



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



# Child Protection Practices in UNHCR

2014–2022





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# INTRODUCTION

The protection of children has been a core part of the mandate of UNHCR since its establishment in 1950.<sup>1</sup> Every year, millions of children are affected by forced displacement, and over the past decade the number of forcibly displaced children has increased significantly, from 20.5 million in 2010 to an estimate of over 36.5 million by the end of 2021. UNHCR estimates that children now constitute 41 per cent of the people of concern to UNHCR, and in some contexts more than 60 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Forcibly displaced children live in highly diverse settings and with dramatically different prospects for the immediate and longer-term future. Children affected by crises and forced displacement are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse. Frequent risks to displaced children include separation from their families and caregivers, increased rates of violence and abuse within the family and community, trafficking, lack of access to child-friendly asylum procedures, and socioeconomic distress leading to increases in various harmful coping mechanisms such as child labour and child marriage.

Enhancing knowledge of effective programming to protect children of concern to UNHCR has never been more important. This report provides highlights of interventions to protect children implemented by UNHCR and its partners. It documents examples of child protection responses from across UNHCR operations, reflecting the diversity of the children of concern to the organization and the variety of contexts and intervention types that UNHCR and its partners engage in. The practices documented in this report are drawn from UNHCR and its partners' work in refugee and internally displaced person settings, as these form the majority of UNHCR's child protection programming. The report compliments the UNHCR global child protection audit<sup>3</sup> and "Evaluation of UNHCR's child protection programming (2017–2019)",<sup>4</sup> and inter-agency review of effective programming on children on the move,<sup>5</sup> adding to the growing evidence base to inform the child protection programming of UNHCR and its partners. The report documents promising practices from a range of UNHCR operations which illustrate successes and challenges within child protection programming, support learning, and provide inspiration within the organization and for others working in the field of child protection.

UNHCR delivers protection to children of concern to UNHCR by preventing and responding to the risks they face. This includes protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; ensuring immediate access to appropriate services; and ensuring durable solutions in the child's best interests.<sup>6</sup> To implement programmes on child protection, UNHCR works with a wide range of partners including government actors, community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector actors and United

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1 United Nations, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951). Available from [www.unhcr.org/uk/3b66c2aa10](http://www.unhcr.org/uk/3b66c2aa10).

2 UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder" (2022). Available from [www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/](http://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/)

3 United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Report 2021/071: Thematic audit of child protection at the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" (2021). Assignment No. AR2021-164-01. Available from <https://oios.un.org/>.

4 UNHCR, "Evaluation of UNHCR's child protection programming (2017–2019): Final evaluation report, December 2021" (2021). Available from <https://www.unhcr.org/media/evaluation-unhcrs-child-protection-programming-2017-2019>.

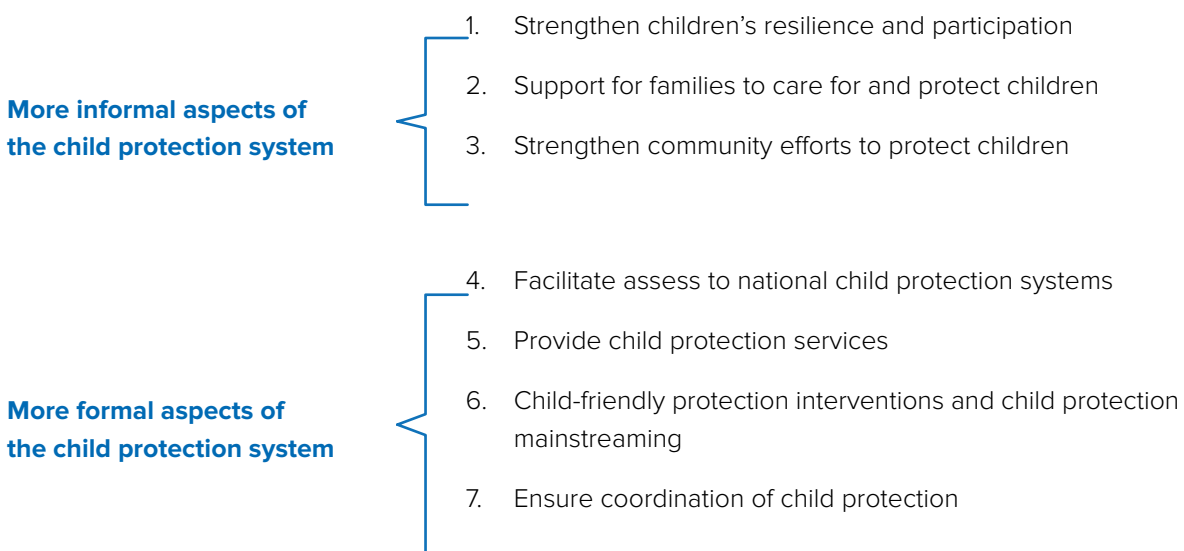
5 Overseas Development Institute, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and UNICEF, "What works to protect children on the move: Rapid evidence assessment, July 2020" (UNICEF, 2020). Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/what-works-protect-children-move-rapid-evidence-assessment-july-2020>.

6 UNHCR, "A framework for the protection of children" (2012). Available from <https://www.unhcr.org/media/31720>.

Nations sister agencies. The interventions highlighted in this report have all been implemented in close collaboration with partners which have contributed vital technical expertise and capacity that have contributed to the results described in this report. This report therefore not only highlights the efforts of UNHCR, but also the hard work, skills and local know-how and dedication of partners to protect children at risk.

UNHCR interventions on child protection span a range of technical areas that take into account the diversity of the situations that children live in and the different roles children themselves, as well as their families and communities, and national actors, are playing in addressing their protection needs. UNHCR interventions reflects a socioecological approach to child protection that recognizes and works across different levels to enhance the protection of children through a holistic understanding of risks and protective factors.

This publication offers examples of UNHCR and its partners' interventions across eight main focus areas, aligned with the socioecological model in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action:<sup>7</sup>



7 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, "2019 edition of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS)" (2019). Available from [https://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS\\_home](https://alliancecpha.org/en/CPMS_home).

# METHODOLOGY

The practices highlighted in the report have been identified through a desk review of more than 1,000 annual reports from operations covering the period 2015–2020, through conversations with UNHCR colleagues in headquarters and regional bureaux, and from other existing documentation, including other publications documenting child protection practices.<sup>8</sup>

The documentation exercise has been informed by UNHCR’s methodology for collecting practices and case studies developed in 2019,<sup>9</sup> and contains examples from across the spectrum of promising practices, emerging practices and case studies. Due to the remote nature of the exercise, the vetting of individual interventions against the methodology has not been done, and examples are not organized within these categories. Instead, emphasis has been placed on identifying practices with a high degree of intervention coherence, meaning that there is a clearly identified problem, an intervention intended to address the problem, and a demonstrated impact on the problem which was addressed. Where available, results are highlighted, and challenges and lessons learned are reflected upon. Most examples include references where further information regarding the intervention can be found.

*More information about any specific intervention is available, including through [UNHCR’s Child Protection Community of Practice](#). Please contact the Child Protection Unit in the Division of International Protection: [hqchipro@unhcr.org](mailto:hqchipro@unhcr.org).*

Practices have been chosen from across UNHCR operations, and efforts have been made to ensure a balanced geographical representation. Special attention has been given to collecting examples from regions and countries that are underrepresented in previous documentation exercises, and from interventions that are less frequently highlighted. As the interventions were conducted at different times between 2014 and 2022, the data and information presented in the different case studies refers to the situation at the time when the intervention was undertaken, unless otherwise specified.

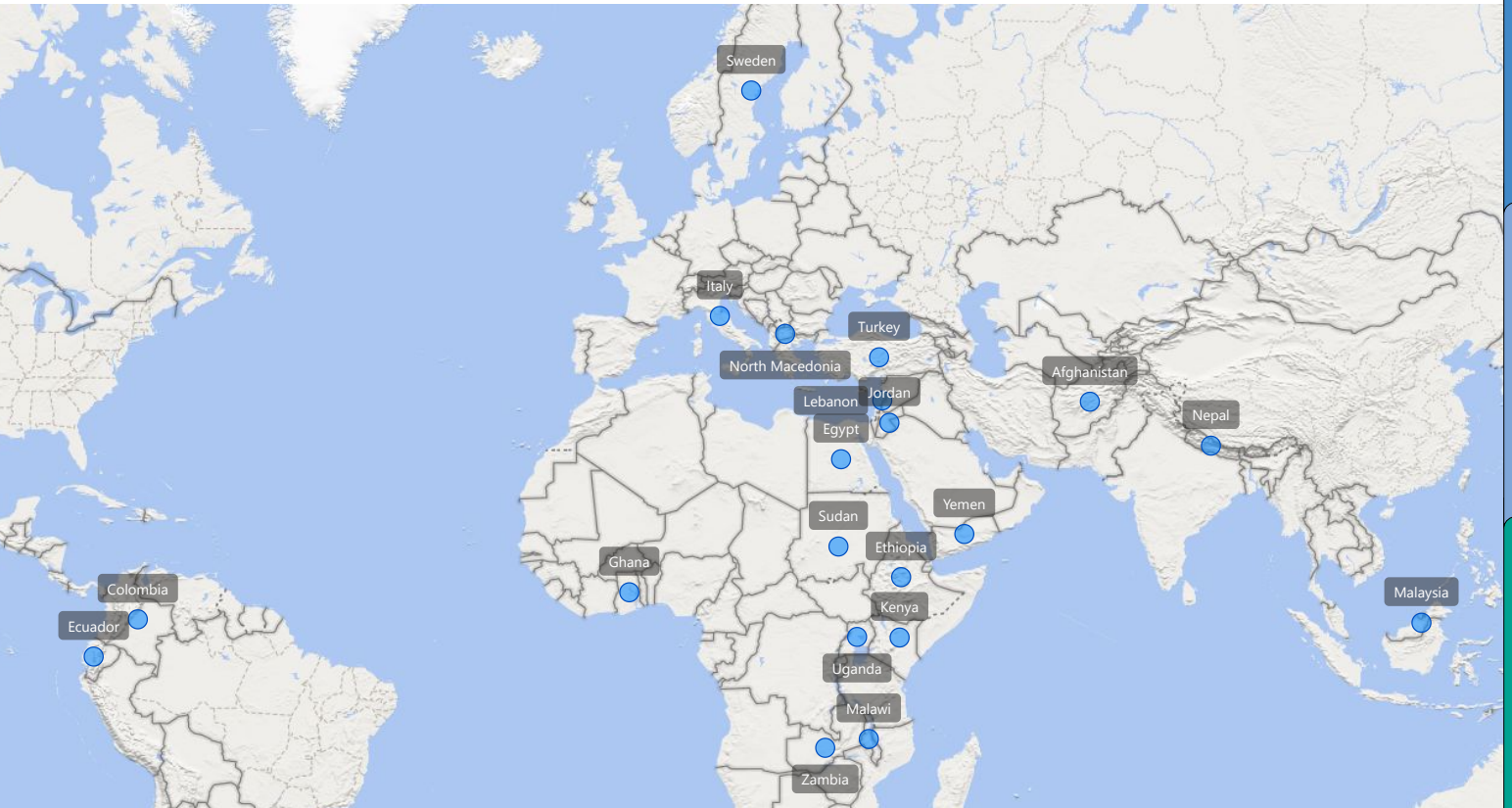


<sup>8</sup> See references at the end of the document for a list of publications. Contributing UNHCR staff are noted in the acknowledgements.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR Child Protection, Community-based Protection, Gender Equality and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Units, “Collecting practices and case studies” (2019). Available on the UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice [here](#).



# GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF HIGHLIGHTED PRACTICES



# OVERVIEW OF PRACTICES

## 1. STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE AND PARTICIPATION

All children need opportunities for social interaction and to develop their life skills and coping mechanisms, and have the right to participate.<sup>10</sup> In forcibly displaced populations, these opportunities have often been disrupted. Engaging children in group activities including sports, arts, life skills and peer-to-peer activities can greatly enhance children's well-being and resilience during a crisis. Structured opportunities for children to participate in their own community, as well as in the programming response, are a core right of children, essential for their protection and well-being.

A key part of UNHCR's approach to child protection is engaging and empowering children through interventions which provide opportunities for children's participation, and strengthen children's life skills and social support. These interventions also reflect UNHCR's commitment to be accountable to affected people by providing opportunities for children to participate and influence decisions that affect them.

### Resources

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 15" (2019)

[UNHCR, "Listen and learn: Participatory assessment with children and adolescents" \(2012\)](#)

[UNHCR, "Operational guidance on accountability to affected people \(AAP\)" \(2020\)](#)

[UNHCR, "UNHCR policy on age, gender and diversity" \(2018\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> Resources:

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 15, group activities for child well-being" (2019). Available from [https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006\\_003](https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006_003).

UNHCR, "Listen and learn: Participatory assessments with children and adolescents" (2012). Available from [www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/children/50f6d1259/listen-learn-participatory-assessment-children-adolescents.html](http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/children/50f6d1259/listen-learn-participatory-assessment-children-adolescents.html).

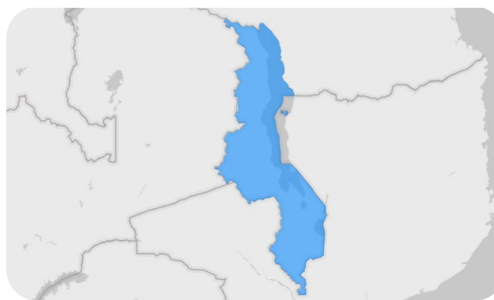
UNHCR, "Operational guidance on accountability to affected people (AAP)" (2020). Available from <https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-aapoperationalguidance>.

UNHCR, "UNHCR policy on age, gender and diversity" (2018). Available from [www.unhcr.org/5aa13c0c7.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5aa13c0c7.pdf).

## MALAWI

### Engaging children through the Dzaleka Children's Parliament

**Partners: Plan International Malawi (PIM), World Vision International (WVI), When the Saints Girls Empowerment Network (GENET)**



#### THE ISSUE

In 2021 Dzaleka refugee camp hosted approximately 50,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the Great Lakes region of Africa, with a majority arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and Ethiopia. Children make up 51 per cent of the refugee population, asylum-seeking and host community population.

