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# POLICY

## on Child Protection



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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# 1. Purpose

**1.1** The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear vision and strategic framework for UNHCR work to protect forcibly displaced and stateless children. This policy outlines UNHCR commitments and contributions **to keeping forcibly displaced and stateless children safe and protected from harm**. To achieve this goal, UNHCR works to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and the separation of children, and promotes solutions in children's best interests.<sup>1</sup>

**1.2** The policy outlines the UNHCR approach to supporting States in meeting their responsibilities to protect forcibly displaced and stateless children and to coherent, quality child protection programming, coordination and partnerships. It provides clarity and direction on key actions to protect children and sets out the accountabilities and authorities for these actions at different levels of the organization. It reaffirms that the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children is a core priority for UNHCR and a collective responsibility that requires personnel across the organization to put the protection of children at the centre of UNHCR's work.

# 2. Scope

**2.1** This policy applies 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 level. It is of particular importance for personnel and senior managers whose functions relate to children, including protection, programme, sectoral and coordination personnel.<sup>2</sup>

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

**2.3** UNHCR advocates and works in partnership with governments, United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society actors, and communities, to implement this policy in all settings. The policy may be used to guide partnership agreements and mutual accountabilities between UNHCR and partners and may inform the child protection strategies of partners working with forcibly displaced and stateless children.

**2.4** Compliance is mandatory.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from inter-agency definition of child protection outlined in the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Settings](#).

<sup>2</sup> "Personnel" refers to staff members and the affiliate workforce.

## 3. Rationale

**3.1** The protection of children is central to UNHCR's mandate given that children constitute over 40 per cent<sup>3</sup> of forcibly displaced and stateless persons and the fact that children have specific rights and face unique protection risks.

**3.2** Situations of forced displacement and statelessness can have a lifelong, devastating impact on the lives and development of children – from infancy and childhood through to adolescence and adulthood. Conflict and persecution expose children and their families to violence, abuse and exploitation and cause families and children to flee. As a result, family and other social support networks are often weakened and livelihoods and access to basic services such as education is disrupted. Forcibly displaced and stateless children and their families often face exclusion and discrimination. They may face refoulement, lack access to child-friendly asylum procedures, solutions in their best interests or – in the case of stateless children – lack access to child-friendly statelessness determination procedures which provide pathways towards naturalization or confirmation of nationality.

**3.3** As a result, forcibly displaced and stateless children face a wide range of child protection risks which include diverse forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Violence, abuse and exploitation can occur in the family, in communities, schools and institutions, and online and can be physical, emotional or sexual. Children may face family separation, neglect, child labour, child marriage, trafficking, child recruitment or immigration detention. Children commonly experience psychosocial distress, as do their caregivers.<sup>4</sup> The objectives and core actions of this policy aim to prevent and address these risks.

**3.4** The protection of children is governed by complementary and mutually reinforcing international legal and policy frameworks. These include international standards governing the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons,<sup>5</sup> the child protection provisions set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and its Optional Protocols,<sup>6</sup> as well as in other international<sup>7</sup> or regional instruments. The UNHCR commitment to protecting children is not only a legal imperative; it also contributes to ensuring a better future for children, their families and communities.

**3.5** This policy consolidates the significant progress made by UNHCR and its partners in protecting children since the issuance of the [Framework for the Protection of Children](#) in 2012. It is aligned with recent UNHCR policies, notably the [Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#) and the [Policy on Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence](#), as well as inter-agency child protection guidelines, particularly the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#). The Policy provides the framework for UNHCR programming for the protection of children to ensure that the substantial investment of UNHCR in child protection is as strategic, coherent and impactful as possible.

<sup>3</sup> See UNHCR, [Global Trends Reports 2023](#); UNHCR, [Protecting Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Children: What do we know?](#)

<sup>4</sup> See UNHCR, [Protecting Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Children, What do we know?](#)

<sup>5</sup> See UNHCR, [Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol and the Global Compact on Refugees, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#); UNCHR, [1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#); UNCHR, [1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#).

<sup>6</sup> See OHCHR, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 2000](#) and OHCHR, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, 2000](#).

<sup>7</sup> See OHCHR, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) for other provisions concerning children with disabilities.

## 4. Guiding principles for protection of children

**4.1** UNHCR work to protect children is grounded in children's rights; in particular, the right to protection from violence, abuse and exploitation and the right to family unity and identity – see Annex 1. UNHCR child protection work is guided by the following principles:

