

FIELD HANDBOOK ON

UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

Inter-agency Working Group on
Unaccompanied and Separated Children



Alliance for Child Protection in
Humanitarian Action

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Foreword

Separation from parents, relatives or usual caregivers is a devastating experience for children.

Separated children are among the most vulnerable of all children affected by emergencies. Having lost the care and protection of their families and caregivers just when they need them most, these girls and boys are at increased risk of physical and psychological harm, abduction, trafficking and unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, sexual abuse and exploitation, and permanent loss of identity. Moreover, they may be burdened with adult responsibilities far beyond their years. Indeed, it is vital that governments, child protection organizations and other protection actors work together to ensure that the most vulnerable children are protected.

The Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC)¹ was created in 1995, in recognition of the diverse needs of these children and the fact that the range and complexity of circumstances in which children become separated could not be addressed by a single agency.

The development by the IAWG-UASC in 2004 of the *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* was an important milestone in promoting a coherent approach to the problem. It also served to improve collaboration and good practice in working with unaccompanied and separated children under a protection framework and in line with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

This *Field Handbook on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* reinforces the common commitment to the principles and standards set out in the guiding principles, providing up-to-date and detailed operational guidance for all actors concerned with the welfare and protection of unaccompanied and separated children. Indeed, it is essential that all actors work together to strengthen responses and meet the challenges in working with these children.

¹ The members of the IAWG-UASC are the International Committee of the Red Cross, International Organization for Migration, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and World Vision International.



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Acronyms & abbreviations

ACE	Alternative Care in Emergencies (Toolkit)
ARC	Action for the Rights of Children
BIA	Best interests assessment
BID	Best interests determination
CPiE	Child Protection in Emergencies
CPRA	Child Protection Rapid Assessment
CPIMS+	Child Protection Information Management System Plus
CP AoR	Child Protection Working Group
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECD	Early childhood development
FTR	Family tracing and reunification
GBV	Gender-based violence
IA CP IMS	Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee
IAWG-UASC	Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IDTR	Identification, documentation, tracing and reunification
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMS	Information management system
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISP	Information-sharing protocol
MIRA	Multisector Initial Rapid Assessment
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SRSG-CAAC	Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict
	Primero Protection-related Information Management for Emergency Response Operations
PSEA	Prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse
RapidFTR	Rapid family tracing and reunification
RFL	Restoring Family Links (ICRC)
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SOP	Standard operating procedure
UASC	Unaccompanied and separated children
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WWNK	What we need to know



Introduction

Children can easily become separated from their parents, relatives or usual caregivers in emergencies – whether rapid or slow in onset, or resulting from natural disaster, armed conflict or other situations of violence. Lacking the care and protection of their families, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are at increased risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. Indeed, such children have urgent needs: to be identified, to be provided with appropriate alternative care and to be reunited with family. It is imperative that further family separation is prevented and that an immediate and comprehensive response to the needs of these children is a priority in all emergencies, beginning with preparation for emergencies and prevention of separation. To be effective, these interventions should be implemented as part of a broader child protection response and integrated within an overall protection response.

The need for a field handbook on UASC

The *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* established the core principles for working with such children and were unique when they were developed in 2004. Indeed, they were endorsed by many agencies and routinely referred to by governments, lawmakers and practitioners. However, more recent emergencies, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and recent conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and South Sudan, highlighted the need for further technical guidance to support the implementation of these principles and to strengthen capacity building in programming for UASC. This field handbook and accompanying training materials have been developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC) to meet the demand for comprehensive, practical guidance on working with some of the most vulnerable children affected by emergencies.

The handbook elaborates on and serves as a complement to the guiding principles, which are still valid and applicable. It is also compatible with current inter-agency normative tools and draws on recent guidance, in particular the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*,¹ the 2010 *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, endorsed by the United Nations, together with its accompanying implementation handbook,² and the *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*.³

Purpose and intended audience of the handbook

The purpose of the field handbook is to provide operational guidance for child protection staff and all other actors working on prevention and response to family separation in emergencies. The handbook sets out to ensure that responses meet agreed inter-agency standards (where relevant), and are complementary. Moreover, it seeks to ensure that responses are appropriate

¹ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012.

² Cantwell, Nigel, et al., *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'*, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, UK, 2012.


³ Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013.

to the particular situation of individual unaccompanied and separated children, and in their best interests, emphasizing the importance of working with affected communities, including children themselves, and building on their strengths and resilience.

When to use the handbook

The handbook should be used before and during all phases of emergencies. Indeed, case studies highlight the diversity and complexity of circumstances in which children can become separated. It may also be useful in preparedness efforts prior to emergencies, to ensure that agencies are ready to handle possible unaccompanied and separated children.

How to use the handbook

The handbook is divided into three sections: Summary guidance and two detailed sections, each comprising a number of chapters. Each chapter begins with a summary and key points, and closes with a list of resources for further reading; definitions are highlighted in red, case studies and quotes in blue, and suggested actions in yellow. Readers may find it more useful to refer to specific chapters, using the table of contents rather than reading from cover to cover. Information and guidance throughout the handbook relates to all UASC, however, **refugee-specific guidance** is highlighted using the symbol of a tent (). Note that the handbook should be used in conjunction with organization-specific guidance, policies and procedures.

Summary Guidance collates all the essential actions and tools covered in the handbook. It acts as a quick reference guide for practitioners; detailed guidance on each topic can be found within corresponding chapters in Sections One and Two.

Section One provides an overview of the foundational elements of UASC programmes. It lays out the legal framework and organizational mandates related to UASC, characterizes family separation in emergencies, describes the causes of separation, outlines how to prepare for and prevent separation in emergencies, and how to undertake coordination and assessment. It also covers the basics of UASC programming, case management and information management.

Section Two provides detailed guidance for those working with UASC, including how to meet immediate needs in emergencies and detailed information on identification, documentation, alternative care, family tracing, verification, reunification, reintegration and cross-sector programme areas of particular relevance to UASC.

Definitions, guiding principles, key international instruments and guidelines relating to UASC

A **child**, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is “every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 1)

Definitions

According to the *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*:

Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

Separated children are those separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

It is important to differentiate unaccompanied and separated children from **orphans**, who are defined as children, both of whose parents are known to be dead. In some countries, however, a child who has lost only one parent is also called an orphan.

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2004, p. 13)

Note that the IAWG-UASC does not endorse the term ‘minor’ and recommends that the term ‘child’ be used instead to ensure use of the common definition of ‘child’, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Guiding principles

Child rights principles relating to UASC

Family unity – or integrity of the family – entitles all children to a right to a family, and families to a right to care for their children. Unaccompanied and separated children must be provided with services aimed at reuniting them with their parents or primary legal or customary caregivers as quickly as possible, if this is in their best interests.

The best interests of the child constitutes the basic standard for guiding decisions and actions affecting individual children, whether by national or international organizations, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.

The right to life, survival and development of the child entitles all children, including unaccompanied and separated children, to have their lives protected and for them to grow and develop healthily, including with access to the resources necessary to achieve their maximum human potential.

Participation and respect for the views of the child underscores that all boys and girls should be able to express their views, and that these views should be respected and given due weight in relation to the child's age and maturity. Children must be kept informed and, as far as possible, involved in decision-making and plans concerning their placement, care, tracing and reunification. Programmes should actively engage children in the prevention of and responses to family separation.

Non-discrimination, a basic tenet of international human rights and humanitarian law, stipulates that the protection and guarantees of international law must be granted to all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, ability or other status. This includes, in particular, girls and their specific needs, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

★ [See Chapter 1.1, International legal framework related to UASC](#)

Principles of good practice in humanitarian programming

Additionally, actors working with unaccompanied and separated children should: commit to **coordination**⁴ and cooperation with all organizations concerned, make **long-term commitments** (often lasting years), integrate UASC programmes within a **protection framework**,⁵ and **strengthen child protection systems**⁶ in order to increase the resilience of all children and their families.⁷ All organizations must carry out their activities with **impartiality** (not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, religion, gender or other similar criteria) and in line with **overall protection needs** and the organization's **mandate**, expertise or mode of action.

⁴ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, see Standard 1: Coordination.

⁵ The Child Protection Working Group defines child protection in emergencies (CPiE) as “the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation of and violence against children in emergencies,” <www.CP.AoR.net>, accessed 7 January 2016.

⁶ “A child protection system is defined as certain structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of children.” Source: Conference on Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, May 2012.

⁷ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, see Principle 5: Strengthen child protection systems, and Principle 6: Strengthen children's resilience in humanitarian action.

Summary Guidance

This Summary Guidance mirrors the structure of the handbook. Its first section covers foundational elements of UASC programmes, followed by a second section that covers the implementation of UASC response: the identification, documentation, tracing and reunification cycle. Each section encapsulates the key actions that actors working with unaccompanied and separated children should undertake and tools to help them in these activities. Further guidance on each topic can be found in the corresponding chapter.

FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF UASC PROGRAMMES

CHAPTER	TOOLS
Chapter 1: International legal framework and mandates related to UASC	
<p>Legal framework related to UASC:</p> <p>Understand the legal framework applicable to your context, including international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, as well as other relevant international, regional and national law, 'soft' law or policies related to unaccompanied and separated children.</p> <p>Make decisions and build UASC-related policies, programmes and advocacy strategies based on this legal framework. This includes, in particular, making the best interests of the child a primary consideration in all actions concerning individual unaccompanied or separated children.</p>	<p>Chapter 1.1</p> <p>Tool 1: Key international instruments and guidelines relating to UASC</p> <p>Tool 2: Understanding the legal framework in your context</p>
<p>Organizational mandates relating to UASC:</p> <p>Be aware of the mandates of organizations operating in your context and how this affects roles, responsibilities and coordination of UASC work.</p>	Chapter 1.2
Chapter 2: Characterizing family separation in emergencies	
<p>Background information on family separation:</p> <p>Understand the nature and causes of separation in your context – including accidental, deliberate and aid-induced separation – to ensure better preparedness, more relevant prevention measures and a more accurate response.</p> <p>Be aware of any pre-existing separation and how that interacts with emergency-related primary and secondary separation. Coordinate with other humanitarian and national actors to ensure awareness of trends in mixed migratory flows and possible new, secondary separations that may occur after the emergency.</p>	Chapter 2.1
<p>The impact of family separation: vulnerabilities and needs of unaccompanied and separated children in emergency response:</p> <p>Be aware of the impact of separation on children and the specific needs, vulnerabilities and threats faced by UASC. Watch for elevated risk among and deliberate targeting of specific groups of UASC, such as adolescent girls and child-headed households.</p> <p>Take urgent prevention and response measures to protect children by minimizing risks and making referrals to relevant services and cross-sector partners.</p>	<p>Chapter 2.2</p> <p>Matrix: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p> <p>Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response</p> <p>External resource: <i>Child Protection Minimum Standards</i></p>

FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF UASC PROGRAMMES

CHAPTER	TOOLS
Chapter 3: Mitigating risk of separation: Prevention and preparedness	
<p>Preventing and preparing for family separation:</p> <p>Develop context-specific prevention plans/measures through the UASC coordination group, ensuring that these build on and are linked to existing child protection systems and interventions. Include children, communities and governments, where appropriate, as early as possible in planning.</p>	Chapter 3.1
<p>Community-level prevention and preparedness:</p> <p>Ask what affected populations have done to avoid separations in past emergencies and whether these ideas can be built upon or supported.</p> <p>Form or strengthen community child protection committees. Work with families and children to build their capacity to actively take on specific roles to prevent separation and to strengthen resilience among communities by raising awareness among children and parents of how to prevent separation, and assisting communities in their own planning for emergencies.</p> <p>Identify, monitor, report on and respond to sites where potential family separation may occur (such as rest stops on flight routes, transport hubs, border crossings or distribution sites), and deploy child protection staff to implement context-specific preventive actions.</p> <p>Strategically establish/identify appropriate 'lost children's posts,' child protection locations or 'focal points' where people can come for information, UASC can be documented and decisions made about their care, and where information on missing children can be recorded. Ensure that staff are clearly identified and make it clear that these are not places where children can be cared for or left.</p> <p>Identify existing residential care centres and work with centre staff to ensure that children are only placed there as a last resort, plan ways to keep children safe, and facilitate their return to, or contact with, their families.</p> <p>Conduct information campaigns to inform communities in transit how to prevent separation and who to notify if they lose a child.</p> <p>Work with communities and cross-sector partners to develop criteria and procedures to identify and support vulnerable families. Ensure that humanitarian assistance is not distributed in a way that encourages families to divide into smaller households.</p>	Chapter 3.1.1 Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures
<p>National-level prevention and preparedness:</p> <p>Work with authorities to identify, strengthen and develop (where necessary) child protection systems, legislation and policies (<i>see Chapter 6.1.1</i>), including accessibility by all children.</p> <p>Identify key national actors in alternative care and their current roles and activities. Ensure updated registration of all children in alternative care and support the establishment of systems for case tracking in the event of population movements, relocation or evacuation.</p> <p>Strengthen or implement national or subnational mechanisms for monitoring families at risk of separation and referral mechanisms, along with measures to prevent separation of children with disabilities.</p> <p>Work with social welfare services to ensure quality case management systems are in place, including monitoring and follow-up of children at risk (<i>see Chapter 7.2.1</i>).</p> <p>Forge cooperation with relevant embassies/consulates to prevent illegal or inappropriate movement of UASC out of the country.</p> <p>Advocate for, implement or promote access to legal documentation and birth registration for all children, including UASC and refugee children.</p>	Chapter 3.1.2 Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures

FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF UASC PROGRAMMES

CHAPTER	TOOLS
<p>Preventing aid-induced separation:</p> <p>Work with other sectors bilaterally and through cluster coordination meetings to raise awareness of UASC, how separation can be prevented and what actions to take if UASC are found.</p> <p>Protect and assist in place. Only evacuate children as a last resort. If humanitarian evacuation is unavoidable, preserve family unity as much as possible and only undertake evacuations when it is in the child's best interests (including if life is under threat), and under proper conditions (with informed consent, keeping families together when possible, and with complete records and communication plan).</p>	<p>Chapter 3.1.3</p> <p>Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p> <p>Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures</p>
<p>Messages on prevention of separation:</p> <p>Organize child-friendly, culturally appropriate and widely disseminated information campaigns to inform communities before and during transit on how to prevent separation and who to notify if they lose a child. These can take a range of forms, but should reach all community members, including children and those who cannot read.</p> <p>Work with other sectors bilaterally and through cluster coordination meetings to incorporate prevention of separation messages into sector work.</p> <p>Raise awareness among cross-sector staff of the need to be alert for UASC, how they can prevent separation, what immediate actions to take if they find UASC, what information to give UASC/families whose children are missing, and which child protection organizations are responsible for UASC in their context and how to contact/refer children to them.</p>	<p>Chapter 3.1.4</p> <p>Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages, Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR</p> <p>Tool 6: Prevention of separation messages for parents and carers</p> <p>Tool 7: Prevention of separation messages for children</p> <p>Tool 8: Contextualized messages on child protection from Jordan, UNHCR</p> <p>Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners</p>
<p>Project preparedness:</p> <p>Where possible, begin UASC project preparedness in advance of an emergency to better prevent separation: Identify funding and resource requirements (human and material) for anticipated UASC activities, pre-position Family Tracing and Reunification Kits, stockpile supplies and organize transport, prepare for rapid assessment of separation and develop emergency preparedness and response plans specific to UASC. Develop and implement a strategy to recruit and train staff based on the most likely scenario, ensuring that basic minimum training of case workers and staffing flexibility allow for immediate deployment as separations or risk of separation are identified.</p>	<p>Chapter 3.2</p> <p>Tool 10: Family Tracing and Reunification Kit supply list, IAWG-UASC</p>
<p>Chapter 4: Coordination⁸</p>	
<p>Framework for national and subnational coordination:</p> <p>Where possible, coordinate UASC work with and through existing government structures.</p> <p>Link UASC work with an existing child protection forum, broader protection working groups, and the wider humanitarian response by ensuring that a representative of the UASC coordination mechanism engages with each of these groups.</p>	<p>Chapter 4.2</p>
<p>Context-based coordination structures and roles:</p> <p>Establish effective UASC coordination mechanisms, such as UASC technical working groups, within the broader child protection coordination structure and agree on information-sharing early in an emergency, based on the context and organizations involved.</p> <p> In refugee contexts, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) leads coordination for protection, including for UASC.</p> <p>Be aware that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as the National Societies, may participate as observers in UASC working groups.</p>	<p>Chapter 4.2.1</p>

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<p>Roles, responsibilities and functions of a UASC technical working group:</p> <p>In all contexts, UASC technical working groups should agree on leadership/chairs, terms of reference, decision-making processes, roles and responsibilities of different organizations working with UASC, and communication mechanisms, where these have not been agreed upon through the broader child protection coordination group. They should also discuss coordination with the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.</p> <p>Via the UASC technical working group, undertake essential mapping, harmonization and strategic actions.</p>	<p>Chapter 4.2.2</p> <p>Tool 11: Sample terms of reference for a UASC technical working group</p>
<p>Cross-border and regional coordination:</p> <p>Coordinate cross-border tracing and reunification of refugees in countries of origin with the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UNHCR, and other organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and implementing partners that may be involved, as appropriate.</p> <p>Where a regional structure for coordination is not in place, establish a mechanism for sharing information and managing UASC work in more than one country as early as possible with clearly defined lines and methods of communication. However, do not allow establishment of regional coordination to delay urgent tasks of identifying and documenting children and carrying out straightforward family reunifications.</p>	<p>Chapter 4.2.3</p> <p>Chapter 11.2.9</p> <p>Tool 12: IOM/UNICEF Guidelines on assistance and protection to children affected by humanitarian crises, focus on UASC, IOM and UNICEF Regional Offices for West and Central Africa</p>
<p>Overcoming challenges to effective coordination:</p> <p>Use simple coordination tools to fix urgent needs without delaying programming. Where necessary and appropriate, use standard operating procedures (SOPs) that are as simple and functional as possible, without delaying programming.</p> <p>If necessary, seek support from the global Child Protection Working Group (CP AoR) or Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC).</p> <p>Be aware that the ICRC and National Societies do not sign standard operating procedures. They might opt to issue an information sheet on Restoring Family Links activities of the Movement in favour of unaccompanied or vulnerable separated children in order to inform UN agencies and other humanitarian actors.</p>	<p>Chapter 4.3</p> <p>External resource: <i>Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook</i></p> <p>Tool 13: Example SOP for Emergency Response for UASC in Jordan, Child Protection Sub-working Group – UASC Task Force, Jordan</p> <p>Tool 14: Sample briefing note: Tracing approach of the ICRC and Nigerian Red Cross Society for UASC as a result of armed conflict, ICRC</p> <p>Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC</p>

Chapter 5: Assessment of separation and risk of separation

Assessing risk of separation and mapping capacity:

When possible in advance of an emergency, assess the risk of and children's vulnerability to separation. Factor in pre-existing patterns of separation, community-level capacity to prevent/mitigate separation, the type of emergency anticipated, and household coping mechanisms. Use risk assessments to broadly predict the scale and scope of separation, identify which children are most vulnerable to separation, and inform initial prioritization and response activities.

