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UNHCR

Operational Guidance on Child Protection Core Programme Actions

UNHCR
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UNHCR Operational Guidance on Child Protection Core Programme Actions

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Purpose

The UNHCR Policy on Child Protection (UNHCR/HCP/2024/01) provides a clear vision and strategic framework with core programmatic actions for UNHCR work to protect forcibly displaced and stateless children. To support UNCHR operations to implement the higher-level principles and standards outlined in the policy, these guidelines provide more details on how to operationalize the policy.

The core programmatic actions outlined in the child protection policy and these guidelines provide the building blocks for UNHCR programmatic engagement and advocacy work to prevent and respond to child protection risks. They recognize the distinct mandate and responsibilities of UNHCR and outline its contribution to supporting States and partners as part of a multi-stakeholder response.

Scope

In line with the policy, these guidelines apply to UNHCR engagement with forcibly displaced and stateless children up to the age of 18, including returnee children. It applies across the full range of UNHCR operations at country, regional and headquarters levels. It is of particular importance for personnel and senior managers who have functions relating to child protection, including protection, durable solutions, programme, sectoral and coordination personnel.

It applies to all stages of preparedness and programming, in emergencies and protracted displacement, as well as to UNHCR operational programming and advocacy work.
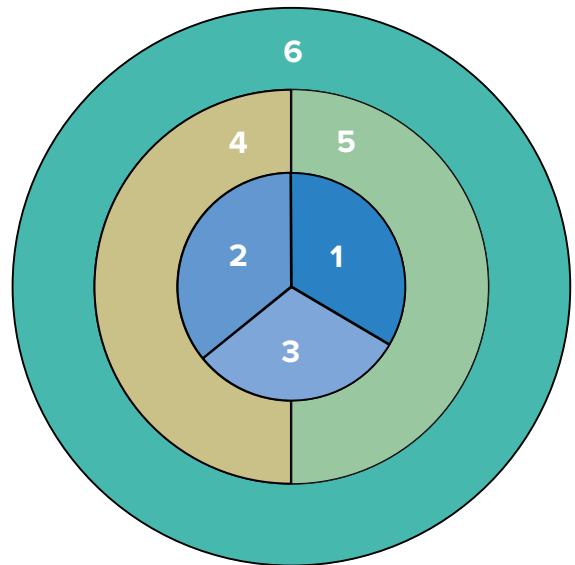
Core actions

Application

The UNHCR child protection policy outlines six core programmatic actions which are primarily implemented by country operations, supported by regional bureaux and headquarters in their respective roles. The way in which these programmatic actions are implemented varies by context and each operation determines the specific activities that they will pursue, according to the risks and capacities identified, as well as the partnership and coordination arrangements in place. These six core programmatic actions are supported by six enabling actions (see below). This operational guidance focuses on the six core programme actions.

VISION: FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND STATELESS CHILDREN ARE SAFE AND PROTECTED FROM HARM

CORE PROGRAMME ACTIONS

1. Strengthen inclusive child protection systems

2. Support children, families and communities to protect children

3. [When needed] Provide supplementary child protection services for children at risk

4. Strengthen child-friendly protection and solutions

5. Promote children's safety and prevent harm through sectoral responses

6. Strengthen child participation and child-friendly communication and accountability

CORE ENABLING ACTIONS

Planning and programming

Evidence and advocacy

Partnerships

Coordination

Child protection workforce

Learning and development

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For each core programmatic action, the guide explains

> **What we aim for.** Describes the changes in children's lives and/or protection systems that UNHCR is working towards. It draws on established standards and benchmarks as well as good practices to support operations programming for positive protection outcomes for children. They may be achieved through a combination of activities delivered through an integrated and multisectoral approach.

> **Why it is important.** This section briefly outlines why this action is important to the protection of children and to the UNHCR strategic approach to protecting children.

