

TOOL 04

UASC prevention and preparedness measures

General preparedness measures for organizations implementing programmes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)

Step 1: Assess risk, vulnerability and capacity to respond and build/develop/strengthen capacity, where necessary (see Chapter 3.7):

- Assess risk and vulnerability to separation – for example, in terms of hazards, vulnerability and childcare practices.
- Assess existing local practices for the prevention of family separation, reunification and provision of alternative care arrangements for UASC.
- Assess the level of functioning and capacity of government social welfare services and existing child protection services at the national and local level.
- Map local capacity to respond (in collaboration with the affected community, where possible).
- Identify potential national and international partners for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification (IDTR) and collaboratively plan geographic and functional divisions of responsibility, ensuring the inclusion of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (where present) and National Societies.
- Implement capacity-building and training initiatives as necessary.

Step 2: Strengthen or establish coordination (see Chapter 4):

- Ensure that coordination, including of emergency preparedness, operates within the protection/child protection cluster or other emergency coordination framework, incorporates government/national partners where appropriate and is coordinated with the ICRC and National Societies.
- Ensure that coordination is integrated within the broader inter-agency coordination structure and that cross-sectoral linkages are established.
- Ensure that cross-border/regional coordination mechanisms are established or strengthened, where relevant.
- Where necessary, develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) or other tools (such as a Memorandum of Understanding or letter of intent) on the roles and responsibilities of those involved in IDTR and UASC programmes, including methods of referral, information-sharing and the role of community structures.
- Establish initial contact and discuss potential future collaboration with all relevant sectors involved in the wider humanitarian response.

Step 3: Ensure appropriate policies, standards, tools and procedures are available for work with UASC:

- Adopt and promote the use of common standards, and ensure availability, where possible, in relevant languages via urgent translation.
 - *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied Children*, 2004
 - *The Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, 2013

- Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC), *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, 2009
- *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'*, CELCIS, 2012
- *Minimum Standards on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin*,¹ 2005
- *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1997.²
- Where there are gaps in policy/procedures (for example, regarding caseload prioritization), develop these within the UASC coordination group.
- Promote the use of standard forms for IDTR (as agreed to by the global IAWG-UASC), adapting only if necessary for local context. Consider double language forms and ensure adequate supplies are distributed to relevant actors after training on their use.
- Prepare for the implementation of information management systems; a simple paper or Excel system can be used, or a decision can be made (where there is both the need and the human, technical and financial capacity) to implement a particular electronic database system³ (see Chapter 7.3).
- Set policy/procedures on confidentiality and information security (data-protection protocols,⁴ safe storage and data security in evacuations).
- Develop systems for analysis and rapid feedback of separation information during the emergency to prevent further separations.
- Adapt key advocacy messages on separation-prevention information campaigns to the local context and arrange for urgent translation of materials.

Specific preparedness measures to take with government, national organizations and civil society actors

Step 1: Advocate and build capacity (where required) to achieve the following:

Legal and policy framework:

- National child welfare laws (including legislation on adoption and fostering), which provide the necessary protection for UASC, including refugee children, in line with international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Policy to promote family/community-based care, limit the development of residential care and restrict its use to essential situations
- Policy to regulate residential care centres that includes registration and monitoring of all centres, implementation of record-keeping and case management measures, strict screening policies and procedures, and minimum standards of care
-  Policy to avoid immigration detention of UASC and ensure fair and prompt access to the asylum process
- Policy and practical measures to monitor the potential for and prevent trafficking, abduction, recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups and illegal adoption of UASC
- Policy on and access to legal documentation, including birth registration for newborn children in refugee and displaced populations, to protect against loss of identity or inaccessibility of services.

Child protection systems:

- Functioning social welfare services, including the capacity for efficient case management, including monitoring and follow-up of children at risk
- Strengthened coordination between relevant child protection actors and social services, and agreement on ways of working to prevent and respond to separation in case of emergency
- Procedures and professional capacity to carry out a best interests assessment (BIA) and, where relevant, best interests determination (BID)
- Registration and updated registration of all children in alternative care. Systems in place for case tracking in the event of population movements, relocation or evacuation; policy and guidelines on ways to keep children safe in emergencies and actions if UASC go missing
- Mechanisms for monitoring families at risk of separation and referral mechanisms
- Measures to prevent the separation of children with disabilities and to ensure that the needs of disabled UASC are addressed in emergencies.
- Ensure accessibility for all children to the child protection system, including refugee-specific actions:
 - Ensure that national policies on UASC, including alternative care and family reunification, specifically consider the needs of refugee children and include relevant provisions to ensure that care is within refugee children's own community.