While structured platforms have long been in place for adults to express their views and participate in decision-making, UNHCR and Plan International Malawi noted a lack of similar mechanisms available to children. According to UNICEF, “Children in Malawi are largely absent from policy and decision-making processes, and struggle to access knowledge that can improve their lives.” Children consequently often remained side-lined as “largely invisible and voiceless citizens” who have “limited opportunities to actively participate in in decision-making processes.”<sup>11</sup> As of 2021, the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare introduced the National Child Participation Strategy<sup>12</sup> and the National Child Participation Guidelines.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE RESPONSE

In order to foster the engagement and active participation of refugee children, in July 2015 UNHCR and Plan International Malawi supported the establishment of a Children's Parliament, bringing together children from both the refugee and host communities. The Parliament was intended as a platform for these children to voice their concerns and views, as well as actively participating in and influencing decision-making on issues of relevance to them. After its establishment, Plan International Malawi provided capacity-building for the members of the Children's Parliament. A learning visit to the Youth Parliament session in the Malawi National Assembly chambers was arranged, where the children interacted with young Members of Parliament, including the Speaker. The trip enhanced the children's knowledge and confidence in participating in parliamentary sessions.

Initially primarily focused on facilitating discussion among children themselves, the Parliament was reoriented to allow children to engage more directly with decision makers and local authorities. In 2016, refugee child members of the Children's Parliament realized that they could use this forum and role to speak directly to the Government of Malawi through the Dowa District Council, which has the direct responsibility to respond to the Parliamentarians' issues concerning service provision in Dzaleka

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF Malawi, “Voices of children in Malawi” (2021). Available from [www.unicef.org/malawi/media/6306/file/Voices%20of%20Children%20in%20Malawi.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/malawi/media/6306/file/Voices%20of%20Children%20in%20Malawi.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Malawi, Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, “National child participation strategy” (2021). Available from <https://malawi.savethechildren.net/sites/malawi.savethechildren.net/files/library/National%20Child%20Participation%20Strategy.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Malawi, “National child participation guidelines” (NORAD and Save the Children, 2021). Available from [https://malawi.savethechildren.net/sites/malawi.savethechildren.net/files/library/National\\_Child\\_Participation\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://malawi.savethechildren.net/sites/malawi.savethechildren.net/files/library/National_Child_Participation_Guidelines.pdf).

refugee camp. In the course of 2017 and following years, the Children's Parliament steadily enhanced its political reach and influence. In 2017, the Director of the Ministry of Children's Affairs was invited to join a session of the Children's Parliament, and in 2018 the Children's Parliament was convened in the District Council chambers. The resolutions of the session were presented to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Children's Affairs. In 2020, the Children's Parliament was convened in the Malawi National Assembly chambers and the office of the Speaker was "taken over" by the Children's Parliament Speaker.



## RESULTS

The establishment of a forum for refugee children to engage with decision makers in a structured manner has greatly enhanced their ability to raise issues of concern to them at the highest political levels. Since 2016 child Parliamentarians were empowered to raise issues of concern to children and their communities about service provision in Dzaleka refugee camp directly to entities responsible for decision-making. Further, the formation of the Parliament has not only given a voice to refugee children, but has increased the visibility of the lived experience of displaced children hosted in Malawi through direct interfacing with the highest levels of Government, including the President. In November 2020, as part of the commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child, five refugee children were invited to participate in a meeting with the President. The refugee children presented concerns related to the legal framework and policies affecting children, including refugee children. They called on the President to take action to eliminate inconsistencies across legal statutes on the age of the child in the Penal Code and the Constitution.

Child parliamentarians from Dowa and Lilongwe districts, including refugee child parliamentarians, formed a central region task force to develop a child-led Complimentary National Periodic Report to be submitted to the United Nations African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Children received training on the national and international legal instruments and principles on the rights of the child. The children collected the data and drafted the report to be submitted to the ACRWC. In their own words:

*"I am very happy to be among the children who have contributed to this report.  
It is high time we take the best interests of children seriously by promoting children's participation."*

*Refugee child Member of the Dzaleka Children's Parliament*

In addition, this more structured process for child representation has influenced the development of the National Child Protection Strategy and the National Child Participation Guidelines, spearheaded by the Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, Honourable Dr Patricia Kaliati, supported by UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children and Plan International Malawi. The Malawi Children's Parliament has not only been sustained but continues to increase its visibility and representation in key decision-making forums. Notably, two Child Parliamentarians, from the Parliaments of Dowa North and Lilongwe City East respectively, aged 12 and 16, were elected to represent Malawi at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Child Parliament in January 2022<sup>14</sup>.



## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

The establishment of a structured mechanism for refugee children to advocate on issues that concern themselves and their communities to the highest levels of Government has created a critical avenue

<sup>14</sup> Read more about the Malawi Children's Parliament's election to represent Malawi in the SADC Child Parliament here: <https://www.wvi.org/stories/malawi/meet-children-selected-represent-malawi-sadc-parliament>

for their views to be elevated and make recommendations to influence decision-making. With refugee and host community children jointly convening parliamentary sessions, and identifying shared challenges and opportunities, social cohesion between refugee and host communities has been strengthened. Through leveraging resources for protection, prevention and response programming that benefits both refugees and host community children, resources are more equitably shared, and their impact maximized. Key tips for replication include:

- Establish a forum for children to participate in discussions around matters that affect their life and children's rights, situated in the national legal framework of the host country. Identify concrete avenues for advocacy, representation and interfacing with decision makers at relevant levels of governance.
- From the inception, consider the longer-term sustainability of the forum and define mechanisms to realize this, such as establishing partnerships and planning for multi-year resources.
- Partner with skilled civil society and NGOs, such as Plan International Malawi, coordinate with other role-players such as UNICEF Malawi and OHCHR, and mobilize funding from international donors interested in pursuing child participation and the children's rights agenda. Collaborate with relevant governmental bodies such as the ministry responsible for child welfare, and link the children's parliament to formal legislative bodies such as the national assembly.
- Provide capacity-building for children on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and national legislation, participation and representation, in a structured, sustained and child-friendly manner.
- Create and facilitate concrete events and avenues for the forum and members to participate in such as holding meetings in the district council or national assembly chambers, meeting with the director of children's affairs or the President, or participating in regional economic forums.
- Provide financial and material resources to support the children to prepare for and participate in varying activities and forums which have a high impact and potential for influencing decision makers.
- Implement periodic monitoring to evaluate the impact of interventions with and by children involved in the parliament on influencing decision makers.

Please see the National Child Participation Guidelines<sup>15</sup> for tips on replication situated in broader child participation activities and programming.



15 Malawi, "National child participation guidelines".

**ITALY****Enhancing inclusion and participation for unaccompanied and separated children****Partners: Autorità garante per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza (AGIA)****THE ISSUE**

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of arrivals of unaccompanied and separated children in Italy. From 2016 to September 2022, 71,228 unaccompanied and separated children arrived in Italy by sea.<sup>16</sup> Although new arrivals have decreased in recent years, from 1 January to 31 September 2022, 9,647 unaccompanied and separated children arrived in Italy by sea. Italy was hosting 5,016 unaccompanied and separated children in 2020 when this project was implemented.<sup>17</sup> Ensuring that unaccompanied and separated children's needs and views are reflected in programming, and that they are able to participate in decision-making, are important elements of ensuring the realization of their rights. Supporting the participation of separated and unaccompanied children is also an important entry point for promoting the social inclusion of children who arrive in Italy without parental care.

In 2017, a series of participatory assessments were carried out with unaccompanied and separated children in 15 reception facilities across 10 regions in Italy. The results clearly showed a need among children to be heard and participate in the decisions that affect them and the programmes which aim to support them. Both girls and boys asked to be informed and to be able to give their views on an equal footing with adults – not treated only as beneficiaries of assistance, but as actors in their own protection and well-being.

**THE RESPONSE**

The results of the assessment informed the formulation of activities in 2018, in which accountability to children was reinforced, providing greater opportunities for children to share their views on their situation and the support they received and would like to receive. The participatory activities were based on the principle that children are competent social actors, able to take decisions and to be active subjects in their contexts, and able to create social and cultural networks. The project centred around two main activities:

1. Participation of unaccompanied and separated children in the implementation of training courses for voluntary guardians, hosted in Florence and Pescara. This was the first time a group of unaccompanied and separated children was involved in a training for voluntary guardians.
2. Organization of photography workshops for unaccompanied and separated children in Rome. The photographs documented children's perceptions of issues of concern to them, and were exhibited in three public installations.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Italy Sea Arrivals Dashboard" (no date). Accessed from <https://reliefweb.int/updates?search=Italy%20Sea%20Arrivals%20Dashboard&page=0> (accessed 24 November 2022).

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, "Refugee and migrant children in Europe accompanied, unaccompanied and separated: Overview of trends January to June 2020" (2020). Available from [www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/2021-03/UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM%20Factsheet%20on%20refugee%20and%20migrant%20children%20Jan-June%202020.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/2021-03/UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM%20Factsheet%20on%20refugee%20and%20migrant%20children%20Jan-June%202020.pdf).

Based on these experiences, and as part of the of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, AGIA and UNHCR initiated a programme of participatory activities with unaccompanied and separated children and their Italian peers in four Italian cities to enhance the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in Italian society. In each of the four cities – Turin, Florence, Naples and Palermo – focus groups were organized between unaccompanied foreign children and Italian children to provide opportunities for exchange and dialogue on children's rights principles, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children were invited to reflect on how these principles applied in their daily lives.

In the second half of 2019, AGIA and UNHCR also arranged a participatory workshop for unaccompanied and separated children hosted in reception centres in Rome. The workshop was designed to deepen media literacy, digital citizenship and awareness of hate speech. The project provided tools to enhance children's knowledge and awareness of social media, and resulted in the production of a video in which children talk about their experiences of hate speech, racism and xenophobia in Italy.

### **i** MORE INFORMATION

- Global Compact on Refugees, “Unaccompanied and separated children in Italy: the right to be heard and participate” (2022). Available from <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/unaccompanied-and-separated-children-italy-right-be-heard-and-participate> (accessed on 25 November 2022).
- UNHCR Italia, “Ascoltare per accogliere” (2022). Available from [www.unhcr.org/it/cosa-facciamo/protezione/bambini-e-giovani/ascolto/](http://www.unhcr.org/it/cosa-facciamo/protezione/bambini-e-giovani/ascolto/) (accessed on 25 November 2022).
- UNHCR Italia, “Il razzismo raccontato dai minori stranieri a Roma” [video]. Available from [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmuXx-KGKME](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmuXx-KGKME).
- UNHCR Italia, “L'ascolto e la partecipazione dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia: Rapporto finale attività di partecipazione AGIA – UNHCR 2017 –2018” (2019). Available from [www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2020/07/report-agia-unhcr-finale.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2020/07/report-agia-unhcr-finale.pdf).



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## AFGHANISTAN

### Giving a voice to children through collective accountability and community engagement

Partners: Awaaz Afghanistan



#### THE ISSUE

In Afghanistan, a combination of conflict, logistical barriers and social norms undermines the protection of internally displaced persons and refugee returnees, particularly women and children. Prevailing social norms often limit children's contribution to decision-making in the household and community, with girls particularly excluded from family and community decision-making. Nonetheless, children are crucial partners for service providers in order for service providers to understand their needs and priorities, and providing opportunities for feedback from children is a key component of UNHCR's commitment to accountability to affected populations. Providing opportunities for children to share their concerns and suggestions through multiple avenues in Afghanistan is therefore a key part of UNHCR's strategy to engage children. Child-friendly feedback mechanisms help ensure UNHCR's interventions are responsive and accountable to the views of children, and are a way to operationalize UNHCR's commitment to child participation.

#### THE RESPONSE

UNHCR in Afghanistan used a combination of community-based protection monitoring and feedback mechanisms that are all tailored to respond to inquiries and feedback from children:

- *Community-based protection monitoring:* Community-based protection monitoring is conducted mainly through focus group discussions applying an age, gender and diversity approach. Specific mechanisms are in place to ensure the participation of children, including ensuring as far as possible that adolescent boys and girls are consulted directly during the protection monitoring, and that specific issues facing children are included in the protection monitoring.
- *UNHCR hotline number:* UNHCR runs two hotline numbers that are respectively managed by one full-time and two part-time protection staff. One of these staff members is specialized in responding to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) issues and referring them to the child protection officer. While the number of child protection cases is limited, the hotline also provides information about other child-related issues, such as education. The existence of the hotline is advertised to the community during protection monitoring exercises.
- *Awaaz:* UNHCR is also supporting Awaaz Afghanistan (Awaaz), a collective accountability and community engagement initiative that functions as a toll-free, countrywide hotline number affected populations can dial to access information and register feedback on assistance programmes. Awaaz functions as an interactive information, complaints and feedback hotline, which any Afghan mobile phone user can access for free. Awaaz was created to receive and act on complaints and feedback from children as well as adults, and operators receive targeted training in handling and processing calls from children, including on sensitive and urgent child protection risks and services available for children. Partners participating in the mechanisms provide specific child-friendly information to children about the hotline and how to approach it.





