**JUVENILE JUSTICE AND CHILD PROTECTION UNIT**

Child protection and juvenile justice are closely linked, focusing on the developmental well-being of children and adolescents. In the legal context, a juvenile is a person below a specified age, where special laws and procedures may apply to them, especially in the areas of criminal justice and protection of their rights. Being physiologically immature or undeveloped, juveniles, they exhibit tendencies of different deviance and being unaware of the consequences makes them susceptible to both victimization and involvement in crimes.

The need for specialized legal procedures, education and skill development, as well as a focus on accountability with compassion, underpin the essential aspects of an effective juvenile justice system.  United Nations has aimed to strengthen juvenile justice through the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) (United Nations, 1995), OHCHR, UNICEF, and the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice (IPJJ). Pakistan adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990, however, there was a delay in implementing the convention domestically, where the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance (JJSO) was promulgated in 2000 and remained in force until it was replaced by the Juvenile Justice System Act (JJSA), 2018.

Acknowledging the distinctive needs and vulnerabilities of juveniles, the National Police Bureau (NPB) has established the Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Unit (JJCPU), not only to navigate the legal dimensions of juvenile justice but also to provide a protective and supportive shield for vulnerable young individuals. Emphasizing the principles of rehabilitation, prevention of recidivism, and adherence to human rights, the JJCPU is mandated to perform the following functions:

**Functions:**

* 1. Review existing laws on juvenile justice and child protection, collect and analyze data, undertake research studies to inform evidence-based policy decisions and identify areas for improvement in the juvenile justice system.
  2. Develop comprehensive and evidence-based policies related to the handling of juvenile offenders. Propose SOPs and guidelines and update police and criminal justice partners, to align with evolving legal standards and societal needs.
  3. Organize training programs for law enforcement personnel, judges, and other stakeholders involved in juvenile justice, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle cases with a focus on rehabilitation and fair treatment.
  4. Establish and maintain partnerships with relevant government agencies, NGOs, and international bodies working on juvenile justice and child protection.
  5. Collaborate with NHCR and NCRC, community leaders, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive, inclusive and informed approach.
  6. Stay abreast of international best practices and ensure that national policy frameworks are aligned with national laws, international conventions, and human rights standards.
  7. Promote diversion programs and community service initiatives as alternatives to traditional legal proceedings for minor offences.