- Ensure that roles and responsibilities among the different government bodies responsible for child protection and refugee protection (such as the Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Border Protection/Interior) are clearly defined in terms of UASC, and are trained on child protection and refugee protection.
- Ensure that state child protection services are adapted to the needs of refugee children (for example, by addressing linguistic, cultural, religious, geographic and socio-economic barriers)
- Ensure that refugee children access birth registration (see below).

Cooperation and mapping:

- Access to affected communities for those organizations working with UASC, as well as access to all children's residential care facilities
- Identification of key national actors involved in alternative care and their current roles and activities
- Inclusion of local leadership in the planning, management and delivery of alternative care through capacity building and training.
- Cooperation with relevant embassies/consulates to prevent illegal or inappropriate movement of UASC out of the country.

Specific preparedness measures to take with actors in the wider humanitarian community

Step 1: Advocate for organizations to help prevent separation and preserve family unity though incorporating into their planning the need to:

- Provide the necessary support for basic services, ensuring that all households have access to basic relief supplies, including family kits, health services, education and psychosocial support, as quickly as possible.
- Put resources into monitoring, supporting and managing family-based care options for UASC, rather than residential care, where possible.
- Limit the development of residential care options and restrict their use to those situations in which residential care is absolutely necessary.
- Provide appropriate material/financial support to vulnerable families, enabling them to continue to care for their children.

Step 2: Raise awareness about family separation, potential for separation, risks for UASC, and ways to prevent separation and preserve family unity:

- Offer to review practices, work alongside other actors, provide resources, or develop guidance regarding separation prevention.
- Emphasize the need for proper record-keeping, such as registers of all hospital admissions, discharges, deaths and medical evacuations.
- Offer to provide information/training on mainstreaming to prevent separation and preserve family unity.

★ [See Chapter 3.1.4, Key messages to emergency actors in other sectors of the humanitarian response](#)

★ [See Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners](#)

Step 3: Liaise closely with those actors undertaking humanitarian evacuations, including evacuation of children, to preserve family unity during evacuation:

- First protect and assist in place.
- Never be involved in involuntary evacuations.
- Organize and implement evacuations as part of a coordinated plan of action, including both the starting point and destination.
- Give families full information so that they can give informed consent.
- Whenever possible, evacuate children together with adult family members.
- Only evacuate children without family members as a last resort and as a temporary measure.
- Evacuate to the nearest safe and appropriate place, ensuring cultural/linguistic links and ease of return.
- Ensure supervision of placement/care of children by national or local welfare services.
- Maintain communication between children and their families, even where it requires special efforts.
- Maintain complete records of all evacuations.

Specific preparedness measures to take with the affected community (depending on the context and available time)

Step 1: Ask what affected populations have done to avoid separations in past emergencies and whether these ideas can be built on or supported.

Step 2: Take community-level actions such as:

- **Form or strengthen community child protection groups and work with families and children** to build their capacity to:
 - Analyse risks of separation.
 - Implement community measures, including awareness-raising, and teach children and parents skills to prevent separation; such as:
 - Teach children the names of their parents/home village, etc., and what they should do if they become separated.
 - Teach parents to talk to their children about what to do in case of flight and/or separation (in other words, make family plans).
 - Where relevant, talk to parents and children about technologies available to help in case of separation.
 - Identify, train and support community members for specific roles in preventing separation, for example, helping to support especially vulnerable children, including those who are very young or sick, disabled, living outside of family care or in child-headed households.
 - Discuss and plan for possible scenarios with communities, including movement or evacuation of children with disabilities; while it is important to be sensitive and not cause panic, people (including children) will feel more in control if they are prepared.
 - Prevent the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups.
- **Identify and monitor sites where potential family separation may occur** (such as rest stops on flight routes, transport hubs, border crossings or distribution sites), deploy child protection staff to implement context-specific preventative actions as necessary.
- **Strategically establish/identify appropriate 'lost children's posts,' child protection locations or 'focal points'** where anyone can come for information, UASC can be documented and decisions made about their care, and where information on children unaccounted for can be recorded. This could include Red Cross/Red Crescent local branches and volunteers working to restore family links, including those working in camps for internally displaced persons, those in transit and refugees. Ensure staff are clearly identified and make it clear that these are not places where children can be cared for or left.
- **Conduct information campaigns to inform communities in transit how to prevent separation and who to notify if they lose a child** (see Chapter 3.1.4).
- **Identify existing residential care centres** and work with centre staff to ensure that children are only placed there as a last resort, plan ways to keep the children safe and facilitate their return to, or at least contact with, their families.
- Incorporate disaster risk reduction or prevention of separation advocacy messages into **school curricula**.
- **Work with authorities and identify and support community networks to strengthen the capacity of child protection systems** at the local level (see Chapter 6.1.1).
- Work with communities and cross-sector partners to develop criteria and procedures to identify and **provide targeted support through social protection/livelihoods programmes to families vulnerable to separation**, though, for example, cash transfers; ensuring that all households have equal access to basic relief supplies and other services can help prevent 'strategic' separation (see Matrix on p. 264 of the handbook: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