- A. UNHCR promotes children's **right to life, survival and development**, including their right to **safety, well-being and dignity**. UNHCR takes all measures necessary to enhance the safety of children and families and to **avoid exposing them to harm**, including abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation, as a result of the actions of UNHCR and its partners, in line with the **Do No Harm** principle.
- B. **Non-discrimination**. UNHCR supports States and communities in protecting children, without discrimination on the basis of age, gender, disability, race, nationality, legal status, or any other reason. It analyses and addresses causes of discrimination and exclusion, as well as the impact on violence, abuse and exploitation. UNHCR child protection policies and programmes must ensure non-discrimination and be inclusive of and adapted to the specific needs and capacities of children of different ages, genders, disabilities and other diverse characteristics, in line with the [UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#).
- C. The **best interests of the child** must be a primary consideration in all UNHCR actions and decisions directly or indirectly affecting groups or individual children, as well as in all child protection support given to authorities and other actors by UNHCR.
- D. **Participation**. UNHCR must ensure the participation and inclusion of children in all stages of the programme cycle as active agents of their own protection and recognize and build on children's capacities and resilience.<sup>8</sup> It must ensure, in all interventions, that children are able to express their views freely and must give due weight to the views of children in accordance with their age, maturity and abilities.<sup>9</sup>
- E. **State responsibility**. UNHCR supports States as the primary actor responsible for the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children and the provision of non-discriminatory access to services to all children under their jurisdiction, regardless of their legal status or other age, gender and diversity characteristics.
- F. **Prevention and early intervention**. UNHCR recognizes **that child protection risks are preventable and that protection of children cannot wait**. UNHCR prioritizes investing in evidence-based approaches to prevention and must take early action where children are at risk, in order to mitigate those risks and prevent harm wherever possible.
- G. **Integrated approach to the protection of children**. UNHCR takes a multisectoral approach to holistically address the multiple and interconnected causes of child protection risks and catalyses action from diverse partners for a comprehensive response.
- H. **Adherence to quality child protection standards**. UNHCR child protection programming is guided by and adheres to inter-agency standards, in particular the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) and the UNHCR child protection guidelines, including the [UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines](#).

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<sup>8</sup> See OHCHR, [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989](#).

<sup>9</sup> See UNHCR, [Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#); UNHCR, [Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People](#).

# 5. UNHCR core actions for the protection of children

**5.1** The core actions outline the strategic priorities of UNHCR work to protect children. They recognize the distinct mandate and responsibilities of UNHCR and outline its contribution to preventing and responding to child protection risks. In doing so, UNHCR supports States and works in complementary and collaboration with partners as part of a multi-stakeholder response as follows:

**01. Core programme actions** describe the strategic priorities for UNHCR programming and advocacy to protect children. For each programme action, the result describes the changes in children’s lives and/or protection systems that UNHCR and partners are working towards as well as UNHCR’s role in achieving these changes.

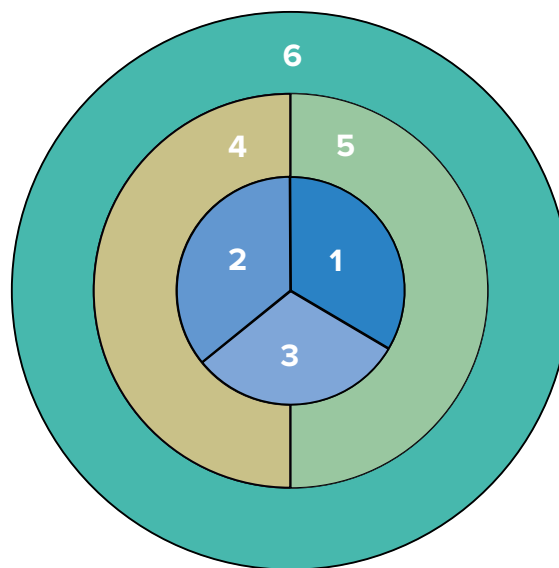
**02. Core enabling actions** set out supporting actions needed to effectively implement the programme actions.

**5.2** The core programme actions are primarily implemented by country operations and are supported by regional bureaux and headquarters in their respective roles – see section 7 for more details. The core enabling actions apply to country operations<sup>10</sup>, regional bureaux and headquarters.

## 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



Coordination



Evidence and advocacy



Child protection workforce



Partnerships



Learning and development

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the policy, country operations also include multi-country offices.

**5.3** These core programme actions provide the framework for predictable engagement of UNHCR in the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children, while recognizing that the specific role of UNHCR in each context will depend on the capacity of States and other partners. As such:

- **UNHCR must address Core Programme Actions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 and the enabling actions in all country operations.**
- **Core Programme Action 3** should only be undertaken by UNHCR and partners in country operations if such services cannot be adequately provided by the national child protection system.

**5.4** UNHCR recognizes that child protection risks are inextricably linked to broader issues that cannot be solved through child protection interventions alone. Actions 1–3 outline the strategic priorities of UNHCR in dedicated child protection programming, while Actions 4–6 outline the contribution of its broader protection, solutions and assistance programming to the protection of children. This holistic approach to child protection includes ensuring children’s access to dedicated child protection programming, as well as leveraging UNHCR and partners’ protection, solutions and assistance programming to contribute to the protection of children. These actions have a strong focus on preventing child protection risks by addressing the multifaceted drivers of child protection risks and supporting evidence-based child protection prevention interventions.<sup>11</sup>

**5.5** To ensure that these actions are adapted to the context, within each core action area, operations should determine the most impactful activities that will achieve the associated result most effectively in their context.<sup>12</sup> This should be based on the analysis of risk and protective factors for children, the broader situation analysis, partners’ capacity and the role of UNHCR, including whether it is predominantly an advocacy operation or an operation directly providing services to forcibly displaced and stateless people. UNHCR will work in partnership with authorities, UN and local and international civil society organisations to achieve these results. This may be done through UNHCR’s direct implementation of programmes and/or advocacy and support to other actors including national authorities. Implementation of this policy is intended to refocus programming for more effective impact and use of resources, including an integrated focus on child protection across UNHCR programming and advocacy. It will not automatically require increased resources for child protection programming in specific operations.