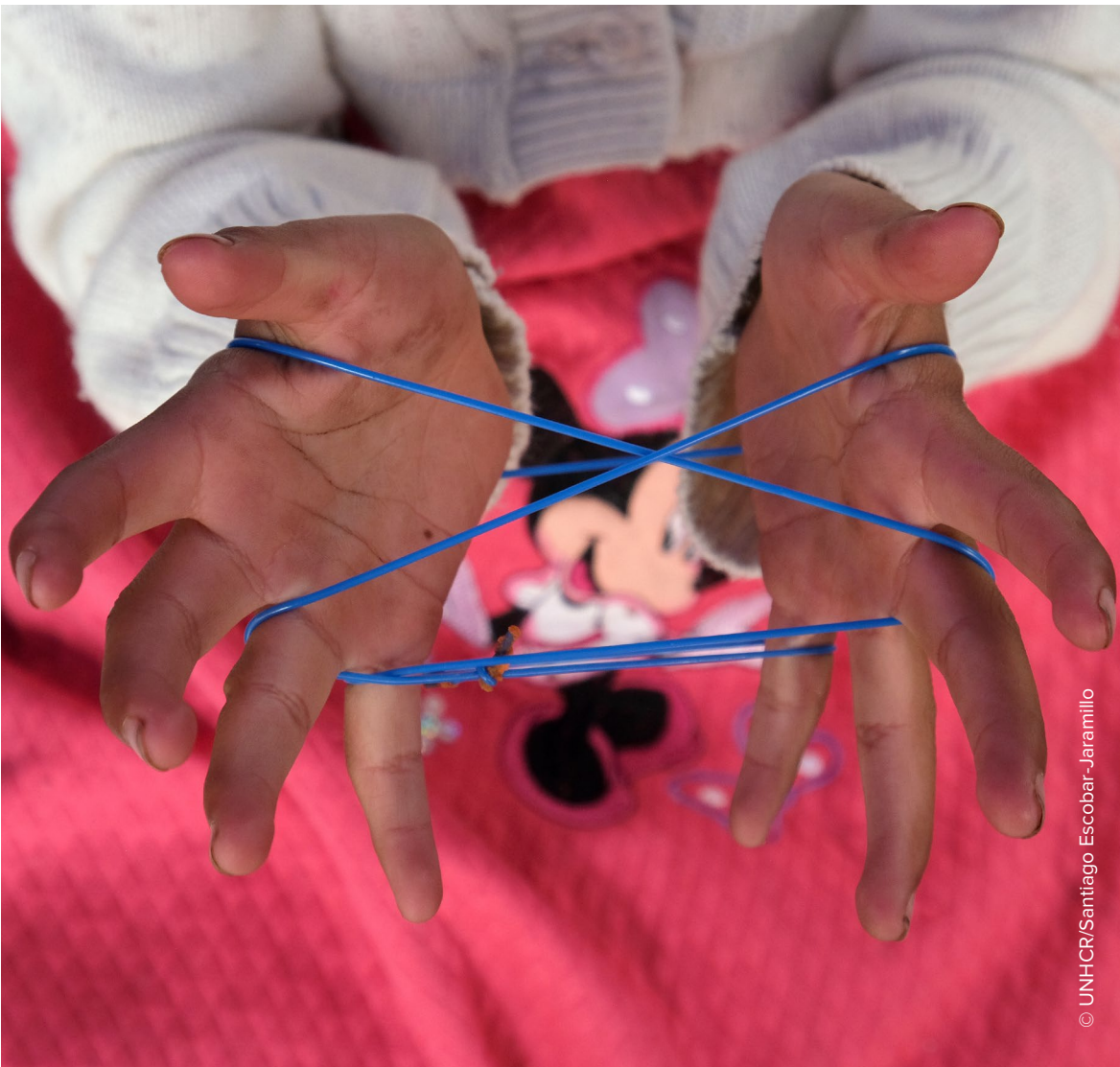
## RESULTS

The multitude of avenues through which UNHCR encourages dialogue with children, has resulted in children gaining confidence in speaking out about their concerns and suggestions and increasingly utilize the mechanisms at their disposal to express their point of view. In 2020, 33 per cent of those consulted during UNHCR's protection monitoring were children, and children made up approximately 14 per cent of callers to the Awaaz hotline. Child protection issues are also growing in visibility, and the protection risks facing children are more frequently brought to the attention of the humanitarian community. As such, in 2020, 25 per cent of all protection-related calls to Awaaz had a child component. The main concerns highlighted by children included safety, peace, equal rights and access to basic services. UNHCR tailored its interventions based on feedback received from children, placing special emphasis on children's safe access to education and the gender-specific risks facing boys and girls.



## MORE INFORMATION

- Awaaz Afghanistan. Available from <https://awaazaf.org/> (accessed 25 November 2022).



## 2. SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO CARE FOR CHILDREN

Families play a crucial role in caring for and protecting children.<sup>18</sup> A family is where children draw their strength and receive support and care. Supportive, safe families are a cornerstone of children’s resilience in the face of adversity. During crisis and displacement, families can be placed under enormous psychological, social and economic pressure, and their ability to cope, care for and protect children is often stretched. This can increase children’s exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse as violence in the home increases and the households have to resort to coping mechanisms. UNHCR supports parents’ and caregivers’ efforts to protect children by providing practical and psychosocial support for caregivers, offering legal counselling and support for families, and helping families meet their basic needs.

### Resource

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 16” (2019)



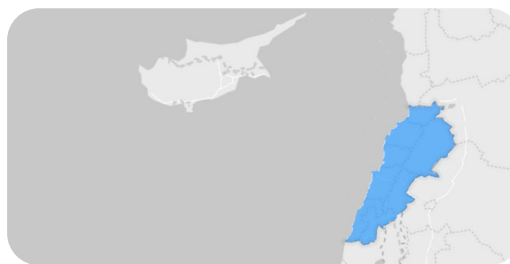
<sup>18</sup> Resource:

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 16, strengthening family and caregiving environments” (2019).

Available from [https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006\\_004](https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006_004).

## LEBANON

### Reducing harmful coping mechanisms by supporting families to meet basic needs



#### THE ISSUE

Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees globally.<sup>19</sup> In 2020, at the time of this project, more than 76 per cent of displaced Syrians in Lebanon lived below the poverty line,<sup>20</sup> and child labour was on the rise among refugees as children increasingly helped sustain their households through working. Child labour reached alarming levels, with an estimate of more than 100,000 children in 2020 working in Lebanon, among which more than 35,000 were Syrians. The number of Lebanese children engaged in child labour increased threefold between 2009 and 2016.<sup>21</sup> As at May 2022, 89 per cent of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon continue to live in extreme poverty.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE RESPONSE

In an effort to address some of the underlying drivers of child labour, UNHCR provided multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA) to households, as well as time-bound cash assistance (PCAP) for the purposes of responding to specific protection needs or incidents. This cash assistance was integrated within a multisectoral approach to addressing child labour by UNHCR and other partners, which included provision of cash assistance, case management, education and vocational skills, as well as support to the Ministry of Labour in addressing child labour.

#### RESULTS

A study (listed below) examining the impact of cash assistance for vulnerable households on child protection in 2018–2019 found that in addition to the positive results that such assistance can have for children through its impacts on nutrition, health and education, cash assistance can also help reduce the reliance on child labour. The study found that cash assistance influenced child labour indirectly through its impact on structural drivers such as poverty, indebtedness, and access to education. In other words, households receiving cash assistance were able to address structural drivers, which would in turn led to the reduction of child labour.

The study furthermore indicated that families who received the PCAP and MPCA cash assistance along with food and winter cash assistance were protected from harmful coping mechanisms, including child labour. The provision of MPCA in isolation from other interventions did not address child labour, but it showed a significant impact when combined with other services. Moreover, a comparison between the previous and current beneficiaries of cash shows that receiving MPCA

19 UNHCR, “Syrian Regional Refugee Response: Lebanon” (2022). Available from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71> (accessed 24 November 2022).

20 Lebanon and United Nations, “Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2017–2020 (2018 update)” (2018). Available from [www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/04/LCRP-EN-2018.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/04/LCRP-EN-2018.pdf).

21 United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, “In focus: Child labour in Lebanon” (2018). Available from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67049>.

22 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, “Lebanon factsheet” (2022). Available from [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east/lebanon\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east/lebanon_en) (accessed 10 May 2022).

improved the work conditions for some of the children engaged in labour by reducing working hours. This impact was noted during the period where the family received MPCA; however, most children ended up going back to longer working hours when the MPCA was discontinued.

### MORE INFORMATION

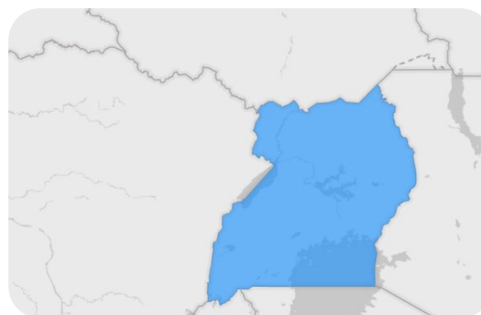
- UNHCR, “UNHCR MENA Protection Service: Enhancing child protection services by incorporating cash-based interventions as part of comprehensive programming. Pilot study outcomes” (2020). Available from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/79523>.



## UGANDA

### Strengthening the protection of displaced children through promotion of positive parenting strategies

**Partners:** Save the Children, World Vision, the Lutheran World Federation, the Danish Refugee Council, Humanitarian Initiative Just Relief Aid, Service Civil International



#### THE ISSUE

At the end of 2020, Uganda hosted more than 1.4 million refugees, mainly from neighbouring countries such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Somalia and Rwanda. A total of 60 per cent (over 834,000) of all registered refugees in Uganda are children. The number of children at risk within the refugee population is disproportionately high, with over 55,000 children registered, including over 41,000 unaccompanied or separated children at the end of 2020.

Parents and caregivers have reported a range of challenges in providing children with responsive, caring and supportive parenting. Two thirds of children worldwide experience violent discipline,<sup>23</sup> and in those countries of origin of refugees in Uganda for which data is available (Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi), about 90 per cent of children experience violent discipline. Such high levels of violent discipline indicate a widespread acceptance of this form of parenting. In addition, displacement exacerbates challenges to parents caring for and protecting their children, due to stressors such as difficulties in making ends meet, and limited social support. Both parents and children report widespread psychosocial distress, reportedly due to both incidents that took place in their countries of origin and current stressors. Psychosocial support needs are high, with limited available resources. Parents and caregivers struggle with their own distress, as well as in knowing how to support and respond to children's own distress. In addition, alcohol and substance abuse – issues also facing refugees in Uganda – have been shown to contribute to less responsive and support parenting. In short, parents are often overwhelmed or struggle to know how to best help children remain safe and to support their psychosocial needs.

Finally, many unaccompanied or separated refugee children in Uganda are in alternative care arrangements, including spontaneous, temporary or longer-term foster care. While many of these care arrangements are supportive and protective, foster caregivers struggle with the same issues as parents described above. In addition, reports indicate that children in foster care are disproportionately at risk of neglect, exploitation and/or abandonment – for instance, some foster children are required to work as house maids in their homes, or do cheap labour in the fields.

#### THE RESPONSE

In 2019, UNHCR initiated a family-strengthening initiative to prevent and respond to violence against children. Together with its partners, UNHCR worked on linking Best Interests Procedures (BIPs), alternative care for unaccompanied and separated children, and positive parenting activities, to promote supportive, responsive parenting for refugee children, and to provide a timely quality response to children experiencing violence and neglect.

23 UNICEF, "Violent discipline" (2022). Available from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/violent-discipline/> (accessed 24 November 2022).

The main activities under this project included:

- increased case management staffing and provision of case management services for children at risk;
- training and awareness-raising sessions with parents and community volunteers on positive parenting, positive discipline, and roles and responsibilities in child-rearing;
- case conferencing for complex cases of children exposed to violence, abuse or neglect;
- facilitation of quarterly meetings with community members and foster family networks to consult on challenges and provide guidance on parenting challenges;
- parent-to-parent support groups;
- facilitating vulnerable parents' and caregivers' access to self-reliance and other economic strengthening programmes to increase family resilience;
- roll-out of proGres v4 to provide a harmonized information management system for child protection case management actors.

Since the roll-out of the various initiatives implemented by UNHCR and its partners, positive parenting and awareness on children's rights and child protection risks have become an integral part of UNHCR and its partners' child protection response in Uganda. Building on the outcomes of the initial project, UNHCR's partners have systematically included parenting skills-building in their programmes. This initial programme has been broadened to reach more families.



## RESULTS

Overall, the project enhanced the capacity of child protection service providers to conduct child protection case management and case documentation, increased awareness of community members on the importance of positive parenting, and increased the knowledge and awareness of parents and caregivers on child protection, children's rights, positive parenting and positive discipline. In addition, for unaccompanied children in foster care, the project ensured that challenges were identified and discussed, and that foster parents' skills and knowledge on positive, responsive parenting were increased. This was achieved through monthly foster parent meetings and separate sessions with unaccompanied children that contributed to an improvement in the relationship between children and foster parents. Participants in the various community engagement sessions reported changes in their behaviour towards children including reduction in the use of violence, although further evidence of the impact of the programme is still required, including collection of evidence of parental or caregiver behaviour change from children themselves.

The following results were achieved:

- Specialized training was provided on parenting skills and awareness sessions, benefiting 15,027 parents, caregivers, and community members.
- UNHCR and its partners scaled up the case management response through a variety of capacity-building initiatives targeting social workers, providing case management services to children as well as to community members. A total of 11,837 children were assessed using the Best Interests Assessment (BIA) and provided with case management services in 2019.
- A total of 1,148 caseworkers, supervisors and community-based volunteers supporting case management services were trained on the BIP/case management procedures.

- Through a case management approach, a total of 166 families were identified and referred to livelihood activities and cash-based interventions to support their basic needs and reduce financial pressures on the household.
- A countrywide training on the proGres V4 Child Protection Module was undertaken for UNHCR staff, and a road map for the roll-out to partner staff was put in place. This has contributed improved information management and increased the quality of data on children at risk – as a result, Uganda is the country with the highest number of child protection cases recorded in proGres.<sup>24</sup>
- In 2019, all UNHCR partners complemented case management services with community-based child protection activities which have contributed to child protection outcomes and strengthened community awareness on parenting and child-rearing. A total of 10,921 community members and 2,566 adolescents and youth were reached with a variety of activities, including regular dialogues with unaccompanied and separated children and adolescent/youth peer-to-peer support and awareness sessions on child protection.



### TIPS FOR REPLICATION

- Develop multi-year plans which include continued funding to have a more sustainable impact.
- Identify a contextually appropriate evidence-based parenting skills curriculum and support one partner to lead on the capacity-building and technical support for the roll-out of a standard package.
- Enhance the involvement of children and adolescents, as well as relevant community members, in planning for the implementation of the curriculum on family-strengthening and positive parenting, for example by ensuring that children are part of the project planning.
- Ensure a monitoring and evaluation plan is in place at the start of the intervention to document changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours from both parents and children.

