; Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Ghana Statistical Service; and Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

² Ghana Statistical Service Census 2010

Child-protection concerns

The most prominent concern in the Upper East Region is the inability of parents to provide for the needs of their children. There is widespread poverty due to outmoded farming practices, drought and a slow-down in economic activities as a result of perennial ethnic conflict. Consequently, children must support their parents' economic activities by farming, shepherding and hawking or selling their parents' wares on market days.

Conflict

Children living in the Upper East Region are vulnerable to insecurity, disrupted education, violence, injury and death from conflicts. The baseline study indicated that occasional violent clashes between the Kusasis and Mamprusis, especially during festive seasons, put children at risk of being hit by stray bullets or being injured. To prevent children from being hit by stray bullets, they are put in fertilizer bags. Children in the region complained that this is very uncomfortable and dangerous as it sometimes results in suffocation.

Violence at home and at school

Violence at home

Children in the region report one of the highest levels of physical violence at home. Three in four children (73.3 per cent) reported that they were beaten between the ages of 2 and 14 by an adult. This rate confirms that of a survey carried out in 2011 (MICS report³), which identified that 69.5 per cent of children aged 2–14 years had experienced any form of physical punishment. The cane, sticks and sometimes bare hands according to the baseline study are the most common methods of dispensing physical violence.

11.7%

adults reporting a child in the household being beaten by an adult at home in past month

38.3%

adults stating they physically punish children

13.3%

children reporting being beaten by an adult at home in past month

73.3%

children reporting being beaten by adults 'all the time' or 'sometimes' between the ages 2 and 14



³ Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service

36.7%

**CHILDREN
REPORTED
BEING ABUSED
AT SCHOOL**

The MICS report (2011) also revealed that for household members that resorted to physical punishment, 51.7 per cent hit the child on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with something like a belt, hairbrush, stick or other hard objects and 47.9 per cent spanked, hit or slapped the child's bottom with bare hands.

Violence at school

Children in the region reported the lowest level of verbal humiliation and physical abuse at school. One in every ten children (10.0 per cent of children) reported to have been verbally humiliated by a teacher/head teacher and one in every three children (36.7 per cent) reported being physically abused.



children reporting being verbally humiliated by a teacher at school in past month

Sexual abuse and exploitation

The baseline study revealed that sexual abuse of young girls is common in urban areas in the region. Such abuse is normally committed by adult men who defile young girls between the ages of 9 and 17 years. Parents (especially mothers) fail to report the perpetrators because they fear the stigma which could cost girls their marriage prospects. Some perpetrators also buy their way out of the judicial system. In rural areas on the other hand, sexual abuse is related to an intention to marry the victim.

Commercial sexual exploitation

In rural areas, girls are most at threat during the lean or dry season when poverty and hunger are most prevalent. Children aged 13 to 17 are often abused by men who can provide them with money and food in exchange for sex, resulting in pregnancy and the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and HIV. The baseline study revealed that the region has one of the highest rates of commercial sexual exploitation with 68.3 per cent of children and 58.3 per cent of adults reporting that children in their communities are having sex in exchange for money and other things they need.



adult respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community



child respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community

Child labour

The baseline study revealed that children in rural communities in the region between the ages of 6 and 17 mostly engage in activities such as shepherding, farming and gathering of concrete stones for sale. The baseline study identified the youngest age at which a child engaged in child labour activities as 6 years, but the MICS report (2011) identified the average age at which a child starts to work as 8 years.

The GLSS 6⁴ showed that the region has the third highest rate of child labour in the country. One out of every three children (31.7 per cent) aged 5–17 were engaged in child labour while one out of eight children (13.1 per cent) aged 5–17 were involved in hazardous labour.

Of the number of children who were engaged in child labour, 29.1 per cent were attending school while 10.9 per cent worked in other forms of hazardous labour. For children in school, herding livestock is an after school activity that must not be missed.

Among children who were not attending school, 49.4 per cent were employed in child labour with 28.2 per cent in hazardous forms of child labour.

Child trafficking

In the region, trafficked children are mostly girls as young as 7 years. They are trafficked to big cities, where they become domestic servants and are not put in school. Trafficking peaks during the dry season and school vacations when parents give out their daughters to friends and relatives because they are unable to support them.

Trafficked children are vulnerable from the time they are rescued until the time they are successfully reintegrated into their families. There are no accommodation facilities to take them in while they are taken through counselling or their families are being contacted. According to anecdotal information, money earned through child labour is often taken by adults, including trafficking agents, and in some circumstances by their parents.

Begging

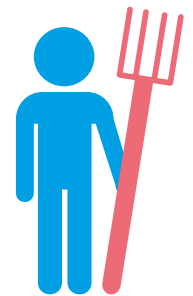
Children engage in street hawking in every part of the country in both urban and rural settings. In the region, street work includes begging. Boys who are taken to *mallams* to be trained in Islamic teachings are sometimes used as beggars or *almazeeeri* on the street in order to collect alms to pay for their upkeep and that of their master.