Chapter 5.1

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Map existing local and national capacity to respond to separation using participatory measures. Use capacity mapping to identify traditional and formal responses to and care for UASC, and ways and priorities for building, developing and strengthening local and national capacity to prevent and respond to separation. Ensure that programmes support community resilience without destroying local coping mechanisms.

Assessment of separation:

Assess the nature and scale of separation using a range of methodologies in a variety of sites, based on the context. Methodologies can include desk/secondary data reviews, rapid assessments, population-based estimations, ongoing surveillance and trend analysis, and situational analysis. Use any existing assessment of risk of separation (above) to inform early assessments, such as desk reviews, which then serve as a basis for further detailed assessments.

Adapt or add questions to assessments that are sensitive to the context and UASC-specific, such as the Multisector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA), Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) or Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA), to enable assessors to identify whether and in which ways separation is an issue in your context. Be sure to include the UASC 'What we need to know in CPRAs: Patterns of separation, types of care arrangements for UASC and gaps, communities' capacities and mechanisms for responding to separation, patterns and level of residential care for UASC, and adoption-related laws, policies and practices'.  For refugee contexts, ensure that assessment tools are adapted to refugee populations and refugee-specific protection issues for UASC.

Chapter 5.2

Tool 16: Sample assessment tools from various sources

Organizing assessments:

Conduct assessor trainings to ensure common understanding of the definition of UASC and an agreed interpretation of and culturally appropriate way to convey these definitions in local languages.

Avoid using multiple assessments of the same type in the same location to avoid duplication of effort; where possible, jointly assess the situation of UASC as part of a broader protection or child protection needs assessment.

Involve communities and children, where safe, meaningful and appropriate; ensure that assessors are prepared to make urgent referrals or provide follow-up information regarding UASC.

Chapter 5.3

Chapter 6: The basics: Programme planning for UASC

Programme development:

During programme design, decide on priority UASC interventions, set clear objectives, establish indicators to measure progress towards achieving these objectives, select activities and related outputs to achieve results.

Use assessments as a basis for UASC programmes, ensuring that they address underlying vulnerabilities and contribute towards the strengthening of child protection systems, where necessary. Focus on child protection system factors that increase the resilience of UASC and, where appropriate, use family tracing and reunification programmes as an entry point to strengthening such systems.

Be strategic: Limit the scope of UASC programme responses to match priorities and capacity, prioritize the issues identified in assessments, draw on lessons learned from interventions for UASC in other emergencies, cover all the different elements of the response to UASC, include an overall timeline, exit strategy and a funding strategy that looks beyond the emergency period, and collaboratively develop a UASC protection strategy under the relevant coordination lead.

During the design phase, facilitate linkages between UASC programmes and broader protection, child protection and human rights monitoring initiatives. Involve children and communities, and consult with other external stakeholders.

Chapter 6.1

Tool 17: Step-by-step guide to UASC programme development

Tool 18: *Child Protection Minimum Standards*, Standard 13: Unaccompanied and separated children


Tool 19: Tools and resources to support programme design

Tool 20: Key questions when considering support for government use of an Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System

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<p>Plan sustainable programmes with the involvement of long-term actors, such as the government to avoid parallel structures. Incorporate a plan for capacity building, transition and eventual handover to government/other partners in programme planning. Conduct a risk assessment prior to handing over information management systems to ensure there is no risk to UASC from handing over confidential information, especially in armed conflict. Advocate for extension of donor funding to cover transition periods.</p> <p>Conduct participatory monitoring and evaluation of UASC programmes to understand what works well and what needs improvement. Apply lessons learned to continually improve UASC programmes.</p> <p>Seek early and strong partnerships with government, the ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, international, regional, national and local organizations, and communities.</p>	<p>Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC</p>
<p>Programme resources:</p> <p>Build a diverse staff team that meets UASC competencies, including: technical knowledge/skills related to separation, family tracing and reunification and case management (and refugee protection, where applicable), communication skills, ability to complete forms to a high standard, familiarity with data confidentiality requirements, and training and competency in working with and interviewing children.</p> <p>Regularly train, mentor and supervise those carrying out identification, documentation, tracing and reunification activities and case management. Prioritize training in emergencies based on the context and use rolling or 'on the job' training if time is short.</p> <p>Draft adequate budgets for UASC programmes that allocate resources for programme elements (such as care arrangements, material support to UASC or vulnerable families, emergency expenditures), human resources (such as adequate staffing to match caseloads and recommended staff-to-child ratios of no more than 1:25), and logistics, support and monitoring and evaluation (such as transport, UASC supplies, documents).</p>	<p>Chapter 6.2</p> <p>Tool 21: Core staff functions for an emergency response to UASC</p> <p>Tool 22: Additional staff competencies related to preventing and responding to child separation, CP AoR <i>Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) Competency Framework</i></p> <p>Tool 23: Terms of reference for child protection specialist (UASC), emergency (surge) missions, UNICEF</p> <p>Tool 24: Template budget for response to separated and other affected children, IRC</p>
<p>Chapter 7: Case management and information management for UASC</p>	
<p>Confidentiality, informed consent and UASC:</p> <p>Respect the confidentiality of UASC and only share information about UASC on a 'need to know' basis and when in the best interests of the child. Never publicly associate names of UASC with their photos.</p> <p>Seek informed consent from children/guardians by explaining in simple, age-appropriate language why information is sought and what it will be used for, including how it will be shared. Obtain informed consent <i>before</i> proceeding with documentation, tracing, case management, referral and any other actions related to care and protection.</p>	<p>Chapter 7.1</p> <p>Tool 25: Sample confidentiality and data protection checklist, IA CP IMS</p> <p>Tool 26: Sample Informed Consent Form, CP AoR</p>


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CHAPTER	TOOLS
<p>Case management:</p> <p>Decide which UASC to prioritize based on agreed criteria for tracing or urgent needs interventions (such as the likelihood of rapid reunification and vulnerability). Allocate staff to fast track these cases for family tracing and reunification or other related priority actions during identification and documentation or based on existing caseload data.</p> <p>Use case management systems that feed into or establish national case management systems. Coordinate all interventions and manage information related to an individual child through the case management cycle without losing sight of the long-term goal of family reunification.</p> <p>Undertake individual assessment of the needs and best interests of a child (for example, through a best interests assessment), as necessary. If there is no adequate national process to determine what is in the child's best interests, consider using the <i>UNHCR Best Interest Determination Guidelines</i>;  in refugee situations, their use is required where no national procedure exists. Avoid multiple assessments of the same child at the same time.</p> <p>Close tracing cases for reunified children when a formal review results in a decision that further post-reunification follow-up is no longer needed. If a child is successfully reunified and reintegrated into his/her family but has additional protection concerns, refer the child to the general child protection case management system. Develop criteria for general case closure when a child no longer needs support, monitoring or care planning..</p>	<p>Chapter 7.2</p> <p>Tool 27: Sample prioritization tool for UASC</p> <p>Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan</p> <p>Tool 29: Sample case management flow chart, UNHCR, Jordan</p> <p>Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form, UNHCR</p> <p>Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form, UNHCR</p>
<p>Information management systems:</p> <p>Establish confidential and effective information management systems.</p> <p>Handle data about UASC, and refugees and asylum-seekers in particular, with the utmost care. Develop data protection protocols and information-sharing protocols among organizations to ensure confidentiality and protection of all UASC-related data, as necessary and appropriate.⁹</p>	<p>Chapter 7.3</p> <p>Tool 25: Sample confidentiality and data protection checklist, IA CP IMS</p> <p>Tool 32: Questions to ask while developing data protection and information-sharing protocols</p> <p>Tool 33: Sample information-sharing protocol, Turkey cross-border operations</p> <p>Tool 34: Template for an information-sharing protocol agreement</p> <p>Tool 35: Template data protection protocol, IA CP IMS</p> <p>Tool 36: Sample data management process, Save the Children UK, Dadaab, Kenya</p>


^[8] For further resources on coordination, particularly in cluster contexts, see: *Child Protection Working Group, Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook*, CP AoR, 2010.

^[9] The International Committee of the Red Cross uses its own database and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing, as appropriate, with humanitarian organizations working with UASC, provided that the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share his/her information with other organizations..

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CHAPTER	Tools
Matrix: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies	
<p>During and immediately following an emergency, undertake expedited steps to identify, document, trace and reunify children with families. This includes action to: prevent separation, identify, prioritize (where necessary), document, arrange alternative care for, conduct family tracing, verify family relationships, reunify, and follow up on UASC. Each step should be undertaken urgently and creatively, using resources at hand, guided by the child's best interests and coordinated with authorities and other actors/sectors. For detailed guidance on each step, see chapters below in Section Two.</p>	<p>Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies</p> <p>Tool 37: Sample checklist for UASC emergency programme response</p>
Chapter 8: Identification of UASC	
<p>Promoting consistency when identifying UASC:</p> <p>Apply the definitions of UASC within the local context and account for levels of vulnerability. Be aware of potential confusion with locally used terms.</p>	<p>Chapter 8.1</p> <p>Tool 38: Decision tree for determining a child's separation status, UNHCR</p> <p>Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese Children in Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan</p>
<p>Measures to locate and identify UASC and record information on missing children:</p> <p>Carry out identification urgently as part of a coordinated and strategic programme response. Inform staff in all sectors, local authorities, community-based organizations, community and religious leaders, and camp managers of the need to identify UASC and to whom to refer them.</p> <p>Avoid further separations during identification by clearly communicating the objectives of identifying UASC; do not to provoke abandonment of children, incentivize separation or cause children to be hidden.</p> <p>Where appropriate, launch a widely disseminated, culturally appropriate public information campaign (such as announcements at distribution centres, radio/text messages, posters) that conveys the need for both unaccompanied <i>and</i> separated children to be documented.</p> <p>Inform actors in the wider humanitarian response of the need to be aware of, identify and refer UASC to relevant organizations, as well as what to do if they come across UASC.</p> <p>Establish and publicize child protection locations or 'focal points' where UASC can be documented/assessed or missing children reported; make clear that these are not places where children can be cared for or left.</p> <p> In refugee situations, UNHCR or national refugee authorities identify UASC at registration and establish child protection 'help desks' or screening points for best interests assessments.</p> <p>Map and prioritize locations where UASC are known/thought to be, where there is a risk of separations still occurring and where potential for this exists, such as at transportation or distribution sites or transit camps. Negotiate access to detention centres, where necessary. Deploy staff to actively search for and identify any UASC in these locations. Make sensitive inquiries to ensure that infants, very young children and girls are not missed or hidden.</p> <p>Follow up on reports of UASC among groups of children recruited by armed forces or armed groups, or working, trafficked or abducted children.</p>	<p>Chapter 8.2</p> <p>Matrix on p. x: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies</p> <p>Chapter 3.1.4</p> <p>Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages – Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR</p> <p>Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners</p>





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CHAPTER	Tools
<p>Actions to take when unaccompanied and separated children are identified:</p> <p>If trained to interview children, undertake documentation (see below) and only remove children when certain there are no family/community members there or nearby (unless there is immediate risk to the child).</p> <p>If a child is unable to provide information: First, interview any people with whom he/she is found and record all the information they know about the child/family of the child and any information that may help to trace the family. Then, undertake documentation.</p> <p>Assess immediate care needs or protection concerns and make arrangements/referrals, including to UNHCR and national refugee authorities for refugee status determination, if necessary.</p> <p>Ensure that the child's case is followed up.</p>	<p>Chapter 8.3</p> <p>Tool 39: What to do if you come across children who are separated or reported missing, Global Child Protection Cluster</p> <p>Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response</p> <p>Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p>
<p>Chapter 9: Documentation</p>	
<p>Documenting unaccompanied and separated children:</p> <p>Deploy trained staff to interview and document UASC. Seek the active participation of communities; they are likely to know more than outsiders.</p> <p><i>Before</i> documentation, explain the purpose of documentation and tracing to children/carers and seek their informed consent to have information recorded, shared (on a need-to-know basis only for family tracing and reunification) and to be photographed.</p> <p>Document <i>all</i> UASC (including those separated prior to the emergency, in residential care and who cannot provide information). Take quick action to document and photograph young children or those with insufficient information for tracing when and where they are first identified. Do not repeat documentation if it appears that an organization has already documented the child.</p> <p>Photograph or record a description of clothing, jewellery and any items found with the child, and try to ensure these items stay with the child; never write children's names on their photographs.</p> <p>Use standard registration forms or other agreed rapid registration list. Fill these out to as high a standard as possible to enable successful tracing. Adapt forms where necessary, but do not wait for a 'perfect' form to be finalized to begin documentation. Note that the ICRC and National Societies use their own forms.</p> <p>If you do not have access to these forms, be innovative with the tools you have. Record details in a notebook/spread sheet and transfer to a form as soon as possible. At a minimum, record: name of child, age/date of birth, sex, name of mother/father, permanent address before separation, details of separation (date/place), name of and relationship to caregiver, status, accompanying siblings, current location/contact, destination (if applicable), and comments (including priority/urgency).</p> <p>Agree on format and assign temporary ID codes to all documentation, photographs or objects to link all information and photos to the child.</p> <p> Ensure that identified refugee UASC are recorded with the correct specific needs codes in proGres, where it is used, and that the proGres ID or other refugee unique identification number of the UASC is recorded in any non-UNHCR UASC information management system.</p> <p>Store registration forms and all subsequent forms in a locked file. If not already done, establish systems for safe forwarding/storage of information, ensuring data confidentiality and abiding by information-sharing protocols.</p>	<p>Chapter 9.1</p> <p>Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies</p> <p>Tool 40: Conducting interviews with children</p> <p>Tool 41: Rapid registration list, IAWG-UASC</p> <p>Tool 42: Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC</p> <p>Tool 43: Extended Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC</p> <p>Tool 44: Guidance note on Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC</p> <p>Tool 45: ProGres needs codes, UNHCR</p>



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CHAPTER	Tools
<p>Missing children:</p> <p>When families report missing children, first ensure an appropriate security response with relevant authorities to address concerns about abduction or trafficking.</p> <p>Record information from families looking for their children, without raising their expectations, and manually or digitally cross-check it with records of UASC.</p> <p>Referrals to the ICRC for Restoring Family Links services are encouraged; in exceptional instances where the ICRC or National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are not present, provide services consistent with the best interests of the child.</p>	Chapter 9.2
<p>Chapter 10: Alternative care of UASC¹⁰</p>	
<p>Assessment of the current care arrangements for UASC:</p> <p>Screen potential carers and assess UASC's current living situations.</p>	Chapter 10.2 Tool 3: Threats to UASC and responses
<p>Identification of alternative care arrangements for UASC:</p> <p>Identify suitable alternative care arrangement options for UASC while tracing is carried out. Prioritize the following options within local parameters, guided by the best interests of the child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-based care within the child's community (family, kinship or foster care), with priority given to children under 3 years of age, children with special needs or urgent protection concerns • Supported independent living/child-headed households, as appropriate. • Organized small group care within the child's community • Temporary and appropriate residential care in <i>existing</i> facilities, where possible and appropriate, for the shortest time possible; move to community-based care when possible, if in the best interests of the child. <p>Do not establish <i>new</i> long-term care facilities in emergency settings.</p>	Chapter 10.3 Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies External resource: <i>Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit</i> , Chapter 3, 8, 9, 10 Tool 46: Deciding to support child-headed households Tool 47: Standards for temporary care
<p>Monitoring care arrangements:</p> <p>Monitor UASC in alternative care by opening a case file, allocating a case worker to conduct visits, monitor the child's well-being, support the placement, update tracing and develop a care plan. Where possible, use local child welfare systems or community structures for monitoring, as long as they have guidelines to follow in case of abuse, exploitation or neglect.</p>	Chapter 10.4 Tool 48: Guidance on monitoring care arrangements External resource: <i>Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit</i> , Chapter 6
<p>Long-term/permanent care for UASC:</p> <p>If reunification is not possible or in the best interests of the child, identify appropriate long-term term care arrangements, with the involvement of children, local authority social workers or child welfare workers.</p> <p>Advocate against and do not facilitate adoption – whether national or intercountry – <i>during/ immediately after emergencies</i>, as it is <i>not</i> an appropriate form of care for UASC at that time.</p> <p>Consider national adoption or its equivalent (and, in some cases, intercountry) as a <i>long-term care</i> option for UASC who are unable to be reunited with family members, when handled through legally established procedures.</p>	Chapter 10.5 External resource: <i>Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit</i> , Chapter 5 Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response