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<sup>11</sup> See Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Primary prevention framework for child protection in humanitarian action](#); WHO, [INSPIRE: 7 Strategic Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children](#).

<sup>12</sup> See UNHCR, [Child Protection Programming Guidance](#).





## Core Programme Action 1: Strengthen inclusive child protection systems

Result: national child protection systems have the commitment and capacity to protect forcibly displaced and stateless children

**5.1.1.** In all operations, UNHCR monitors the protection situation of forcibly displaced and stateless children and supports national child protection systems to protect them from violence, exploitation, abuse and separation as part of our work on inclusion in national systems and collaboration with development partners. UNHCR together with partners supports national and local child protection systems to ensure that:<sup>13</sup>

- Forcibly displaced and stateless children are included in local and national systems and services that prevent and respond to child protection risks without discrimination
- Forcibly displaced and stateless children who are at risk are identified and referred to effective child protection and multisectoral services
- National child protection systems have the capacity to address the specific needs of forcibly displaced and stateless children and respect international legal and policy frameworks on the protection of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons
- Forcibly displaced and stateless children have safe and non-discriminatory access to birth registration and civil registration.

**5.1.2** UNHCR must engage national authorities and other relevant actors such as UNICEF and other development actors to assess the capacities of national child protection systems and services, advocate for non-discriminatory access and alignment with international standards and identify key barriers, gaps and concrete measures for system strengthening.<sup>14</sup> Such measures may include capacity development, supporting legal and policy reform, technical and financial support and/or the development of standards or innovative delivery models, as relevant to context and existing national plans and strategies.

<sup>13</sup> See UNHCR, [EX Com Conclusion on Children at Risk](#).

<sup>14</sup> See UNHCR, UNICEF, [Inclusion Toolkit: Refugee Children in National Child Protection Systems](#).



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

Result: children, families and communities have the capacity to prevent and address child protection risks

**5.2.1** Children, families and communities are central to the protection and well-being of forcibly displaced and stateless children. UNHCR integrates child protection within community-based protection programming and together with other partners supports interventions that:

- Reinforce the capacities, resilience and participation of children in their own protection and psychosocial well-being, and those of their peers
- Support families in their efforts to protect and care for forcibly displaced and stateless children
- Identify and strengthen community-based organizations, mechanisms and initiatives that protect children including networks of women, youth and forcibly displaced persons
- Promote protective social and gender norms related to the protection of children and address harmful norms.

**5.2.2** UNHCR should work with authorities and partners to ensure that capacity is strengthened across all four layers outlined above. UNHCR country operations should leverage partners capacity in this area and design UNHCR's community-based child protection interventions to complement existing programmes and in consideration of the role and operational footprint of UNHCR.



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

Result: children at risk access quality supplementary child protection services where needed

**5.3.1** UNHCR country operations provide supplementary child protection services to children at risk where there are critical gaps that cannot be provided by national child protection systems or other child protection partners.<sup>15</sup> These supplementary services should be combined with system-strengthening objectives, to increase the availability and accessibility of national child protection services over time and reduce the need for supplementary services. They include:

- **Identification and referral.** UNHCR must work with partners to ensure that Standard Operating Procedures are in place for the safe identification and referral of children at risk. When UNHCR is engaging directly with children, all children at risk identified by UNHCR must be referred to child protection services. Staff in contact with children must be trained in safe identification and referral
- **Best Interests Procedure (BIP).** In refugee settings,<sup>16</sup> UNHCR must work with partners to ensure that child protection case management is available for individual refugee and asylum-seeking children at heightened risk in line with [UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines](#), where this cannot be provided by the national system. UNHCR identifies partners to provide BIP and

<sup>15</sup> See UNHCR, [EXCOM Conclusion # 107 on Children at Risk](#) for calls on UNHCR and partners to both strengthen and supplement the national child protection system where gaps exist.

<sup>16</sup> For the UNHCR role in child protection case management in IDP settings, see IDP section below and UNHCR Operational Guidance on Child Protection Programmatic Core Actions.

is responsible for coordination, oversight, capacity-building and linking BIP to refugee case management<sup>17</sup>

- **Protection and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children.** UNHCR must work to preserve family unity and prevent and respond to family separation. UNHCR must ensure that unaccompanied and separated children are identified, referred to child protection case management/best interest procedures and are provided with family-based alternative care; and that family tracing and reunification are undertaken in line with their best interests.<sup>18</sup>

**5.3.2** UNHCR may provide other child protection services for children at risk where these are not available yet required in the context. This may include specialized psychosocial interventions for children at risk.<sup>19</sup>

**5.3.3** UNHCR recognizes that when funds are insufficient, operations must prioritize to respond to the needs of children who are most at risk. In these situations, UNHCR continues to work with the government, the United Nations, civil society and donors to mobilize resources and strengthen advocacy efforts. This includes supporting partners to identify needs and mobilize resources for child protection services, including meeting standards on child protection case management including child-to-caseworker ratios.<sup>20</sup>

**Addressing gender-based violence against children.** In line with the [UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to gender-based violence](#), UNHCR child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) personnel work in close collaboration to ensure timely and specialized support to child survivors of GBV, who have specific needs and rights.<sup>21</sup> UNHCR ensures that all GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response actions concerning children are carried out in a child-friendly manner and the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all decisions affecting children affected by GBV. Both GBV and child protection actors providing support for child survivors of GBV must have the required skills, knowledge and competencies and be trained in both child protection and GBV principles, approaches and skills.<sup>22</sup>

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17 For more details see UNHCR Operational Guidance Note on Child Protection Core Programme Actions.

