



Chuuk State,
Federated States of
Micronesia



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CHUUK DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Policy Briefs on Children and Childhood

Inter-agency Chuuk Child Protection Policy (CCPP)

Introduction

The main purpose of this policy note is to outline the intention to establish an Inter-agency Child Protection Policy that specifically incorporates Care and Educational components in order to improve child protection in Chuuk State. It highlights the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in supporting the quality of services including the provision of developmentally-age appropriate programs as means for protecting and safe-guarding children's interests, rights and wellbeing. The FSM government has acknowledged that violence against children is a key public health concern and that available data suggest it is a significant problem in FSM.¹ Essentially, the CDOE recognizes the need to integrate broader development and systems approaches to safe-guarding children within the school system, building on prevention strategies rather than only focusing on emergency response to incidents of abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence.

Rationale

In the FSM, following the 2020 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, a concerning trend surrounding the high level of abuse of children, including domestic violence, emotional abuse and sexual abuse, and the significant underreporting of such cases, owing to stigma and other reasons were reported.² Recently, in a comparative recent research study facilitated by the University of New South Wales, Australia, Chuuk State recorded the highest number of Adolescent Unplanned Pregnancy (AUP) in three research contexts in the Pacific.³ Trafficking and sexual exploitation of young girls and boys also remain an issue of concern in FSM. Cases tend not to be reported due to social stigma and 'victims' fear of possible repercussions in their home communities.⁴ In terms of young children's rights to quality education including potential growth and development, the elimination of sector grant in light of the step down of Compact funds has had a negative impact on protecting young children's wellbeing in this regard. As the FSM moves towards the end of the financial provision in fiscal year 2023, the capacity of the CDOE to provide programs best suited for early detection and intervention have been drastically affected.

Development and Participation

Following the reactivation of the FSM President's National Advisory Council on Children (PNACC), the FSM government has committed to developing a child protection law which underpins child protection as well as a comprehensive law on child labor. Essentially, the FSM government had recently established a new unit responsible for child protection. As an expansion of this unit, a comprehensive child protection legislation or a national child protection policy to provide the legal framework for the child protection system is yet to be established. In addition, there needs to be a comprehensive legal framework guiding the delivery of child protection prevention, early intervention and response services put in place.

In response, under the leadership of the CDOE, the Inter-agency Chuuk Child Protection Policy working group (CCPPWG) was formulated in April 2022. The CCPPWG consists of representatives from all key government and civil society. The CCPPWG terms of reference and the Inter-agency CCPP documents were drafted with the assistance of the Education Advisor who is responsible for leading the design and development of the child protection policy and costed implementation plan.

Data, Information and Research

The FSM lacks comprehensive data on the prevalence of child protection issues to support evidence-based policy development. In addition, effective planning, policy development and monitoring of the child protection system are hampered by the lack of a centralized child protection information management system. In its Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concerns that the collection of data on the status of children's situation remains problematic and does not allow for disaggregation or analysis. It is envisioned that through the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach, a comprehensive system of data collection that allows for disaggregation by relevant factors will be enhanced⁵ to establish a multi-sector information management system on the situation of children in Chuuk State. *Assos* or the informal conversation space has been identified as the culturally appropriate methodological tool for consultations with service providers and members of the wider community.

¹ Government of the FSM, FSM: Voluntary National Review on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2020, p. 57.

² Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of the Federated States of Micronesia, CRC/C/FSM/CO/2, 3 April 2020, Para 38.

³ Adolescent Unplanned Pregnancy. Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

⁴ US State Department, 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, available at, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TIP_Report_Final_20210701.pdf

⁵ Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of the Federated States of Micronesia, CRC/C/FSM/CO/2, 3 April 2020, Paras. 15, 16.

Finance, Governance and Regulations

A recommendation was put forward for a specific budget line for child protection following the concerns raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its Concluding Observations in the FSM of the absence of a CP budget. Figure 1 below provides a window into the budget allocation for child protection in comparison to the FSM government programs under the Department of Health and Social Affairs.

Figure 1: FSM government Programs under Health and Social Affairs 2018 – 2021

	Program Name	Fund Type	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Gender Development	General (local)	34,024	85,194	94,724	74,424
2	Sport & Youth Support Services	General (local)	45,335	45,941	72,206	64,156
3	Personal Responsibility Educ. Program	Federal	107,435	107,435	109,554	109,554
4	Abstinence	Federal	15,492	15,492	15,492	15,492
5	Child Protection	Foreign (UNICEF)		4,487	83,000	116,000

Source: Department of Health and Social Affairs, Budget Unit, 2021

Of particular note is the absence of funding from government specifically directed towards child protection prior to 2019. Evidently, the FSM child's interests, rights and wellbeing need to be a matter of national and/or state priority.

Though the FSM Government has taken significant steps to meet its international commitments through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) and the involvement of Children in armed conflicts on October 26, 2015,⁶ it is critical that sufficient funding ought to be directed at setting up Child Protection systems. including legislations. In endorsing the CP inter-agency approach, Chuuk State will take the lead in making substantive progress generally towards meeting the SDGs and, in particular, realizing the commitment of the FSM under the CRC whereby children have the right to:

- Relevant and quality education
- Play (with specific reference to a play-based curriculum for 3-5 yo)
- Excellent health
- Access to appropriate information
- Know and practice one's culture and religion.

Implications

What are the implications for establishing an inter-agency child protection mechanism? Protecting children from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation is everybody's responsibility. Families, communities, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including civil societies play a vital role in realizing children's rights and protection. Integral parts to these collaborative measures require:

- Strengthening partnership ties with members of the community in the respective regions in Chuuk State on raising child protection awareness through training, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Fostering quality response and referral systems within agencies who work (in)directly with children;
- Develop an inter-agency Child Protection Information System and a child protection intervention registry to target assistance programs in the five regions within Chuuk State;
- Drafting of a comprehensive Child Protection and Child Justice legislation; and
- Establishing a Child Protection Coordinator (CPC) to implement delegated child protection initiatives as defined by the CCPP framework including the development of a multi-sector information management system to compile data on the situation of children.

These requirements are important in strengthening collaboration efforts to establish a rigorous multi-sectoral child protection policy and relevant tools. A key reason for state and national support and regulation is that the quality of early childhood services, including safe-guarding and protecting the younger generation, is linked to long-term educational and social benefits for children and their families.

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The *CDOE Policy Briefs on Early Childhood* is a series of short, flash notes on early childhood and family policy issues. It seeks to answer various questions that policy makers have about the planning and implementation of early childhood and family policies. For further information and the electronic version of the *Briefs*, please check:

<http://www.chuukdoe/ec/briefs>

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⁶ Human Rights Council Forty-seventh session 21 June–9 July 2021

Agenda item 6 Universal periodic review. FSM

⁷ The author acknowledges the contributions of the CCPP working group which

consists of representatives at leadership levels of government agencies, faith-based organizations and civil society.