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CHAPTER	Tools
Chapter 11: Family tracing and verification	
<p>Spontaneous, informal or traditional methods of tracing:</p> <p>Ask children/communities about existing tracing practices and whether/how they wish to be supported. Make linkages between formal and informal methods, and provide support where these do not pose a risk to UASC.</p>	Chapter 11.1
<p>Formal and organization-led family tracing:</p> <p>Use varied and innovative approaches to tracing, choosing methods that fit the circumstances, as long as these are safe. Examples are included below.</p> <p>Work with local organizations, networks and communities, including Red Cross/Red Crescent local branches and volunteers working to restore family links.</p> <p>Manually or digitally cross-check documentation of UASC with that of missing children to find matches.  In refugee situations, proGres may also be available as a tool for data cross-checking for tracing.</p> <p>Undertake mass tracing and/or photo tracing,  including in refugee/IDP camps or temporary accommodations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display lists/photographs of UASC, with only the child’s registration ID shown. • Make megaphone announcements at places where people gather. • Make and distribute flyers, posters and tracing books among communities. • Use radio announcements to cover a wide geographic area. • Set up an identification, documentation, tracing and reunification information centre (such as a tent, booth or kiosk). • Use web-based tracing possibilities offered by the Family Links website: <familylinks.icrc.org>. <p>Work with interim carers and residential centre staff, who guide relationships with children over time, to learn new information that opens tracing leads.</p> <p> Undertake inter-camp and in-country tracing in refugee and IDP contexts, in coordination with UNHCR as appropriate.</p> <p>While conducting case-by-case tracing, take an investigatory approach to an individual child’s case, travel to significant locations in the child’s history of separation, such as his or her home, the last place the family was seen, etc., or deploy community volunteers to do the same.</p> <p>For young children, immediately carry out tracing at the place the child is identified by searching the immediate area, going to the child’s last address (if possible), and using phones/SMS (text messaging) to contact family; keep the child at the location until it is certain no family is in the immediate area.</p> <p>Coordinate cross-border tracing and  reunification of refugees in countries of origin with the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (which have a unique mandate to provide Restoring Family Links services across international borders), UNHCR, and other organizations, such as IOM, UNICEF, NGOs and implementing partners that may be involved, as appropriate.</p>	Chapter 11.2
<p>Good practice in family tracing:</p> <p>Share the maximum information for tracing at the minimum risk to the child and family when tracing between organizations and in public campaigns; keep the child’s safety and confidentiality at the forefront of your mind.</p> <p>Ensure emotional support is available throughout the tracing process and involve children in their own tracing as much as possible.</p>	Chapter 11.3 Tool 49: Organizational guidance on best practices in family tracing

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CHAPTER	Tools
<p>Before allowing a child to accompany tracing workers in search of his/her family or relocating a child closer to his/her home, conduct an assessment of the child's circumstances, weighing potential benefits against potential risks.</p> <p>Keep track of UASC during extended tracing by following up regularly, coordinating with organizations working in UASC's 'next' destinations, and informing UASC and carers how to update their tracing information in the event of movement and which organization to report to in that location.</p>	<p>Tool 50: Evaluating whether children should accompany tracing workers while searching for family</p>
<p>Results of family tracing:</p> <p>Depending on their age and circumstances, inform children of tracing results, unless the family member does not want the child to know that he/she has been found.</p> <p>Continue tracing until all reasonable efforts have been made to trace family members, including extended family, or there is conclusive proof that all family members are dead.</p> <p>Conduct a formal review process, involving national authorities where possible, before discontinuing tracing. If the tracing case is discontinued, make long-term alternative care arrangements and integrate the child's case into the regular child protection case management system. Resume tracing at a later date if new tracing information comes to light.</p>	<p>Chapter 11.4</p> <p>Tool 51: Delivering news of death to a child</p>
<p>Verification for family reunification:</p> <p>If tracing is positive, verify all family relationships and both the child's and family's willingness to be reunited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check official documents (such as identity cards or birth certificates).  In refugee situations, check asylum and proGres documentation. • Separately ask the child and family members the same set of questions about the child/family and make sure their answers match. • For babies and young children, ask adults to describe the child, place/circumstances of separation, the child, clothing, jewellery or other possessions at separation and words used by the child before separation. Compare answers to documentation and photos. • Speak to community members to verify information on the child/family. • Only use DNA testing in exceptional cases. <p>For long, intentional, voluntary, or cross-border separations, very young UASC, or complex cases, undertake formal verification by filling out standard verification forms and assessing conditions for reunification.</p>	<p>Chapter 11.5</p> <p>Tool 52: Sample Child Verification Form (Ethiopia), IA CP IMS</p> <p>Tool 53: Sample Adult Verification Form (Ethiopia), IA CP IMS</p>
<p>Chapter 12: Reunification and reintegration</p>	
<p>Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests:</p> <p>Conduct an assessment to determine if reunification is in the best interests of the child, including the willingness of all involved, home visits to assess the living situation, and security and other circumstances the child will return to. In complicated cases, a more detailed assessment may be necessary to reach a decision and put support in place before reunification.</p> <p> For straightforward UASC cases, conduct a best interests determination. For complex refugee UASC cases, cross-border reunification or durable solutions (voluntary repatriation, local integration, resettlement), a best interests determination is usually required. Note that the determination process should not unduly slow down family tracing and reunification.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.1</p> <p>Tool 54: Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests in complex cases</p> <p>Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form</p> <p>Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form</p>
<p>Delaying reunification or deciding not to reunite a child:</p> <p>If reunification is not yet in the best interests of the child, delay reunification for review at a future date while maintaining family links. If necessary, facilitate family mediation.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.1.1</p>

UASC RESPONSE: A DETAILED GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER	Tools
<p>If a final determination is made that reunification is not to be in the best interests of the child, do not reunify. Instead, refer the case to national authorities, identify long-term care arrangements and ensure the case enters the general case management system.</p> <p>When the family and child both want reunification but there are concerns that the reunification is not in the child's best interests, inform the child and parents of the risks and mitigation strategies, and choose not to facilitate reunification; however, do not prevent their independent reunification.</p>	
<p>Reunification:</p> <p>Plan the reunification and prepare the child, family, caregiver and community. Never prematurely reunify without preparation and consent of both child and family.</p> <p>For long, intentional/voluntary, cross-border and very young UASC separations or complex cases, take steps prior to reunification to support the child and family to prevent secondary separation, including referral for assistance, livelihoods support and family mediation.</p> <p>Facilitate the reunification by ensuring the child's genuine participation, organizing transportation, providing hard copies of all relevant documentation to both the child and family, and ensuring formal handover of the child to the responsible family member. In cross-border cases, ensure clearance from authorities in both countries.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.2</p> <p>Tool 55: Checklist for preparing for reunification</p>
<p>Reunification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children:</p> <p> Ensure that refugee children have gone through the best interests and voluntary repatriation procedures, and have the relevant documentation before they return to their country of origin. Coordinate closely with UNHCR. No refugee child should be reunified in their country of origin against their wishes.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.3</p> <p>Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form</p> <p>Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form</p>
<p>Return of children found not in need of international protection:</p> <p>Consider establishing a multidisciplinary, inter-agency panel to consider alternative durable solutions for unaccompanied children whose asylum claims are rejected. If there are reasonable grounds to believe the child may be at risk upon return, advocate for the child's right to local integration.</p> <p>Where appropriate to mandate and context, support the country of origin in post-return monitoring and follow-up of an unaccompanied child who lawfully returns to his/her country of origin after a rejected asylum claim.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.4</p> <p>Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies</p> <p>Tool 56: Sample Self-repatriation Form, Save the Children</p>
<p>Reintegration:</p> <p>Set criteria for prioritizing follow-up cases based on the circumstances of the child's separation (such as length of separation) and the circumstances into which he/she will return (death of family members, for example).</p> <p>Follow up on reunified children through local child welfare systems or community structures, where existing and functioning. Provide capacity building as necessary. Follow-up includes: monitoring care arrangements, providing support to the child/family through their transition, facilitating access to and information about specialized support, basic services and humanitarian assistance, and making referrals for services.</p> <p>Establish and implement criteria for family tracing and reunification closure after follow-up. After closing such cases, enter reunified children with additional protection concerns into the general case management system.</p>	<p>Chapter 12.5</p> <p>Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p>
<p>Matrix: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p>	

UASC RESPONSE: A DETAILED GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER	Tools
<p>Collaborate – bilaterally and through clusters/sectors – with other actors in the humanitarian response to refer individual cases of concern, underscore sector-specific UASC actions for cross-sector partners, and make partners aware of their important role in preventing separation of children and supporting family unity.</p>	<p>Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC</p> <p>Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners</p>

^[10] See Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, for further guidance.



FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF UASC PROGRAMMES



Chapter 1 sets out the applicable legal framework related to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) across international human rights, humanitarian, refugee and other relevant bodies of law. It contains an analysis of particularly relevant rights and protections for UASC, including the best interests of the child, and children's rights to family life and unity, identity, care and protection. It also covers specific organizational mandates related to unaccompanied and separated children. An understanding of this legal framework and related organizational mandates should underpin all UASC responses and programmes detailed in this handbook.

01

International legal framework and mandates related to UASC

TOPICS

1.1 International legal framework related to UASC

- 1.1.1 International human rights law
- 1.1.2 International humanitarian law
- 1.1.3 International refugee law
- 1.1.4 Additional bodies of international, regional, national and soft law

1.2 Organizational mandates related to UASC

- 1.2.1 Legal mandates
- 1.2.2 Other organizational mandates

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- All children, including UASC, are entitled to the rights enumerated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including the right to not be separated from their parents and to family life. State parties cannot derogate from the Convention, meaning that it applies even in emergencies, including natural disasters and armed conflict.
- The best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.
- International humanitarian law applies in situations of armed conflict (international and non-international), is binding upon all parties to conflict and provides special protection to children, as well as a provision for family unity and contact. International humanitarian law provides the mandate for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
- International refugee law provides specific protections to refugee and asylum-seeking UASC. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and, together with governments, to find solutions for refugees, including UASC, worldwide.
- In each context, UASC-related policies, programmes and decisions need to be guided by applicable international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, alongside regional, national and 'soft' law, and guidelines.
- It is important to recognize that a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies working with UASC have mandates 'derived from' international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, most particularly child rights.



01

**International legal
framework and
mandates related
to UASC**

1.1 International legal framework related to UASC

While primary responsibility for ensuring children's survival and well-being lies with parents, family and community, national and local authorities are responsible for ensuring that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Indeed, UASC-related policies, programmes and decisions need to be guided by applicable international, regional and national instruments, 'soft' law and guidelines based on the bodies of law listed below.

1.1.1 International human rights law

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)¹¹ is the cornerstone of the international legal framework applicable to UASC. It is nearly universally ratified and State parties cannot derogate from it, meaning that it applies even in emergencies, including natural disasters and armed conflict. However, because some States have made reservations to its provisions, those working with UASC should understand whether any reservations apply in their particular context.

The CRC establishes the basic principles of this handbook, namely, **right to family** (Preamble, Article 16), **the best interests of the child** (Article 3), **participation and respect for the views of the child** (Article 5), **right to life and development** (Article 6), and **non-discrimination** (Article 2) (*see Introduction*).

The CRC entitles each child within a State party's jurisdiction – including UASC and children of other nationalities – to have the rights enumerated in the Convention respected and ensured. For UASC separated across borders, this means that these rights should be respected regardless of whether or not they are recognized as refugees.

First and foremost, unaccompanied and separated children have the right to know and be cared for by their parents, and to not be separated from their parents (Articles 7 and 9). While UASC are by definition already separated from their parents, these articles entitle such children to have these rights restored by virtue of the identification, documentation, tracing and reunification process. Indeed, the CRC obliges State parties to facilitate family reunification:

"In accordance with the obligation of States parties under article 9, paragraph 1 ['State parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will...'], applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner."

(Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 10(1))

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

(Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 3)

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3.

“1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to **special protection and assistance** provided by the State.
2. States parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure **alternative care** for such a child.”

(Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 20)

The CRC also confirms another central protection for such children: The **right of children to preserve their identities, including nationality, name and family relations** (Article 8). This right is particularly important for infant or very young UASC, who may not know or be able to communicate their names or other identifying information.

While the CRC entitles all children to **protection** (Articles 19, 34, 35, 36), it is especially important for unaccompanied and separated children, who are uniquely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (*see Chapter 2.2*). For UASC programmes, such protection may take the form of advocacy with authorities, interventions, or removal of the child from inappropriate care arrangements, following careful assessment. In addition, the Convention underscores the need to carefully monitor care arrangements for such children and to act on cases of exploitation or abuse (*see Chapter 10.4.1*).

The CRC also delineates obligations to provide alternative care, for example, while tracing is carried out. It does not prescribe the form of care and offers several possible options. However, it does stipulate that in cases of adoption, “the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration” (Article 21).

Additionally, Article 22 entitles all **refugee children** and those seeking asylum, “whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents,” to “appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance,” building upon the protections of international refugee law (*see section 1.1.3 below*).¹² It also specifically provides for family tracing and reunification of refugee children, as well as long-term alternative care arrangements for refugee UASC whose families have not been traced:

“States Parties shall provide, as they consider appropriate, co-operation in any efforts by the United Nations and other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations co-operating with the United Nations **to protect and assist such a [refugee] child and to trace the parents or other members of the family** of any refugee child in order to obtain information necessary for reunification with his or her family. In cases where no parents or other members of the family can be found, the child shall be accorded the same protection as any other child permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment for any reason, as set forth in the present Convention.”

(Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 22(2))

¹² Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 22(1).

Both the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography specify that **children recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups and child victims of sale, prostitution or pornography are entitled to “assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration.”**¹³ For UASC who become separated due to recruitment, sale, prostitution or pornography, or those UASC who may be vulnerable to recruitment or such exploitation after separation, these provisions set the stage for family tracing and reunification.

Children, including UASC, are additionally entitled to the rights and protections included in other international human rights instruments, including but not limited to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (*see Tool 1*).

Statelessness

While containing no specific mention of UASC, the Convention relating to the Reduction of Statelessness (1961) provides important **protection for ‘foundling’ children from statelessness** and the added vulnerabilities that accompany it.¹⁴ The Convention grants UASC whose nationality is unknown the nationality of the State in which they are found, unlocking a host of rights conferred by citizenship. This is a particularly important provision for infant and young UASC as well as those lacking documentation of their nationality.

1.1.2 International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law, which is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977), applies in situations of international and non-international armed conflict¹⁵ and is equally binding on all parties to conflict, including non-state actors. In addition to the protections provided to civilians, children – including those “who are orphaned or separated from their families as a result of the war” – are accorded special respect and care.¹⁶

Maintenance of family unity, particularly during evacuation or transfer by an occupying power, is also a central component of international humanitarian law.¹⁷ In both international and non-international armed conflict, renewing family contact and reunification among those dispersed by war are essential

“A foundling found in the territory of a Contracting State shall, in the absence of proof to the contrary, be considered to have been born within that territory of parents possessing the nationality of that State.”

(Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961), Article 2)

“Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason.”

(Additional Protocol I (1977), Article 77(1). See also Additional Protocol II (1977) Article 4(3))

¹³ United Nations General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2000), A/RES/54/263, Article 6(A). See also similar language in: United Nations General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2001), A/RES/54/263, Article 9(3).

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, 30 August 1961, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 989, p. 175, Article 2.

¹⁵ See Common Article 2 to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II, Article 1 for definitions of international and non-international armed conflict.

¹⁶ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Articles 23, 24, 38, 50, 76, 89; Additional Protocol I (1977), Article 70(1).

¹⁷ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Article 27(1); Additional Protocol I (1977), Article 78.

obligations.¹⁸ For conflict-affected UASC, these legal principles and obligations underpin family tracing and reunification programming. For example, in international armed conflict:

“The High Contracting Parties and the Parties to the conflict shall facilitate in every possible way the reunion of families dispersed as a result of armed conflicts and shall encourage in particular the work of the humanitarian organizations engaged in this task.”

(Additional Protocol I (1977), Article 74)

Meanwhile, in non-international conflict, family unity is a fundamental guarantee:

“Children shall be provided with the care and aid they require, and in particular:

(b) all appropriate steps shall be taken to facilitate the reunion of families temporarily separated....”

(Additional Protocol II (1977), Article 4(3)(b))

Contact between family members¹⁹ and the provision of information on missing persons are also important related aspects of international humanitarian law for UASC, including through documentation of UASC and missing children, and subsequent family tracing.

1.1.3 International refugee law

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol²⁰ extend specific protections to refugees, who are defined as those who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him or herself to the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear is unwilling to return to it. (1951 Convention, Article 1A). The Convention makes specific provision for unaccompanied and separated refugee children, including by making recommendations to State parties on the **protection of family unity** and protection of unaccompanied refugee children with special reference to guardianship and adoption (Recommendation B).