18 See UNHCR, [Best Interests Procedure Guidelines](#) pp. 135–140 and section 3.8.1 for Family tracing and reunification and Best Interests Procedure.

19 See UNHCR Guidance Note on child protection and psychosocial support.

20 See UNHCR, [Best Interests Procedures Guidelines](#) pp. 101–106 for more detail on child-to-case worker ratios.

21 Child protection personnel refers to all personnel responsible for child protection, irrespective of their job title.

22 See UNICEF, [Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse](#).



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

Result: children benefit from child-friendly protection and solutions interventions

**5.4.1** UNHCR operations work to make protection and solutions interventions and procedures child friendly, whether they are managed by authorities, UNHCR, or other partners. These include: reception, registration, refugee status determination or asylum procedures, statelessness determination, repatriation, resettlement, local integration and complementary pathways.<sup>23</sup>

**5.4.2** Procedures must be appropriate and accessible to children, centred on their needs, capacities and best interests and contribute to their safety, protection and well-being. They must be:

- Implemented by staff with appropriate skills
- Carried out in an accessible and safe environment
- Promote children's meaningful participation, and
- Have safeguards/measures to support children.

**5.4.3** UNHCR establishes or supports child-friendly protection procedures in which:

- Refugee and statelessness determination procedures are child-friendly and consider the best interests of children
- Children have access to child-friendly information about procedures and their rights, understand the procedure and their options in the decision-making process and the implications of decisions, and are treated with dignity and respect
- Children benefit from prioritized processing to easily and urgently access protection assistance
- Children at risk are safely identified and referred to appropriate child protection and other services

<sup>23</sup> See UNHCR, [Technical Guidance on Child-Friendly Procedures](#).

- Children can make an independent refugee status claim and child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution and discrimination are considered in refugee status determination<sup>24</sup>
- Procedural and evidentiary safeguards for children are in place during Statelessness Determination Procedures. The needs of children are considered in facilitated naturalization procedures and access to documentation for stateless persons
- Age assessment methods respect human rights standards<sup>25</sup>
- The detention of children for reasons relating to their status of displacement or statelessness is avoided, their immediate release and alternatives to detention are promoted
- Children’s specific needs and rights, including their best interests are addressed and respected in UNHCR-supported solutions including voluntary repatriation,<sup>26</sup> local integration, resettlement<sup>27</sup> and complementary pathways.

**5.4.4** UNHCR must ensure that the protection of children is integrated into the planning and implementation of UNHCR-supported solutions. In addition, UNHCR ensures that the specific needs of children and their protection are integrated into UNHCR’s other protection interventions such as protection monitoring.



24 See UNHCR, [Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination Under UNHCR’s Mandate](#) (Chapter 2.8); UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims](#).

25 See UNHCR, [Detention Guidelines](#) pp. 34–36.

26 See UNHCR, [Operational Guidelines on Voluntary Repatriation](#).

27 See UNHCR, [Resettlement Handbook](#) chapter on Children and Adolescents at Risk.



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

Result: forcibly displaced and stateless children access essential services safely and the multisectoral drivers of child protection risks are addressed

**5.5.1** All humanitarian sectors have a crucial role to play in contributing to child protection outcomes, including through ensuring children's access to safe education, addressing the economic drivers of child protection risks and promoting safe and healthy communities for children. UNHCR operations must together with partners support children in accessing essential sectoral services in those sectors in which UNHCR is engaged in a country operation and integrate a focus on the protection and well-being of children into the service provision. Where national actors deliver essential services, UNHCR operations advocate with and provide technical support to integrate child protection considerations into the planning and implementation of services.

**5.5.2** When UNHCR provides services, including WASH, education, shelter, health, MHPSS, nutrition, livelihoods, food security and camp management, it must make sure programming contributes to the protection of children in line with inter-agency standards.<sup>28</sup> UNHCR programming and advocacy promotes:

<sup>28</sup> See Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) Pillar 4, Standards for Working across Sectors, pp. 223-295.

- **Equitable access** for children and their families to services regardless of their legal status, geographical location or age, gender and other diversity characteristics
- **Safety and well-being and avoidance of harm** by identifying child protection risks, their causes and designing interventions actions that will mitigate these risks and promote well-being. This includes ensuring that interventions do not contribute to child protection risks
- **Services that are adapted to meet the needs of children** including adolescents, taking into account contextualized gender, age and other diversity aspects
- **Safe identification, referral and response.**<sup>29</sup> Personnel of all sectors must work with child protection personnel to safely identify children at risk, refer them to existing child protection and multisectoral services and provide child-friendly services to children at risk in their sector
- **Note:** All sectoral services must ensure child participation, communication and accountability as outlined below.



29 See UNHCR, [Best Interests Procedure Guidelines, 2021](#) (section 3.1.4) for additional principles under which referrals and responses must be undertaken.





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

Result: children effectively participate in UNHCR protection, assistance and solutions interventions. UNHCR communication with children is child-friendly and children have access to child-friendly accountability mechanisms.