> **How to do it.** Suggests a range of recommended activities that operations should consider, taking into account the causes of child protection risks identified through participatory assessments, situation analysis and other data, the contributions of other actors and the operational role of UNHCR in this setting.

Table 1 shows how the role of UNHCR in implementing the core programme actions will vary according to the populations with wich the operation works. It also outlines the Global Outcome Areas associated with each core action and whether the action is predominantly prevention, predominantly response, or both.

Table 1: core programmatic actions, link to results-based management (RBM) outcome area, prevention/response and populations under the UNHCR mandate					
Action	**UNHCR results-based management outcome area (#)[1]**	**Prevention / response**	**Refugee**	**IDP**	**Stateless**
1. Strengthen inclusive child protection systems	Child protection (5) and documentation (1)	Prevention and response	Yes	Yes*	Yes
2. Support children, families and communities to protect children	Child protection (5)	Predominantly prevention	Yes	Yes*	Only if done for IDPs or refugees
3. [When needed] Provide supplementary child protection services for children at risk when needed	Child protection (5)	Predominantly response	When gaps in national system	Usually not (see below)	Only if done for IDPs or refugees
4.Strengthen child-friendly protection and solutions	Protection (1, 2, 4, 5 and 7) and solutions (14,15 and 16) outcomes	Prevention and response	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Promote children's safety and preventing harm through the UNHCR sectoral response	Basic needs, housing, health, education, WASH, and livelihoods (8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13)	Predominantly prevention	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Strengthen child participation and child-friendly communication and accountability	Across all UNHCR outcome areas	Predominantly prevention	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Resources permitting

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1 See UNHCR, Results Areas.

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Core Programme Action 1: Strengthen inclusive child protection systems

This section provides guidance on how to strengthen inclusive national child protection systems. It has two components; (i) child protection system strengthening in general; (ii) actions to strengthen access to birth registration. Specific guidance is provided on birth registration, which is generally considered part of the overall child protection system. Birth registration programming is usually integrated under UNHCR results-based management Outcome Area 1: Access to territory, registration and documentation, while child protection system strengthening is usually integrated under UNHCR RBM Outcome Area 5: Child Protection.

COMPONENT 1. CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

What we aim for. Forcibly displaced and stateless children have access to and are protected by national child protection systems. National child protection systems have the commitment and capacity to protect forcibly displaced and stateless children and provide the following quality services to forcibly displaced and stateless children:

I. Identification and referral of children at risk to national child protection and multisectoral services

II. National case management services

III. Alternative care

IV. Child-friendly access to justice

V. Birth registration (see below)

Note: national child protection systems include services provided by national child protection authorities as well as local civil society operating under the oversight of national authorities.

Why it is important. States are primarily responsible for the protection of children. They need to establish and implement child protection systems in accordance with their international obligations, ensuring non-discriminatory access for all children under their jurisdiction. UNHCR is committed to strengthening national child protection systems and services and advocating for access to them for forcibly displaced and stateless children.

How to do it:

- Work with national authorities, local NGOs and other partners, particularly development partners, to assess the capacities of national child protection systems and services, identify key barriers, gaps and opportunities and develop interventions to address these gaps – see UNHCR UNICEF Inclusion Toolkit: Refugee Children in National CP Systems.

- Advocate for non-discriminatory access to national child protection systems and services for forcibly displaced and stateless children.

- Undertake advocacy and provide capacity building for national child protection actors to support alignment with international laws and standards on child protection and the protection of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons.

- Provide inputs into the development or revision of national child protection policies and procedures relating to child protection to ensure that they adequately address the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless children.

- Include specific objectives and activities to strengthen national child protection systems within the operation's strategic approach to child protection.

- Systematically collaborate with partners including the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF) to strengthen national child protection systems.[2]

- Provide technical and financial support to ensure the accessibility of national child protection services to forcibly displaced and stateless children and to ensure that national child protection systems have the capacity to address the specific needs and rights of these children.

- Support innovative national child protection service delivery models in areas hosting forcibly displaced and/or stateless children.