Moreover, the principle of **non-refoulement** prohibits the expulsion of refugees, meaning that UASC who cross international borders must be given access to territory and must not be forcibly returned to their country of origin. This is a particularly important consideration for UASC in relation to cross-border tracing and reunification (for example, when positive tracing reveals that a child’s parents are in the country of origin) (*see Chapter 11.2.9*).

“No Contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

(Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), Article 33)

¹⁸ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Article 26.

¹⁹ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Article 25(1).

²⁰ UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137; UN General Assembly, Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 606, p. 267.

1.1.4 Additional bodies of international, regional, national and soft law

Depending upon the context, additional bodies of international, national, regional or soft law may also be applicable. For example, the Hague Conference on Private International Law includes conventions that set important standards for lawful intercountry adoption and accountability measures for abduction of children.²¹



“An adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the State of origin...

- a. have determined, after possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin have been given due consideration, that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests;
- b. have ensured that
 1. the persons, institutions and authorities whose consent is necessary for adoption, have been counselled as may be necessary and duly informed of the effects of their consent...
- c. have ensured, having regard to the age and degree of maturity of the child, that
 1. he or she has been counselled and duly informed of the effects of the adoption and of his or her consent to the adoption, where such consent is required,
 2. consideration has been given to the child's wishes and opinions...”

(The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention), Article 4)

Regional legal frameworks vary in relevance to unaccompanied and separated children. **Those working with such children should understand the regional legal framework applicable in their context.** For example, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child specifically references the rights of separated children to “special protection and assistance,” alternative care, family tracing and reunification:

“2. States Parties to the present Charter:

(a) shall ensure that a child who is parentless, or who is temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment... shall be provided with alternative family care...

(b) shall take all necessary measures to trace and re-unite children with parents or relatives where separation is caused by internal and external displacement arising from armed conflicts or natural disasters.”

(African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Article 25)

²¹ For example, see: The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention), Articles 4, 5; Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, Articles 3, 7, 10.

In all contexts, those working with unaccompanied and separated children should be aware of and make reference to the national legal framework in their specific context. While each context is unique, national legislation of relevance to UASC is most often found in family codes, policies and constitutions. For example, the Constitution of Colombia includes the right of children “to have a family and not be separated from it.”²²

International law does not specifically address the plight of **internally displaced persons**, but this does not mean that they are not protected under the law. In fact, the following three bodies of law provide a comprehensive legal framework for protection in all situations of internal displacement, including during armed conflict: international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law.

While not binding, the ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement’²³ represents an important soft law contribution to the normative framework applicable to unaccompanied and separated children in emergencies. Indeed, it explicitly acknowledges the needs of internally displaced UASC, including protection and assistance (Principle 4(2)), knowing the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives (Principle 16(1)), and respect for family life (Principle 17(1)) as well as reunification:

“Families which are separated by displacement should be reunited as quickly as possible. All appropriate steps shall be taken to expedite the reunion of such families, particularly when children are involved. The responsible authorities shall facilitate inquiries made by family members and encourage and cooperate with the work of humanitarian organizations engaged in the task of family reunification.”

(Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 1998, Principle 17(3))

Although the Kampala Convention is a regional treaty, it is notably the only legally binding convention on the rights of internally displaced persons, including of UASC, to special protection and assistance. It also specifically obligates parties to establish “specialized mechanisms, to trace and reunify families separated during displacement and otherwise facilitate the re-establishment of family ties.”²⁴

²² Republic of Colombia, Constitution, 1991, Article 44.

²³ United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39, Addendum ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,’ E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2 (1998), noted in Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/50.

²⁴ African Union, African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), 22 October 2009, Article 9(2)(c), 9(2)(h).

TABLE 1
LEGAL PRINCIPLES AND SOURCES RELATING TO UASC

Principle	Source
Best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all actions concerning children	Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 3
Right to a name, legal identity and birth registration	CRC, Articles 7, 8 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1954), Articles 2, 4
Right to family life and unity, to not be separated from his/her parents, and to humane family reunification	CRC, Articles 9, 10, 16 Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Articles 26, 27(1), 49(3) Additional Protocol I (1977), Article 47 Additional Protocol II (1977), Article 4(3)(b) Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), Recommendation B African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Articles 19, 25 Kampala Convention, Article 9
Protection from illicit transfer abroad	CRC, Article 11 Hague Conference on International Law, Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, Article 3
Right to legal and physical protection from abuse and exploitation	CRC, Articles 19, 34, 35, 36
Right to special protection and alternative care	CRC, Articles 20, 25 American Convention on Human Rights, Article 19 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 25
Right to adequate safeguards and adherence to a child's best interests in the case of adoption	CRC, Article 21 The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, Article 4, 5
Entitlement to special respect and protection in armed conflict, including care for separated children	CRC, Article 38 Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 23, 24, 38, 50, 76, 89 Additional Protocol I, Articles 70(1), 77(1) Additional Protocol II, Article 4(3) African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 22

★ *See Tool 1: Key international instruments and guidelines relating to UASC*

★ *See Tool 2: Understanding the legal framework in your context*



1.2 Organizational mandates related to UASC

1.2.1 Legal mandates

While a wide range of actors and organizations undertake vital and valuable UASC-related work, several key organizations derive their specific mandates from the above legal framework. These mandates, in turn, impact the way in which UASC programmes and coordination are carried out, when and by whom (see Chapter 4).

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

'Restoring Family Links' (RFL) is a generic term used to describe various activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement aimed at preventing separation, restoring and maintaining contact between family members separated by armed conflict, other situations of violence, natural and human-induced disasters and migration, and clarifying the fate of persons reported unaccounted for. These activities include organizing the exchange of family news; tracing individuals; registering and following up on children and adults to prevent their disappearance and to enable families to be informed of their whereabouts; reuniting and repatriating families; forwarding official documents (birth certificates, etc.) and issuing ICRC travel documents; providing families with missing relatives with material, legal, psychosocial and psychological support; supporting authorities and promoting the establishment of mechanisms to clarify the fate of persons unaccounted for; and undertaking forensic management and the identification of human remains. Restoring Family Links may take various forms depending on the situation and context. The Movement's principal strength lies in its worldwide Family Links Network, which includes the ICRC Central Tracing Agency, and the RFL services of 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and 80 ICRC delegations that can apply the same principles and working methods. The ICRC, through the Central Tracing Agency, has the lead role within the Movement on Restoring Family Links: It coordinates and strengthens the capacity of RFL services of the

National Societies and the ICRC delegations in the field and provides consistency within the Family Links Network through guidelines and methodological tools. In addition, the Central Tracing Agency has been recognized by States as a technical adviser on RFL to National Societies and governments.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols provide the legal basis for all the RFL activities of the National Societies and the ICRC: “All persons (...) shall be enabled to give news of a strictly personal nature to members of their families, wherever they may be, and to receive news from them.”²⁵ This legal basis as well as the roles of each component of the Movement with regard to RFL, have been further defined in the Movement’s statutes, the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent resolutions, the Council of Delegates of the Red Cross/Red Crescent resolutions, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent’s statutory meetings, and the policy frameworks of the ICRC, National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The RFL Strategy 2008-2018 states that “Whenever people are separated from, or without news of, their loved ones as a result of armed conflict, other situations of violence, natural disaster or other situations requiring a humanitarian response (including migration), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement responds efficiently and effectively by mobilizing its resources to restore family links.”²⁶

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on 14 December 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly.

Refugees

UNHCR has been entrusted with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with governments, to seek permanent solutions for the problem of refugees. Paragraph 8(a) of the UNHCR statute and the preamble to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees confer responsibility upon UNHCR to supervise the application of international conventions for the protection of refugees. Asylum-seekers also fall within the High Commissioner’s competence *ratione personae*.

The refugee mandate also applies both within and outside camp settings. In fact, the High Commissioner has a mandate with respect to refugees globally, regardless of their location.²⁷ The activities that the High Commissioner is required to carry out for refugees are set out both in the Statute (in particular, paragraphs 1, 8, 9 and 10) and in subsequent resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and the UN Economic and Social Council. The High Commissioner is primarily mandated to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance and to seek permanent solutions for persons within the

²⁵ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Article 25.

²⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross, Restoring Family Links Strategy (2008-2018), February 2009, p. 15.

²⁷ For more information, see the ‘Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and his Office’, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013, <www.refworld.org/pdfid/5268c9474.pdf>, accessed 6 January 2016.

Office's core mandated responsibilities. In performing these functions, UNHCR collaborates in the development of partnerships with other international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), promoting and facilitating coordination to enhance the welfare of refugees.

Statelessness

Through a series of resolutions beginning in 1994, the UN General Assembly gave UNHCR the formal mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness around the world, as well as to protect the rights of stateless people. Twenty years earlier, the General Assembly had asked UNHCR to provide assistance to individuals under the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

UNHCR's governing Executive Committee provided guidance on how to implement this mandate in a 'Conclusion on the Identification, Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and the Protection of Stateless Persons', issued in 2006. This requires the agency to work with governments, other UN agencies and civil society to address the problem.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

UNHCR does not have a general or exclusive mandate for internally displaced people, but has been authorized by the UN General Assembly to be involved operationally under certain circumstances in enhancing protection and providing humanitarian assistance to such persons through special operations. Since its founding, UNHCR has supported States in fulfilling their responsibility to protect child asylum-seekers, refugees and other children of concern within their territories.

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol set standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults.

Protection of refugee children

UNHCR delivers protection to children within its purview by responding to their specific needs and 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.

Globally, children constituted 51 per cent of the refugee population in 2014.²⁸ The primary responsibility for the protection of children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child lies with States. National child protection systems have proved to be the most effective and sustainable way – even in emergency settings – to prevent and address the multiple protection risks that children face, and to ensure access to quality services.

²⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *World at War: UNHCR global trends, forced displacement in 2014*, UNHCR, 2015, p 3.

Children's Rights

Children's rights are enshrined in international law, including in the CRC, and are at the heart of UNHCR's protection mandate. **The aim of UNHCR in relation to UASC is to prevent separations, to identify children who have become separated from their families, to ensure that such children receive the protection and assistance they need, and to reunite them with their families.**

In 2007, the Conclusion on Children at Risk was adopted by the UNHCR's Executive Committee (Executive Committee Conclusion No. 107). It provides operational guidance for States, UNHCR and other relevant agencies and partners on the protection of children affected by displacement and statelessness at heightened risk. Executive Committee Conclusion No. 107 is the foundation of UNHCR's 2012 Framework for the Protection of Children and reflects international best practices.

In 2008, UNHCR released *Guidelines for Determining the Best Interests of the Child*. All actions concerning children shall be guided by the principle of the best interests of the child. The principle applies to all children – including refugee, internally displaced, stateless and asylum-seeking children. Every day, UNHCR and partner staff encounter situations where decisions for individual children need to be guided by the best interests principle. To help UNHCR and partner agencies operationalize the principle in their everyday work, the agency developed a formal process for determining children's best interests. The 2008 guidelines remain the authoritative guide, while the 2011 field handbook on implementing the guidelines is a complementary resource that offers additional advice on how to carry out the best interests determination process in practice for UASC and other children at risk.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. Indeed, the CRC provides the guiding principles for UNICEF's support to unaccompanied and separated children, including, in particular, articles 3(1), 7(1), 8(1), 9(1), 20(1) and 22(1).

The Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF's central policy to uphold the rights of children affected by humanitarian crisis, also provide a framework for humanitarian action. Regarding unaccompanied and separated children, Core Commitment 4 stipulates that the separation of children from families must be prevented and addressed, and family-based care is promoted. The benchmark for this Commitment is for all UASC to be identified and in family-based care or an appropriate alternative.

UNICEF's strategy on UASC is to strengthen capacities and preparedness to respond to the separation of children, particularly in large-scale sudden onset

natural disasters, which lead to extensive family separation. Together with governments and UN and NGO partners, UNICEF actively works to prevent the risk of family separation through emergency preparedness and response by supporting vulnerable families with access to basic relief supplies and services; limiting and restricting the use of residential care unless absolutely necessary; ensuring that medical evacuation of children is undertaken in such a way as to support family reunification; raising awareness among communities about the risks of family separation and the importance of preventive mechanisms; and pre-positioning standard family tracing and reunification kits in strategic hubs to expedite response in sudden onset emergencies.

In emergencies, UNICEF coordinates with UN partners and humanitarian agencies to make its unique facilities for rapid response available to relieve the suffering of children and those who provide their care. For UASC, this means working to reunite separated children with their parents, relatives or caregivers as quickly as possible, in coordination with government authorities and communities, and to also provide services for interim care in a manner consistent with the aim of family reunification and children's overall protection and well-being.

UNICEF's work to ensure the protection and well-being of UASC includes operational and technical support and guidance, including participation in the development, dissemination and use of the *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, the Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit*, and this field handbook. It also includes use of the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System and the Child Protection Information Management System Plus within Primero²⁹ to support effective case management of vulnerable children, including those who are unaccompanied or separated.

Additionally, the global Child Protection Working Group (CP AoR), which UNICEF leads, significantly strengthens child protection coordination and field capacity to protect and reunite UASC as quickly as possible in emergencies. The Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC) operates under the umbrella of the CP AoR, further strengthening policy, practice and tools related to UASC as well as coordination.

1.2.2 Other organizational missions

Additionally, it is important to recognize that a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies working with UASC have missions 'derived from' international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, most particularly child rights.

²⁹ Primero is the acronym for 'Protection-related Information Management for Emergency Response Operations'.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

This intergovernmental organization acts to help meet the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and work towards effective respect for the human rights and well-being of migrants. Specific attention needs to be given to vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied and separated children. The IOM acts with its partners in the international community to uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants, which has been a concept present in IOM constituent documents since its inception. The IOM acknowledges the principle that States bear the primary responsibility to protect and assist crisis-affected persons residing in their territory, and where appropriate their nationals abroad, in accordance with international and national law, including international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. As part of the crisis-affected population, the IOM strives to protect and assist unaccompanied and separated children. Among other organizations, IOM acts in coordination with UNHCR and the ICRC for cross-border tracing, return and reintegration, including family assessments; implements international humanitarian evacuations and emergency transfers in cases of UASC stranded in both armed conflict and disasters; prevents and responds to child trafficking cases; and as global cluster lead on camp management and camp coordination in natural disasters, integrates UASC protection considerations in these activities.



Tool 1: Key international instruments and guidelines relating to UASC

Tool 2: Understanding the legal framework in your context

Hague Conference on Private International Law, [International Protection of Children, Family and Property Relations Section](#).

Henckaerts, Jean-Marie and Louise Doswald-Beck, [Customary International Humanitarian Law. Volume I: Rules](#), International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005, Rules 105, 131, and 135.

International Committee of the Red Cross, [Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War \(Fourth Geneva Convention\)](#), 12 August 1949, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 75, p. 287.

International Committee of the Red Cross, [Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol I\)](#), 8 June 1977, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1125, p. 3.

International Committee of the Red Cross, [Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol II\)](#), 8 June 1977, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1125, p. 609.

International Organization for Migration, [International Migration Law Information Note, The Protection of Unaccompanied Migrant Children](#), 2011.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Refugee Protection: A guide to international refugee law](#), 2001.

Organization of African Unity, [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#), 11 July 1990, CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990).

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin](#), 2005, CRC/GC/2005/6.

United Nations General Assembly, [Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#), 30 August 1961, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 989, p. 175.

United Nations General Assembly, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3.

United Nations General Assembly, [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137.

United Nations General Assembly, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography](#), 2001, A/RES/54/263.

United Nations General Assembly, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict](#), 2000, A/RES/54/263.



Chapter 2 provides background on family separation. It looks at the causes of separation in emergencies and non-emergency related separation and mixed migratory flows, which may converge with or exist alongside emergency-related separation. The chapter also examines children's vulnerability to and the impact of family separation, including the specific risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in emergencies as well as child protection responses to those needs.



02

Characterizing family separation in emergencies

TOPICS

2.1 Understanding family separation

2.1.1 Causes of separation in emergencies

2.1.2 Non-emergency related separation & mixed migratory flows
Children on the move

Children living apart from their parents before the emergency

2.2 Vulnerability to and impact of family separation

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Family separations are likely to occur in any emergency, whatever the cause and nature of the emergency, but the scale and scope of separation will vary.
- Understanding the causes of separation in different contexts can help to ensure better preparedness, more relevant prevention measures and a more accurate response.
- Separations can be accidental or ‘deliberate’.
- Separations, including those linked to the emergency humanitarian response, can be prevented.
- Separation may be pre-existing – pre-dating the onset of the emergency. ‘Primary’ separations occur during or immediately after the emergency, usually as a consequence of the event itself. And a ‘secondary’ separation occurs after the emergency.
- Unaccompanied and separated children who are ‘emergency-related’ can exist side by side with other UASC. Unaccompanied and separated children in mixed migratory flows can be both the consequence of pre-existing separation and of new separations. Close coordination between humanitarian and national actors is important to ensure awareness of trends and possible secondary movement of UASC.
- Unaccompanied and separated children have specific needs and vulnerabilities. Separation from parents or previous carers in an emergency places children at increased risk of a number of threats and, in some cases, can result in permanent separation. Unaccompanied and separated children may be deliberately targeted, since they are usually less likely to report perpetrators.



KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Urgent prevention and response measures must be taken to protect children where these dangers are apparent or have potential to occur, particularly in chaotic environments after natural disasters or quick onset emergencies.