**5.6.1** Child participation, communication and accountability are crucial in addressing harm against children. The participation, capacities and priorities of children must be integrated into UNHCR protection, assistance and solutions programming. Country operations must work with partners to establish processes that enable:

- Children to participate in programme design and decision-making, by gathering and prioritizing children's views on the safety and protection risks that they face and the actions that are needed to prevent or mitigate harm<sup>30</sup>
- Children and families to access information about their rights, protection, assistance and solutions in an age- gender- and diversity-sensitive manner and in a format and language that can be understood by children of different ages, literacy levels and abilities

30 See Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Primary Prevention Framework](#).

- UNHCR personnel and partners to communicate with children in a child-friendly manner<sup>31</sup> through appropriately adapted channels and methods
- Children to access feedback and response mechanisms adapted for use by children and generate data that is used for decision-making
- Children to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation by UNHCR and partners<sup>32</sup>
- Children to be able to access safe and confidential channels to report exploitation and abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and receive child-friendly, survivor-centred child protection services and assistance.<sup>33</sup>

### Protecting children in situations of internal displacement and statelessness

While operations globally are expected to take action in the core programme areas, the operational engagement of UNHCR will differ in refugee, stateless and internal displacement settings. The boxes below summarize how this policy applies to the work of UNHCR in internal displacement settings and its work with stateless children, mindful of the role of UNHCR and partners in these various settings.

In situations of internal displacement, child protection is coordinated through the Child Protection Sub-Cluster/Area of Responsibility (AoR) led by UNICEF, within the Protection Cluster which is led by UNHCR. In IDP settings, UNHCR should:

- Actively participate as a member in the Child Protection sub-cluster/AoR led by UNICEF and co-led by the government or NGO
- As the protection lead agency, integrate child protection in overall inter-agency protection planning, programming and advocacy
- Integrate child protection into existing UNHCR programming including child-friendly protection interventions, child protection mainstreaming across sectors, and child participation and child-friendly communication and accountability (Programmatic Actions 4, 5 and 6 of this policy)
- In mixed situations where refugees and IDPs reside in the same geographical locations, integrate IDPs into UNHCR child protection programming
- In IDP settings, resources permitting, invest in dedicated child protection programming as part of the operation's overall protection and solutions strategy. UNHCR child protection programming must align with the inter-agency child protection strategy and address gaps in the inter-agency response, particularly in locations at which UNHCR has a strong field presence and footprint
- In locations where UNHCR implements child protection programming, UNHCR should: reinforce community-based child protection mechanisms (Programme Action 2 of this policy); contribute to strengthening national systems, particularly access to birth registration in support of UNICEF (Programme Action 1); leverage and integrate existing national and inter-agency child protection tools, services and initiatives in UNHCR child protection programming; and advocate for response services for children at risk to be available (Programme Action 3).

For more information see [UNHCR IDP Building Blocks, Child Protection](#)

31 See UNHCR, [Technical Guidance: Child-Friendly Procedures](#).

32 See [Keeping Children Safe](#).

33 See UNHCR [Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct](#).

34 See [IASC, Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action \(2016\)](#).

UNHCR engagement to prevent childhood statelessness and protect stateless children is guided by the [UNHCR Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#). The main areas of focus are:

- UNHCR child protection work strengthens child protection systems that are inclusive and accessible to stateless children (Programme Action 1)
- Where UNHCR supports forcibly displaced children, families and communities to protect children (Programme Action 2) and provides child protection services to children at risk (Programme Action 3), it ensures that stateless children have access to its child protection interventions
- UNHCR statelessness work must ensure that statelessness procedures, policies and solutions are child-friendly and address the specific needs of children (Programme Action 4)
- UNHCR must safeguard children and prevent child protection risks across all statelessness programmes, including ensuring child safeguarding and safe identification and referral, and promote child participation, child-friendly communication and accountability (Programme Action 6).



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## 6. Core enabling actions for the protection of children

### **6.1. CORE ENABLING ACTION 1: Integrate child protection into strategic planning and programming**

Result: child protection is integrated across UNHCR programmes and all stages of the UNHCR operations programme cycle

**6.1.1** UNHCR country operations must integrate child protection considerations into all stages of the multi-year programme cycle and reflect the operation's strategic approach to child protection as part of the multi-year strategy.<sup>35</sup> Programme teams must identify the risks and protective factors for children and analyse the capacity of authorities, communities and other partners particularly other child protection organisations to address these risks. The operation should identify its strategic approach to child protection that is appropriate to the context and national capacities, complements other actors' work, reflects the role and operational footprint of UNHCR and is aligned with the programmatic actions outlined in this policy.<sup>36</sup> Children's capacities and priorities must be integrated into all stages of the programme cycle. UNHCR must, together with partners, regularly monitor the situation of forcibly displaced and stateless children and their protection and use this information to inform advocacy and programming.

**6.1.2** Predictable, strategic allocation of resources to the protection of children is key to achieving results. Operations must reflect the resources required for the country operation's strategic approach to child protection in both the needs-based budget (the OP budget) and the budget available to UNHCR to address child protection (the OL budget).<sup>37</sup> Where resources are not available to meet the full range of child protection needs, UNHCR must:

- Work with partners to develop advocacy and fundraising strategies to increase predictable funding for the inter-agency child protection response
- Prioritize the most urgent child protection needs
- Highlight the implications of gaps in child protection programming and the potential increase in risks.