- Build the capacity of UNHCR and partners to ensure the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless children in national child protection systems.

- In refugee settings: (i) regularly conduct training for national child protection authorities on refugee child protection; (ii) advocate for the harmonization and integration of child protection and asylum systems, including laws, policies and services; and/or (iii) work with national child protection systems to strengthen national child protection case management procedures to assess and determine refugee children's best interests.

- Where UNHCR is providing child protection services, ensure that they complement and are aligned with national child protection systems, standards and procedures as much as possible.

- In IDP settings, contribute to national child protection systems, strengthening efforts led by UNICEF and other actors.

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2   See UNHCR-UNICEF Strategic Collaboration Framework for Child Protection, Annex and Compendium.

COMPONENT 2. BIRTH REGISTRATION

What we aim for. Forcibly displaced and stateless children have safe and non-discriminatory access to birth registration.

Why it is important. Birth registration is essential to ensure children's access to the full range of child rights, prove their identity, prevent statelessness[3] and protect them from exploitation. Forcibly displaced and stateless children often face additional barriers in having their births registered. UNHCR promotes universal, non-discriminatory access to birth registration and takes measures to prevent forcibly displaced and stateless children from being left behind.

How to do it:

• Advocate for non-discriminatory access to birth registration, irrespective of the parents' nationality, immigration or residency status.

• Identify any barriers to, and gaps in, birth registration.

• Support legal or policy reform.

• Advocate for the removal of procedural barriers to birth registration and documentation

• Facilitate late birth registration.

• Support civil registration authorities in scaling up birth registration in areas hosting forcibly displaced persons.

• Provide information on birth registration procedures.

• Facilitate access to, or provide, legal aid and counselling where required.

• Advocate for children without birth certificates to be able to access basic services such as education and health.

Additional guidance

• [UNHCR UNICEF Inclusion Toolkit: Refugee Children in National CP Systems](#)

• [UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice (COP) – Inclusion in National CP Systems](#)

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3   Lack of birth registration does not usually mean that a person is stateless or even at risk of statelessness, but birth certificates contain key information that may be used to assert the child's right to a nationality.

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Core Programme Action 2: Support children, families and communities to protect children

What we aim for. Children, families and communities have the capacity to prevent and address child protection risks and support children's psychosocial well-being. Children have the resources, skills and support to contribute to their own and their peers' protection and well-being. Families and caregivers provide positive, supportive and protective parenting and caregiving for children and support children's psychosocial well-being. Communities take concrete action to promote the protection and well-being of children. Social and gender norms support the protection and psycho-social well-being of children.

Why it is important. Children, families and communities are central to the protection and well-being of forcibly displaced and stateless children. Some social and gender norms may contribute to the protection and well-being of children, while other harmful norms will undermine their protection. UNHCR takes a community-based approach to child protection that supports the engagement and empowerment of children, their families and communities in the protection of children. This is in line with the UNHCR community-based approach to protection and the socio-ecological approach to child protection – see Standard 14 of the Minimum Standards on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

How to do it:

- Analyse the risk and protective factors for the protection of children at child, family and community levels, as well as relevant social norms. Identify existing community-based initiatives and efforts to protect children across the four layers outlined below.

- Together with partners, develop a multi-layered approach to reinforcing the protection of children, by designing interventions that support the four layers of community-based child protection programming.

- Identify the specific role of UNHCR, complementing and, where relevant, collaborating with partners across the four layers. Integrate child protection into UNHCR partners' community-based protection programming and/or develop dedicated community-based child protection interventions.

- **Layer 1:** Children. Support group activities that build children's skills on protection and supports their psychosocial well-being. Provide recreational, sports, cultural or artistic activities and/or structured psychosocial and life skills programmes for children. Provide children with information on positive coping mechanisms, protection, their rights and available services. Support child-led and peer-to-peer initiatives on child protection issues.