02

Characterizing family separation in emergencies

2.1 Understanding family separation

Children are at risk of becoming separated from their families or usual caregivers as a result of any emergency situation. However, the number of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as the geographic scope of the problem, will greatly depend on the following factors:

- **Different types of emergencies and contexts** – whether armed conflict, natural disaster or political unrest – can create significant population movements over extensive areas, including across international borders, and may result in large numbers of UASC. Other disasters on a smaller scale and locally contained, such as the explosion of ammunition stockpiles in the Congo in 2012, can also result in family separation. In addition, where the general infrastructure is of a high standard, the impact of the emergency itself is likely to be less devastating.
- **Population movements** that are foreseen, planned and orderly can minimize the scale of family separation. Those able to move in a more organized fashion may include, for example, those in urban areas with access to transport, the Internet and mobile phones, all of which facilitate organization, information-sharing, communication and reunification within families.
- **The humanitarian response** can have both a positive and negative impact on the numbers of UASC – that is, how much preparedness was possible, whether there were difficulties in accessing the affected population and the degree to which the overall response supported family unity.

★ [See Chapter 5.1.1, Table 2. Characteristics of separation in emergencies](#)

2.1.1 Causes of separation in emergencies

Prevention and response efforts require different methods and approaches, depending on whether the separation is accidental or deliberate. It is therefore essential to understand the nature of separation.

Accidental separation is not planned or anticipated, and occurs against the will of the parent/caregiver and child(ren). It generally occurs when communities are under attack or forced to flee from danger.

Causes of accidental separation include:

- Family members are split up during the chaos of flight; children, especially those with disabilities, may be unable to keep up during population movements.
- Family members are in different locations (such as school, work) when the event strikes and are unable to find one another.
- Family members are injured, killed, captured, kidnapped, abducted, arrested or detained.
- Children are abducted for ransom, trafficking, recruitment into armed forces or armed groups, or labour.

“It is important to recognize that separation can result from a variety of causes. Children can accidentally become separated during flight to safety, during an attack or during a population movement. They may have been entrusted by a parent to someone else, separated during provision of health services to themselves or their caregiver, picked up by another family or aid worker after having been left by a parent looking for survival resources, abandoned, abducted or orphaned. They may also have run away. The basic assumption, until tracing efforts demonstrate otherwise, should be that a child has someone with whom he or she can be reunited. Absolutely avoid referring to these children as 'orphans'.”

(Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 117)

- Children become separated in transit sites or refugee/internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or sites (for example, after searching for firewood or during distribution of food or humanitarian aid).

'Deliberate' separation occurs when parents, caregivers or children themselves make a conscious decision to separate, whether during ('primary separation') or after the emergency ('secondary separation'). 'Deliberate' separations do not always have a negative impact on children (for example, children can be placed in a more beneficial situation), but they can increase children's vulnerability in some circumstances. 'Deliberate' separation does not imply the separation is intended to be prolonged or permanent. However, this can occur even where it was not the original intent.

Causes of deliberate separation include:

- Families under stress (by poverty, for example, or death/disability of parents) send their children far away from insecurity or give up their children – to residential care, for instance. These may be deliberate decisions, often taken alone by parents, to separate in order to increase the child's chances of survival.
- When schools or other services shut down because of conflict, or are otherwise inaccessible, children may leave their families to move to areas where education and services are available.
- Children with disabilities are given up by families (to residential care, for example) or are left behind in flight.
- Families temporarily hand responsibility for children to others (such as a neighbour).
- Children are left behind by their foster carers (for example, during repatriation).
- Children leave their family/foster carer, with or without family/foster carer's consent (for example, following abuse, poor care or exploitation).
- Children volunteer to join armed forces or armed groups, often due to economic necessity or perceived injustice/identity concerns.
- Border-control measures that favour separation by allowing children but not adults to cross encourage families to send children ahead to request reunification in order to legally access the territory themselves.
- Coping mechanisms, such as economic migration by either child or parents to earn income, and inability to access or the collapse of informal social welfare services, extended family structures and community-level child protection systems can also create separation or place children at increased risk of separation.

Aid-induced separation results from the humanitarian response itself. In some emergencies, media coverage of 'orphaned' children can generate pressure to identify quick and visible solutions, such as residential care or adoption, and may cause separations. It is important to raise awareness among media and donors of the risks of inappropriate actions.

Causes of aid-induced separation include:

- Poorly organized evacuations³⁰ or population relocation movements that do not follow protocols and guidelines – for example, moving children who appear to be alone without adequately investigating their circumstances or keeping records.
 - Medical treatment, health care or therapeutic feeding programmes that do not take account of the need to *either* keep families together *or* ensure contact can be maintained during/following the intervention.
 - Provision/promotion of residential care, particularly where this is seen to provide benefits not available to other children in the same community or area.
 - Children admitted to residential care by police, non-governmental organizations or health authorities without proper record-keeping.
 - Adoptions that do not follow guiding principles or comply with legislation.
 - Targeting criteria for food/shelter/non-food item aid that does not keep families together – that is, aid that targets UASC by encouraging 'false claims' of separation.
 - Disorderly distribution of humanitarian assistance, including poor crowd control.
- ★ [See Chapter 3.1.3, Preventing aid-induced separation, and the Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC](#)

All these forms of separation may be **pre-existing** – pre-dating the onset of the emergency; **primary** – occurring during or immediately after the emergency, usually as a consequence of the event itself; or **secondary**³¹ – occurring after the emergency and often as a consequence of deteriorating livelihoods and the reduced capacity of families to provide care to children. Accidental separation tends to be primary, while deliberate separation tends to be pre-existing or secondary.

2.1.2 Non-emergency related separation & mixed migratory flows

It is important to be aware that 'emergency-related' UASC can exist side by side with other UASC, including children on the move (such as migrant children in mixed migratory flows) and those children who were separated prior to the emergency. Their needs should also be taken into consideration within the humanitarian response, since targeting should be based on clearly defined vulnerability criteria rather than reasons for separation.

³⁰ For guidelines relating to evacuation, see: International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, p. 24; Ressler, Everett M., *Evacuation of Children from Conflict Areas – Considerations and Guidelines*, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1992.

³¹ The International Committee of the Red Cross generally uses the term 'secondary separation' in relation to agency-induced separation.

Children on the move

Communities, families and children, including UASC, who are fleeing conflict or disasters, often use the same routes as those who are moving in search of better economic opportunities, safety from abuse, or cultural practices.³² Humanitarian actors are therefore more and more likely to operate in situations with pre-existing migration patterns, either at the point of departure, in transit countries or at an end destination. In some cases, a pre-existing response to children on the move exists. For example, some of the UASC among migrant workers caught in the 2011 Libyan conflict fled to refugee camps in Tunisia,³³ while others arrived in Italy.

The numbers of UASC among mixed migratory flows is very hard to quantify, and their status is likely to change over time. Some children who begin their migration with family or community members may become separated along the way; in the same manner, their migratory status might evolve from migrant to asylum-seeker. Regardless of their status, children have a right to protection throughout their journey to their final destination.

It is equally important to note that, in emergency situations, **UASC in mixed migratory flows can be both the consequence of pre-existing separation and of new separations.** This dynamic, for example, has been seen among the high numbers of Syrian UASC smuggled across the Mediterranean to Europe. Some children were separated, for example, in Lebanon or Jordan, before joining the mixed migratory flow and opted to take such a path; others initially fled the Syrian emergency with their parents, but became separated when families chose to send them along mixed migratory flows in search of better opportunities. Thus, **close coordination between humanitarian and national actors, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), is important to ensure awareness of trends and possible secondary movement of UASC,** including information campaigns in communities on the risks of smuggling.

Detailed information on working with children on the move is beyond the scope of this field handbook. However, in situations where UASC who have separated from families and caregivers due to an emergency exist side-by-side with UASC moving with mixed migratory flows, **response programmes need to consider both groups of children** and ensure that emergency programmes complement existing work with children on the move.³⁴

³² Global Movement for Children, *Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move*, <www.gmfc.org/en/action-within-the-movement/gmc-actions/actions-by-imperatives/other-campaigns-a-actions/current-actions/90>, accessed 7 January 2016.

³³ Altes, M. K., *Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Ras Ajdir in Tunisia*, Draft internal report developed by UNICEF and child protection in emergency (CPiE) partners in Tunisia, 2011.

³⁴ The Praesidium Project, a joint effort of the Italian Ministry of Interior, Italian Red Cross, IOM, UNHCR, and Save the Children, enhances the humanitarian reception and assistance of irregular migrants arriving in southern Italy by sea. It is an example of programmes designed to address mixed migratory flows, including UASC and children on the move.

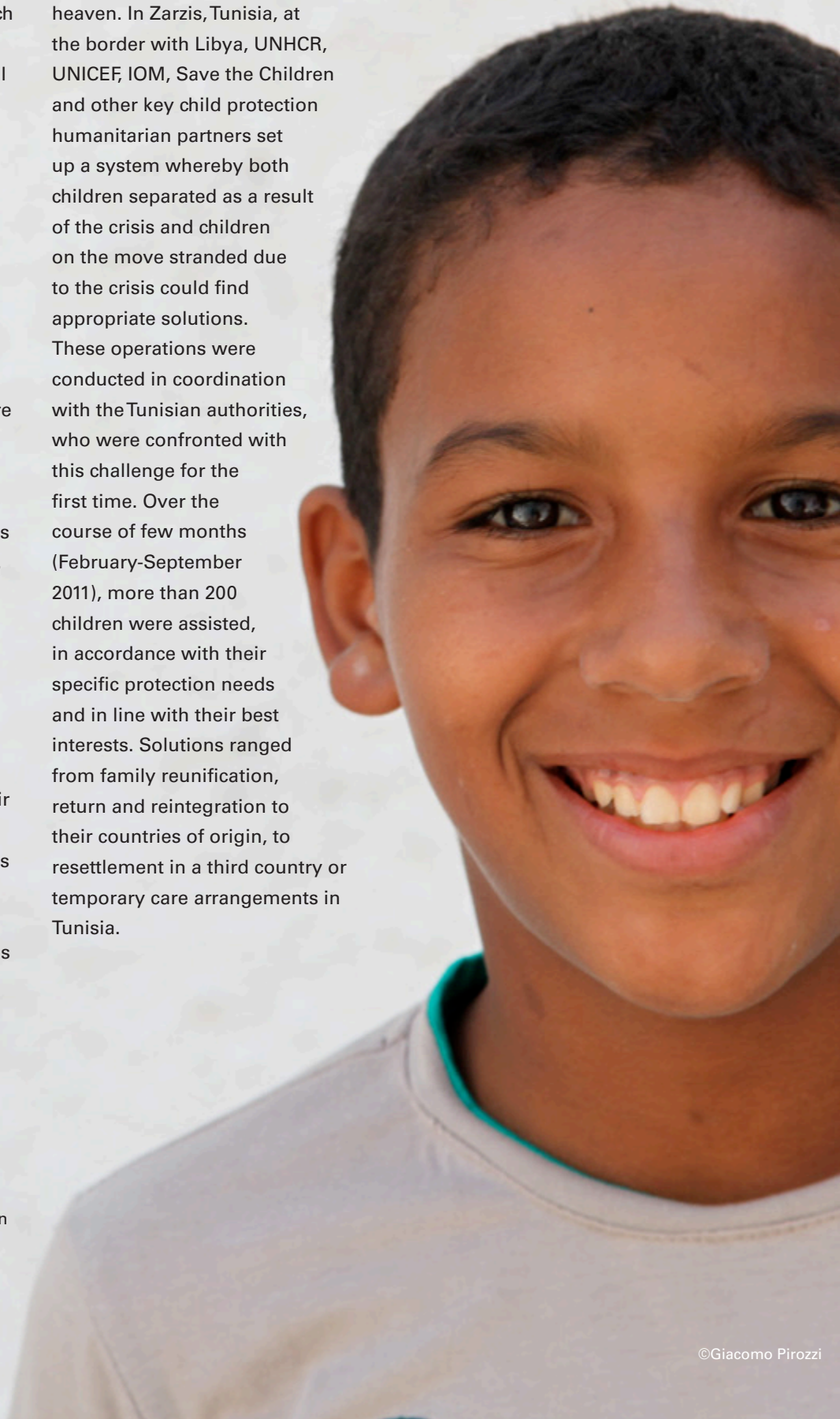
Libya: Mixed migratory flows and UASC

In February 2011, Libya witnessed an unprecedented civil unrest against the Gadhafi regime, which led to internal violence and the creation of a National Transitional Council comprised of rebels hostile to the Gadhafi regime. A political and social confrontation between the Gadhafi regime and the Transitional Council brought diffused violence across the country with serious security threats for both civilians in Libya as well as foreign migrant workers residing in the country. According to IOM statistics before the crisis, approximately 2.5 million foreign migrants were residing both irregularly and regularly in Libya, working across different sectors of the economy.

By February 2011, many of these migrants, mostly from Asia and Africa, together with Libyan nationals, were under physical and psychological threat and demanded urgent evacuation. At that time, many left Libya on their own and found refuge in Tunisia and Egypt. These massive arrivals in Tunisia were mixed migratory flows: stranded migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and other mobile

vulnerable groups were fleeing all at once in search of a safe heaven. In Zarzis, Tunisia, at the border with Libya, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, Save the Children and other key child protection humanitarian partners set up a system whereby both children separated as a result of the crisis and children on the move stranded due to the crisis could find appropriate solutions. These operations were conducted in coordination with the Tunisian authorities, who were confronted with this challenge for the first time. Over the course of few months (February-September 2011), more than 200 children were assisted, in accordance with their specific protection needs and in line with their best interests. Solutions ranged from family reunification, return and reintegration to their countries of origin, to resettlement in a third country or temporary care arrangements in Tunisia.

(Communicated by an IOM protection policy officer, 2015)



Key considerations for dealing with UASC and mixed migratory flows:

- Ensure that all humanitarian actors are aware of pre-emergency migratory patterns for children.
- Ensure that all humanitarian actors are aware of the additional risk factor that mixed migratory flows can include emergency-induced UASC.
- Ensure that all humanitarian actors are aware of national referral mechanisms for UASC in mixed migratory flows, including for rejected asylum-seekers, non-refoulement and detained children.

As part of the humanitarian response, support systems-strengthening efforts that seek to protect all vulnerable children, including UASC, *regardless* of the reasons for separation (see *Chapter 3.1.3*).

Children living apart from their parents before the emergency

Organizations responding to the needs of UASC in emergencies need to be aware of pre-existing separation issues for children in the affected population and include such children in their programmes if they are considered to be among the most vulnerable and/or require family tracing. Indeed, emergency-induced population movement could result in such families and children losing touch. In addition, pre-existing separation practices may increase as a result of the emergency, while at the same time the normal protective factors that apply in the community may decrease, exacerbating the overall scale of separation.

Children in many countries are sent away or live apart from their families on a long-term basis, whether to 'children's homes' or facilities for those with disabilities. Often, this is for reasons considered beneficial within the culture – it is part of tradition and can allow access to opportunities such as education and, in some instances, improved protection; it can also strengthen family bonds and affirm familial obligations where extended families or clans provide care. It is important to note that although living apart from their parents, children being hosted in this way by extended family members or friends who have specific obligations for their care, or sent to boarding schools, would not be considered 'separated'; this is because the separation is carried out by choice, the children are in touch with their caregivers, and the environment is protective. However, in situations such as natural disasters, these children might lose this protective environment, contact with their parents or be separated from their customary caregivers. In that case they would be considered separated.

Given the spectrum of living arrangements in which children are not living with their parents, it is essential that programmes focus on the appropriateness of care and vulnerability in order to target children in need of support. Vulnerability criteria should be developed in collaboration with those local organizations with a good understanding of the local situation and child protection issues before the emergency.

2.2 Vulnerability to and impact of family separation³⁵

Any child can become separated from his or her family in emergencies, but certain factors, in addition to the emergency itself, may increase the vulnerability of some children to separation. These factors may be related to external causes (such as displacement, migration or extreme poverty) or they may relate to the child and his/her family (for example, children with disabilities or chronic disease, children cared for by adults with disabilities or chronic disease, and children living in single-carer households or outside family care) (see Chapter 5.1).

Separation from family members in an emergency is a highly distressing event that can have a negative impact on child development. For example, children may become fearful, depressed and angry or regress to an earlier stage of development.³⁶ Research shows that loneliness, depression and isolation can affect unaccompanied asylum-seeking children for many years.³⁷ For young children, an attachment figure is essential for their sense of agency, safety and well-being, and gives a sense of security in the midst of chaos; indeed, such attachment forms the basis of social and emotional health for life. The emotional impact and the effect on their development will depend on an individual child's age, developmental stage, resilience and circumstances, and length of separation. Additionally, children affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence may have been a victim of, a witness to, or forced to participate in acts of violence.

In some cases, the emergency context can provide opportunities to improve the lives of children who were separated and living in abusive situations prior to the emergency. However, **experience shows that in emergencies, children who are separated from their families or previous caregivers may face greater risks to certain threats than other children in the affected population.** Moreover, very young children and others with special needs are especially dependent on adults or older children for their survival. It is important to understand and take preventive and responsive action towards these threats, which include:

- Abduction, trafficking, and illegal adoption
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Recruitment by armed forces and armed groups
- Physical violence, child marriage and child labour

³⁵ Responses to the specific needs of UASC are detailed in remaining chapters; for example, Chapter 8 through 12 cover identification, documentation, tracing, reunification and reintegration, and the Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes with particular relevance to unaccompanied and separated children.

³⁶ For a discussion of the effect of separation on evacuated children, see Ressler, 1992.

