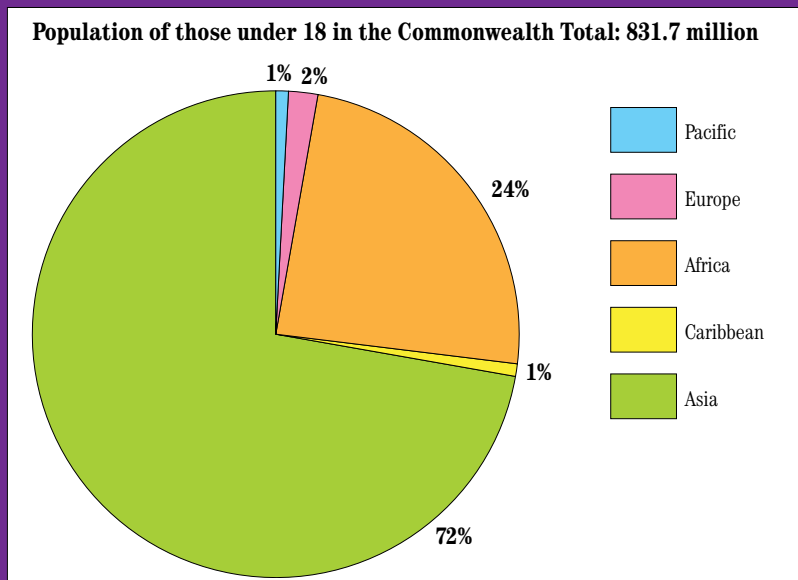


THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD – SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH

The following pages present and discuss some key data on the lives of children across the Commonwealth. They are a mixture of good news and bad news: while major challenges remain in delivering the range of rights set out in the Convention, there have been great strides forward that have improved the lives of millions of children.

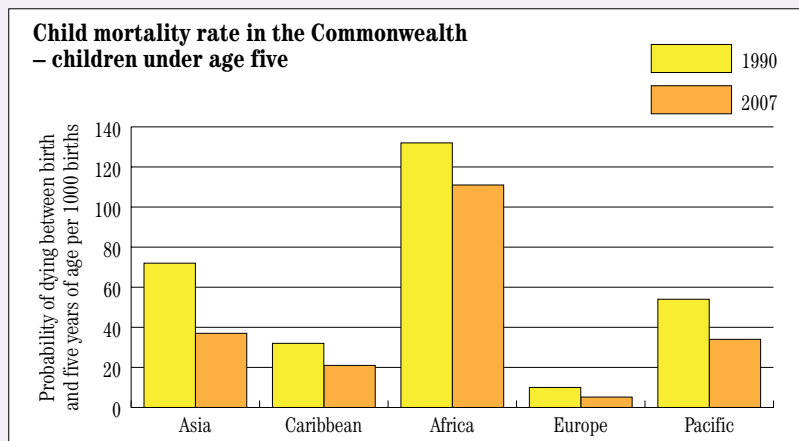
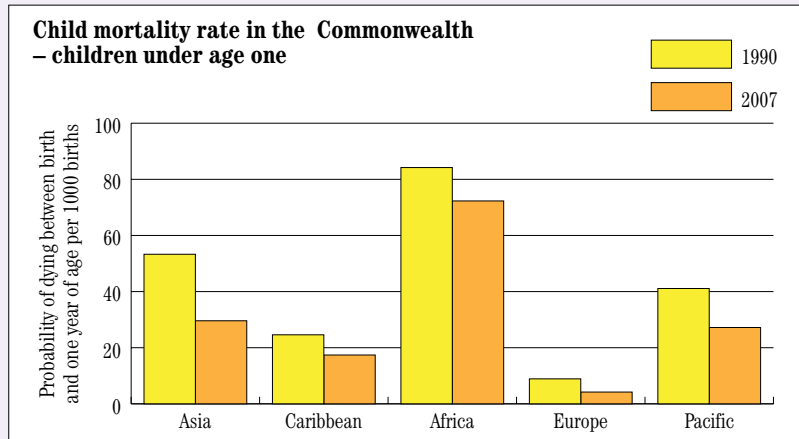
Data on children has not been historically uniform or consistent in quality. The data presented here collates what is reliable and relevant; the periods covered by the data vary according to what is available. Not all aspects of the Convention are addressed here: instead, key issues are briefly explored.