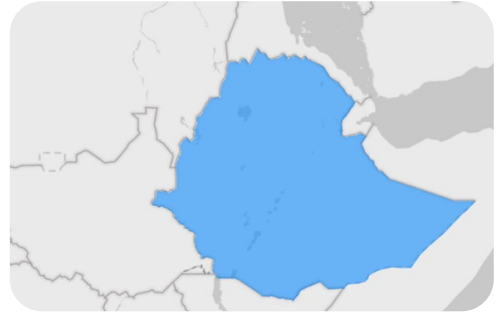


24 Almost 1,300 child protection records have been created in the child protection module of proGres by October 2022.

## ETHIOPIA

### Providing family-based care to unaccompanied refugee children in Shire refugee camps

**Partners: Ethiopian Government Refugee and Return Service (RRS), Innovative Humanitarian Solutions, Lumos Foundation, Norwegian Refugee Council**



#### THE ISSUE

According to estimates from UNHCR, there are nearly 600,000 Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees globally.<sup>25</sup> The overwhelming majority cited the indefinite national service as the principal reason they fled the country.<sup>26</sup> As of October 2022, there are 162,011 Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup>

In 2018, Eritrean refugees who cross the border into northern Ethiopia were processed at Endabaguna reception centre, before being transferred to one of the four camps in the region. In October 2018, there were approximately 47,000 refugees in the four refugee camps, around 5,600 of whom were unaccompanied children.

Most adults and families only stayed at Endabaguna for a few days. However, unaccompanied children often remained there for up to two months awaiting a placement in the camps. The centre was often overcrowded, and the institutional nature of the facility meant that Endabaguna could not meet the needs of these children, who were exposed to risks of harm and abuse.

In contrast, family-based care is right for a child and leads to better outcomes for the child, as they are provided with more individualized care, love, support and guidance in a family than in a group setting. In addition, in a refugee setting, moving children from group care settings such as interim care centres to family-based care has led to a reduction in conflict among unaccompanied children, and between children and the broader community at large, as children are better integrated in the community.

#### THE RESPONSE

Together with UNHCR, the Ethiopian Government's RRS, and implementing partners, Lumos designed a transformation care model to reduce the amount of time unaccompanied children stay in the reception centre, and move them as quickly as possible after registration to family-based care. Its main aim was to build on the existing child protection system developed in Shire, and to expand and improve family-based care.

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder".

<sup>26</sup> Landinfo – Country of Origin Information Centre, "Eritrea: National service" (2016). Available from [www.refworld.org/docid/577681224.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/577681224.html).

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR, "Operational Data Portal Country View: Ethiopia" (2022). Available from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth> (accessed 24 November 2022).



This was done through:

- reducing the amount of time children spend in Endabaguna by introducing temporary foster care;
- expanding the long-term foster care network and speeding up family reunification in the camps;
- improving the quality of family-based care.

The aim of the project was to reduce the amount of time that unaccompanied children spend in institutional care in the reception centre and prevent them from moving into group care in the camps where they live as a group of unaccompanied children, a form of residential care identified by partners and the refugee community as unsuitable. The aim of the project was to scale up foster care and increase the number of unaccompanied children in family-based care – particularly challenging given the transitory nature of many of the refugee families in the camps.

Temporary foster carers and refugee social workers received a salary for their work, and long-term foster carers were remunerated to reduce the financial burden of caring for a child. Carers and social workers also received training in areas such as foster care concepts, parenting skills and child development. This promoted self-reliance.

This project required funding for child protection staff, refugee para-social workers, remunerated temporary and long-term foster carers, and initial allowances for children moving into care or being reunited with their family. It also required technical support through the provision of trainings, capacity-building and the design of case management tools.



## RESULTS

The project resulted in 20 temporary foster carers who could provide care to approximately 60 children over 12 months, and 100 additional long-term foster carers who could care for up to 200 children.

The aim of the project was to test a model, ensuring quality care and positive outcomes for children and the community, which could be scaled up to provide quality care for all unaccompanied children in the Shire camps, and be emulated in other refugee camp contexts. In Shire, the investment in child protection case management and alternative care programming over several years led to the lowest number of children residing in group care in the camps since the creation of the group care model in 2010. Only 300 unaccompanied and separated children remained in group care in October of 2020, compared<sup>28</sup> to over 2,000 at the beginning of 2020.

<sup>28</sup> The foster care project, along with most of the services in the camps, has been severely disrupted or completely suspended as a result of the conflict in northern Ethiopia that started in November 2020.

## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

Challenges included:

- high levels of influx and high proportion of unaccompanied children in the camps;
- the high caseload for social workers and refugee para-social workers, with limited opportunities for capacity-building;
- the low level of financial incentives for foster carers and lack of opportunity for work in the camps;
- traditional child protection programming and alternative care models are not adapted for adolescent unaccompanied children who plan to move beyond Ethiopia;
- shortages of shelter in the camps.

These challenges were addressed through:

- recruitment campaigns to encourage adult refugees to become foster carers;
- selection criteria and training provided to potential carers;
- funding social workers and para-social workers to support children and families;
- training of trainers for implementing staff, enabling them to provide ongoing trainings for social workers and foster carers;
- increasing the capacity of social workers and legal staff to support the family tracing and reunification process;
- awareness-raising campaigns about the benefits of family-based care and the risks associated with irregular onward movement;
- advocacy carried out by implementing partners to increase the availability of shelter.



### 3. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Communities and community networks are important actors in enhancing children’s protection and ensuring longer-term sustainability of interventions.<sup>29</sup> However, during conflict and crisis, pre-existing community networks are often undermined, and new tensions may arise within the community as well as between displaced and host communities. In addition, communities are diverse and generally contain attitudes, behaviours and norms that both contribute to the protection of children, and present risks.<sup>30</sup>

UNHCR works to harness the knowledge and resources of communities and to strengthen their capacities to protect children. If communities affected by crises are empowered, they are in a stronger position to protect and support their children, promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence with host communities, respond to the aspirations of children, and support them to rebuild their lives.<sup>31</sup>

By identifying and tapping into existing community-based mechanisms for protecting and supporting children, UNHCR supports existing structures that positively contribute to addressing and mitigating risks to children. UNHCR works with and supports a range of different community-based structures to enhance community outreach and communication on child protection issues, establish community centres and safe spaces for children, and establish structures and mechanisms within the community that actively and positively engage to enhance the protection of children.

#### Resource

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 17” (2019)



Artist: Sainju, Sabin Prakash (Soham)

29 Resource:

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Standard 17, community-level approaches” (2019). Available from [https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006\\_005](https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch006_005).

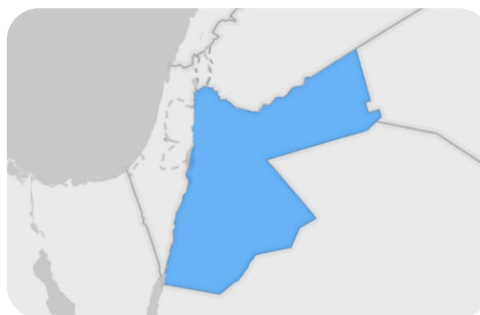
30 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and USAID, “Strengthening community-level approaches to child protection in humanitarian action: An initiative of the Community-Level Child Protection Task Force” (2021). Available from <https://alliancecpa.org/en/community-level-approaches> (accessed 24 November 2022).

31 UNHCR, “Emergency handbook: Community-based protection” (2022). Available from <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/50478/community-based-protection>.

## JORDAN

### The Amani campaign – supporting social and behaviour change

**Partners: Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and all members of the child protection and SGBV sub-working groups**



#### THE ISSUE

Assessments among the Syrian refugee community in Jordan revealed a range of child protection issues, including child labour, child separation and child marriage.<sup>32</sup> Pre-existing levels of domestic violence were on the increase, and mental health and psychosocial problems were widespread. Levels of distress linked to people's experiences in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the arrival in a welcoming yet unfamiliar situation in Jordan, were high.

Through assessments, the child protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) sub-working groups identified the main child protection and GBV issues in the community. In 2012, the sub-working groups developed a pool of basic key messages in response to major child protection and GBV issues such as child marriage, violence against children, and psychosocial well-being. In addition, various actors started developing different materials or approaches to providing information to communities on child protection issues, often focused on the problem. Inspired by other behaviour and social change campaigns in the region, including the [Saleema Initiative](#) in Sudan, the child protection and GBV partners agreed to work on an inter-agency social and behaviour change campaign that would be based on principles and evidence on how to work constructively with communities on sensitive protection issues.

#### THE RESPONSE

The Amani campaign was an inter-agency campaign initiated in 2012 to prevent and mitigate GBV and child protection risks among Syrian refugees in Jordan. The campaign provided a harmonized, structured approach to community engagement on child protection and GBV. It aimed to positively influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of women, girls, men and boys related to violence, abuse and exploitation in Jordan. It aimed to prevent such acts, and to ensure that survivors are protected from further harm and seek necessary support. The campaign was developed by the child protection and SGBV sub-working groups in Jordan, in collaboration with refugee and local communities, and drawing on best practices and lessons learned from other contexts.

The campaign was developed through first identifying the key child protection and GBV issues facing refugees in Jordan,<sup>33</sup> and then engaging in extensive consultations with women, girls, boys, and men from refugee and host communities, and service providers. These initial consultations focused on eliciting positive knowledge, attitudes and behaviours from the different sections of the refugee community and service providers that could be used to prevent these forms of violence and

32 See, for instance, UN Women, "Gender-based violence and child protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan, with a focus on early marriage: Inter-agency assessment" (2013). Available from <https://jordan.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Jordan/Attachments/publications/2014/GBV-CP%20assessment%20Jordan.pdf>.

33 Key GBV issues were domestic violence including physical and verbal abuse, early marriage, and sexual violence. The primary child protection issues were child labour, violence in schools and in homes, bullying and discrimination against children, separation of children from parents or other relatives, children in conflict with the law, and psychosocial distress.

exploitation, as well as what women, girls, boys and men considered the main concerns for each of these issues. Participants were also asked for positive images, sayings and names of characters that could be associated with the campaign in general, as well as specifically for each particular protection issue. Building on these community ideas, the key character in the campaign – Amani, a female name meaning “my safety” – was developed, along with the images and slogan for the campaign.

A key messages document was then produced, setting out main and supporting messages, images, and slogans which built on widely understood positive imagery, sayings and values which had cultural resonance. Extensive preliminary research and testing was undertaken on all the information and visuals associated with the campaign to develop the tools that allowed interactive dialogue and debate.

The initial key messages document included key information on specific child protection and GBV issues, the positive knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of women, girls, men and boys that protect refugee children and adults from GBV and child protection risks, and information for communities on risks and on how and where children and adults can seek support. It combined technically sound messages addressing the key child protection and GBV issues with culturally appropriate information and images relevant to different sections of the community, namely girls, boys, women and men.

Each issue, such as violence in the home, included an image, slogan and supporting information to be used by organizations in their community engagement. Over 30 members of the SGBV and child protection sub-working groups endorsed the campaign and were trained to use and integrate it in their ongoing child protection and GBV programming. All organizations were encouraged to contribute to the development of new Amani materials and to share their good practices with other organizations to inspire innovation. The initial training focused on key principles of social and behaviour change, including the importance of identifying and supporting community advocates, supporting community dialogue, and focusing on positive alternatives, rather than predominantly focusing on the risks or what community members should stop doing.

In the next stage, these innovative approaches to implementation of the campaign were documented in the implementation guide.<sup>34</sup> This implementation guide provided participating agencies with ideas on how to implement the Amani campaign and to continue to develop it further with an inter-agency approach. The guide included basic information about the campaign, an introduction to the theory of change, information on how to plan, monitor and evaluate the campaign, tips on key communication activities, suggestions on how to use existing communication tools, and ideas on how to develop new tools in line with the spirit of the Amani campaign. A second round of training was conducted, and a monitoring system was established.



## RESULTS

The campaign was endorsed by over 30 organizations in Jordan and reached tens of thousands of refugee women, girls, boys and men with information and interactive dialogue. While an external evaluation of the project was not conducted, the training results showed that organizations and staff had greater knowledge, confidence and skills in facilitating effective community dialogue on sensitive protection issues. Over time, a number of the child protection and GBV organizations implementing the campaign moved from implementation of Amani campaign activities by their own organization staff, to identifying and supporting community-led initiatives and dialogues using the Amani materials.

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<sup>34</sup> Child Protection Sub-Working Group, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, UNHCR, United Nations Population Fund Jordan Office, UNICEF and SGBV Sub-Working Group, “Amani campaign implementation guide” (2014). Available from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42962>.



### TIPS FOR REPLICATION

One key aspect of this approach was the engagement of the community from the outset of the project. The approach engaged existing positive knowledge, practices and behaviours to be documented, shared and replicated in the community, therefore contributing to the practicability and acceptability of the solutions in different segments of the community. Reinforcing existing positive protective practices was more effective than focusing on stopping negative or harmful behaviours.

In addition, the campaign was designed and implemented with the participation of adolescent boys, girls, men and women. This ensured that the approach of the campaign resonated with different segments of the population. For example, in relation to child marriage, consultations revealed that one of the main concerns of girls and women was that girls should get an education before marrying, as they felt this would provide girls with better opportunities and enable them to better care for their families. Men, on the other hand, more commonly cited concerns with the fact that child marriages may not be legally recognized and the difficulties this creates in registering the births of any children of such marriages. Such consultations ensured that the campaign was inclusive and spoke to the diverse needs and perspectives of different people within the refugee community.

Finally, the inter-agency nature of the campaign was crucial to its success. Participants in the Amani campaign become part of an extensive team of organizations all working towards the same aim, to prevent and respond to GBV and child protection issues. Having many organizations all working together, using consistent information and an approach in different settings, meant that the campaign reached more communities and had a greater impact on people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Having two organizations lead on the development, capacity-building and coordination of the initiative on behalf of all organizations maximized resources to develop common approach and tools that we developed and implemented in partnership with communities.

While monitoring of the project activities were undertaken, the project did not plan for an evaluation to measure the impact of the Amani campaign on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of refugee women, girls, boys and men. In the future, such initiatives should integrate a plan for evaluation of the impact of the campaign from the beginning.



### MORE INFORMATION

- Jordan Amani campaign. Available from [UNHCR CP Community of Practice - Amani campaign](#).