³⁷ Chase, Elaine, Abigail Knight, and June Statham, *The Emotional Well-being of Unaccompanied Young People Seeking Asylum in the UK*, British Association for Adoption and Fostering, 2008.

- Detention
- Lack of access to asylum procedures
- Disability from physical harm
- Permanent separation
- Homelessness
- Institutionalization
- Abuse and neglect
- Poverty, hunger and malnutrition
- Severe emotional/psychosocial distress, and chronic mental health problems
- Lack of appropriate developmental support
- Discrimination regarding or barriers to accessing basic support and services, including food, health care, psychosocial support and education
- Loss of identity.

★ [See Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response](#)

Such risks underscore the importance of identifying and tracing UASC and families as soon as possible after separation to minimize their exposure to such risks, since the likelihood of reunification decreases the longer a child is separated from his or her family. Indeed, UASC need to be identified (*see Chapter 8*) and documented (*see Chapter 9*), referred for family tracing and reunification services (*see Chapter 11 and 12*), and considered for other interventions, such as psychosocial support or support to access health care. Children separated from family or previous caregivers also need to be ensured appropriate – and monitored – alternative care while family tracing is carried out. Over the longer term, such care must continue to be available for those children who cannot be reunited or for whom reunification is not in their best interests (*see Chapter 10*). Systematic case management is key for effective protection and care of these children, as are strong referral and coordination systems among service providers (*see Chapter 7*).

Regardless of their separation status, UASC have similar needs to all children affected by emergencies. However, lacking the support of parents or previous carers, UASC may have to rely on others to ensure their needs are addressed, ideally from within their community and through services provided by the State where available, supported by humanitarian organizations. Despite the risks and hardships associated with separation, **it is important to recognize children’s resilience and seek to support their capacity to protect themselves rather than focusing only on their vulnerability**. Those children who make a deliberate decision to leave home during an emergency, perhaps fleeing abuse or neglect, or to access services or opportunities, may feel that their changed situation is an improvement. Consequently, they may need support to ensure that their current living situation is protective rather than help to return to their previous caregiver.

★ [See Section Two, UASC response: A detailed guide for implementation](#)

★ [See Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response](#)



Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response

Child Protection Working Group, [Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action](#), 2012.

Global Movement for Children, [Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move](#), 2010.


International Organization for Migration, [Unaccompanied Children on the Move](#), 2011.

International Organization for Migration, [Human Rights of Migrant Children](#), 2008.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), [General Comment No. 6 \(2005\): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin](#), CRC/GC/2005/6.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Manual on Human Rights Monitoring](#), 2011.

United Nations High Commissioner for [Refugees, Refugee Protection & Mixed Migration: A 10-Point Plan of Action](#), 2007.



Chapter 3 sets out ways in which child protection actors can prepare for emergencies and mitigate the risk of separation before, during and after an emergency. This includes strategic community-level and national-level prevention and preparedness activities, such as mapping and deploying staff to likely sites of separation and supporting comprehensive birth registration. It also addresses prevention of aid-induced separation, underscoring the importance of working with other sectors of the humanitarian response to prevent separations before they occur, including during humanitarian evacuations. The chapter also lays out key messages for child protection actors to use in information campaigns with children, parents/carers, communities and cross-sector partners in the humanitarian response, including how to prevent separation and what to do if an apparent unaccompanied or separated child is found. Finally, the chapter emphasizes the importance of undertaking project preparedness measures like stockpiling supplies, recruiting qualified staff and conducting trainings.

03

Mitigating risk of separation: Prevention and preparedness

TOPICS

3.1 Preventing and preparing for separation

3.1.1 Community-level prevention and preparedness

3.1.2 National-level prevention and preparedness
Birth registration

3.1.3 Preventing aid-induced separation
Humanitarian evacuation, including the evacuation of children

3.1.4 Messages on prevention of separation
Developing information campaigns

Key messages to children, parents and communities

Key messages to emergency actors in other sectors of the humanitarian response

3.2 Project preparedness


3.2.1 Supplies and stockpiling

3.2.2 Human resources

3.2.3 Training

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Emergency preparedness is always important in preventing family separation and preparing for an emergency response to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).
- The term ‘preparedness’ means *all* activities undertaken throughout the programme cycle to strengthen the ability of families and communities to care for vulnerable children and increase their resilience, and not just those actions undertaken before an emergency.
- With careful planning and quick intervention, it is possible to prevent children from being separated from their families, even in extreme emergencies.
- Reducing the vulnerability of children to separation involves taking measures at the community level, including conducting information campaigns and identifying and monitoring sites where potential family separation may occur, and deploying child protection staff to implement context-specific preventive actions.
- At the national level, prevention and preparedness involves supporting child protection systems and implementing or promoting birth registration for all children.
- One of the best ways to prevent separation is to ensure that the right information reaches the right people. Spreading key messages to children, parents, affected communities, authorities and other partners in the emergency response in advance of or in the early days of an emergency can have an important mitigating effect on separation.
- Child-friendly and culturally appropriate information campaigns should inform communities before and during transit how to prevent separation and who to notify if they lose a child. These can take a range of forms but should reach all community members, including children and those who cannot read.



KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Other humanitarian sectors are key partners in preventing separation. Their staff should be aware of which child protection organizations are responsible for UASC in particular contexts. They also need to know how to prevent separations in their work, what information to provide UASC or their families, and what to do in the event of finding an unaccompanied or separated child.
- Humanitarian organizations should first protect and assist in place. However, if humanitarian evacuation is unavoidable, they should preserve family unity as much as possible and only undertake evacuations under proper conditions to minimize the risk of separation.
- Critical actions for project preparedness include the identification of funding and resource requirements (human and material) for anticipated activities, pre-positioning family tracing and reunification kits, organizing supplies and transport, recruiting and training staff, preparing for rapid assessment and developing emergency preparedness and response plans.

03

Mitigating risk of separation: Prevention and preparedness

3.1 Preventing and preparing for separation

To protect family unity and ensure that UASC receive the special protection they need during emergencies, prevention and preparedness activities should be incorporated into all stages of the programme cycle, noting that disasters tend to have the biggest impact on those groups already vulnerable before the emergency, particularly the poorest and most marginalized. Prevention work should not be limited to the preparatory phase: In the immediate aftermath of an emergency or in protracted crises, there is ongoing risk of family separation. Even in extreme emergencies it is possible to prevent children from being separated from their families.

There are two interrelated approaches to consider when developing prevention and preparedness measures for UASC: disaster risk reduction³⁸ and strengthening child protection systems (see Chapter 6.1.1). While the former looks at reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards and lessened vulnerability, the latter entails strengthening government and community actors and processes to protect all children. In the context of child protection, disaster risk reduction should specifically include disaster-sensitive systems strengthening.

Therefore, prevention and preparedness for separation resulting from emergencies involves the identification and implementation of measures to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience to separation in emergencies at both the community and national levels.

³⁸ Disaster risk reduction is defined as “the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.” For further details, see the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), 2009.

Disaster risk reduction: Good practice principle ⁴⁰	Applying the principle to UASC
<p>Actions are based on a comprehensive multi-hazard, risk, vulnerability and capacity assessment of the particular risks faced by children, women, youths, the disabled, the elderly and single-headed households.</p>	<p>Analyse the risks of separation (including secondary separation after an emergency) to identify which children are most vulnerable to different types of separation and why (for example, adolescent girls who are sent to nearby towns to work as domestic servants to generate additional income when livelihoods are affected by drought or disaster).</p> <p>Analyse existing mechanisms for family members to find each other or stay in touch. (See Chapter 5.1)</p>
<p>Actions target the populations and areas most vulnerable to disaster risk with specific prevention and mitigation measures.</p>	<p>These actions should include preparedness and prevention measures at the community, district and national level. (See Chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.2)</p>
<p>Actions are multisectoral in nature, requiring different sectors to work together to reduce risks.</p>	<p>Work with education, nutrition and livelihoods partners to ensure that vulnerability to separation is considered and that prevention measures are included in these sectors (for example, considering prevention of separation in school evacuation procedures in case of attack; ensuring that livelihoods support targets families vulnerable to secondary separations; developing community support mechanism for families needing to leave mothers and children at nutritional facilities). (See Chapter 3.1.3 and Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC)</p>
<p>Actions address immediate and underlying causes of disaster risk, as per the Hyogo Framework for Action.⁴¹</p>	<p>Consider how to work with other sectors to address causes related to poverty, lack of information or communication mechanisms.</p>
<p>Actions are participatory and based on local knowledge of risks and input from communities.</p>	<p>Include vulnerable children and families, including pre-existing UASC, and ask questions about children who have left the community.</p>
<p>Actions focus on the explicit risks and vulnerabilities faced by children and families, and involve them in all levels of disaster risk reduction work.</p>	<p>Support children to identify, learn and promote behaviours that prevent or mitigate separation, such as teaching younger siblings names and phone numbers or developing family plans with their parents in case of conflict or disaster. (See Chapter 3.1.4)</p>
<p>Actions emphasize coordination and collaboration with key humanitarian and development partners, as well as national counterparts.</p>	<p>Identify roles and responsibilities for UASC in advance, and agree on procedures and coordination mechanisms. (See Chapter 4.2)</p>
<p>Actions focus on capacity development of communities and all levels of governments and institutions to ensure sustainability and scale-up.</p>	<p>Ensure that specific training is provided on what to do when an UASC is identified.</p>

[40] Adapted from United Nations Children's Fund, 'DRR [Disaster Risk Reduction] and Child Protection Technical Note', Draft internal document, 2011, p. 3.

[41] United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*, United Nations, 2007.

3.1.1 Community-level prevention and preparedness

Reducing vulnerability to separation at the community level can be a particular challenge where widespread poverty is an underlying factor and in the absence of a strong State and institutions, such as functioning social services, health and education systems. The child protection sector can play an important role in reducing vulnerability to separation through the following actions.

Community-level measures:

- **Form or strengthen community child protection committees and work with families and children** to build their capacity to:
 - Analyse risks of separation and strengthen resilience among communities.
 - Implement awareness-raising activities and teach children and parents skills to prevent separation. For example:
 - » Teach children the names of their parents/home village, etc., and what they should do if they become separated.
 - » Teach parents to talk to their children about what to do in case of flight and/or separation (that is, make family plans).
 - » Where relevant, talk to parents and children about technologies available to help in case of separation.
 - Identify, train and support community members for specific roles in the prevention of separation. This could include, for example, helping to support children who are particularly vulnerable, including those who are very young or sick, disabled, living outside family care or in child-headed households.
 - Discuss and plan for possible scenarios with communities, including movement or evacuation of children with disabilities. While it is important to be sensitive and not cause panic, people (including children) will feel more in control if they are prepared.
 - Prevent the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups.
- **Identify and monitor sites where potential family separation may occur** (for example, rest stops on flight routes, transport hubs, border crossings or distribution sites), deploy child protection staff to implement context-specific preventive actions as necessary.
- **Strategically establish/identify appropriate 'lost children's posts', child protection locations or 'focal points'** where anyone can come for information, UASC can be documented and decisions made about their care, and where information on missing children can be recorded. This could include Red Cross/Red Crescent local branches and volunteers working to restore family links. Ensure that staff are clearly identified and make it clear that these are not places where children can be cared for or left.
- **Conduct information campaigns to inform communities in transit how to prevent separation and who to notify if they lose a child** (see Chapter 3.1.4).
- Incorporate disaster risk reduction or prevention of separation **advocacy messages into school curricula**.
- **Identify existing residential care centres** and work with centre staff to ensure that children are only placed there as a last resort. In the event of an emergency, plan ways to keep the children safe and to facilitate their return to, or at least contact with, their families.

- Include local leadership in the planning, management and delivery of alternative care through capacity building and training.
- **Work with authorities and identify and support community networks to strengthen the capacity of child protection systems** at the local level (see Chapter 6.1.1).
- Work with communities and cross-sector partners to develop criteria and procedures to identify and **provide targeted support through social protection/livelihoods programmes to families vulnerable to separation**. Such support could include cash transfers. Ensuring that all households have equal access to basic relief supplies and other services can help prevent 'deliberate' separation (see Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC).

★ See Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures

3.1.2 National-level prevention and preparedness

Parallel to community-level prevention and preparedness measures, child protection actors should take national-level action. This includes supporting the development and strengthening of child protection systems (see Chapter 6.1.1) and implementing or promoting birth registration for all children, as well as the following specific actions.

National-level measures:


- Strategically design programmes and advocate with governments to **strengthen national child protection systems, legislation, policies and practices** (see Chapter 6.1.1 and Tool 4).
- Identify key national actors involved in alternative care and their current roles and activities. Ensure updated registration of all children in alternative care and systems for case tracking in the event of population movements, relocation or evacuation; support policy and guideline development on ways to keep children safe in emergencies and actions to take if UASC go missing.
- Strengthen or implement mechanisms for monitoring families at risk of separation and referral mechanisms.
- Strengthen or implement measures to prevent the separation of children with disabilities and to ensure that the needs of disabled UASC are addressed in emergencies. Ensure access of all children, including refugees, to the child protection system.
- Implement or strengthen projects to **increase rates of birth registration** (see below).
- Work with social welfare services to ensure that **quality case management systems** are in place, including monitoring and follow-up of children at risk (see Chapter 7.2.1).

- Strengthen coordination between relevant child protection actors and social services, and agree on ways of working to prevent and respond to separation in case of an emergency.
- Negotiate access to affected communities and all children's residential care facilities.
- Cooperate with relevant embassies/consulates to prevent illegal or inappropriate movement of UASC out of the country.

Birth registration

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴¹ recognizes children's right to a legal name and identity. Yet millions of children around the world continue to go unregistered. The vast majority of unregistered children are born in less developed countries, where only half of children under 5 years of age have their births registered. Indeed, countries dealing with armed conflict make up the majority of countries with the lowest birth registration rates.⁴²

Universal birth registration, increasingly a core programme objective in child protection work, is a critical element of disaster risk reduction and prevention of separation in areas prone to natural disasters or in countries affected by armed conflict, where lack of documentation has been a hindrance to accessing humanitarian assistance, repatriation, tracing and family reunification.⁴³ Even where physical birth certificates are not available, information stored on databases, where accessible, can be utilized for these activities.

 Despite increasing awareness and efforts to improve birth registration systems, many refugees, other displaced persons, and stateless persons often face significant barriers in this regard. Often these barriers, like restrictive government policies, bar refugee children and families from accessing birth registration. The problem is compounded by a general lack of capacity among local registrar offices to issue birth certificates for the population within their districts or in remote locations of refugee settlements. Additionally, complex procedures, which at times involve high fees, can also discourage families from seeking birth certificates. Advocacy directed to government partners, in particular national registrar offices, as well as innovative approaches using electronic registration of births, have contributed to facilitating the process to obtain birth certificates for refugee children.

Organizations working with UASC should advocate where necessary for implementation strategies to enable birth registration programmes to reach all boys and girls, including minorities, refugees and the internally displaced. This can include, for example, raising awareness through children's clubs or community leaders and supporting mobile registration to reach remote areas.

★ [See Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures](#)

⁴¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Articles 7 and 8.

⁴² United Nations Children's Fund, *Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse – Birth registration*, <www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58010.html>, accessed 10 January 2016.

⁴³ Plan International, *Count Every Child – The right to birth registration*, Plan International, 2009, p. 26.

3.1.3 Preventing aid-induced separation

The 'Do no harm' principle is essential to all work with UASC. **Child protection actors and others working in humanitarian response should be especially sensitive to the ways in which their own work may inadvertently cause family separation and take immediate preventive action.** For those working with UASC, this often means raising awareness among cross-sector partners of UASC and sector-specific ways to prevent separation (see Chapter 3.1. and the Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the needs and well-being of UASC*). Key actions include:

- **Develop context-specific prevention plans/measures** through the UASC coordination group, ensuring these build on and are linked to existing child protection systems and interventions (see Chapter 4.2.2).
- **Work with other sector partners bilaterally and through cluster coordination meetings to raise awareness of UASC**, determine how they can prevent separation and what actions to take if they find UASC (see Chapter 3.1.4 and the Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

★ [See Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures](#)

Humanitarian evacuation, including the evacuation of children

Humanitarian evacuations – whether to another location within the country or to another country – can take place in any emergency where there is an imminent threat to the safety of the affected population or to provide medical care for the sick or wounded.

Evacuations may be organized and carried out by a national government through its local authorities or military forces. Where the capacity of the national government is overwhelmed or does not exist, United Nations agencies and other international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM),⁴⁴ may also be involved in humanitarian evacuations and transfers in disasters and conflicts. In armed conflict situations, the International Committee of the Red Cross works with parties to ensure the safe evacuation or transfer of the 'wounded, sick and shipwrecked'.⁴⁵

A review by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF of past evacuations recognized the tension between the desire to protect children from danger and hardship at any cost and the potential for emotional harm to children separated during evacuation.⁴⁶ While each situation is unique and there is no single 'right' solution, **organizations should:**

⁴⁴ The International Organization for Migration is particularly involved when migrants are caught in a crisis situation and consular authorities are overwhelmed and in need of support.

⁴⁵ Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck, *Customary Study on International Humanitarian Law, Vol. 1: Rules*, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005, Rule 109.

⁴⁶ Ressler, Everett M., *Evacuation of Children from Conflict Areas – Considerations and Guidelines*, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1992.