Life

Almost all Commonwealth countries witnessed a reduction in infant and child mortality rates in the period 1990–2007. The infant mortality rate measures deaths of those below the age of one; the rate for children relates to the period from birth to 5 years.

While infant and child mortality rates rose in four member states, they improved dramatically in Malawi, Bangladesh and Maldives during this period.

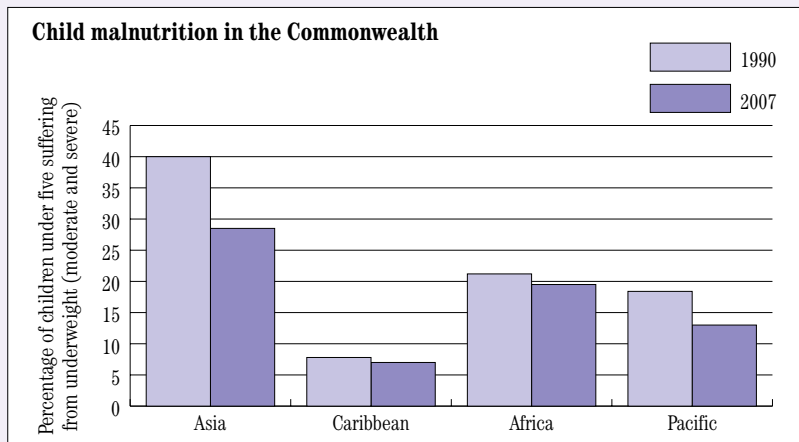


Data information for graphs: Source UNICEF, The State of the World's Children Report 2009 (data 1990 and 2007). Australia and New Zealand are classified as Pacific region countries, and Canada is included in the Caribbean grouping.

Health

Child malnutrition fell in the period 1999–2007 in all regions of the Commonwealth, although in some countries it remained level or increased. In one country more than one-third of children under five were recorded as being seriously under-nourished, according to UNICEF. In another, anaemia affects 74 per cent of children under the age of three and 90 per cent of adolescent girls.

South, south-east Asia and the Pacific region have recorded considerable falls in rates of child malnutrition. Malaysia and Bangladesh saw the largest falls; Ghana and Malawi also recorded significant drops.



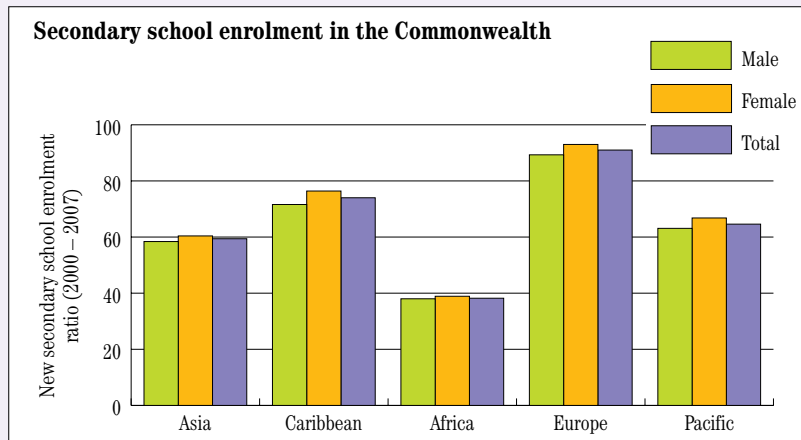
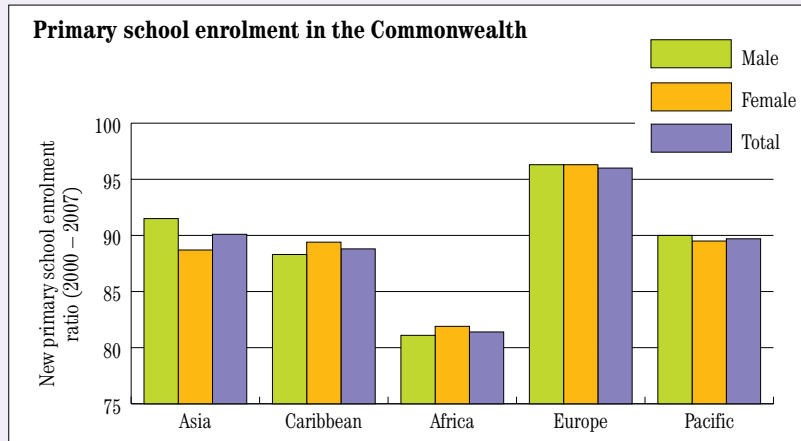
Data information for graph: Source UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children Report 2009* (data 2007); *The State of the World's Children Report 2000* (data 1999). No data were available for Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Europe. Calculations are based on incomplete data in the Pacific.