- **Layer 2:** Parents and caregivers. Implement programmes to support caregivers and families in their efforts to care for children, including: positive parenting programmes; information on coping strategies for parents and children; and/or provision of information and the referral of caregivers to psychosocial and other multisectoral services.

- **Layer 3:** Community level. Support community-level efforts to protect children. This may include training and mentoring for community youth, women or child-led networks on the protection of forcibly displaced children and support to community-led action and community outreach on the care and protection of children.

- **Layer 4:** Social norms. Support inter-agency social and behavioural change initiatives to promote protective social and gender norms and address harmful norms contributing to child protection risks.

- Ensure that these programmes are inclusive and address the specific risks faced by children of diverse ages and genders and children with disabilities.

Additional guidance

- UNHCR Guidance on MHPSS and Child Protection (upcoming 2024[4])

- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Settings](#) Standards 14, 15, 16 and 17

- Child Protection Component of the [MHPSS Minimum Service Package](#)

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Core Programme Action 3: Provide child protection services for children at risk

What we aim for. Children at risk are identified by UNHCR and partners and benefit from quality supplementary child protection services. These services help reduce the longer-term impact on children of violence, abuse, neglect or separation, as well as the likelihood that a child will be harmed again.

Why it is important. National child protection systems are often under-resourced and/or overburdened, particularly when responding to significant numbers of forcibly displaced or stateless children. As such, UNHCR and partners provide child protection services for children at risk to supplement national child protection systems where gaps exist[5].

How to do it:

Identification and referral of children at risk

Where UNHCR and partners implement services that work directly with children:

- With partners, establish inter-agency standard operating procedures (SOP)[6] and referral pathways for the identification of children at risk and their referral to multisectoral services. Ensure that these address the range of child protection issues and the specific risks faced by children with diverse characteristics accounting for age, gender and disabilities.

- Establish system to track the identification and referral of children at risk to child protection and multisectoral services.

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4 This will be published in the UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice.

5 See UNHCR, Ex Com conclusion No. 107, 2007.

6 See BIP Toolbox | UNHCR. In addition, in line with the upcoming UNHCR Policy on Fraud, this should integrate integrity measures.

- Integrate the identification and referral of children at risk into UNHCR internal procedures.

- Train UNHCR staff and partners in direct contact with children in the safe identification of children at risk and their referral to appropriate child protection and multisectoral services.

Best Interests Procedure

In refugee settings, assess authorities' child protection case management services for refugee children to determine whether UNHCR needs to lead Best Interests Procedures (BIP) and within what scope. See section 2.2 of UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines.

Where UNHCR-led BIP is implemented, undertake the following actions:

- Ensure that children at heightened risk who are identified by UNHCR or its partners are referred to – and receive – BIP, including those benefiting from UNHCR-supported solutions, and that they are referred to relevant multisectoral services.

- Ensure that the scope of UNHCR-led BIP complements national child protection systems and, wherever possible and in the child's best interest, involve national child protection actors.

- Oversee the coordination, planning and implementation of BIP, including identifying partners to provide BIP and supporting them (see below).

- Establish inter-agency SOPs for BIP or integrate refugee children into child protection case management SOPs.

- Provide capacity-building and technical assistance for partners and authorities on BIP. Support partners to identify needs and mobilize resources for BIP.

- Link BIP to broader refugee protection case management.

- Establish and lead Best Interests Determination (BID) panels[7].

- Monitor the quality of BIP, including appropriate child-to-caseworker ratio standard and appropriate supervision and support of case workers. Where the resources and/or capacities of child protection case management partners do not allow all children in need of case management to be reached or the appropriate child-to-case worker ratio to be maintained, UNHCR should work with its partners to prioritize the caseload,[8] and support resource mobilization.

- Ensure that UNHCR-led BIP are inclusive of and adapted to the needs of children with diverse child protection risks and diversity characteristics, including children with disabilities and of diverse ages and genders.