## NEPAL

### Creating sustainable community-based child protection structures with refugees

Partners: AMDA-Nepal and LWF



#### THE ISSUE

Since the early 1990s, Nepal has been home to thousands of refugees from Bhutan. Resettlement efforts have seen 113,500 Bhutanese refugees resettled to third countries due to the lack of voluntary repatriation prospects. The remaining refugee population was 6,365 as of January 2022.<sup>35</sup>

As UNHCR gradually scaled down its operations from 2017 to 2020, UNHCR worked with the refugee community and local authorities to put solid child protection structures in place to ensure continued protection and services to refugee children. At the end of 2020, UNHCR closed its field office in Damak. Nonetheless, UNHCR's partners the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia-Nepal (AMDA-Nepal) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) maintained offices in Damak, to continue to provide support to Bhutanese refugees in the sectors of health, education, social protection and livelihood, thereby mainstreaming these into the existing available national services.

#### THE RESPONSE

Over the course of 2017–2020, UNHCR pursued a dual strategy of enhancing and capacitating community-based structures, and increasing refugee children's access to national protection services.

In order to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms, UNHCR focused on enhancing the institutional capacity of refugee community-based organizations, as well as the knowledge and skills of civil society and local authorities. A series of trainings on child protection case management, alternative care arrangements, child-friendly local governance, ensuring safe learning environments, and the prevention of child sexual abuse, were held for community-based organizations, including children's hubs and the Bhutanese Refugee Children Forum (BRCF), teachers, children with disabilities and their parents, and local authorities. In addition, community-based organizations, in particular BRCF, were provided with training on financial and procurement policy in order to build institutional capacity and ensure a smooth transition to self-management.

In 2017, a social protection task force was created to serve as the main forum for advocacy, coordination and forging strategic partnerships between actors, with the objective of enhancing refugee children's access to national protection mechanisms. In order to jointly address service gaps and strengthen synergies between local and refugee community-based protection mechanisms, a joint service mapping was conducted. Stronger partnerships were developed between community-based structures and local authorities, including the Sanischare-Pathari municipal child networks and the Women and Children Office in Jhapa District.

In order to scale back camp services specific to the camp and enhance refugees' access to local protection services available for all people living in the area, camp structures with overlapping functions were merged, and some were handed over to the local authorities, including the Early Childhood Development Centres and the Community Child Care Centres.

35 UNHCR, "Fact sheet: Nepal – January 2022" (2022). Available from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1353>.



## RESULTS

The active involvement of child protection authorities and robust community-based mechanisms allowed UNHCR to build local capacity on case management and thus reduce its direct involvement in case management. This allowed UNHCR to focus on advocacy and building linkages with the host community and the authorities' protection mechanisms.

During the scale-down period, protection activities for children were increasingly delivered through community-based structures including BRCF, Community Child Care Centres, drop-in-centres, disability centres and Early Childhood Development Centres. Through these structures, a number of child protection cases were identified and provided with services. BIPs were established, and a Best Interests Determination (BID) panel was set up with the active participation of the District Child Welfare Board. Procedures and services were established to ensure family reunification or alternative care. Study session classes were provided through drop-in centres, and palliative care services were provided for children with disabilities in the disability programme centre.

The key outcomes of strengthened coordination with district/municipal level stakeholders included the issuance of birth certificates for refugee children and the increased enrolment of refugee children in public schools. Refugee children were also included in provincial level activities for children, including a girls' summit.

## 4. FACILITATING ACCESS TO NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

States have the primary responsibility for the protection of all children within their territories.<sup>36</sup> This is done through the establishment of systems which ensure that children are protected against harm, and that they receive appropriate and timely services if needed. National child protection systems include social welfare services, justice and civil registration systems, and have links to education, health and asylum systems. All children, regardless of their status, should have access to these systems and benefit from the protection they afford.

UNHCR works with governments to advocate for non-discriminatory access for all children to national child protection systems and social services, and helps to strengthen these where possible, through legal and policy reform, advocacy, and the provision of technical and financial support to government authorities and local civil society service providers.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Conclusion on children at risk No. 107 (LVIII)" (2007). Available from [www.unhcr.org/excom/exconc/4717625c2/conclusion-children-risk.html](http://www.unhcr.org/excom/exconc/4717625c2/conclusion-children-risk.html) (accessed 24 November 2022).

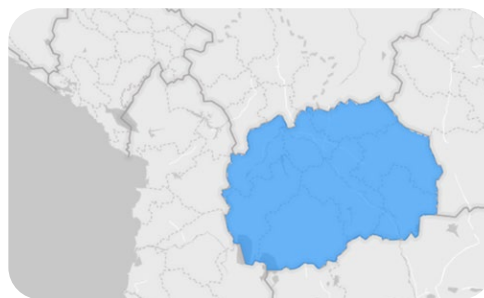
<sup>37</sup> UNHCR and UNICEF, "UNHCR-UNICEF inclusion toolkit for refugee children in national child protection systems" (2022). Available from the UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice [here](#).



## NORTH MACEDONIA

### Integrating asylum-seeking and refugee children into the national child protection system

**Partners: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, UNICEF**



#### THE ISSUE

In the second half of 2015 and the first 3 months of 2016, almost a million migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa undertook the perilous journey through the Eastern Mediterranean route.<sup>38</sup> The vast majority crossed the Aegean Sea by boat from Turkey to Greece, continuing onwards towards Europe through the Western Balkans.

During this emergency, child protection was a particular focus for operations in North Macedonia. Following an initial mapping of the national child protection system, UNHCR conducted a series of consultative sessions with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, UNICEF, and several NGOs. The consultations assessed the North Macedonian child protection system's ability to protect refugee and asylum-seeking children, and identified opportunities for strengthening the case management system for refugee children. Stakeholders, including the relevant State bodies, concluded that there was a need for an initial training on international standards and good practices related to BIPs. This was jointly organized by UNHCR and the line Ministry, with the participation of the other relevant State bodies, UNICEF and key NGOs. The parties involved then identified the need to develop practical tools for the national child protection systems to undertake BIPs for refugee and asylum-seeking children.

#### THE RESPONSE

As a result, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy initiated the development of the “Handbook on assessment of the best interests of the child” in coordination with the Institute for Social Affairs – a body tasked to provide capacity-building and to supervise the implementation of all social protection services in the country – with the support of UNHCR. The handbook included a set of tools for practitioners and a harmonized framework to be used within the child and social protection systems. The aim was to ensure the implementation of the best interest principle in all relevant procedures.

Subsequent to the finalization of the handbook at the end of 2019, five trainings were delivered by the authorities in 2020, covering 90 participants from different centres for social work, and of whom received a copy of the handbook. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a shorter version of trainings was delivered online, while in 2021 a more thorough follow-up training was delivered with support from UNHCR.

Additionally, UNHCR continued to work alongside UNICEF to support the Government in addressing other relevant child protection concerns, including through:

- strengthening capacities to provide alternative care for unaccompanied children by exchanging knowledge and experience on alternative care arrangements for foreign children, regardless of their legal status;

<sup>38</sup> International Organization for Migration, “Mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean: Compilation of available data and information, December 2019” (2019). Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/mixed-migration-flows-mediterranean-compilation-available-data-and-information-3>.

- supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to work with the Ministry of Education and Science to ensure access to education of asylum-seeking and refugee children, including by establishing procedures for assessment of children’s previous knowledge to ensure proper enrolment in school, and following up on any gaps in formal school enrolment for asylum-seeking or refugee children;
- strengthening the capacity of social workers responsible for the BIP via delivering trainings on the topic and continued distribution of the “2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedures guidelines” to over 30 centres for social work covering the whole country.



## RESULTS

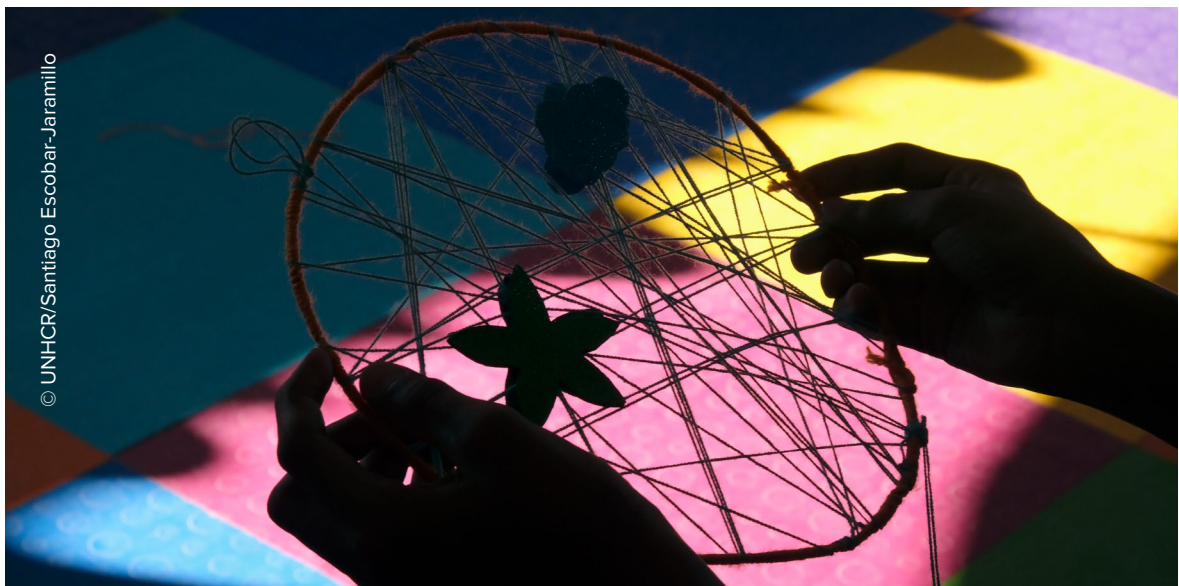
As the trainings and distribution of the handbook were only implemented in 2021, and due to pandemic restrictions, a full documentation of the results is not yet available. However, within its regular supervision work, the Institute for Social Affairs planned to conduct thorough case reviews to check which instruments from the handbook were being used. This, coupled with a feedback and complaint mechanism from beneficiaries which is currently being established, is expected to provide an indication of quality of the BIPs conducted.



## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

In order to ensure sustainability, the intervention was done in close coordination with the Government and adjusted to the context and available resources. For that purpose, extensive preparations were undertaken before the development of the guidance and implementation of the training, which included a mapping of the system, and a number of coordination meetings with the authorities and UNICEF. This was followed by a workshop involving field and managerial staff in the Inter-municipal Centres for Social Work and NGOs to be able to identify specific challenges and gaps that would be addressed with the tool.

For future such projects, it is also recommended to ensure exchange and learning from other contexts on system strengthening, for instance by engaging an international expert to support the process, or arranging a workshop on good practices from other contexts.



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## GHANA

### Supporting child protection authorities to strengthen the protection of refugee children

**Partners:** Department of Social Welfare and Community Development under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana  
Refugee Board of the Ministry of Interior



#### THE ISSUE

In 2020, Ghana was home to nearly 14,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. A nationwide verification exercise was conducted from March to October 2019, which identified a number of child protection risks affecting refugee children including unaccompanied and separated children, such as lack of birth certificates, sexual abuse, child pregnancies and school dropouts.

#### THE RESPONSE

To respond to the child protection risks identified during the verification, UNHCR worked closely with the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development (DSWCD) to foster the integration of refugee children into the national child protection system.

DSWCD has officers in the regions where there are refugee camps, and work directly with refugee children and families at camp level. These officers visit the four camps regularly and provide a range of counselling services, including in the areas of domestic violence, child protection, child maintenance and custody. UNHCR field colleagues work closely with the families and DSWCD to monitor and support the implementation of the various protection measures taken by the authorities. UNHCR also provides support to DSWCD for travel expenses to the camp.

UNHCR collaborates with DSWCD on BID reports, and authorities participate in the BID panel. UNHCR also works with the authorities on foster care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children, and custody and child maintenance issues. DSWCD also provides support for the identification of safe shelters for child and adult victims of GBV.

#### RESULTS

In 2019, DSWCD provided support to refugee children and families to address child custody, child welfare and maintenance, abandonment of children, sexual abuse, school dropouts, and minor crimes. Social welfare officers were included in the BID panels and provided counselling and support for children at risk and their families. Regular monitoring and home visits at the camp level by the social welfare officers helped to strengthen child protection interventions and services for refugee children and their families. This outreach was essential in ensuring that refugee children and their families were able to benefit in a timely manner from available national child protection services.



## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

Coordination and effective working relations with government social services officers in the field is key. Social services officers should be included in regular stakeholder meetings on refugee protection, including child protection.

- Basic procedures for referrals should be developed, and UNHCR should be involved in the follow-up on cases identified by UNHCR, to ensure that children and families receive relevant services from the national authorities.
- Ensuring sufficient capacity for social workers to carry out their functions is important. Where possible, UNHCR should consider providing assistance with transport costs to remote areas/camps, and should consider whether other material support, such as laptops, are needed.
- Continuity of staff from the local authorities is important for consistency and continuity of the response. Specific training on the protection of refugee children is essential to ensure that national authorities understand the specific needs, legal status and procedures for refugee children.



## ZAMBIA

### Enhancing the capacity of the national child protection system through community-based caseworkers: The Isibindi model

**Partners: UNICEF, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, World Vision International, National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers (NACCW)**



#### THE ISSUE

Zambia is a historically welcoming country to refugees fleeing conflict in the Southern Africa region, since 1999. With ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia has continued to see large influxes of refugees in need of urgent, life-saving and specialised services. While the country has an inclusive national child protection system which provides care and protection to refugee and asylum-seeking children on the territory, the national system is over-stretched with both limited capacity and limited resources to meet the high and increasing demands for the protection of refugee children. Through the refugee response in Zambia, substantial gaps were identified in child protection programming provided by UNHCR, other United Nations agencies, NGOs and Government partners. With limited resources and particularly limited human resources, vulnerable refugee children and those at heightened risk were not systematically identified and therefore their needs, and those of their caregivers, remained unmet. Some unaccompanied children were left without adult guidance and supervision, foster families were not adequately monitored, child survivors of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation did not receive sufficient crisis and long-term psychosocial counselling, and children with disabilities did not always benefit from integration and specialized services. At the heart of this issue was an inadequate social welfare workforce – whether managed by UNHCR and its partners in camps and settlements, or by national authorities in urban situations – due to both funding and skills shortages.