1. **Protect and assist in place:** Prioritize provision of protection and help that enables families to meet their children's needs in place; identify those needs clearly and address them effectively, so that people are able to choose to remain where they are and to keep their families together.
2. **Preserve family unity:** If evacuation is unavoidable, the most effective way to reduce any harm to children is to evacuate them with parents or primary caregivers.
3. **Evacuate only under proper conditions:** This includes ensuring that the wishes of parents and children are considered, that evacuation is undertaken in safety, that the best interests of the child are assessed when making arrangements for the reception and care of children, and that help is given to ensure that further or permanent separation does not occur.

(Adapted from Ressler, Everett M., *Evacuation of Children from Conflict Areas – Considerations and guidelines*, UNICEF and UNHCR, pp. 29, 30)

Evacuating children without regard to 'proper conditions' risks creating permanent family separation. **When the evacuation of children is unavoidable and in their best interests, organizations should minimize the risk of further harm to children and should:**

- **Never be involved in involuntary evacuations.** Evacuation should be voluntary, unless people are under immediate threat or in need of urgent medical support.
- **Urgently implement prevention of family separation measures in mass evacuations** (see Chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.4).
- **Organize and implement evacuations as part of a coordinated plan of action.** A coordination structure incorporating those organizing the evacuation and those responsible for the care and reception of children should include communication between the starting point and destination.
- **Give families full information so that they can give informed consent.** This includes information about the evacuating agency to which they are entrusting their child(ren), the intended childcare arrangements and the risks and possible consequences of evacuation.
- **Whenever possible, evacuate children together with adult family members** to prevent secondary separation. Give parents support in arranging care for their remaining children if they wish to accompany an individual evacuated child (for example, for medical treatment where there is only one carer).
- **Only evacuate children without family members as a last resort and as a temporary measure,** after it has been carefully determined that protection/assistance cannot be provided in place and that family evacuation is not feasible. Plan such evacuations with a view to the earliest possible reunification and clearly explain to guardians/foster parents that, although the duration of separation may be long, the objective is family reunification.
- **Evacuate to the nearest safe and appropriate place,** ensuring cultural/linguistic links and ease of return.

- **Ensure supervision of placement/care of children by national or local welfare services** so that care meets at least the minimum standards and is appropriate for each child.
- **Maintain communication between children and families**, even where it requires special efforts.
- **Maintain complete records** of all evacuations.

Sometimes the situation is so extreme that there is no time to prepare for evacuations. However, even then, actions can be taken to reduce the risk of long-term separation, such as in the severe floods in Mozambique in 2010, where organizations worked with helicopter crews to record minimum information on each child and family to facilitate family tracing.⁴⁷

3.1.4 Messages on prevention of separation

One of the best ways to prevent separation is to ensure that the right information reaches the right people. Spreading key messages to children, parents, affected communities, authorities, and other partners in the emergency response in advance of or in the early days of an emergency can have an important mitigating effect on separation. While the exact form of public information campaigns will vary depending on the context and available time, it is important to think creatively and act quickly to make sure affected communities and humanitarian actors have the information they need to prevent separation and its often devastating effects.

Developing information campaigns

Asking these questions while developing an information campaign will help to ensure its effectiveness:

Process of developing the campaign

- Is our approach coordinated and collaborative across all actors working with UASC?
- What is the best way to involve the affected population and to incorporate their ideas?
- Can we test messages first with the affected population – especially girls and boys – to check levels of understanding?
- Is information provided in the local language/dialect, 'child-friendly' language and picture form for those unable to read?

Information and content of messages


- Do our messages clearly and consistently:
 - Use simple terms to explain what an UASC is and the criteria for documentation?
 - Convey the fact that many UASC will have living relatives who are looking for them and want to once again be in contact and reunited, where appropriate?

⁴⁷ Communicated in 2012 by a child protection adviser, Save the Children Mozambique.

- State which organization(s) are dealing with UASC/missing children and how they can be contacted?
- Convey that this is *not* a programme of material assistance? Is there a possibility of misinterpretation, allowing people to believe identified children will receive benefits not available to others?
- Reinforce the importance of family-based care and explain that most separated children will remain with their carers until reunification is possible?
- Could the messages cause fear or suspicion, possibly leading to children being hidden?
- How can the messages allay fear/suspicion and dispel any rumours or misinformation (for example, that children will be taken out of the country)?
- Is there a danger of raising expectations of what we are able to do?

Methods of disseminating information and messages

Information and messages should be widely displayed and disseminated, through, for example, the use of posters, leaflets and announcements wherever people gather, including specific sites or 'focal points' for child protection. These could include child-friendly spaces, including mobile child-friendly spaces, schools, churches and mosques, public buildings, transit sites and transportation hubs, markets, shops; water-collection points, feeding centres, baby tents, health-care clinics and in-patient hospitals. Start by asking:

- Can we use established channels of communication, including those used for public health messages such as advice relating to hygiene and infant feeding?
- Can we include messages in general distributions – of non-food items, for example?
- Are there trusted local community members – including children – who could deliver messages, such as popular and effective local leaders/politicians?
- Which methods of communication are the most likely to ensure information/messages are disseminated as widely as possible, for example, local radio, television, Internet, SMS messages (text messaging) or ceremonies, songs, dance and drama?
- How can we optimize our chances of reaching marginalized or 'hidden' children, for example, through peer-to-peer initiatives, working through schools, child-friendly spaces, sports or recreational facilities, or where UASC might be working? For example, if UASC are known to be active in the sex trade, organizations providing sexual and reproductive health care can be involved in raising awareness or disseminating information.
-  In a refugee context, registration and transit centres are key locations to disseminate information and messages. In addition, community leaders, elders or community networks are often important channels for communication.

★ [See Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages, Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR](#)

Key messages to children, parents and communities

The first step in preparing prevention messages is to **ask what the affected community has done to avoid separations in past emergencies and whether these ideas can be built on or supported**, where appropriate.

When spreading message to communities on preventing separation, use:

- Standard child protection messages that are culturally, socially and child-appropriate (where possible), rapidly adapted to the culture/context and translated into local languages/dialect and in picture form for those unable to read (*see Tools 6 and 7*).
- A range of creative, relevant and appropriate media to deliver messages across the affected area, for example, SMS (text messaging) and local radio, and through the distribution of leaflets, comics and posters. Drama groups, ceremonies, songs and dance can also be used to disseminate messages as well as announcements in public places or general distribution points for humanitarian aid or health care, such as infant feeding or immunizations. To reach children, ensure that the campaign includes schools, child- and youth-friendly spaces, and community and religious centres.
- The voices of trusted local people, elders, community leaders and children. Support children to develop and disseminate prevention of separation messages in their own communities, including classrooms and religious centres.
- Messages that are developed with input from local communities, including children, tested before use and that focus on positive actions.

For standard child protection messages that can be rapidly adapted and translated for immediate use:

- ★ *See Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages, Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR*
- ★ *See Tool 6: Prevention of separation messages for parents and carers*
- ★ *See Tool 7: Prevention of separation messages for children*
- ★ *See Tool 8: Contextualized messages on child protection from Jordan, UNHCR*

Key messages to emergency actors in other sectors of the humanitarian response

It is important to engage other sector actors in the humanitarian response since they can play a key role in preventing separation; this is particularly true for transport, health and nutrition sectors. Such engagement can take the form of establishing emergency referral pathways, organizing bilateral meetings to review specific practices or briefings at cluster/sector coordination meetings, conducting training for other organizations' staff, providing resources such as standard forms, or launching joint prevention of separation information campaigns – for example, at nutrition and feeding centres.

- ★ *See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC, for sector-specific guidance beyond the instructions below, which apply across all sectors*

At a minimum, all staff working on the humanitarian response – from all sectors – should be informed of the following points,⁴⁸ which can be written on laminated cards alongside the contact details of child protection organizations working with UASC in a given context:

- **Which organizations are responsible for UASC and how to contact them** in case they come across an apparently unaccompanied or separated child.
- **The need to be alert for children who may be separated and to refer** all such cases to those organizations working with UASC.
- **What information they should give** to UASC, families who have lost children and families caring for children other than their own, such as available services and relevant organizations.
- **What identification, documentation, tracing and reunification programmes are being implemented and what immediate action to take if they find an apparent UASC**, including, where possible, asking if he/she is alone, what help is needed, and providing referrals to child protection organizations, if necessary.

- ★ *See Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners*

Additionally, across all sectors as appropriate, organizations should ensure:

- **Integration of key child protection actions and joint messages**, such as the need to prevent separations, into sector-specific interventions.
- **Prominent display of prevention of separation information** in local languages, including advice for UASC, carers and families with missing children at all cross-sector facilities.
- **Awareness among cross-sector staff of the relevant organizations working with UASC and ways to prevent separation in their own work**. This could include, for example, allowing family members to remain together, keeping records, and enabling family contact in case of movement or evacuation. It could also include training on psychosocial first aid, identification of and response to distress, and referral to appropriate support and services.
- **Awareness among sector partners of how their own work may impact separation or tracing**.

- ★ *See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*

⁴⁸ The following draws on the Child Protection Working Group, 'Mainstreaming child protection into other sectors', *Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook*, CP AoR, 2010, pp. 74-77.



3.2 Project preparedness

Project preparedness refers to all the activities taken in anticipation of a crisis to expedite an effective emergency response. The more that can be accomplished as part of preparedness, the greater the likelihood that separations will be prevented and that the response will be effective.

For UASC, key actions include **identification of funding and resources** (human and material), **pre-positioning and organizing** supplies and transport, **recruiting and training** staff and partners, preparing for **rapid assessment**, and developing **emergency preparedness and response plans**. Within organizations, team leaders should be designated and staff members assigned to manage different elements of preparedness and response, ensuring logistical support is in place and management and support structure is clear.

Emergency preparedness and planning should aim for future responses that have the capacity to:

- Undertake rapid assessment/situation analysis (see Chapter 5.2).
- Implement activities to prevent separations and respond to UASC (see Chapter 3.1)
- Engage with community-based/civil society organizations already working with vulnerable children to plan what to do in the event of an emergency (see Chapter 3.1.1).
- Establish/strengthen/maintain case management systems (see Chapter 7.2.1).
- Establish and train staff on information management systems and protocols for information management and secure storage of confidential information, including an Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System (see Chapter 7.3).
- Promote and support *Minimum Standards in Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*.⁴⁹
- Ensure, assess and monitor existing and possible emergency alternative care for UASC, including training possible carers and identifying adaptable unused buildings or temporary shelter sites (see Chapters 10.2 and 10.4).
- Organize translation services for key materials into local languages for dissemination to communities and national partners to encourage their involvement.
- Organize transport for staff, affected children and partners.

3.2.1 Supplies and stockpiling

The quantity of supplies required to manage UASC depends on the emergency's scale and nature. Where possible, it is preferable to source local materials, if they are of high quality. While contexts vary, programmes will likely need:

⁴⁹ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012.

- **Adequate supplies of materials and resources for prevention of/emergency response to separation:**
 - UASC forms and stationery, including carbon paper where electricity is not guaranteed
 - Identity bracelets (or labels and marker pens)
 - Megaphones and pre-prepared, culturally adapted messages relating to prevention of separation and promoting family- and community-based care (see *Tools 6, 7, 8, and 9*)
 - Cameras, mobile/satellite phones and laptops
 - Family tracing and reunification kits⁵⁰ or backpacks containing the above, which can be pre-positioned if necessary.
- **Technology & communications equipment**
 - Radios/mobile phones/satellite phones for field staff
 - Computers and printers for programme use and for any partners.
- **Documents (translated as applicable)**
 - Printed supplies of information and documentation required for programming, such as:
 - » Relevant legal framework
 - » National policies and guidelines related to child protection/social welfare
 - » Agency protocols, evacuation guidelines, standard agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), standard operating procedures (SOPs) and training materials.
 - Examples of best practice policies developed with governments in other emergencies, which promote community-based care rather than institutional care.⁵¹
 - Copies of:
 - » [Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System Training Manual](#) (see Chapter 7.4)
 - » [Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#)
 - » *UASC Field Handbook: Summary guidance* (Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2015)
 - » [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#) (United Nations, 2010, section IX, paragraphs 153 onward)
 - » 'Care Provision Abroad and in Emergency Situations' in [Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'](#) (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, p. 113)
 - » [Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit](#) (Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013).

⁵⁰ Standard family tracing and reunification kits have been agreed upon by the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (the International Committee of the Red Cross does not use the family tracing and reunification kits but equipment and tools used by all agencies are standard and fulfil the same purpose). The kits contain all the basic materials for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification start-up and, if necessary, backpacks can also be prepared for individual team members for rapid deployment (see *Tool 10: Sample Tracing and Reunification Kit supply list*).

⁵¹ An example of a policy document already developed is the *Indonesian Government Policy on Separated Children, Unaccompanied Children and Children Left with One Parent in Emergency Situations*, Better Care Network, 2005.

- **Care & basic needs provisions**
 - Access to clean water and food for children and infants (see WHO, [Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies: Operational guidance for emergency relief staff and programme managers \(version 2.1\)](#)). Supplies for temporary alternative care provision, such as non-food items including shelter materials, bedding and emergency supplies for children (clothing, basic toys, etc.).
- ★ [See Tool 10: Family Tracing and Reunification Kit supply list, IAWG-UASC](#)

3.2.2 Human resources⁵²

An effective response to family separation is dependent on the availability of sufficient child protection staff experienced in working with UASC in emergencies. The number of staff required will depend on factors including the scale and geographic scope of the emergency, the number of people affected, and the capacity of national/local government, local NGOs, and the affected community as well as their role in emergency response. Ensuring basic minimum training of case workers and flexible staffing allows for immediate deployment as separations or potential for separations are identified; if possible, have 'floating' national and international staff available for immediate response (see Chapter 6.2.1).

As part of preparedness, a strategy for the recruitment, training, deployment and supervision of child protection staff should be developed, based on the most likely scenario. Preparedness should also involve the development of a child protection policy, ensuring that all staff have received training and signed a code of conduct.

Where there is an anticipated lack of suitably experienced international or national staff to respond to UASC, programmes should advocate with their respective organizations for additional staff recruitment/deployment, deployment of standby rosters and redeployment within the organization. Organizations can also work together to pool experienced staff.

- ★ [See Chapter 6.2.1, Programme staff, training and capacity building, for detailed information on the types of human resources required for UASC programmes as well as training](#)
- ★ [See Child Protection Working Group, 'Human resources', Standard 2 in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012](#)
- ★ [See Child Protection Working Group, Child Protection in Emergencies \(CPIE\) Competency Framework, 2010, p. 26, 'Prevention of and response to the separation of children from their families,' which are **additional** to the core child protection and humanitarian competencies](#)

⁵² Child Protection Working Group, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Standard 2 provides detailed guidance on human resources in child protection in emergencies.

3.2.3 Training

Based on the mapping of capacity and gaps, a training and capacity-building programme should be developed for international and national child protection staff, staff of partner organizations, national and local authorities and civil society actors, staff working in residential care, foster carers and others, as required. Organizing training workshops jointly with a number of organizations and, where appropriate, with government, will help to pool resources, share expertise, develop inter-agency relationships, coordinate responses and ensure coherent policies and practice.

★ [See Chapter 6.2.1, Programme staff, training and capacity building: Training](#)



Tool 4: UASC prevention and preparedness measures

Tool 5: Sample core child protection message, Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR

Tool 6: Prevention of separation messages for parents and carers

Tool 7: Prevention of separation messages for children

Tool 8: Contextualized messages on child protection from Jordan, UNHCR

Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners

Tool 10: Family Tracing and Reunification Kit supply list, IAWG-UASC

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Chapter 4 sets out the fundamental importance and workings of the coordination mechanisms operating in emergency contexts specific to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). The chapter establishes a framework for national and subnational coordination and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of different actors in different emergency contexts, whether cluster, non-cluster, refugee, or cross-border/regional contexts; these often depend on the specific mandates of the organizations involved, which should all coordinate their work closely. Finally, the chapter offers suggestions for overcoming challenges to effective coordination, such as standard operating procedures.



04 Coordination

TOPICS

4.1 The importance of coordinating an emergency response to UASC

4.2 Framework for national and subnational coordination

4.2.1 Context-based coordination structures and roles

Cluster and cluster-like (non-refugee) situations

Refugee (non-cluster) situations

4.2.2 Roles, responsibilities and functions of a UASC technical working group

4.2.3 Cross-border and regional coordination

4.3 Overcoming challenges to effective coordination

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Effective coordination helps prevent duplication of activities, facilitates information exchange and promotes standardized approaches and good practice in programmes for UASC.
- Governments have prime responsibility for protection of children and UASC, including in terms of coordination; it is important (where possible, relevant and in line with an organization's mandate, principles and working methods) to work with and through existing government structures.
- Coordination mechanisms for UASC that build on existing local capacity and involve national actors are more likely to be effective and can make a significant contribution to broader child protection systems.
- The Global Protection Cluster and the child protection 'Area of Responsibility', for which UNICEF is the focal point agency, provide the framework for coordinating and implementing child protection work in a cluster situation. In a refugee setting, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response, including child protection and work with refugee UASC.
- Usually the UASC coordination mechanism is linked to the existing child protection coordination forum (such as a technical group or task force). This ensures that the UASC programme is part of a range of activities aimed at addressing holistically the situation of child protection in-country and not as a stand-alone programme.
- Standard operating procedures can be useful in promoting effective coordination. However, they should be kept as simple and functional as possible and their development should not delay or impede necessary response activities. Organizations working with UASC should be results-oriented rather than process-focused, and not develop unnecessarily heavy procedures.




04 Coordination

4.1 The importance of coordinating an emergency response to UASC

Effective coordination helps prevent duplication of activities, facilitates information exchange and promotes standardized approaches and good practice in programmes for UASC.