- Set up, train and supervise UNHCR child protection colleagues in the use of the child protection case management module of proGres to record BIP information provided by UNHCR personnel and information shared with UNHCR by partners.

- Establish appropriate information-sharing with partners concerning child protection cases, either through partnership agreements and/or inter-agency child protection information-sharing protocols.[9]

- Support partners in implementing appropriate information management systems for child protection case management.

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7   See UNHCR, Best Interests Procedure Guidelines, Chapter 4, for situations requiring BID.

8   Standard is 1 caseworker for 25 children. See UNHCR, Best Interests Procedure Guidelines for more detail on child-to-case worker ratios, pp. 101–106 for prioritization of caseloads.

9   These should be in line with UNHCR General Policy on Personal Data Protection and Privacy, 2022; Policy on Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, 2015.

Protection and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children

- Undertake actions to prevent separation, including as a result of national policies and procedures, humanitarian actions or community/family factors.

- Ensure timely identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children.

- Map authorities and partners' prevention and response programming for unaccompanied and separated children to determine how UNHCR can support and complement existing initiatives.

- In collaboration with partners such as authorities, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and communities, support family tracing and reunification services for unaccompanied and separated children.

- Strengthen family- and community-based alternative care for forcibly displaced and stateless unaccompanied and separated children.

- Where necessary, support family-based alternative care services including fostering by members of the child's own community.

- Monitor the situation of forcibly displaced or stateless children without parental care, including those in all forms of institutional care and children with disabilities. Advocate to prevent risks and for the use of institutional care as a last resort and for the shortest possible time. [10]

- Ensure that all unaccompanied and separated children identified by UNHCR receive BIP or child protection case management services, are placed in appropriate alternative care and wherever possible and provided it is in their best interests, have access to family reunification.

Addressing gender-based violence against children

- Establish coordination between child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) actors on prevention and response services for child survivors and children at risk of GBV. This includes agreeing on key principles, and mapping and identifying appropriate prevention and response services.

- For response services, agree on roles and responsibilities of service providers when responding to cases of child GBV to identify which services would be most appropriate for girl, boy and gender non-conforming children (considering that GBV programming and GBV actors often focus their programming on violence against women and girls, while child protection services generally target both girls and boys). Establish clear and consistent referral pathways – within both CP and GBV SOPs – for child survivors of GBV.

- Train personnel working with child survivors of GBV in both GBV and child protection, including caring for child survivors.

- Ensure that all child survivors of GBV identified by UNHCR and partners are referred to, and benefit from, appropriate multisectoral services that are child-friendly and survivor-centred. Ensure that child survivors are included in the UNHCR-led Best Interests Procedure.

- Establish clear guidelines and information-sharing agreements to ensure that safe and ethical data-sharing can take place among organizations.

Prioritisation of child protection response services

- When services and funds are insufficient to respond to all children at risk, analyse cases and

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10   See UNHCR, Inter-agency Guidelines on Unaccompanied and Separated Children.

prioritize those child victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and separation who are most at risk.

- Map existing inter-agency services and develop an inter-agency plan to ensure equitable access to child protection response services.

- Assess local capacities and develop a transition plan to build local child protection response capacity.

- Identify children at risk and refer them to multisectoral services; if necessary, advocate for the scale-up of quality services.

- Where specialized mental health services cannot be provided, UNHCR and its partners may integrate brief psychological interventions into child protection services for children at risk, provided they have a mental health specialist to train and supervise the child protection staff.[11]

- Work with authorities, partners and donors to mobilize resources and strengthen advocacy efforts to address the gaps.

- In IDP settings, where services for children at risk are not available at the location where UNHCR implements child protection programming, UNHCR should advocate with partners and the Child Protection Sub-cluster/Area of Responsibility (CPAoR) to provide these services. Where such services cannot be provided by other actors and UNHCR partners have expertise in providing child protection services for children at risk, UNHCR may support its partners in providing these services at specific locations.