The number of babies who are underweight at birth remains a cause for concern in south Asia, four African and two Caribbean countries. Great improvements were noted in Papua New Guinea and Bangladesh in the period 1994–2007.

HIV/AIDS has a destructive effect across many Commonwealth states. Sexual abuse of children and mother-to-child transmission of HIV affects the health status of young people. Five Commonwealth countries each have an estimated 1 million or more children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In another country, an estimated 220,000 children are infected with HIV, while between 55,000 and 60,000 children are born every year to mothers who are HIV-positive (UNICEF data 2007).

Education

In the vast majority of Commonwealth countries there is a high enrolment rate in both primary and secondary schools.



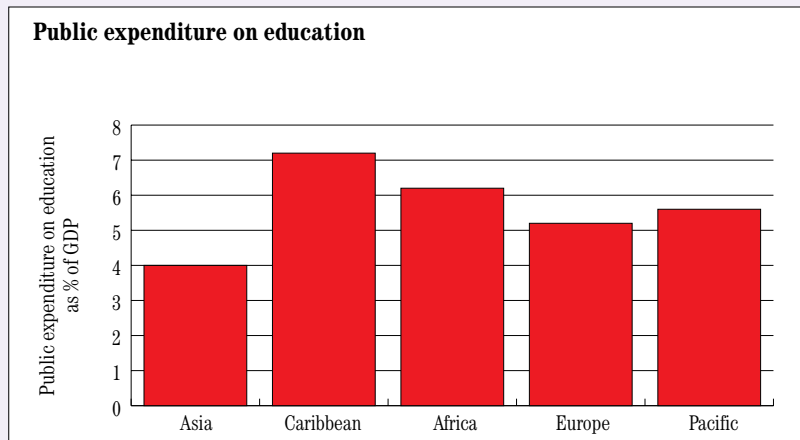
Net attendance means the percentage of children in the age group that officially corresponds to primary/secondary schooling who attend primary or secondary school.

Data information for graphs: Source UNICEF, The State of the World's Children Report 2009 (data 2007) (No data were available for enrolment in secondary school for Canada, Cameroon, Sri Lanka and Singapore and some countries in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. For primary school enrolment, no data were available for Singapore, Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tuvalu.)

In primary education, 23 countries have an enrolment rate of 90 per cent or higher, with two members – Canada and Malaysia – at 100 per cent. Gender differentials remain, most worryingly at levels of 17 percentage points in one state (where boys have a higher enrolment rate) and at 14 percentage points in another (where girls have a higher rate).

In secondary education, achievement for children is more equivocal. The spread of enrolment rates is wide – between 4 and 94 per cent, with 25 Commonwealth states having a rate of 50 per cent or over and 18 below 50 per cent (data are not available for every member state). The lowest enrolment rates are in Africa, followed by countries in the Pacific region and Asia. The highest rates are in Europe and the Caribbean, and in New Zealand, Brunei Darussalam and Seychelles. The gender gap is over ten points in three states; in all of them the enrolment rate is higher for girls than boys.

Investment in education is seen as an indicator of the commitment of governments to promote the right to education.



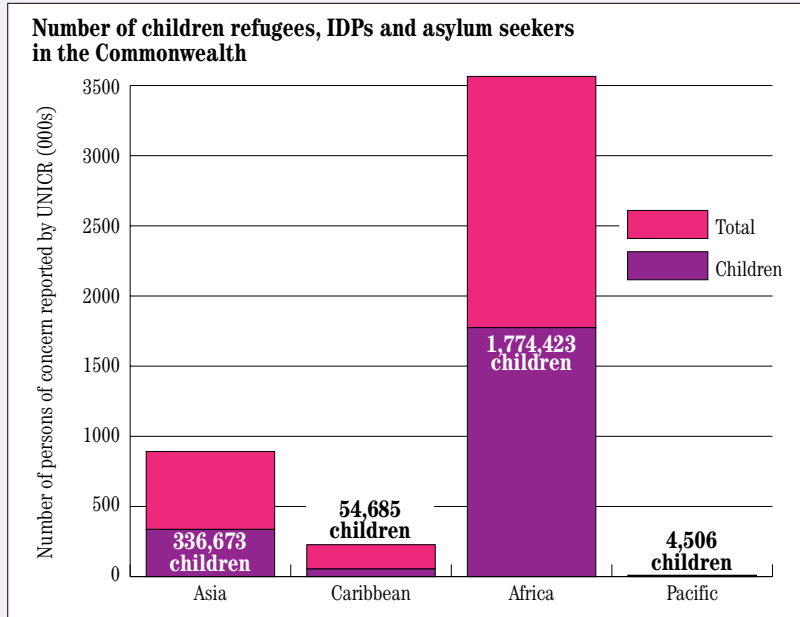
Data information for graph: Source UNESCO (data 2006–2007). (Data not available for Sri Lanka, Brunei, Cyprus and some countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific region.)