### **6.2. CORE ENABLING ACTION 2: Generate evidence, advocate and communicate on forcibly displaced and stateless children**

Result: UNHCR effectively and systematically advocates and communicates for the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children

**6.2.1** UNHCR will have most impact when country operations, regional bureaux and headquarters advocate and communicate in a coherent way on the protection risks children face, actions needed

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35 See UNHCR, [Policy on Planning for, Getting and Showing Results](#).

36 See UNHCR, [Programme Manual](#); UNHCR, [Child Protection Programming Guidance](#).

37 See UNHCR, [Policy on Resource Allocation and Management](#).

to address these risks and advocate for the respect of international and regional standards on child protection. UNHCR must coordinate advocacy and communications with key partners at all levels of the organization, and where appropriate, undertake joint efforts that build on credible evidence and information.

**6.3.2** These efforts include:

- Collecting data disaggregated by age in all stages of the programme cycle, in line with the [UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#)
- Collecting, reporting, and using credible, reliable, and disaggregated data,<sup>38</sup> including through the participation of children, on child protection issues faced by forcibly displaced and stateless children, UNHCR interventions to address these risks, the results achieved, and on the challenges<sup>39</sup>
- Leveraging inter-agency advocacy and human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Integrating child protection issues into protection monitoring and contributing to child rights monitoring, including of grave child rights violations.<sup>40</sup>

**6.2.3** UNHCR must reflect child protection in all external reports and communications on the situation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

### **6.3. CORE ENABLING ACTION 3: Strengthen partnerships**

Result: UNHCR operations establish effective partnerships and collaborations to deliver child protection results

**6.3.1** In line with the [Global Compact on Refugees](#), [IASC Grand Bargain](#) and the [UNHCR Principles of Partnerships](#), UNHCR implements the core actions in this policy in partnership with a range of stakeholders that can influence positive child protection outcomes for forcibly displaced and stateless children, whether specialized in child protection or not. UNHCR and its partners work collaboratively to develop a holistic response to the full range of child protection issues<sup>41</sup> in any given setting, in line with the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#). These efforts include:

- Mapping existing capacities and initiatives of States, civil society, UN and other actors, and ensuring UNHCR's child protection programming complements these efforts
- Identifying areas of collaboration with partners in line with the comparative advantage of UNHCR and the core actions outlined in this policy
- Supporting localization by partnering with local authorities and civil society actors to provide child protection services and supporting the engagement of refugee-led organizations in child protection

38 Any data collected on children including disclosure of personal data must be in line with UNHCR's data protection framework: [UNHCR General Policy on Personal Data Protection and Privacy](#), 2022; [Policy on Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR](#), 2015.

39 See UNHCR, [Child Protection Programming Guidance](#).

40 See SRSG/CAAC, [Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Child Rights Violations](#).

41 See UNHCR, [Protecting Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Children: What do we know?](#)



- Partnering on joint child protection assessments and monitoring, programme design and delivery, advocacy, capacity-building and fundraising.
- Advocating for increased investment to all partners to scale up child protection programming (see above).
- Supporting funded child protection partners in delivering quality child protection services including by selecting qualified child protection partners, supporting adequate child protection staffing, monitoring, and providing capacity-building and technical support as needed.
- Undertake all efforts to ensure predictability in funded partnerships, ensuring the continuity of child protection services and avoiding gaps in service provision that negatively impact on the protection of children.

#### 6.4. CORE ENABLING ACTION 4: Lead or contribute to child protection coordination

Result: UNHCR leads or contributes to effective child protection coordination

**6.4.1** The coordination of child protection is essential to ensure quality, coherent and effective inter-agency child protection prevention and response. Roles and accountabilities for child protection coordination are determined by the nature of the displacement (e.g. internal displacement and refugee situations) and the capacity of state actors.

- In *refugee situations*,<sup>42</sup> UNHCR in support of the State leads the coordination of refugee child

42 See UNHCR, [Refugee Coordination Guidance Note](#) for definitions, which include mixed movements and mixed

protection. UNHCR must ensure that child protection is coordinated through an appropriate mechanism and contributes to refugee protection and solutions within the broader Protection Sector. UNHCR may co-lead child protection coordination with the government and/or another organization in situations in which the government is unable to fulfil its coordination responsibilities. Country operations must strengthen coordination mechanisms that bring together relevant government institutions, community-led, national and international organizations and United Nations agencies

- In **internal displacement situations**, where clusters are activated, UNHCR leads the Protection Cluster and participates in the Child Protection Sub-Cluster/Area of Responsibility (CP AoR) led by UNICEF. UNHCR should contribute to child protection coordination by supporting assessments and situation analyses, strategic planning, advocacy, technical support and capacity-building, to ensure integrated protection analysis and response within the Protection Cluster.