Additional guidance

- [UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines and UNHCR Child Protection COP – Best Interests Procedure](#)

- [UNHCR Child Protection COP – Information Management for Case Management](#)

- [UNHCR Child Protection COP – UASC & Alternative Care](#)

- [Inter-agency Guidelines on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)

- [UNHCR Child Protection COP – Child Marriage](#)

- [UNHCR Child Protection IDP Building Blocks](#)

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11   See UNHCR Guidance on MHPSS and Child Protection

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Core Programme Action 4: Strengthen child-friendly protection and solutions

What we aim for. Children benefit from child-friendly protection interventions and solutions in a timely manner, participate in decisions that affect them and are treated with respect and dignity. Their specific needs and rights are addressed and respected in the process.

Why it is important. Ensuring children's access to protection procedures and solutions is essential in protecting refugee, IDP and stateless children from violence, abuse, exploitation and separation. As children have specific needs and rights, these procedures need to be implemented in a child-friendly manner. As such, child-friendly protection and solutions interventions are an integral part of UNHCR's approach to protecting children.

How to do it:

- Assess and put in place measures to strengthen the child-friendly nature of the following protection procedures, in line with UNHCR Technical Guidance on Child-friendly Procedures:

    a. Arrival and reception

    b. Registration

    c. Refugee Status Determination (RSD)

    d. Solutions including repatriation, local integration, resettlement and complementary pathways.

- Establish procedures for children at risk to be safely identified during protection and solutions interventions and referred to services. Prioritize children at risk in arrival and reception, registration, RSD and Solutions procedures.

- Integrate child-friendly considerations and procedures into training and guidance on protection and solutions interventions.

- Provide advice for States on additional procedural and evidentiary safeguards for children during statelessness determination procedures.[12] Ensure that the needs of children are considered when advising authorities on facilitated naturalization procedures and access to documentation for stateless persons.

- Systematically integrate child protection into the training of border/immigration and asylum authorities.

- Ensure that UNHCR staff undertaking refugee status determination are familiar with child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution and/or provide the authorities with technical assistance in this area.

- Advocate with authorities for the use of appropriate human rights standards and procedural safeguards when conducting age assessment[13] . In UNHCR procedures, use holistic assessment of capacity, vulnerability and needs rather than stand-alone age assessments.

- Advocate to end the detention of forcibly displaced and stateless children and support alternatives to detention.

- Ensure that capacity for child protection is included in planning for and implementing UNHCR-supported solutions.

- Identify and train child protection focal points within key protection and solutions interventions.

- Systematically integrate child protection into operations' key protection interventions, including protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy.

- Facilitate access to legal aid and counselling for children and families, to prevent and address child protection risks.

- Integrate child-specific considerations into trafficking prevention efforts and UNHCR's protection work in relation to onward and mixed movements.

- Ensure that protection programming is inclusive of, and addresses the needs of, children with disabilities and of different ages, genders and other diversity characteristics.

Additional guidance

- UNHCR Technical Guidance: Child-friendly Procedures

- UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice Child-Friendly Procedures

- UNHCR Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons

- UNHCR, Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination Under UNHCR's Mandate (Chapter 2.8)

- UNHCR, Resettlement Handbook (Chapter 3.5)

- UNHCR, Operational Guidelines on Voluntary Repatriation (Chapter 7.1)

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12   See UNHCR, Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons.

13   See UNHCR, Technical Note on Age Assessment Procedures, 2016.

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Core Programme Action 5: Promote children's safety and prevent harm through sectoral responses

What we aim for. Children and families have access to safe, child-friendly sectoral services addressing the key drivers of child protection risks.

Why it is important. Poverty and lack of services to support families and children are often key causes of child protection risks. Preventing and mitigating harm to children and ensuring their well-being requires children and families to be able to address their basic needs in safety and dignity.[14]

How to do it:

The table below outlines the key roles of various sectors in contributing to the protection of children in line with Pillar 4 of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. UNHCR should aim to integrate these considerations into the sectors in which they are working in a given operation, among other contextually specific priorities to ensure sectors contribute to keeping children safe and protecting them from harm.