With this backdrop, the UNHCR Zambia operation set out to develop a quality refugee childcare and protection programme that could be sustained in a context of constrained capacity and funding. The professionalization and formalization of existing community-based child protection mechanisms, and the development of a pool of refugee para-social workers, was identified as a key component towards a potential solution. Such an approach would simultaneously build upon existing capacities within the refugee community while also working towards professionalizing and integrating refugee para-social workers into national social welfare structures. This was seen as a win-win solution that could both strengthen the social welfare workforce in the region and contribute to providing recognized skills and qualifications and a livelihood for predominantly women refugee para-social workers, and thus both identify and meet the needs of refugee and host community children at heightened risk.

#### THE RESPONSE

The Isibindi Model, a community-based childcare and protection model, developed by the South African Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), was tailored to the refugee context, and launched as a pilot in Zambia in 2016. In the Isibindi model, child and youth care workers are trained to work with children within their “life-space” – where they live, play, learn and access services. It is offering a range of key support services and safe referrals,

including providing practical guidance and support to families, identifying children at risk, assessing their needs, providing care and protection and making referrals for more specialised assistance and services. Child and youth care workers attend a 5-week long on-the-job training in 14 modules over a 2-year period, leading to a nationally accredited certificate. Thereafter they receive ongoing training and support from trained team leaders. The Isibindi model also offers supervisory monitoring and structured ongoing support for child and youth care workers from experienced NACCW trainers and mentors.

The NACCW and UNHCR supported the Zambian Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare to establish the Zambian Association for Child Care Workers (ZACCW), mirroring the structure of the South African precedent and establishing a formal and regulated body to oversee the implementation of the Isibindi Model and scale up both the expansion of the social welfare workforce and delivery of services nationally.

In Zambia, refugees were trained in basic childcare and child protection competencies by NACCW and started providing services and support to children and youth at risk through home visits and supervised child-friendly “safe parks”, under the management of the Zambian Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare. Home visits provide a community-based approach to child protection case management, where child and youth care workers provided early intervention support to families at risk, follow up and support child living in alternative care arrangements, and make referrals to specialised service providers. Safe parks were established as community spaces (parks) that provide a safe, supervised location for children to socialize and play, along with engaging in structured activities that build life skills. Further, Safe Parks act simultaneously as a key venue to identify children at risk and monitoring children’s health and well-being as they receive services through the Isibindi program and access specialised services.

After an initial pilot of the Isibindi model in Meheba refugee settlement in 2016, Mantapala refugee settlement was identified for the second roll-out in Zambia in 2019. The location was chosen due to the high numbers of unaccompanied children following the 2017–2018 emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where renewed insecurity and conflict resulted in large-scale displacement and an influx of refugees to Zambia. It was critical to establish mechanisms for rapid identification, assessment of needs and early intervention for recently arrived refugee and asylum-seeking children, and their caregivers.



## RESULTS

In 2017 a preliminary evaluation of the efficacy of the application of the Isibindi model was undertaken and showed promising results. The evaluation indicated a notable impact of the initiative on community awareness and response to child protection cases. Members of the community demonstrated ownership through identifying and reporting cases of child abuse and neglect within the settlements to relevant child protection actors. Since then, the UNHCR operation notes that the ZACCW Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCW) have a “multiplier effect” on service delivery to target groups in the community, as they are themselves refugee and host community members who are trained and supported to provide care and protection, which they implement within the “life-space” of refugee children and their families, who too benefit from the interventions and support.

In-service trainings and mentorship for the CYCWs and other stakeholders have enhanced the quality of child protection case management and programming, coupled with training for caregivers and livelihoods assistance. Further, the involvement of children and youth in activities that address their needs, such as the Safe Park, support CYCW to understand and meet their needs. Notably, the implementation of the Isibindi model served as a catalyst to redress the Child Protection response

broadly – updating referral pathways and standard operating procedures, identifying key gaps and developing a “levelled” approach to providing basic assistance, childcare services, child protection case management and other specialised services and interventions.

In recent years, CYCW were deployed to work with more than 350 unaccompanied and separated children in foster care, to support both the children and the foster families in providing childcare and protection, and access key services and systems available to them. The CYCW network has also proven an efficient and effective channel for disseminating information among children and encouraging return to school, reporting of abuse and violence, and particularly in disseminating key health and safety information to children and families in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



### TIPS FOR REPLICATION

Case Management supervision and continuous capacity-building for community child and youth care workers is critical. Follow-up training, especially on psychological first aid and psychosocial counselling, was identified as essential and should be considered as a requirement in the development of a contextualised application of the model.

- The number of child and youth care workers must be sufficient to meet the needs of at risk children, especially during an emergency; if this is not possible due to limitations in funding, a case management prioritisation criterion needs to be developed and applied. An approach similar to that of the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Intervention Pyramid<sup>39</sup> is a useful resource to determine at what level intervention, and by whom, should be delivered for different types of cases based on priority and the needs identified. For example, CYCW are equipped and capacitated to provide basic child protection case management services for most children identified as in need of case management, but those that require more specialised support – such as victims of violence or children with disabilities – should be referred to child protection case workers and other specialised services. Child and youth care workers struggled to meet the needs of all children at risk due to the high number of cases
- Projects that aim to build the social welfare workforce require multi-year planning and sustained requisite funding. Due to funding limitations, the maintenance of the workforce and structures that were created during the project, such as safe parks, proved a significant challenge which directly and negatively impacts the delivery and continuation of childcare and protection services. Without a multi-year funding plan, the project could not be sustained when UNHCR faced funding cuts and there was no established exit or sustainability plan, or alternative donors to fund the project going forward. Ultimately its sustainability became solely contingent on UNHCR funding impacting the future of the program.
- National child protection systems must be sufficiently mature to absorb the refugee child and youth care workers.<sup>40</sup> Where national child protection systems are at early stage of system development, absorbing refugee para-social workers can be a challenge. In Zambia, the original intention for the mechanisms to be absorbed by the national social welfare system proved challenging due to the absence of mature national child protection structures to build on and the required resources to support the national system in doing so.

39 See the IASC MHPSS Intervention Pyramid here:

[https://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/iasc\\_rccr\\_pyramid-2.pdf](https://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/iasc_rccr_pyramid-2.pdf)

40 UNICEF, “Child protection systems strengthening: Benchmarks” (2021). Available from

[www.unicef.org/media/110866/file/2.%20Phases%20and%20Benchmarks%20of%20Measurement.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/110866/file/2.%20Phases%20and%20Benchmarks%20of%20Measurement.pdf)

- The Isibindi model is only effective in emergencies if it is already in place prior to the onset of an influx or acute emergency. While the model has proven to have great potential to strengthen the engagement of refugee para-social workers and strengthen the social welfare system in protracted settings, it has proven less appropriate as an emergency response due to the time involved in establishing it. However, if already in place before an emergency occurs, it can be very effective in an emergency, as a network of auxiliary caseworkers is already in place to help identify and refer children at risk.
- Cross-fertilization and sharing of best practices among settlements and operations implementing the Isibindi model helps to maximize the benefits and address challenges. In addition, sustaining communication with NACCW to utilise their vast experience in implementing, tailoring and applying the model is important.
- In safe parks, activities need to be tailored for different age groups, and specific activities developed for older children. Further, sustainability planning for Safe Parks needs to be established prior to the opening of the facility, with multi-year planning and avenues to diversify the funding sources to ensure the running of the parks and upkeep of equipment and premises.

### MORE INFORMATION

- National Association of Child Care Workers, “The Isibindi model” (2014). Available from [www.naccw.org.za/isibindi](http://www.naccw.org.za/isibindi) (accessed 25 November 2022).

## 5. PROVIDE CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Local authorities and civil society are the first providers of child protection services in any context, but often face challenges in responding to the nature and scale of the needs of refugee children. In such cases, UNHCR provides supplementary child protection services to address critical gaps in the protection of forcibly displaced or stateless children, while simultaneously working to strengthen the national child protection system. UNHCR implements programmes for all children of concern to UNHCR at heightened risk, including child victims of violence, exploitation and abuse, and unaccompanied and separated children. Key interventions include identification and referral of children at risk to multisectoral services, ensuring access to child-friendly asylum procedures, providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and services for child victims of GBV. For refugee children, the BIP is the cornerstone of the organization’s child protection case management approach. For unaccompanied and separated children, key interventions include prevention of separation, provision of appropriate care arrangements, family tracing and reunification.



## COLOMBIA

### Preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse of children

**Partners:** Fundación Renacer, the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, UNICEF, International Organization for Migration



#### THE ISSUE

Global estimates indicate that thousands of people are trafficked every year. Women and girls account for the largest numbers of the victims, with 34 per cent of the detected victims being children.<sup>41</sup> When women and children are forcibly displaced, they not only leave behind their homes and familiar surroundings, they also often lose their community support networks and end up being socially and culturally isolated. Consequently, they are deprived of access to basic resources and livelihood opportunities.

These and other factors contribute to making refugees and other forcibly displaced people an easy target for traffickers, who prey on the precariousness of their situation to exploit them. Conflict acts as an amplifier of pre-existing trafficking practices, such as forced child marriages to members of armed groups, and creates new demands, like forced recruitment, increasing the supply of potential victims. In Colombia, the sexual exploitation and abuse of children takes several forms, with child prostitution and sex trafficking being common issues.

The deteriorating situation in Venezuela has displaced millions. As of 2022, there are an estimated 2,500,000 displaced Venezuelans living in Colombia, of whom an estimated 50 per cent are women, and 28 per cent are children and adolescents.<sup>42</sup>

Desperate to find safety and a better life, Venezuelans have resorted to any means possible to flee the country, with many falling prey to human trafficking networks, criminal gangs and illegal armed groups that are often active along borders. Women and girls are often forced into sexual exploitation by smugglers to pay for their passage. According to data provided by the Colombian authorities, the number of victims of human trafficking increased by 23 per cent from 2015 to 2019. In just the first 4 months of 2020, Colombian authorities had already identified a 20 per cent increase in trafficking involving foreign nationals over the previous year.<sup>43</sup> In over half of cases, sexual exploitation was the ultimate goal of the trafficking. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the vulnerability of children to exploitation and abuse.

<sup>41</sup> A total of 48,478 individuals were detected as victims of trafficking in 2018, the most recent year for which age and sex were reported. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Global report on trafficking in persons 2020” (2020). Available from [www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP\\_2020\\_15jan\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder”.

<sup>43</sup> UNODC, “Global report on trafficking in persons 2020”.



## THE RESPONSE

UNHCR partnered with the Fundación Renacer, the goal of which is to contribute to the eradication of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents through provision of comprehensive care for victims, prevention, research, training and advice to organizations and communities, and defence and restitution of children's rights.

Fundación Renacer plays a key role in re-establishing the rights of children and adolescents who have survived trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Founded 32 years ago in Bogotá, the non-profit opened a rehabilitation home in the region of La Guajira on the north-eastern border with Venezuela in 2019 to provide a safe, healing space for victims of childhood sexual exploitation. The foundation has developed a comprehensive model of care for recovery and reintegration, based on a rights-based approach which recognizes children as subjects, promotes their personal physical, mental, social and spiritual development, and allows for their physical and emotional recovery and reintegration into their families and society. This model has served as the basis for the implementation of the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare's Care and Development Centre (Centro de Acogida y Desarrollo).

The foundation also provides technical assistance to local governments, entities and organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for a comprehensive approach to the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and conducts research and prevention through awareness-raising with communities and local authorities.



## RESULTS

In 2021 alone, Fundación Renacer has provided assistance to 405 children and adolescents. Girls number 86 per cent of those who have been helped.<sup>44</sup> In 2020, the Caribbean Regional Coordinator for Fundación Renacer was awarded the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award for outstanding service to people who have been forcibly displaced.



## MORE INFORMATION

- Fundación Renacer. Available from [www.fundacionrenacer.org/](http://www.fundacionrenacer.org/) (accessed 25 November 2022).
- UNHCR Canada, "For survivors of childhood sexual violence, a second chance in Colombia" (2020). Available from [www.unhcr.ca/news/survivors-childhood-sexual-violence-second-chance-colombia/](http://www.unhcr.ca/news/survivors-childhood-sexual-violence-second-chance-colombia/) (accessed 25 November 2022).

<sup>44</sup> Fundación Renacer, "Informe de gestión 2021" (2022). Available from [www.fundacionrenacer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Informe-de-Gestion-2021-Espanol.pdf](http://www.fundacionrenacer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Informe-de-Gestion-2021-Espanol.pdf).

## TURKEY

### Strengthening caseworker capacity on UNHCR's updated BIP guidelines



#### THE ISSUE

Since 2017, UNHCR Ankara, in collaboration with child protection focal points in various UNHCR field offices, has organized BIP trainings on an annual basis. The aim of the trainings is to enhance the capacity of partner staff engaged in child protection case management for refugee children. Despite the annual trainings, gaps in BIP proficiency among caseworkers have continued to be noted, due to high staff turnover and the complex nature of BIPs that require ongoing training and supervision of staff. In addition, the “2021 UNHCR Best Interests Procedures guidelines” underscores the need for additional training to ensure that all caseworkers are familiar with the revised guidelines and are able to implement these in a consistent manner.



#### THE RESPONSE

In order to help the caseworkers of UNHCR's NGO partners to familiarize themselves with the updated BIP guidelines, as well as to adequately address the gaps mentioned above, the training of trainers was organized at the national level by UNHCR to create a pool of trainers from different partner organizations in different locations able to train caseworkers in implementing the BIP.

The training included 25 participants drawn from UNHCR child protection focal points and mid-level managers from partner organizations, and consisted of 18 online sessions, each covering a specific topic within the updated BIP guidance.<sup>45</sup> The 2-hour training sessions were planned for Monday and Friday every week for 6 weeks to ensure the active engagement of participants in the training and provide opportunities for participants to apply the skills learned in each session. Participants were divided into six groups and were assigned topics to prepare and deliver to the rest of the participants. Each group was assigned a designated training lead from UNHCR (at the country office and field levels) to guide in the preparations.