Child marriage

Child marriage was reported in the region during the baseline study. Reasons given for child marriage included: preventing the girl from engaging in sexual activities with men and in a reckless lifestyle, getting the husband to contribute to the upbringing of the child so that she becomes a good woman, and ensuring that the child is in good hands. According to the MICS (2011), the region has the highest child marriage rate in the country with 39.2 per cent of women aged 20–49 married before age 18. Meanwhile 6.7 per cent were married before they were 15 years of age and 1 out of every 14 (7.3 per cent) teenage girls between 15 and 19 years were married.

13.1%

CHILDREN
AGED 5–17
INVOLVED IN
HAZARDOUS
LABOUR



39.2%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 18



⁴ Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

27.8%

WOMEN
AGED 15-49
REPORTED HAVING
SOME FORM
OF FGM/C

Children in polygynous marriages

Girls are often married in polygynous unions to older men. Both polygyny (where a husband has more than one wife) and a large spousal age gap are a source of discrimination against women. The practice may also create concerns about transmission of HIV and other health issues, while economic instability and vulnerability of women are especially aggravated by polygyny.

The region has the second highest rate of polygynous marriages, affecting two in five women (39.3 per cent of women aged 15-49).

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

The region has one of the highest prevalence rates of FGM/C with almost one in three women (27.8 per cent) aged 15-49 years having some form of FGM/C, compared with around 4.0 per cent nationally. In some communities in the Upper East Region, FGM/C is a deep-rooted tradition, and underlying gender structures still uphold such harmful practices. According to the MICS (2011), 94.0 per cent of women have heard of FGM/C, and 94.9 per cent of these women believe it should be discontinued, one of the highest disapproval rates in the country.

Separation from parents

The baseline study revealed that the region has the second lowest level (8.3 per cent) of children not living with both parents. Some relatives who foster children involve them in forced domestic labour, fail to provide for their basic needs and deny them education.

Mechanisms for protecting children

58.3%

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)

Birth registration

Registering children at birth protects them from violations such as child marriage and trafficking. According to the MICS (2011) report, only just over half (58.3 per cent) of children under 5 in the region have their births registered. Of the children who are not registered, 57.3 per cent have parents/caregivers who know how to register a birth.



Families

Parents are still the principal protectors of children. In polygynous households, stepmothers often play a supportive role in the care of children. In the Upper East Region, for example, it was reported that stepmothers provide care for the child when the mother is not around.

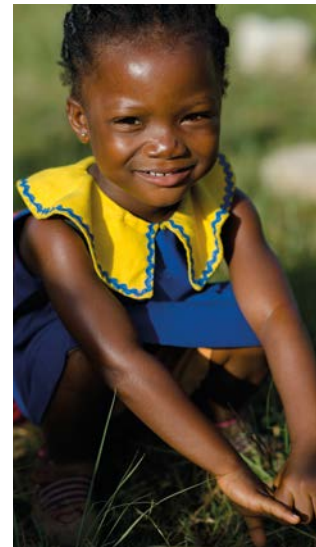
The foremost protective system for children outside the nuclear family is the extended family, comprising uncles, cousins, aunts, grandparents, etc. Children often resort to their grandparents, especially grandmothers, for advice and, in times of wrongdoing, are punished by them.

Communities

In the bid to protect children in communities, various actors/stakeholders play specific roles and responsibilities and act in a coordinated manner to secure the rights and freedoms of children. These actors comprise chiefs and queen mothers, teachers, opinion leaders, elders, concerned individuals, religious leaders, Members of Parliament, etc.

The chief for instance is the overall leader in the community. He makes laws to protect children, imposes bans on activities that are negative to the welfare of children, resolves family disputes involving children, links with institutions to address child-related issues, takes care of needy children and provides land for building of social amenities.

The queen mother also enforces customary laws regarding women and children, serves as a foster mother to needy children, imposes fines on people who abuse children, serves as a role model to young girls, raises the concerns of children at traditional council meetings, advocates against harmful traditional practices, and advises women on how to protect children. Government organizations and agencies responsible for child protection such as the Department of Social Welfare, Department of Community Development, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service and the Judicial Service work together to protect children.



Recommendations for positive change

Sensitization and awareness creation

Sensitization of parents and caregivers on the importance of birth registration will help reduce the number of children that are incarcerated and treated as adults when they come into conflict with the law.

Government departments responsible for protecting children lack adequate financial and logistical resources to carry out their mandates effectively. This situation should be remedied as a matter of urgency.

Night-time entertainment (jams) operators should be educated to prevent children from participating in such activities. Also such 'jams' should not be outdoor activities. They should be held in enclosed places.

Policies and laws

Government should provide livelihood opportunities for women to enable them to properly take care of their children.

Department of Social Welfare

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) should provide temporary facilities to take care of trafficked children who have been rescued before they are reunited with their families.



District Assemblies

Child Protection Officers at the District Assemblies should be involved in planning and implementing child-protection activities. The District Assemblies should also be encouraged to increase budgetary commitment to the plans.

Police

Police officers need to be trained in alternative dispute resolution to support the settling of cases out of court.

Education

Basic and senior high school education should be made more accessible and affordable for all children in both rural and urban areas.

Conclusions

Threats to the welfare of children in the Upper East Region are growing, especially as the level of poverty increases, the number of young children grows and the traditional family structure breaks down. The only answer is better funding for child-protection programmes as well as more government assistance to the local economy.

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Acknowledgement

This profile was developed by the Government of Ghana – Department of Children (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection), supported by UNICEF.