In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted with appreciation that education is the largest single item in the Bahamas national budget and that primary and secondary education is free in public schools for all children. The Bahamas also has programmes that ensure that pregnant teenagers are given an opportunity to complete their education.

Displacement

Figures on the number of children who are displaced, refugees or seeking refugee status are not available for all member states.

Data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show that in 21 member states a total number of 2,183,421 children are of concern to the agency; 1,433,480 of these children are located in two member states alone. The distress faced by children in these situations, including separation from their families and limited or no access to health or education, are all issues that link directly to the content of the CRC.

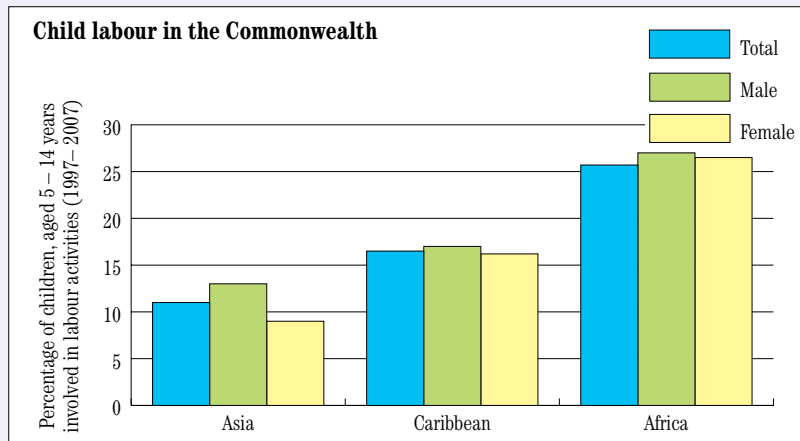


Data information for graph: Source UNHCR (2008). The graph shows the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR defined as refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees, stateless persons and others of concern. In some cases, demographic indicators are only available for a proportion of the entire group and the percentage of children has been extrapolated to the entire population. Data are only available for one country in the Pacific region and two in the Caribbean, including Canada. Some countries provide only total data to UNHCR without a demographic breakdown (Australia, 23,078; NZ, 2,868; UK, 306,702; Malta, 4,834). These countries are therefore not included in the above graph.

Violence, abuse and exploitation

Globally, one in six children work, and 218 million children aged 5–17 are involved in child labour worldwide. 126 million children work in hazardous conditions. The highest number of child labourers are in the Asia/Pacific region, where there are 122 million working children. The highest proportion of child labourers is in sub-Saharan Africa, where 26 per cent of children are involved in work. (Child Rights Information Network, based on data from the International Labour Organization).

Statistics are not adequately available or reliable for the Commonwealth yet some information is notable. The country considered to have the largest number of child labourers in the world under the age of 14 is a Commonwealth member and is estimated to include 12.6 million children working in hazardous occupations (UNICEF). The proportion of working children aged 5–14 is estimated to be over 30 per cent in six Commonwealth states, including one where it is as high as 48 per cent.