## **6.5. CORE ENABLING ACTION 5: Develop a qualified workforce for child protection**

Result: UNHCR has an adequate qualified workforce for child protection

**6.5.1** UNHCR must continue to build a qualified, adequate workforce to deliver quality child protection programming in a safe and professional manner, in line with minimum standards.<sup>43</sup>

**6.5.2** The child protection workforce in an operation may be made up of dedicated child protection staff and/or protection staff with skills and knowledge in the field of child protection. This workforce should focus on UNHCR's child protection strategic approach in the operation, including child protection programming, advocacy, coordination, capacity-building, assessing, monitoring and reporting and support for partners implementing child protection services. Where partners and national authorities have capacity in child protection case management, the operation should shift the UNHCR workforce away from direct implementation of case management to coordination and oversight of BIP (see BIP section above).

**6.5.1** Workforce planning for child protection should consider:

- Assigning qualified personnel to the locations where support is needed, to oversee child protection programming and delivery in line with identified needs
- Ensuring that child protection personnel (whether dedicated child protection staff or not) have the requisite knowledge, skills and technical expertise to deliver the longer-term child protection outcomes of the multi-year strategy (see below)
- Identifying partnerships and additional workforce arrangements that can address shorter-term or key child protection capacity needs with the support of regional bureaux and/or headquarters as appropriate.

**6.5.4** Senior managers must ensure that all personnel involved in delivering child protection outcomes have clearly defined responsibilities and lines of accountability for child protection

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situations where the target populations include refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and/or other affected groups.

<sup>43</sup> UNHCR's standards on child protection staffing have been guided by Alliance for Children in Humanitarian Action, [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) Standard 2, Human Resources.

programming and coordination, and sufficient time to undertake these responsibilities. Child safeguarding/SEA measures must be in place for the recruitment and management of personnel and partner staff working with children.

**6.5.5** In declared emergencies, particularly L2 and L3 emergencies, UNHCR operations – with the support of regional bureaux, the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) and the Division of International Protection (DIP) – must ensure that child protection staff experienced in emergency response are available or deployed at the location of the emergency wherever possible.

## **6.6. CORE ENABLING ACTION 6: Systematic approach to learning and development**

Result: all UNHCR personnel have access to learning and development in child protection relevant to their role

**6.6.1** UNHCR must continue to invest in reinforcing the behaviour, skills and competencies of personnel and partners with responsibilities in child protection including capacitating:

- **Protection and child protection personnel and partner staff:** to assess and monitor child protection issues and to design and implement child protection prevention and response programmes and actions
- **Sectoral and field staff:** to identify child protection risks and put prevention measures in place as well as child-friendly communication and feedback mechanisms
- **Senior managers** to oversee, communicate and lead on child protection.

**6.6.2** Personnel providing BIP or child protection case management must have the necessary case management skills and knowledge and receive structured supervision, coaching and training. They must be prioritized to receive support for staff well-being.<sup>44</sup> All personnel and partner staff interacting regularly with children should be trained in child protection, child development and communicating with children.<sup>45</sup> The child protection workforce and their managers should undertake foundational child protection learning.<sup>46</sup> UNHCR provides staff and partners with structured opportunities for learning and development in child protection, at country, regional and HQ levels (see section 7 below).

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44 See UNHCR, [Best Interests Procedure Guidelines, 2021](#) Chapter 3.4.3.

45 See UNHCR, [Child Protection Job Aid](#).

46 See UNHCR, [Child Protection Job Aid](#).



# 7. Roles, accountabilities and authorities

**7.1** Implementation of this policy requires strong leadership and engagement at all levels of the workforce, in line with the roles, accountabilities and authorities described below.

## **7.2 All UNHCR Personnel**

All managers and members of the workforce must contribute to the UNHCR commitment to addressing child protection concerns by integrating child protection into their respective area of work. All staff ensure child safeguarding by adhering to the ethical standards in the [UNHCR Code of Conduct](#) and adhering to the Do No Harm principle.

## **7.3 Country operations (including multi-country offices)**

**Representatives** have the authority to:

- Prioritize measures for the effective implementation and monitoring of the policy, as defined in the operation's strategy, staffing and resources
- Lead advocacy with states and other actors for the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children
- Establish appropriate mechanisms for the coordination of child protection in refugee operations, as part of the protection coordination.

**Representatives** are accountable for ensuring that:

- The operation implements the core programme actions of the policy, including by integrating them into all stages of the multi-year programme cycle as relevant in the context of the operation
- The operation implements the core enabling actions to advance child protection outcomes
- Child protection risks, programmatic responses and results are consistently reflected in the operation's advocacy, as well as in reporting and internal and external communications with the UNHCR workforce, authorities, partners and communities.

**7.4 Regional Bureau Directors** have the authority to:

- Exercise managerial oversight over implementation of the policy in their respective regions.

**Regional Bureau Directors** are accountable for ensuring that:

- The policy is coherently applied across the region, taking into account country capacities and risks
- The regional bureau has adequate child protection expertise to provide support to operations.

The **Head of the Regional Bureau Protection** pillar, supported by the **regional child protection officer or focal point**, has the authority to:

- Develop region-specific strategies on child protection in line with this policy, if necessary

- Undertake actions within their region to strengthen implementation of the policy, including corrective actions to ensure compliance with the policy.