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14   See Alliance for Children in Humanitarian Action, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Pillar 4, Standards for working Across Sectors; WHO, INSPIRE Technical Package.

Education

Ensure that children are safe and protected in education by

I.   Implementing systems to prevent violence and discrimination in education, including monitoring and addressing risks of bullying, violence and discrimination in and around schools and conducting safety and accessibility audits

II. Integrating social and emotional learning including psychosocial support in schools

III. Establishing mechanisms for identifying children at risk and referring them to child protection and GBV services

IV. Integrating education on rights, risks, self-protection skills and sexual and reproductive health for students

V.   Promoting equity and inclusion in education including addressing barriers for learning and retention of girls and children with disabilities

VI. Training education staff in child protection and psychosocial well-being

VII. Establishing mechanisms to prevent violence and exploitation by education personnel

VIII. Advocating to protect education facilities from attack

IX. Working with child protection and GBV actors to address child protection risks that impact on children's participation in education and learning.

Key resource

- Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Standard 23: Education and child protection

Cash, livelihoods, social protection and food security

Promote child protection outcomes by

I.   Ensuring that cash transfers, livelihoods, social protection and food security support the most vulnerable children and households, including those at risk of child protection risks such as child marriage and child labour and do not increase these risks

II. Establishing safe mechanisms to support unaccompanied children, including child-headed households to access these services

III. Designing, implementing and monitoring cash transfer, livelihoods and food security programmes to explicitly address the economic drivers of child protection risks, including GBV, and to support families in providing care for their children

IV. Establishing referral mechanisms between child protection programmes and cash, livelihoods and food security programmes and vice versa.

Key Resources

- UNHCR Guidance on Promoting Child Protection Outcomes through Cash-based Interventions
- Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Standard 22: Livelihoods and child protection and Standard 21: Food security and child protection

Health and nutrition

In health programmes

I.   Integrate violence prevention – including child safety, positive parenting and information on positive coping mechanisms – into community health programmes

II.   Support identification and referral of children at risk to child protection services

III. Provide child-friendly mental health services

IV.   Provide child-friendly, survivor-centred services to child survivors of GBV

V.   Contribute to timely birth registration through issuance of birth notifications

VI.   Provide child-sensitive forensic evidence to legal proceedings for child survivors of violence, abuse or exploitation

VII. Support gender-sensitive sexual and reproductive health services for girls and boys.

In nutrition programmes

I.   Combine nutrition programmes with child protection and psychosocial support programmes, particularly for caregivers of young children

II.   Identify and refer children and families at risk to child protection services

III. Implement strategies to increase the safety, availability and accessibility of nutrition services for boys and girls.

Key Resources:

- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), Standard 24: Health and child protection and Standard 25: Nutrition and child protection

WASH, Shelter and Camp Management

In WASH

I. Adapt WASH facilities so that they are accessible and child-friendly and minimize protection risks;

II. Provide safe access to water sources and latrines to reduce the risk of gender-based violence and other child protection risks

III. Support adequate and safe menstrual hygiene management for girls.

In Shelter and Camp Management

I. Assess, monitor and address child protection risks resulting from shelter or camp management

II. Integrate child-friendly information on children's safety and psychosocial well-being into shelter and camp interventions

III. Ensure that shelter and camp management provides adequate safe space for children, including privacy and locations for children's activities

IV. Design shelter and camp management to limit dangers and injuries to children.

Key resource

- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), Standard 26: Water, sanitation and hygiene and child protection; Standard 27: Shelter and settlement and child protection; and Standard 28: Camp management and child protection

Actions that cut across all sectors include

- Collaborate with child protection actors to understand the key risks and protective factors for children and adjust programming accordingly

- Integrate child protection considerations into assessments, programme design and monitoring

- Train sectoral staff in understanding child protection considerations and integrating them into their programming

- Ensure that all identification and referral of children at-risk is undertaken in line with the principles set out in the UNHCR Policy on Child Protection and in the [UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines](#) (see section 3.1.4)

- Provide child-friendly services to children at risk, including victims of violence and separated and unaccompanied children

- Ensure the participation of children, and accountability to them, in the design, implementation and monitoring of services (see Core Action 6).