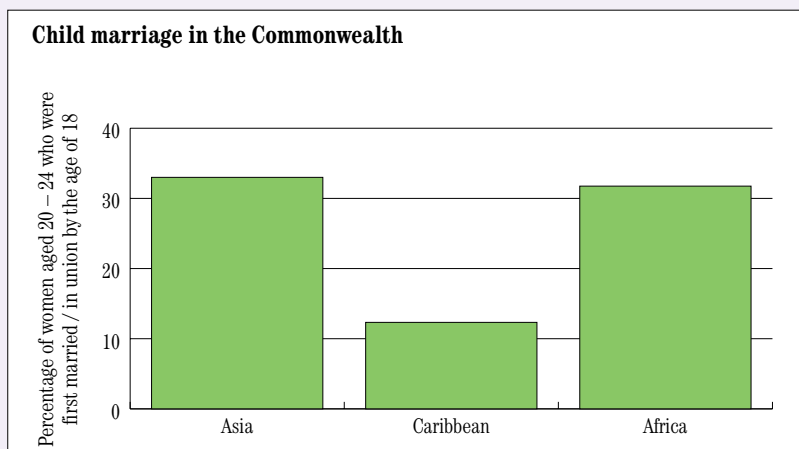


Data information for graph: Source UNHCR and ILO (1999–2007). Graph is compiled based on limited available data. Data are available for 20 countries in the Commonwealth, but unavailable for all European and Pacific region countries.

Attempts to address the issue of child labour include the Bangladesh Labour Law (2006) which specifically prohibits hazardous work for children below 18 years of age. In Ghana, units have been established in 20 districts to investigate child labour and there is a national programme on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in cocoa-growing areas (Summary of Ghana Universal Periodic Review 2008, CRIN).

The practice of female genital mutilation remains prevalent in a number of Commonwealth states, although it has been recognised² as a harmful traditional practice and a form of violence against girls under Article 24 of the CRC. Surveys of mothers reporting at least one daughter being cut show varying response rates, reaching as high as 64 per cent in one member state.

Data on women aged 20–24 between 1998–2007 who reported being married below the age of 18 (see graph below) indicate rates of over 30 per cent in 11 Commonwealth member states, all in south Asia and Africa.



Data information for graph: Source UNICEF, State of the World’s Children Report 2009 (data 1998–2007). (Data not available for the Pacific region, south-east Asia, Seychelles and Mauritius. Only limited data available for countries in the Caribbean.)

Child trafficking across, from or to the Commonwealth is primarily for forced labour, marriage or exploitation in the sex industry. All regions of the Commonwealth are affected. While girls are a key target group, boys are also trafficked. Sex tourism is a feature in a number of states, both in terms of the tourists who buy and the children who sell/are sold. Often punishments meted out to convicted traffickers are largely inconsequential to them.

Important initiatives that have been taken to combat these forms of exploitation include Australian extraterritorial laws on child sex tourism which provide penalties of up to 17 years imprisonment for Australians convicted of sexually exploiting children under the age of 16. Jamaican efforts on prevention of trafficking and prosecution of traffickers have won praise. At the UN, the Secretary-General

² See also UN General Assembly Resolution 56/128, January 2001 on Traditional or Customary Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Girls. The Resolution reaffirms that: “Such harmful traditional or customary practices constitute a definite form of violence against women and girls and a serious violation of their human rights”.

appointed a Special Representative on Violence Against Children, following the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence Against Children 2006.

The physical punishment of children is increasingly seen as being in contradiction to the CRC. Many countries in the Commonwealth allow corporal punishment of children in schools and/or in the home. Yet debates and changes are ongoing – national debate on the issue is underway in Barbados and consultations and legal changes are underway in Belize. Some countries have amended their laws since they ratified the Convention. Tonga abolished corporal punishment in schools in 2002.

Participation and legislation

Several countries have instituted changes or new initiatives that take seriously the experiences, views and participation of children. Malawi has a National Child Parliament and is planning to decentralise this body to the district level, with the aim of increasing child participation (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009).

Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission placed particular emphasis on children's participation. Confidential statements were provided by children in all districts of the country. Children, with the support of child protection agencies, testified at district hearings. A two-day thematic hearing on children was held in Freetown. Official submissions from children were provided to the Commission. A child-friendly version of the Commission's study was published. (Machel Study 10-year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World, UNICEF 2009).

Children's Commissions and advocates have been established and the constitutions of some Commonwealth countries have provisions dedicated to the protection of child rights, including Ghana, Uganda and Namibia (Laying the Foundations for Children's Rights, Philip Alston and John Tobin, UNICEF 2005). Children's Commissioners operate in Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Cyprus and New Zealand. Some National Human Rights Commissions have specific provisions to address the rights of children such as in the Maldives and the Child Rights Unit of the Malawi Human Rights Commission.