Step 3: Organize a public information campaign that uses:

- Culturally, socially and child-appropriate standard child protection messages (where possible), rapidly adapted to the culture/context⁹ and translated into local languages/dialects; include materials in picture form for those unable to read
- A range of creative, relevant/appropriate media to deliver messages, such as SMS (text messaging), local radio, leaflets, posters, drama groups, ceremonies, songs/dance or announcements in public places and general distribution of humanitarian aid or health care (such as infant feeding)
- Trusted local people, elders, community leaders and children's voices; support children to develop and disseminate prevention of separation messages in communities, including classrooms and religious centres
- Messages that are developed with input from local communities, including children, tested before use and focus on positive actions, such as:
 - Promoting family unity and advantages of family-based care (as opposed to residential care, generally); outlining the risks of separation
 - Information for carers looking after other people's children, encouraging them to keep children with them if they must leave home

- Advice for those who lose children and for children who lose parents/carers (to report to authorities or humanitarian organizations)
- Advice for those who find a child who appears to be alone/lost (for example, check with people close to where the child is found before moving him/her away, keep items they are found with, and bring the child to the attention of the authorities or humanitarian organizations)
- Reassure individuals that symptoms of distress in children are normal during difficult times and give advice as to what they can do to help
- Ways to minimize risks to children sent away for care (for example, ensure the child understands the plans, reasons for and how to maintain contact)
- Ways to protect children (for example, not sending children without adults for food, water or firewood and arranging care for childcare while adults carry out these tasks; not entrusting children to strangers offering to provide care or jobs in exchange for food, shelter, or money)
- Ways to prevent separation, such as:
 - ID bracelets/labels for young children prior to planned population movements only, not to identify UASC
 - Teaching younger children their family name and the name of their home village or town, perhaps through songs or rhymes
 - Encouraging older siblings to take care of younger siblings
 - Not giving young children heavy loads to carry that may slow them down
 - Agreeing on a meeting point with everyone in the family in the event of separation
 - Methods to keep families together in crowds or long walks (such as, keep small children in front or give them something to hold).

★ [See Tool 6: Prevention of separation messages for parents and carers](#)

★ [See Tool 7: Prevention of separation messages for children](#)

Specific preparedness measures to take with local and international media

Step 1: Provide information explaining the following (including evidence and examples):

- How family tracing works, including the fact that the majority of UASC have living relatives with whom they can reunite
- The benefits of family- and community-based care and the risks of residential care
- The risks, problems, laws and guidelines associated with adoption in emergencies
- The risks, problems and guidelines regarding evacuation for medical or other purposes
- Guidelines/resources for journalists on protecting UASC from harm (use of images, confidentiality, protecting information on UASC locations).⁶

Step 2: Encourage media coverage of children that highlights children's resilience and the importance of keeping them with their family and community, instead of portraying them as helpless victims

[1] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin*, www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=42dd174b4, accessed 11 January 2016.

[2] *UNHCR Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, 1997, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3360.html, accessed 11 January 2016.

[3] The International Committee of the Red Cross uses its own database and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing, as appropriate, with humanitarian organizations working with unaccompanied and separated children, provided that the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share information with other organizations.

[4] *Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System [IA CP IMS] Training Manual*, part 2, section VIII. Handouts/Additional Resources, Document 5, 'Template data-protection protocols', <<http://cpwg.net/resource-topics/training-packages>>, accessed 11 January 2016.

[5] See Tools 6 and 7 for examples of standard child protection messages that can be rapidly adapted and translated for immediate use.

[6] For information on media guidelines, see Save the Children, *Interviewing Children: A guide for journalists and others*, Save the Children, 1998.