



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION



The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action – An Introduction



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this advocacy brief was led by Amanda Brydon and Elspeth Chapman on behalf of the Alliance for Child Protection for Humanitarian Action. Critical inputs and feedback were provided by key Alliance members and partners including UNICEF; World Vision International; Save the Children; UNHCR; Plan International; International Rescue Committee; Terre des Hommes; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies; Global Food Security Cluster; World Food Programme; Global Protection Cluster; the European Commission Directorate General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO); and Porticus. Special thanks are to be extended to Terre Des Hommes for providing funds and engaging children in the development of the graphic through their CovidUnder19 Initiative. We would also like to extend a very special thanks to the children who contributed their time and valuable insights.

Suggested citation: The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action - An Introduction (2023).

Licence: This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0.

It is attributed to the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance).



For more information on the Alliance's work and joining the network, please visit www.alliancecpha.org or contact us directly: info@alliancecpha.org.

Photo Credit: UNICEF/UN0765149/Pedro

Paper Designed by: Jonathan Auret

Graphic Designed by: Green Communications Design



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION?

The centrality of children and their protection in humanitarian action is a shared responsibility, to ensure the entire humanitarian system is actively and consciously engaged in realising broader child rights as well as children's rights to protection in each step of humanitarian action. While child protection mainstreaming is an essential component,¹ a whole-of-system focus is required to achieve children's protection and well-being. Every single person contributing to and working as part of the humanitarian system has a role to play.

The centrality of children

means considering the views, capacities, rights, needs, and vulnerabilities of children in all aspects of humanitarian response, within all sectoral interventions. It includes emphasising the perspectives and agency of children, in all their diversity, and advocating for stronger inclusion, participation, and prioritisation of children within humanitarian programmes, policies, and decision-making.

The centrality of children's protection is an integral part of the Centrality of Protection,²

and means that all humanitarian actors are accountable towards protecting children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. States hold the primary responsibility to protect children and realise

their rights as set out within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, all actors must prioritise the protection of, and accountability to, children throughout humanitarian action. It is critical that child protection is systematically included within situation and response analyses by all sectoral actors, including monitoring children's rights violations; in all humanitarian and refugee response plans and funding appeals; and Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC)³ policies. Children's vulnerabilities to certain risks and their capacities vis-à-vis these risks need to be a fundamental component of protection risks analyses.

CHILDREN, IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY:

Within this document the term children is used as an all-encompassing term that captures all children, in their uniqueness and diversity. This includes:

- Children of all ages, including infants/early childhood (under age 5), middle childhood (ages 5-12, or school aged), and all stages of adolescence;
- Children of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions; children with diverse abilities and disabilities; and
- Children with other diversity factors, which include, but are not limited to, different racial and ethnic identities; different social, cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds; and children of any minority group.

¹ Child protection is defined as the "prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children". As described on page 19 in: http://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home

² <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/52d7915e4.pdf>

³ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

International law recognises children as a group of right holders, distinct from adults and other population groups. Children are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises.⁴ They have unique needs and capacities that vary by age, gender, ability, legal status, and other individual characteristics. Leaders and champions for human rights have heralded that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its children.

Children are a significant group of rights-holders, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their rights are inter-connected, and a holistic approach is needed by actors across the humanitarian system to ensure their realisation. This is where the centrality of children in humanitarian action becomes critical. The Guidance Note of the Secretary General on Child Rights Mainstreaming sets out specific recommendations on how to strengthen a child rights-based approach across the work of the United Nations.⁵

Among other rights, children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, and the prevention of and response to these form the foundation of the Child

Protection in Humanitarian Action sector. Violence against children can only be fully addressed when all actors work hand in hand to address its root causes.

Children also have the right to exercise their agency in decisions that concern them. They can play a vital role in protecting themselves and their peers and in identifying and helping adults and peers to understand protection needs. Incorporating children's ideas, views, and experiences can lead to more effective, relevant, and sustainable decisions on programmes and policies that serve them. All humanitarian actors have the obligation to support the realisation of this right.

As children are embedded within families, communities, and broader society, their protection and well-being cannot be achieved without investing in their wider ecosystem. For example, for children to be protected, they need to live in safe communities, where they can access protective and inclusive education and their families have access to livelihood opportunities.

CENTRING CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE:

- Contributes to our shared commitment to accountability to affected populations;
- Provides concrete ways to advance on the operationalisation of the Centrality of Protection;
- Strengthens the impact of all sectoral interventions;
- Reduces the likelihood of humanitarian programmes causing harm to children;
- Reduces the likelihood of protection harm to children, such as child labour, child marriage, and recruitment into armed forces and groups;



⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/children-crisis-spotlight-underfunded-humanitarian-emergencies_en#:~:text=Children%20are%20disproportionately%20affected%20by,their%20survival%2C%20growth%20and%20development

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/guidance-note-secretary-general-child-rights-mainstreaming>

WHAT SHOULD HUMANITARIAN ACTORS DO TO PROMOTE THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION?⁶

Turning the concept of the centrality of children and their protection into a reality requires a collective effort across the humanitarian system. Concrete actions by diverse stakeholder groups can contribute to this change, including:

1. Humanitarian leadership, including Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams

Humanitarian leadership should make the protection of all children a strategic objective in advocacy and resource mobilisation efforts, and a collective outcome in humanitarian responses. This is critical to achieving broader protection objectives. This can be considered a “child lens” to the obligations of humanitarian stakeholders to the Centrality of Protection and in particular the implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action.