They are accountable for ensuring:

- Coherent application of the policy in country operations and that corrective actions are undertaken where required, in order to ensure compliance
- That country operations have access to technical support and guidance to implement the policy, in cooperation with DIP
- That the regional bureau facilitates the exchange of knowledge on child protection across and within regions in collaboration with headquarters (DIP)
- That learning and capacity needs within the region are identified and addressed in collaboration with country operations and DIP
- That reviews of country multi-year strategies and annual plans consider child protection
- That child protection concerns and developments within the region are monitored and mitigated and that high-risk concerns are escalated to DIP
- That global child protection tools and initiatives led by DIP and global partners are available to country operations and that inputs and feedback are shared with headquarters.

**7.5** The **Director of the Division of International Protection (DIP)**, with the support of the Child Protection Unit has the authority to:

- Develop and maintain child protection policies and guidelines
- Engage with global partners on child protection and undertake global advocacy on child protection
- Advise the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, the Senior Executive Team and the High Commissioner, headquarters divisions, regional bureaux and, where necessary, operations, on child protection issues
- Undertake analyses and support UNHCR in its global role coordinating child protection in refugee settings, in line with the Refugee Coordination model.

They are accountable for ensuring that:

- The policy is consistently applied across regions and that recurrent gaps and risks are addressed
- Global guidance, tools and initiatives are available to support implementation of the policy, including global learning and development on child protection, in consultation with the regional bureaux
- Global statistics and analysis concerning child protection risks and results are available
- Tools and processes for monitoring and reporting on policy compliance are available.

**7.6** **Headquarters Division Directors** and **Heads of Services** are accountable for ensuring that:

- Global policies, strategies, guidance, tools and learning initiatives are consistent with and promote this policy
- Child protection issues are appropriately integrated into internal and external communication and advocacy
- For areas of this policy that fall within their purview, non-compliance issues are flagged to DIP and/or the Senior Executive Team (SET) as appropriate.

**7.7** The **Senior Executive Team**, under the leadership of the High Commissioner, integrates child protection into all organisational priorities and continuously reinforces child protection as an institutional priority. SET provides global leadership direction, visibility and advocacy for child protection and ensures that child protection is appropriately integrated into their respective areas of accountability.

**7.8** The **Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (AHC-P)** oversees implementation of this policy and associated measures for preventing and responding to child protection risks and appraises the Senior Executive Team on progress. The Assistant High Commissioner for Protection is accountable for advising the High Commissioner on child protection issues, with the support of DIP where appropriate, ensuring appropriate visibility of the protection of children across the organization and undertaking high-level advocacy on child protection, including in bilateral, multilateral and inter-agency forums.

## 8. Monitoring and compliance

**8.1** DIP will monitor the global implementation of this policy, while the regional bureaux will support monitoring and compliance in country operations.

## 9. Dates

**9.1** This Policy will be effective as of its release date. It will be reviewed five years after its release date.

## 10. Contact

**10.1** The contact person for this Policy is the Deputy Director, Field Protection Service, Division of International Protection. The Field Protection Service Child Protection Unit is available to respond to questions and to support implementation and monitoring of this Policy ([hqchipro@unhcr.org](mailto:hqchipro@unhcr.org)).

## 11. History

**11.1** This Policy supersedes the:

- [1993 UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children](#)
- [1994 Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care](#)
- [2012 Framework for the Protection of Children](#)

## 12. References

**12.1** In relation to UNHCR work on the prevention and response to child protection risks, this policy is aligned with and incorporates, inter alia, the following policies and guidance:

- UNHCR [ExCom Conclusion on Children at Risk](#)
- [2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#)
- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)
- UNHCR [Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#)
- UNHCR [Policy on Prevention of, Risk Mitigation and Response to Gender-based Violence](#)
- UNHCR [Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement](#)
- UNHCR [Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct](#)
- UNHCR [Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People \(AAP\)](#)
- UNHCR [Guidelines on Statelessness No. 4: Ensuring Every Child's Right to Acquire a Nationality through Articles 1–4 of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#)
- [Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims under Articles 1\(A\)2 and 1\(F\) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#)

# 13. Annexes

## 13.1 Annex 1: Child Protection and Child Rights

### Annex 1 Child Rights vs Child Protection

While “child rights” and “child protection” are clearly linked, they are two separate concepts.

**Child rights** are a subset of human rights that recognize children’s special needs to ensure they are properly protected, nurtured, and increasingly empowered, in line with their evolving capacities.

Child rights are set out in the 1989 [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) and can be divided into the following groups:

- Rights on the provision of services, skills or resources needed for children’s survival and development (e.g. health care, education)
- Rights on the protection of children from harm (e.g. abuse, neglect)
- Rights on children’s meaningful participation.

For UNHCR, the promotion of child rights broadly is integrated into the [UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity](#) approach which highlights UNHCR commitment to diversity and inclusion, including the promotion of child rights throughout UNHCR programmatic interventions.

**Child protection** is a subset of children’s rights that focus on the prevention of, and response to, abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence against and separation of children. In other words, child protection is about protecting children from harm – either by preventing children from being harmed in the first place; or, if children were or are being harmed, by working to ensure that the harm stops and that the children recover from the negative consequences of the harm.

As child rights are interlinked, child protection also includes promoting other child rights that are particularly closely interlinked with preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence against and separation of forcibly displaced and stateless children. These include the right to participation, non-discrimination, family unity, best interests and identity. In addition, for UNHCR, child protection also involves the promotion of legal frameworks and standards for the protection of refugee, IDP and stateless children, which ensure in particular that the solutions adopted are in children’s best interests.