#### RESULTS

The vast majority of the participants found the training relevant for their work, with more than 90 per cent rating their knowledge, skills and confidence as good or extremely good after the workshop, compared to slightly more than 50 per cent before the workshop. The training also builds more sustainable local capacity on the BIP, so that UNHCR partners are able to provide training for their own staff, with the support of UNHCR.

<sup>45</sup> Topics included coaching and supervision, child-friendly communication principles, child protection basics, adult learning techniques, the child-centred approach, active listening, the difference between BIAs and BIDs, tools for the BIP, BIP and case management, BIAs and case planning, BIA and BID reviews, self-care, child development, the four-factor analysis, creative interviewing skills, structured interviews, and interacting with the BIA and BID forms.

 **TIPS FOR REPLICATION**

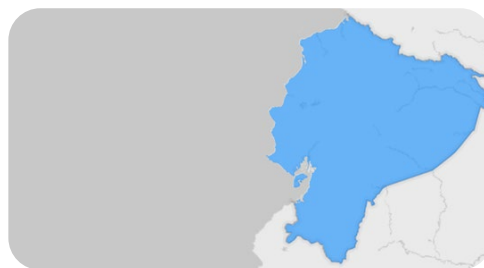
While the delivery modality was appreciated by the majority of the participants, having the workshop spread across 6 weeks was tiring for participants. Having more sessions per week may have helped to reduce the total length of the training. In addition, sustaining interest and engagement with purely online sessions proved difficult, and limited the ability to practice some key skills. Capacity-building for the BIP should therefore aim to deliver the sessions in a 3- or 4-week period, and whenever possible, combine online and in-person learning.



## ECUADOR

### Alternative care for unaccompanied and separated children

Partners: **Asociación Solidaridad y Acción (ASA)**



#### THE ISSUE

With ongoing crises in Colombia and Venezuela, Ecuador has seen an increase in refugee and migrant arrivals in recent years. Among those who have crossed the border looking for safety and opportunities for a better life are a high number of unaccompanied and separated children.<sup>46</sup> Many children, both those travelling alone or accompanied by parents or other family members, have been exposed to severe forms of violence and exploitation, such as child recruitment, armed violence, family violence, lack of access to basic services, sexual exploitation, and trafficking.

#### THE RESPONSE

In response, UNHCR and its partners, including ASA, initiated a project to support unaccompanied and separated children through the provision of alternative care and a comprehensive support package, including psychosocial support, education and health.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- strengthen the identification of unaccompanied and separated children in shelters, hostels and rented rooms in different sectors of Quito;
- provide safe temporary accommodation for unaccompanied and separated children;
- support the local integration of unaccompanied and separated children through psychosocial and educational support;
- promote community activities that facilitate the participation of unaccompanied and separated children;
- enhance coordination between actors providing services for unaccompanied and separated children;
- enhance the capacity of institutions working with unaccompanied and separated children by providing training on good practices in the provision of care.

To achieve this, the project implemented two care modalities:

- *Supervised independent living arrangements* for adolescents are coupled with regular monitoring by caseworkers. Children received guidance on regularizing their presence in Ecuador, establishing community networks to facilitate local integration, and accessing services such as health and education. Children were also linked to recreational and education activities and referred to other available resources as needed. Food, health care and rent were provided on a temporary basis.

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR's registration and case management data indicates that 1,706 unaccompanied and separated children were registered in 2022 (as of September), 2,285 were registered in 2021, and 1,407 were registered in 2020.

- *Group living arrangements* provided temporary care where unaccompanied children received guidance and support from caseworkers to regularize their presence in Ecuador. Local integration was facilitated through children's participation in youth activities, such as sport and neighbourhood celebrations, and health care outreach. Children were also supported through enrolment in educational and livelihood activities through the Polytechnic University, such as training in entrepreneurship, financial management, computer literacy, customer service and sales.



## RESULTS

ASA has become a leader in Ecuador in developing strong alternative care programmes, and has shared this expertise with other organizations in various coordination forums. This has helped to support and encourage other organizations to implement alternative care programmes for adolescents that promote their transition to adulthood and reduce institutionalization practices. ASA is also one of the first organizations to have a programme of foster care, which provides refugee children with temporary care as a protection mechanism, and which has also, in some cases, successfully reunified children with their family in their country of origin.

While a full evaluation of the project has yet to be conducted, the project has demonstrated promising results:

- In 2021, 326 unaccompanied and separated children received a protection response through the alternative care programmes of ASA.
- Protection risks for unaccompanied and separated children have been mitigated through provision of safer forms of care.
- Local integration has been strengthened through the participation of children in community spaces and activities.
- Risks for children have been reduced through the provision of food, health and housing assistance.
- The capacity and understanding of child protection case managers of the needs and best interests of children have increased.



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## 6. ENSURING CHILD-FRIENDLY PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS AND MAINSTREAMING CHILD PROTECTION IN TECHNICAL SECTORS

The protection of forcibly displaced and stateless children requires a full range of interventions, from protection to education and beyond.<sup>47</sup> Education interventions are frequently part of the response to address child labour and child marriage. Livelihood support or cash assistance can help reduce violence in the home and risks of child marriage, which are exacerbated by economic stress. By mainstreaming child protection considerations within these interventions, these programmes can more effectively contribute to the prevention of harm to children and the protection and well-being of children.

UNHCR implements a range of interventions that contribute to children's protection, beyond specific child protection programmes. Protection interventions, such as support for reception, access to asylum and civil documentation, and ending immigration detention, as well as sectoral programming such as livelihoods and education, all contribute to the protection of children when implemented in a child-friendly manner and when child protection considerations are integrated into the design and implementation of the programmes.

### Resource

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Pillar 4" (2019)



Artist: Sainju, Sabin Prekash (Soham)

<sup>47</sup> Resource:

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Pillar 4, standards to work across sectors" (2019). Available from <https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/cpms/#ch007>.

## SWEDEN

### Strengthening child protection in the initial reception of unaccompanied and separated children

Partners: Förnyelselabbet



#### THE ISSUE

The unprecedented large-scale movement of refugees and migrants into many European countries in 2015 also included a high number of unaccompanied and separated children, many of whom arrived in the Nordic countries in search of protection. The sudden arrival of large numbers of children presented exceptional challenges to governments and child protection systems in organizing the reception and appropriate care arrangements. In 2015, Sweden accepted more than 35,000 unaccompanied and separated children in search of protection, and the reception system came under significant strain and revealed several shortcomings, despite Sweden's strong commitment to child protection.

#### THE RESPONSE

Based on the findings of extensive consultations across European countries on responses to unaccompanied and separated children, UNHCR facilitated engagement among key stakeholders to improve the reception system in Sweden. To this end, UNHCR initiated a child protection project (known as Co-Lab 2.0) that set out to support the development of a holistic and child-friendly reception procedure, which integrates and respects child protection principles and standards, including the principle of the best interests of the child.

To generate a shared commitment among the stakeholders to improve reception and protection conditions, the project adopted a five-step human-centred design process. This meant that the child's perspective was the compass to ensure a focus on the child's needs and views in all steps of the process:

1. Stakeholder consultations take place with unaccompanied and separated children and representatives from all the various actors involved in reception.
2. The mapping of protection gaps is achieved through a workshop with practitioners with whom children come into contact at the reception stage.
3. Solutions are formulated with reception actors in a second workshop, followed by children's feedback on these through consultations.
4. Solutions are tested in two municipalities, with the findings of the piloting presented in a third workshop where the solutions were further refined.
5. A plan is formulated for municipalities and the central Government on how to use these solutions to address gaps in the system.



#### RESULTS

The project found that children unanimously expressed their need to feel safe in unfamiliar surroundings and circumstances, as well as a clear desire for a predictable process that keeps them informed. It underscored the importance of creating a reception system that is child-centred and informed by the best interest of the child, based on relationships built on trust.



It also highlighted the need for well-trained guardians to take immediate responsibility for the child and demonstrated that increased communication between municipalities and stakeholders can help the child to feel safe, which directly mitigates the risk of a child absconding when moving from one municipality to another.



### TIPS FOR REPLICATION

#### 1. Prioritize child protection in the initial reception

- Increase the length of stay in the municipality of arrival to allow proper BIA and BID procedures to take place.
- Decouple the child protection system from the asylum system to ensure their rights as children, rather than based on their immigration status.
- Develop standard operating procedures to formalize reception procedures and clarify roles and responsibilities of different actors.
- Develop transnational mechanisms for proper BIA and BID procedures in order to better determine the best interests of the child. Ensure these procedures consider all options and information relevant to the child, such as options for family reunification, as well as considering the outcome of the child's asylum application process.

#### 2. Establish a Barnlanda

- A “Barnlanda” is a temporary reception centre or family home where a child sleeps, rests, eats and showers. During the stay, the child can be informed about the following procedures at their own pace until they understand. The time at the Barnlanda is a preparation for the procedures that are undertaken at the “Barnhus”.
- Centralize expertise and experience on arrivals of unaccompanied and separated children to a few municipalities, to ensure a consistent and standardized approach.
- Systematically appoint an on-call legal guardian in the municipality of arrival to ensure that there is someone responsible to monitor the process and advocate for children's rights.
- Ensure the competence and expertise of all those working with children.

#### 3. Establish a Barnhus

- Formalize and systematize the collaboration and communication between relevant actors, and reduce the number of times children meet different stakeholders, by ensuring a multidisciplinary and holistic approach in one location the Barnhus.

#### 4. Make children feel safe when transferred to a new municipality

- Familiarize children with their assigned municipalities before transfer.
- Escort children personally to the new municipalities whenever possible and based on the results of the BIA.



### MORE INFORMATION

- UNHCR, “I want to feel safe: Strengthening child protection in the initial reception of unaccompanied and separated children in Sweden” (2018). Available from [www.refworld.org/docid/5c07cc0a4.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5c07cc0a4.html).

## MALAYSIA

### Mainstreaming child protection in education in Malaysia



#### THE ISSUE

As of September 2022, 183,433 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR in Malaysia. Of those registered with UNHCR, approximately 86.3 per cent are from Myanmar. The other 13.7 per cent come from a variety of countries including Pakistan, Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Palestine. 26 per cent of refugees are children of which 1.5 per cent are unaccompanied and separated from their families.<sup>48</sup>

As a part of UNHCR Malaysia's efforts to strengthen the capacity of non-child protection actors to address child protection issues, a project was undertaken to mainstream child protection principles and expertise into education and community-based protection programming.

#### THE RESPONSE

The project was conducted in three phases.

In Phase 1, a joint [child protection situation analysis](#) was conducted by child protection, education and community based protection to assess child protection issues and map out child protection response mechanisms. The situational assessment was informed by a wide range of respondents, including personnel from 40 learning centres (out of 129 registered with UNHCR Malaysia), 15 community-based organizations (out of 62) and one UNHCR outreach centre (in Johor) and representing different geographical locations, ethnic groups and nationalities.

In Phase 2, a series of workshops were delivered to increase the knowledge of participants in two areas: child protection programming and child safeguarding. The workshops resulted in:

- an increased understanding of the main child protection issues faced by refugee and asylum-seeker children attending the centres;
- mapping the range of responses given by organizations, ranging from referrals to case management systems/other agencies, to cases being dealt "within the community";
- supporting organizations to have a child safeguarding policy or equivalent in place.

The support was twofold. The organizations that previously did not have a child safeguarding policy in place were supported to draft and adopt one, including necessary procedures for its implementation. Those organizations that already had a child safeguarding policy or similar policy in place were supported through capacity-strengthening on how to effectively implement them.

<sup>48</sup> UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder".

Phase 3 was designed to explore and further highlight some of the wider challenges and potential initiatives needed to strengthen child safeguarding and child protection at the community level. The workshops were divided into four areas, with recommendations on each area provided by participants:

- working with children;
- working with parents;
- working with the community;
- how to link available resources in the community.



## RESULTS

Through the mainstreaming project, capacity on child protection and safeguarding was increased and the participation of a range of community-based groups including learning centres, education partners, community-based organizations, and the Johor Community & Outreach Centre in child protection and child safeguarding was strengthened. The project achieved the following results:

- Increased capacity in child protection: Increasing the capacity of community learning centres, community-based organizations and outreach centres to adequately respond to the protection needs of refugee and asylum-seeker children is key to ensuring that all children have access to quality education which is protective and inclusive. In this regard, the initiative increased the capacity of 79 staff from learning centres, community-based organizations and the Johor Community & Outreach Centre to better understand and respond to child protection concerns including referring cases to child protection services in a timely and safely way.
- Strengthened links and information-sharing between community-based and education practitioners and child protection actors: Teachers and other personnel in learning centres are now aware of child protection services and existing referral pathways, and understand how to safely refer children at risk to appropriate protection services.
- Increased capacity in child safeguarding: At the finalization of the project, 26 per cent of the community learning centres had adopted specific, tailored child safeguarding policies because of the initiative. Most of the remaining centres had developed plans to strengthen their child safeguarding procedures.
- Paving the way forward: The workshops highlighted a number of specific recommendations including the need for further training and capacity-building of front-line workers, the need for compilation and dissemination of materials, the potential to build a pool of resource experts and to share experiences and expertise among the community-based and education groups involved. It was noted by participants that all these suggestions have implications for resourcing and support.

## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

Key considerations for replication include:

- **Budget and planning:** Plan and advocate for financial resources for the replication of the programme's full package, including situational analysis, training workshops, dissemination workshops, and support in designing and implementing child safeguarding policies - to other communities and areas of the country. The aim of having all learning centres trained on child protection and implementing the child safeguarding policy has been incorporated in the UNHCR Malaysia Education Strategy, for 2023 onwards.
- **Ensuring direct support for learning centres:** While having personnel trained on child protection and child safeguarding policies is paramount to ensure the safety and security of children at school, learning centres must also be supported to ensure they are safe, conducive to learning and comply with minimum safety standards.
- **Expansion to other regions and localization:** Expanding to other communities, ideally where UNHCR already has partners, to replicate the initiative through knowledge-sharing, and continue to engage with trained personnel in building their capacities for replication to others. Consider designing a training-of-trainers package.
- **Build in a robust monitoring and evaluation system.** This will allow for a more systematic measuring of results achieved against the baseline, and determining whether child safeguarding policies are being correctly implemented and ultimately impacting the lives of children.
- **Advocacy with and engagement of all stakeholders:** The results of the programme should be disseminated in joint advocacy efforts (child protection and education) with the right governmental counterparts and both the child protection and education coordination mechanisms. Build upon and maintain collaboration between child protection, education and GBV to ensure holistic response to children's protection and wellbeing within education.