2. Humanitarian workers

All humanitarian workers play a role in placing children’s rights and children’s protection from abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence as a central focus in all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle, including in preparedness and anticipatory action. This includes advocating with stakeholders—in their spheres of influence, for example managers and organisational leadership, partners, and donors—to prioritise and resource specific actions to centre children and their protection in humanitarian action.

- a. **Child protection actors:** Child protection practitioners play a critical role in developing and implementing lifesaving and life-sustaining child protection interventions in humanitarian settings, for example interventions to prevent and respond to children at risk of recruitment by armed groups or family separation. They should collaborate with broader humanitarian actors to provide technical support and assistance, for example integrating child protection considerations in multi-sectoral needs assessments, mainstreaming child protection considerations in other sectoral programmes, and conducting child protection monitoring at critical locations, such as food distribution points, etc.



UNICEF/UN0484305/Mazar

⁶ Humanitarian actors, national partners, and donors can find key actionable steps to support the centrality of children and their protection in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS). The eight standards of CPMS Pillar 4: Working Across Sectors provide specific guidance on how health, education, camp management, food security, and other sectoral actors can integrate children’s protection through all phases of humanitarian response.

- b. **Humanitarian workers from other sectors, including coordinators and programme specialists:** Health, Education, Food Security, Livelihoods, Camp Coordination, and Camp Management, Shelter, Nutrition, WASH, and other sectoral actors, as well as those working on cross-cutting issues such as Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and disability and inclusion, should systematically consider the capacities, needs, and vulnerabilities of children in their programming. Furthermore, all programming should contribute to the protection and well-being of children, and this can be supported through working with child protection actors. This includes systemically prioritising children's safety and well-being and the avoidance of harm; ensuring equitable access to services; safely identifying and referring children with protection concerns; adapting services to meet the needs of children; and implementing safe and meaningful channels for child participation and child-friendly accountability mechanisms. Cross sectoral collaboration should collectively address identified child protection risks factors. This can prevent harm to children and reduce the need for remedial interventions, which might never fully reverse the long-term impacts of harm.

3. Humanitarian donors:

All humanitarian donors, institutional and private, including those funding across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, play a critical enabling and influencing role in championing the centrality of children and their protection. Donors should facilitate multi-sector and multi-year flexible funding, which contributes to child protection outcomes. This should include direct funding, and prioritisation in country based pooled funding, to local or national organisations.

Donors should require child protection mainstreaming and integration in all new humanitarian proposals and require funding partners to adhere to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Donors should promote the use of programmatic approaches that are child-sensitive and put in place requirements so that children's perspectives, alongside those of adults, are solicited in all funded programmes. Investments should be made to support capacity strengthening and capacity sharing efforts for a range of child protection and other sector actors to implement quality programming that enhances the protection and well-being of children. When developing funding strategies, policies, calls for proposals, and other core documents, donors are encouraged to adopt principles and approaches related to the Centrality of Children and their Protection.



4. Children and their communities:

Children and their communities should be supported to meaningfully and safely participate in all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle and play an active role in the decisions that will impact their lives, well-being, dignity, and protection. All stakeholders should ensure that the resources, capacities, and systems are in place to ensure children are meaningfully engaged, consulted, and partnered with through age—and developmental stage—appropriate processes.

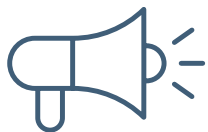
CALL TO ACTION

We call upon the leadership of the humanitarian architecture, decision makers within humanitarian organisations, donors, and all humanitarian actors to fulfil their commitments to children and their protection as an integral part of the Centrality of Protection and central element of all humanitarian action. Children are not only one of the largest population groups affected by humanitarian crises, but they also are the most vulnerable to the impacts of the humanitarian crises. Therefore, a just and equitable humanitarian system should include a strong consideration for children’s capacities, needs, and vulnerabilities.

Through working together, including across sectors and across all levels of the humanitarian system, we can achieve better quality programming, improved outcomes, and greater accountability to affected children and their families.

Effective leadership and collective coordination by all, including supporting Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams and actors across the humanitarian “architecture”, is required if we are to design a humanitarian response that delivers on the rights of children and contributes to their well-being.

Prioritising children’s needs and protection in humanitarian responses is not only a moral imperative but also a cost-effective investment in the future. By investing in children’s well-being, protection, and perspectives, we can build stronger and more resilient families, communities, and societies that can recover and thrive after crises.



“Children and their protection must lie at the heart of each humanitarian action.”

“Everyone has a role to play in the protection of children. Join us.”



THE CENTRALITY OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

