



## CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES

UNICEF supports the Government of China in quality scale up of community-based child-friendly spaces that deliver protection and welfare services to children and families in remote and disadvantaged communities.

### Child protection system and services need to be strengthened

China's emerging child protection system has received much support from the government, which has adopted laws and policies and introduced reforms to address gaps in service provision. These policies contain actions needed to prevent violence and respond to the vulnerable. They also establish a multi-sectoral collaboration mechanism at county, township and village level. The government also increased its investments in protective services for children at village and community levels, and raised community awareness on child protection and welfare.

Initiatives have laid a foundation for a child protection system in China. Yet much room for improvement remains. And demand from the public for high quality services is high. In poor rural areas and remote communities, there is a lack of established and well-organized child protection and welfare services to support children and their families. There is a general absence of preventative measures and community-based services close to children's homes. This means that children are vulnerable to violence and exploitation and families are unable to provide support to keep children safe

from harm. Disadvantaged children including those living in poverty, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV and by migration, are often the ones most in need. But they are less likely to access services due to financial constraints, social stigma, poor access to transportation and language barriers.

### Our programme

Child-friendly spaces are community-based facilities that provide children with a safe place to play, learn and develop. They have been used widely since 1999 to support children's well-being during emergencies. They provide a safe space with supervised activities, by raising awareness of the risks to children, and mobilizing communities to create a protective environment in many countries around the world.

In China, child-friendly spaces were first established by UNICEF and the government to provide child protection and other services after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. In recognition of the potential of the child-friendly spaces to reach vulnerable children, the Government of China — in the latest National Plan of Action for Children's Development (2011–2020) — called for the provision of one Children's Place

(the Chinese version of the child-friendly space) in 90 per cent of all urban and rural communities. From 2012 to 2015, the Government of China and UNICEF began establishing them in a development (i.e. non-emergency) settings.

Since 2016, UNICEF's work has also expanded from supporting the operation of child-friendly spaces to establishing a technical support mechanism at provincial level to ensure replication.

## From emergency setting to development setting

In China, child-friendly spaces were first established by UNICEF and the National Working Committee on Children and Women to provide child protection and other services after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. A total of 58 child-friendly spaces have been established in the provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan under an emergency context.

Initially intended to function in an emergency setting, the child-friendly spaces proved to be such a useful outlet for reaching vulnerable children that the Government of China and UNICEF began establishing them in a development (i.e. non-emergency) setting in nine provinces from 2012-2015. During this period, 21 child-friendly spaces were supported by UNICEF to function in a development capacity. Today, child-friendly spaces are being established by local governments as a permanent fixture within communities for reaching vulnerable children.

## A safe place to play, learn and develop

Child-friendly spaces provide a safe place for children to play, learn and develop through daily activities. This includes organized play, non-formal study, sports, and much more. Child-friendly spaces also protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation through the presence of staff who are trained to recognize warning signs, development and special needs and refer children to specific service facilities.

Child-friendly spaces also provide an opportunity for

communication and improving awareness and understanding on issues concerning child protection and early childhood development (ECD).

## Provincial technical support hubs

Since the government announced the plan of setting up one Children's Place in 90 per cent of all urban and rural communities, UNICEF's work has also expanded from supporting the operation of child-friendly spaces to establishing a technical support mechanism at provincial level to ensure replication. Beginning in 2016, UNICEF has been working in collaboration with the National Working Committee on Children and Women to establish five provincial technical support hubs (Chongqing Municipality, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces) that have, as of 2018, a total of 208 multidisciplinary experts working with local authorities to ensure the establishment and operation of the child-friendly spaces.

The hubs oversee quality assurance in addition to providing technical and supervisory advice. Through these five hubs, UNICEF is supporting 124 child-friendly spaces in 15 counties and districts to demonstrate the impact of providing quality community-based services to children at all ages, and their caregivers. UNICEF is also implementing variations on the child-friendly spaces model, including one that includes disaster risk reduction activities and another that incorporates structured ECD activities for children up to six years old.

As of 2018, through the 5 provincial technical support hubs that oversee **124** child-friendly spaces, **72,973** children and **112,956** caregivers have benefited from services delivered by **462** child-friendly spaces (full-time and part-time) staff and **1,478** volunteers.