## MORE INFORMATION

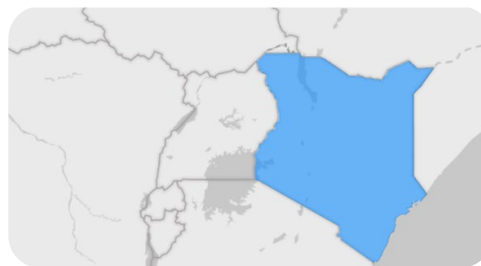
- A full report of the child protection and education mainstreaming practice in Malaysia can be accessed on the UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice [here](#).



## KENYA

### Child protection and education, MHPSS, and WASH mainstreaming in Kakuma

Partners: Danish Refugee Council



#### THE ISSUE

Turkana region is one of the most vulnerable regions in Kenya, with infrastructure, environmental resources and public services further impacted by the refugee influx since 1992. As of July 2022, Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement within the Turkana region host a population of 234,306 refugees and asylum-seekers, 55 per cent of whom are children (46 per cent girls and 54 per cent boys).

The protection of girls and boys in both locations remains an issue of serious concern to UNHCR, with disproportionate risks to women and girls and children with disabilities, including vulnerable host community populations. According to child protection case management data the primary child protection concern is the high proportion of unaccompanied and separated children (a total of 9,707) requiring family-based care and family tracing and reunifications. Violence against children is also high, with major concerns being child abduction, child labour, child neglect and psychosocial distress, emanating from living in a challenging camp environment coupled with economic hardship and day-to-day stressors.

#### THE RESPONSE

In partnership with the Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR Kenya has strengthened the linkages between education and child protection, with the ultimate aim of ensuring children living in Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement enjoy access to quality education that is protective and inclusive, and that promotes their dignity and participation throughout.

The project has been implemented in 28 primary schools, and has been shown to promote children's resilience and psychosocial well-being, mitigate protection risks and improve safe environments at school premises, and strengthen collaboration and coordination between child protection and education actors.

The project mainstreams child protection into education, but also integrates components of other technical sectors such as MHPSS programming, referrals to livelihoods, and WASH components, with the aim of promoting the holistic wellbeing for the children most in need.

#### The programme has mainstreamed child protection in a number of ways:

##### 1) Removing barriers to access for children most in need

- Administrative flexibility in the way that schools are administered can increase the enrolment rate and retention of all children, especially the most vulnerable. The programme has encouraged the registration or readmission of 157 of the most marginalized learners, prioritizing children with specific protection concerns including child mothers, children engaged in child labour, children heads of households, children who have been associated with armed groups, and children with disabilities.

- Entry into education should be based on capacity and competency-based testing, to allow children without documentation to enter and progress. As such, the project has advocated for schools' flexibility to enrol 52 children without official certificates.
- Financial constraints can be a risk factor for children not attending or dropping out of school. The project has supported 104 unaccompanied and other vulnerable children with fee waivers and the provision of education materials through referral to partners.

#### 2) Prioritizing safety and dignity and avoiding causing harm

- Mitigating protection risks is one of the most important actions for education actors to contribute to the protection and well-being of children. This project ensures that safe and child-friendly learning environments are promoted in all 28 primary schools by providing first-aid kits in schools and training teachers on their correct usage.
- In addition, the project ensures children's physical safety, with education facilities (classrooms and recreational and exercise grounds) which are in good condition and resourced with adequate equipment by following Standard 23 of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in upholding safety and security.
- In prioritizing dignity and equitable access for boys and girls, the project ensures schools have separate toilet facilities for boys, girls and school personnel. As part of the menstrual health programme, the child protection focal points in schools (see the section on capacity-building of teachers below) are trained on how to identify and refer girls in need of menstrual health products and dignity kits. These items are provided along with sensitization sessions for adolescent girls.

#### 3) Strengthening the capacity of teachers:

- One of the main actions on child protection mainstreaming into education is to ensure that all educators and staff personnel in contact with children are able to provide inclusive and protective learning environments for all children. In this regard, the project has included the training of 56 primary school teachers (28 male, 28 female) on child protection, basic psychosocial support (training on psychological first aid) and child safeguarding. These teachers become child protection focal points, which enables them to identify children with child protection concerns, provide basic psychosocial support, conduct the mentorship programme for adolescents, and make the necessary referrals to child protection case management services, psychosocial support or other services as necessary.
- Before teachers were trained, there were difficulties in identifying child protection cases in schools, especially non-visible abuse; after the training was provided, there has been an increase in the number of children who have been identified and supported through referral to child protection and other services.

#### 4) Building children's resilience and psychosocial well-being:

- One of the primary functions of mainstream work across education and child protection is to enhance the psychosocial, cognitive and social development of all refugee and asylum-seeking children living in situations of displacement. In this regard, the project has incorporated several components to promote learners' psychosocial well-being and engagement:
  - Psychosocial support services are provided to children who are identified at school by child protection focal points. Being trained in basic psychosocial support, they can safely provide immediate psychosocial support and refer children to specialized services provided by other partners.

- Establishment of “children’s rights clubs”, in which a total of 810 boys and girls (15 boys and 15 girls per each of the 28 schools) learn about child protection, how to identify and refer child protection concerns affecting them and their peers, and social cohesion .
- The project also provides targeted services for the specific needs of adolescent boys and girls by delivering life skills and mentorship interventions. Life skills programming aims to build children’s capacities, confidence and resilience. Through the mentorship programme, child protection focal points in schools liaise with adolescents and their families for basic support and/or referral to specialized services.

#### 5) Intersectoral referrals according to needs

- Referral pathways have been established and are functional in the 28 primary schools in Kakuma and Kalobeyi under the project. Children experiencing any child protection concerns are identified and referred in a timely and safe way.
- Additionally, families identified as in need of financial assistance are referred to actors providing cash assistance according to their specific needs. Cash assistance helps the most vulnerable children and their families meet their needs and promotes retention rates in school.

#### 6) Mainstreaming children’s empowerment through feedback mechanisms

- UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council have installed feedback boxes in the 28 primary schools in order to receive feedback from learners. This has been complemented with information sessions on how to use the mechanism for children. Additionally, posters with key child protection messages and the number of a toll-free hotline have been disseminated at schools, so that children can call whenever they are faced with any issue of concern.



### TIPS FOR REPLICATION

#### Challenges

- Inclusive learning for children with disabilities: While efforts to remove barriers to access and learning of children with disabilities have already been included in the project, more needs to be done in this area, including the engagement of specialized human resources with adequate expertise in promoting inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Social behavioural change approaches: More targeted efforts could be included in the project aiming at changing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of school personnel, as well as caregivers and communities at large, regarding children’s rights and child protection.
- Donor fatigue: Kakuma camp has been running for 30 years in what is considered a protracted refugee crisis. Securing funding for child protection mainstreaming is becoming increasingly challenging, with donors prioritizing other sectors over protection.

#### To replicate the project in other settings the following issues should be considered:

- Budget and planning: Planning and advocating for financial resources is required to implement the programme’s full range of child protection mainstreaming components (removing barriers to access, prioritizing safety and dignity, strengthening capacity of teachers, building children’s resilience, and including feedback mechanisms) to other schools and communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyi settlement, and beyond.

- Continuous building of capacity: In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, more school personnel, including newcomers, need to be trained on child protection, child safeguarding and all components of the project.
- Expand to other sectors: Build on progress made integrate child well-being and protection within education, to expand to other relevant sectors, especially food security, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This should be done in a collaborative manner with the sectors, to meet common goals and enable a joint monitoring of results.

### **i** MORE INFORMATION

- A full report of the child protection and education MHPSS mainstreaming practice in Kenya can be accessed on the UNHCR Child Protection Community of Practice [here](#).

## 7. ENSURING COORDINATION FOR CHILD PROTECTION

Engaging all parts of child protection systems is fundamental for ensuring a comprehensive response to children at risk. The ability to respond holistically to the needs of children requires that interventions are well coordinated and that partnerships are capitalized on to make the most of limited resources. Coordination between operations in countries of origin, transit and final destination is essential to identify and track children on the move, and for the implementation of services such as family tracing and reunification. The exchange of good practices and lessons learned between actors and UNHCR operations can likewise help to improve the quality and standardization of approaches.

Coordination with partners and across sectors is a cornerstone of UNHCR's modus operandi to holistically address the needs of children at risk. UNHCR, in support of national authorities, is responsible for ensuring appropriate coordination between all actors working on the protection of refugee children. At the regional level, UNHCR has also seen a need for coordination across borders and between country operations to respond to highly mobile populations and the children among them who are at heightened risk.

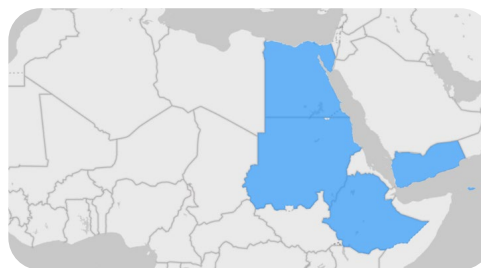




## EGYPT, ETHIOPIA, SUDAN AND YEMEN

### Addressing risks to unaccompanied and separated children on the move through a coordinated regional response

**Partners: UNHCR operations and partners in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen**



#### THE ISSUE

Since 2008, the UNHCR operations in Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have seen a steady influx of unaccompanied and separated children from Eritrea, and, increasingly, from other countries such as Somalia. Driven by a variety of complex and interlinked factors, children as young as 5 have undertaken the perilous journey across borders, only to find themselves exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation along the route.

Many of the unaccompanied children arriving in Ethiopia and Sudan, predominantly adolescents and disproportionately boys, do not remain in refugee camps for long. Motivated by the desire to find a better future, and a lack of alternatives in the camps, these children head to urban centres such as Khartoum, or move to Egypt or Libya as they try to reach Europe. In desperation, some children also attempt to return to Eritrea on their own.

Many of the children who reach Khartoum or Cairo do not register with UNHCR and/or are unable to access basic services and support that meet their specific needs. Unaccompanied and separated children are exposed to a host of protection challenges and an uncertain future. The trafficking and smuggling of people along these routes, and the risks of kidnapping, torture, extortion, sexual abuse and other serious human rights abuses are well documented and have received considerable media attention over the past.

Ensuring the safety and well-being of these children requires, wherever possible, reunification with their parents or families, unless this is not in the child's best interests. Pending such reunification, a range of actions must be undertaken to identify and respond to each child's specific circumstances and needs. These include fulfilling basic subsistence needs, enhancing access to education and livelihoods, providing psychosocial support, and ensuring short- and long-term care arrangements.

Although such programmes were already under way in all the respective UNHCR operations prior to 2014, they were hampered by a wide range of challenges, including the increasing number of unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum, serious resource shortages for basic services for children, limited capacity of partners, low levels of community participation, and lack of engagement in national child protection systems.



## THE RESPONSE

In recognition of the regional dimension of the protection risks for unaccompanied and separated children, in 2014 UNHCR initiated a regional initiative that combines both regional and country-specific interventions. It built on and complemented existing regional initiatives designed to address smuggling and trafficking in East Africa, North Africa and Yemen.

Given that the context and challenges varied between locations, the approaches adopted by the respective UNHCR offices differed according to need, and detailed country-specific strategies were developed by each operation. All country strategies were, however, implemented with the following common objectives:

- Children are better protected against the risks associated with secondary movement, trafficking and smuggling, through information provision and counselling for children, prioritized refugee registration, tracking of missing children, and capacity-building of key actors such as police, security staff, border guards and refugee community members. Victims of trafficking were also provided with access to safe houses, legal aid and psychosocial support.
- Children benefit from appropriate alternative care arrangements through suitable shelter arrangements being available to unaccompanied children immediately upon arrival. This involved renovating collective living facilities, training and deploying caregivers, providing age- and gender-sensitive counselling, and improving case management. Longer-term alternative care arrangements were enhanced through effective community engagement and better support for foster families. Kinship care with extended relatives was promoted and suitable foster parents were identified and supported.
- Children have access to tracing services and can be reunited with their families. Family reunification in the asylum country, third countries or even the country of origin was undertaken when in the best interests of the child. Children received appropriate legal assistance, counselling and, to the degree possible, follow-up to ensure that family reunification is completed, and children are safe and able to reintegrate into their families.
- Children have access to developmental and livelihoods opportunities through specific interventions aimed at increasing children's access to education, supporting educational facilities, and training and deploying adequate numbers of teachers. Adolescent girls and boys were provided with opportunities to gain vocational skills and receive appropriate livelihood support upon the completion of training.
- Child protection systems are strengthened to address the challenges faced by children in a holistic way. This involved the active engagement of community networks, capacity-building, increasing the involvement of national actors, and establishing effective case management and referral systems. Community centres provided developmental and recreational activities for children, which also promoted integration between unaccompanied children and other children in the camps and urban areas and their benefit from psychosocial services.
- Better outcomes for children through more effective regional coordination and cooperation. UNHCR offices and their partners ensured the collaborative efforts necessary to address secondary movements, track and locate missing children, share knowledge, experience and best practices, and carry out family tracing and reunification. Regional workshops were undertaken to share good practices and agree on safe, appropriate mechanisms for information-sharing, including personal information on children who moved across countries.



## TIPS FOR REPLICATION

This initial project was further developed into two regional initiatives to support unaccompanied children in 2019–2022 which built on and expanded on this initial project:

- a. Central Mediterranean route – see UNHCR, “Live, learn & participate: Enhancing access to solutions and development opportunities for children and youth along the Central Mediterranean route” (2019). Available from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20LLP%20Overview%20-%20October%202019%20Oct%202019.pdf>.
- b. West Africa route – see “Live, learn & participate (LLP): Enhancing access to protection, educational & livelihoods opportunities, and strengthening national protection systems for children and youth on the move in Western and Central Africa (2021–2023)” (2021). Available from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/658>.



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