Additional guidance

- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action Pillar 4](#)

- [UNHCR Child Protection COP – Child Protection Mainstreaming](#)

- [IASC Guidelines on Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#)

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Core Programme Action 6: Strengthen child participation and child-friendly communication and accountability

What we aim for. Children participate in decisions that affect their lives and participate in UNHCR protection, assistance and solutions programming. Children receive age- and gender-appropriate information and communication with children is child-friendly. Children can provide feedback on UNHCR services and raise concerns through trusted and confidential channels and will receive timely age- and gender-appropriate responses to this feedback.

Why it is important. The participation of children is central to their protection. Informing, consulting, empowering and respecting children across all UNHCR and partner interventions ensures that programmes address the specific needs and perspectives of children, contribute to children's psychosocial well-being and reduce the risk of harm to children. Ensuring that children's voices inform child protection programming enables UNHCR and its partners to design and implement more effective activities that are adaptive to children's changing needs.

How to do it:

- Consult regularly with girls and boys on their protection risks and capacities, their access to services and their suggestions to improve their protection. Use this information to inform programming and provide feedback to children and the wider community.

- Assess and utilize children's preferred and trusted communication channels: how they are sharing information with each other, with caregivers and with humanitarian actors and how they would prefer to do so. Identify how different groups are using diverse channels to communicate both online and offline.

- Develop and systematically share child-friendly information on children's rights, services, protection and solutions in a format that is understandable to children of different ages, educational backgrounds and abilities. Test this information for comprehension and adapt it for different ages/genders/groups.

- Meaningfully engage children of different age, gender and diversity characteristics as part of UNHCR engagement with forcibly displaced and/or stateless persons at all stages of the programme cycle. Leverage diverse communication channels to promote engagement, assess which groups are silent and develop outreach strategies to promote their inclusion.

- Train staff regularly interacting with children in child-friendly communication, including protection staff.

- Ensure that feedback and response mechanisms are child-friendly and accessible to children by building mechanisms that use children's preferred and trusted communication channels. Ensure that children are aware of the available channels and that these are suited to children's needs.

- Identify opportunities to use the feedback data generated from engagement with children to inform decision-making and programme design across the organization.

- Identify and continue to assess potential risks when engaging with children and work with partners to put in place mechanisms to mitigate these risks.

- Establish child safeguarding mechanisms including child-friendly communication and feedback mechanisms that include confidential reporting channels for Sexual Abuse and Exploitation[15] and other forms of abuse or exploitation of children by UNHCR or partners personnel.

Additional guidance

- Interviewing for Protection eLearning Course, Interviewing for Protection Advanced eLearning Course and Psychological First Aid for Children: Online course

- UNHCR Listen & Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents

- UNHCR Operational Guidance AAP

- Interagency child safeguarding resources: Keeping Children Safe

> 📄 For more child protection learnings and tools see: UNHCR Job Aid for Child Protection

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15   See UNHCR, Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct

Monitoring

DIP is responsible for monitoring the implementation of these guidelines globally, in collaboration with the regional bureaux, which monitor and support their implementation in the respective country operations.

Dates and contact

These operational guidelines are effective as of 26 January 2024. They will remain a living document and be complemented with revised and additional material on a regular basis. The next comprehensive review of the operational guidelines will be conducted before 31 December 2028 and as new developments dictate.

The contact for this Operational Guidance is the Child Protection Unit of the Division of International Protection: hqchipro@unhcr.org

History

This is the first version of these guidelines.