Working through existing systems and early collaboration with the government and local organizations will promote ownership and increase the likelihood of promoting positive change in the social and welfare policy of the country (where required) in the longer term. The involvement of the ministry of social welfare or other relevant ministry, as well as adherence to national laws and policies, is particularly important to ensure the sustainability of case management, provision and supervision of alternative care arrangements, and eventual handover of programme work. Coordination of UASC work is likely to be required beyond the emergency phase, making it even more important to ensure government and local partners are involved from the beginning.

 Different countries have different ways of dividing protection work related to refugee UASC. In most countries, a specific ministry or the ministry of the interior (or equivalent) will be responsible for refugee protection. However, depending on the country, this ministry may – to a greater or lesser extent – share its protection responsibilities in some areas, such as child protection and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, with other relevant line ministries (such as the ministry of social welfare). In a refugee situation, coordination mechanisms for child protection and UASC should therefore be developed to involve the appropriate authorities, depending on their capacities and responsibilities. Different ministries may end up being involved in different ways (for example, the ministry responsible for refugee protection may lead the coordination structure, but the ministry of social welfare will be the relevant authority to be involved in a best interests determination panel).

This growing dynamic makes coordination all the more important. It is imperative that roles are assigned to agencies with the right mandates, skills and capacities to undertake work with UASC. These agencies should include national NGOs with knowledge of issues relating to separation in context. In recent large-scale emergencies, the number and diversity of organizations working with UASC has grown. For example, a report on the UASC-focused response to the 2010 earthquake in Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran, noted that due to lack of coordination, “people came to help and to do good, but they made the situation even worse and some of the children got lost.”⁵³ Following

⁵³ Bazeghi, Farnaz, and Hamid R. Baradaran, *The Role of Non-governmental Organisations in the Management of Separated and Unaccompanied Children following Disasters in Iran*, BMC Research Notes, 2010, p. 6.

the earthquake there, more than 80 organizations planned to work with UASC, some of which had little or no experience in the sector. This growing dynamic makes coordination all the more important. Simple practical adjustments to increase the accessibility of coordination meetings – such as changing their timing, location or the language in which they are conducted – may improve coordination in such situations, particularly among local organizations.

- ★ [See Chapter 5.1.2, Mapping local and national capacity to respond and critical gaps](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 6.1.3, Identifying potential partners](#)



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4.2 Framework for national and subnational coordination

The government is responsible for the protection of all children and, as such, for the coordination of an emergency response, with support from international organizations as desired and appropriate. In situations in which the government is not able or willing to undertake this role, UNICEF, UNHCR or occasionally the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or non-governmental agencies may take on coordination of protection interventions, working in coordination with others, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other components of the Movement.

Programmes for UASC also need to be coordinated with broader protection work as well as other aspects of child protection. Usually, the UASC coordination mechanism is linked to the existing child protection coordination forum (such as a technical group or task force). This ensures that the UASC programme is part of a range of activities aimed at addressing holistically the situation of child protection in-country and not as a stand-alone programme. Cooperation with the wider humanitarian response is also important. A representative, such as the child protection sub-cluster coordinator in cluster contexts, should not only represent the actors working on UASC issues in protection working groups, but also engage with other sectors, including camp management, shelter, health, food and non-food distribution, and water and sanitation, to raise awareness of ways to prevent separation, promote family unity when providing humanitarian assistance, strengthen referral pathways, and increase access to service provision (see Chapter 3.1.4 and the Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes promoting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

Ideally, the coordination structure for UASC should be agreed upon at the preparedness stage (see Chapter 3), although this may be adapted to accommodate the immediate post-emergency situation.

4.2.1 Context-based coordination structures and roles

The shape that humanitarian coordination takes varies in different emergency contexts, as does the form of coordination on UASC. The type of coordination structure that may be appropriate will depend on the nature and size of the emergency and its impact, the strength of the government to address the resulting needs, and the stance of the government towards the affected population.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See, for example, Child Protection Working Group, *The Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook*, 2010, pp. 32-34.

Cluster and cluster-like (non-refugee) situations

Where the UN cluster system is in operation, the protection of children during emergencies is coordinated through the Child Protection Area of Responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster. **As the lead agency for child protection in cluster contexts, UNICEF coordinates the CP AoR and is also the provider of last resort. A response to UASC will be coordinated by the country-level child protection sub-cluster**, which will agree on the formation of a technical working group for UASC, where necessary. In emergencies covering a wide geographic area, it may be necessary to establish further UASC sub-working groups at subnational levels, ensuring strong linkages and two-way communication. Technical working groups are small, task-oriented and time-limited. They advise the strategic advisory group or the child protection sub-cluster and can complete tasks such as agreeing on minimum standards and formulating technical practices related to UASC.



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The International Committee of the Red Cross and the cluster system

The ICRC is not part of the UN system, but it actively coordinates with UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations working with populations affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, natural disasters or migration. The ICRC, as well as the organization's National Societies, may participate as an observer to the UN cluster system and/or UASC working groups. The decision to participate or not in the UN cluster system as well as the level of the participation (active observer, passive observer) lies with the respective ICRC delegations and National Societies in the field.

In 'cluster-like' situations – such as a natural disaster with many UASC in which the cluster system is *not* in operation *and* it is not a refugee context – a group should be established to work with governments to respond to UASC, either as part of a larger child protection coordination group or as a distinct UASC technical working group.

- ★ [See the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\) and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility for cluster-specific coordination guidance](#)

Refugee situations

The cluster system is not applicable to refugee operations. As the United Nations agency mandated to lead and coordinate international protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems worldwide, **UNHCR is responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response in a refugee setting**. UNHCR establishes protection working groups to facilitate coordination on all protection issues and, where necessary, specific sub-groups – for example,

on child protection or on sexual and gender-based violence. Child protection working groups, including on UASC issues, in refugee operations are led by the government and UNHCR, and can be co-chaired by other child protection actors. UNHCR's engagement is not limited to the emergency phase, but continues until durable solutions are implemented.

4.2.2 Roles, responsibilities and functions of a UASC technical working group

Specific coordination roles and responsibilities will vary based on the context and organizational mandates (see Chapter 1.2). However, in each context, the group responsible for coordinating UASC work should agree on the following:

- **Lead/chair(s)** of the UASC technical working group(s): Technical working groups are usually coordinated by a focal point or technical adviser, and are composed of relevant technical experts.
- **Coordination with the ICRC** and other components of the Movement (including National Societies) – for example, in activities aimed at restoring family links for UASC, including family reunification and follow-up for UASC (whether in-country and/or cross-border) to avoid disrupting care or support services.

Additionally, if the broader child protection coordination group has not already developed the points below, the UASC technical working group may need to agree on:

- **Terms of reference** for the technical working group to clarify expectations and roles
- **Decision-making processes** that clarify steps in situations in which it is not possible to reach consensus
- **Roles and responsibilities** of different agencies working with UASC, including which agency should lead in the coordination of information management. This should be worked out in context, taking into account mandate, sustainability of presence in-country, available resources and technical capacity
- **Mechanisms** to guarantee exchange and feedback of discussions and decisions with the larger child protection working group.

★ [See Tool 11: Sample terms of reference for a UASC technical working group](#)

A lack of clarity in these key areas can lead to unacceptable delays in the UASC response. For example, an evaluation by the CP AoR following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti found that, "The registration form continued to undergo several different revisions and there seemed to be no clear mechanism for managing versions of the form with a focal point system and ensuring final sign-off."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Child Protection Working Group, *Key Findings of the Global Child Protection Working Group (CP AoR) Learning and Support Mission to Haiti*, CP AoR, 2010, p. 10.

Where necessary, the global CP AoR and the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC) can give guidance and support to organizations on the ground to help establish an effective mechanism for coordination and to reach agreement on operating procedures. They can also take a 'troubleshooting' role and may be able to provide direct support – for example, in developing joint advocacy messages and statements.

The UASC technical working group provides a forum for organizations to undertake tasks and activities, including the following:

- **Analyse strengths and weaknesses and map operational capacities of social welfare/child protection systems, actors and services** to prevent family separation and assist UASC, agree on geographic areas of operation, identify gaps and mobilize resources (*see Chapter 5.1.2*).
- **Identify local practices** to prevent family separation and care for UASC.
- **Develop standard operating procedures**, where necessary (*see Chapter 4.3*).
Ensure harmonization, understanding and respect for:
 - **Respective modes of action**
 - **Respective registration criteria**⁵⁶ and caseload priorities, including any potential impact on joint programmes, where different.
- **Agree on priority actions** and a strategy for urgent response.
- **Plan collaborative actions**, such as joint assessments, a situation analysis, advocacy or training.
- **Adapt inter-agency tools**, such as the agreed standard registration forms for UASC, only as necessary (for example, to take into account a particular culture and language and messages for prevention of separation and information campaigns).
- **Design case management and referral processes for UASC**, building on any existing systems and integrating with systems for other children at risk (*see Chapter 7.2*).
- **Develop a strategy for capacity building and training** that is appropriate to the context and capacities, including ongoing and collaborative training and mentoring on all aspects of case management for UASC.
- **Adapt, develop or establish information management systems; agree on a policy and procedures for safe storage of information and information-sharing;** and ensure protocols for managing confidential information are available and implemented (*see Chapter 7.3*).
- **Agree on advocacy messages** in relation to media coverage of the emergency.
- **Agree/define policy and programme approaches**, including 'minimum standards'⁵⁷ to ensure that the type and quality of support to UASC is consistent across all organizations and actors.
- **Facilitate participation by members**, including by developing (in relevant language/s) an induction information package for new organizations containing basic information about issues such as coordination, child protection, and policy and principles relating to UASC.

⁵⁶ Organizations may differ in the criteria they use for documentation (*see Chapter 9*), and the decision will be based on context-specific vulnerability criteria.

⁵⁷ See Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012.



TRY THIS: 'COUNTING' REUNIFICATIONS


Organizations may feel under pressure from their head office, donors or the media to state how many reunifications they have facilitated. This can cause tension when one organization documents a child, but tracing and reunification are carried out by another organization. The principal concern is that children receive the best support possible, no matter which individual agency provides that support. To avoid tension that can negatively impact programme effectiveness, it may be pragmatic to agree from the beginning how reunifications will be 'counted' and how double counting can be avoided. In addition, it might be better to share figures at the combined working group level rather than the individual agency level. If collected at the individual agency level, it is important to establish a standard reporting format.

- **Monitor and report** on the effectiveness of the response, and agree on common ways of measuring outcomes for UASC – for example, how organizations count and report reunifications (see Chapter 6.1.2).

4.2.3 Cross-border and regional coordination

A response to emergencies directly affecting more than one country or those creating population movements or the potential for movements across international borders requires effective mechanisms for coordinating work with UASC across borders. This is particularly important in regions characterized by ongoing migration and an already high number of migrant children, since they can then be left behind due to the emergency (see Chapter 2.1.2).

Where a regional structure for coordination is not in place, a mechanism for sharing information and managing work in more than one country should be established as early as possible with clearly defined lines and methods of communication. Coordination may be managed via a regional 'hub' – for example, Nairobi during the Horn of Africa 2011 crisis, or from a designated country programme office or location where information from all country programmes can be easily centralized. While it is important to have fully operational systems in place, getting these up and running should not cause lengthy delays in the urgent tasks of identifying and documenting children and carrying out straightforward family reunifications.

 In refugee situations, a regional coordination mechanism should be based outside of the country of origin (see Chapter 12.1 on individual case decisions that may involve the country of origin).



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Somalia-Kenya: Cross-border cooperation

Early on during the 2011 Horn of Africa famine emergency, the border crossing point of Dhobley in Somalia and Liboi in Kenya was identified as a key location for identification of UASC. Many children and women were travelling into Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp. Through coordination with UNHCR and the Kenyan authorities, and funding to a local non-governmental organization working on both sides of the border, children identified as UASC could be tracked and assisted. At the height of the crisis, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided transport support to vulnerable individuals arriving in Liboi and ensured their safe arrival in the camp. Save the Children-supported reception services in the camp meant that registration, temporary care and family tracing activities were prioritized upon arrival, along with provision of food and other emergency response needs.

(UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2012)

The UASC technical working group at a regional or subregional level provides a forum for organizations to undertake tasks and activities (in addition to national/subnational level tasks), including the following.⁵⁸

- **Agreement of mechanisms for information-sharing** for cross-border tracing and reunification at the regional level, where necessary and appropriate. Where there is more than one organisation managing information on UASC, protocols should be developed with regard to information sharing between agencies, and to ensure that information systems are linked.⁵⁹ The aim of information-sharing (as on specific cases for tracing purposes), should be to support coordination and ensure that children are not asked for the same information multiple times from multiple agencies (see Chapter 7.3).
- **Standardizing** policies, tools, systems and a common approach to family tracing and reunification in all affected countries.
- **Research** to understand the scope and patterns related to the movement of UASC
- **Advocacy with humanitarian agencies, donors and other stakeholders at the regional level**, including identifying and highlighting gaps in resources, access and response as well as protection needs of UASC across countries

West Africa & Central Africa: IOM-UNICEF Regional Guidelines

In 2014, West and Central Africa regional offices of the IOM and UNICEF developed joint regional guidelines on assistance and protection to non-refugee (such as internally displaced, migrant, returnee or third-country national) UASC in humanitarian emergencies. The guidelines, which are complementary to country-level standard operating procedures, set out possible joint and coordinated actions. These actions include joint assessments; data-collection/sharing; pre-identification/rapid registration of UASC for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification; transfer/transport of UASC; temporary care arrangements; psychosocial support; prevention of family separation and awareness-raising; coordination processes; advocacy and fundraising. The guidelines stem from good practices in the Malian crisis in 2012 (involving internally displaced persons) and in Chad (returnees) due to the Central African Republic crisis in 2013. (UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2012)

(Communicated by an IOM protection policy officer, 2015)

- ★ [See Tool 12: IOM/UNICEF Guidelines on assistance and protection to children affected by humanitarian crises, focus on UASC, IOM and UNICEF regional offices for West and Central Africa](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 1.2, Organizational mandates related to UASC](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 11.2.9, Cross-border tracing](#)

⁵⁸ "Ensuring consistency of approach and standards in different countries, as well as high-level advocacy, requires leadership from an inter-agency group at the regional or sub-regional level." *Narrative Report*, Regional Meeting on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 5-7 November 2012, p. 2.

⁵⁹ The International Committee of the Red Cross uses its own database and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing, as appropriate, with humanitarian organizations working

4.3 Overcoming challenges to effective coordination

Coordination of UASC-related work in emergencies can be challenging, but there are tools and best practices, which, if appropriately utilized, can facilitate effective coordination. **Coordination tools can be simple, ad hoc fixes to urgent needs;** it is essential to collaborate as well as possible without slowing down programming. For guidance on how to coordinate child protection in humanitarian emergencies to ensure more predictable, accountable and effective responses, see the [Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook](#). While agencies coordinate in different ways with different tools, this field handbook looks at standard operating procedures (SOPs) and how they can promote effective coordination.

Standard operating procedures refer to a document that aims to regulate coordination among operational agencies and implementing partners on working modalities. Such procedures can be developed specific to UASC-related work, or they can be for more general child protection efforts that include UASC. Note that SOPs are distinct from information-sharing protocols (ISPs), which are necessary whenever confidential data is exchanged among agencies (see Chapter 7.3).

When done well, **SOPs can be useful but not compulsory ways to document who is doing what and where.** If there are already efficient coordination mechanisms and roles/responsibilities are already clear, SOPs are unlikely to be needed. However, **organizations should use SOPs where they are necessary and appropriate**, for example, if there is a high turnover of humanitarian actors. Standard operating procedures may also be necessary to clarify roles and responsibilities on working procedures in all areas of prevention; in identification, documentation, tracing, reunification and follow-up; or in the provision of alternative care and durable solutions to UASC, including organizational roles and working methods. Standard operating procedures should establish the objective of UASC work, the actors involved and their responsibilities. However, **the process of agreeing on SOPs should not prevent operations from starting, nor should they take an extended period of time to develop.** There is no need to be rigid about the form SOPs might take, nor do they need to be lengthy; they can be as simple as a flow chart in some situations.



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Jordan: Coordinating alternative care for refugee UASC

As part of the refugee response in Jordan, an inter-agency SOP was developed to ensure that refugee UASC receive the care and protection they need, including temporary and long-term alternative care arrangements. The SOP was developed through a consultative process from November 2013 to November 2014. The agreement lays out the roles and responsibilities of various entities and work procedures governing the care and protection of UASC. These entities include government agencies such as Jordan's Family Protection Department, the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Social Development, UN organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA) and other national or international agencies involved in case management (the International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps, Jordan River Foundation, and the Institute for Family Health/Noor Al Hussein Foundation).

(Communicated by a UNHCR child protection officer, 2015)

- ★ [See Tool 13: Sample standard operating procedures \(SOP\) for emergency response for UASC in Jordan, Child Protection Sub-Working Group – UASC Task Force, Jordan](#)

The ICRC and its National Societies do not sign SOPs/ISPs, with the exception of a global Memorandum of Understanding between the ICRC and UNHCR. In several contexts and if deemed necessary, **the ICRC and National Societies might opt to issue an information sheet on its Restoring Family Links activities** in order to inform UN agencies and other humanitarian actors of the Movement's actions. However, to the best of its capacities, the ICRC remains strongly committed to pursue efforts to cooperate and coordinate in the field with UNHCR, UNICEF and child protection actors, according to the respective roles and responsibilities stipulated in the Inter-agency Guiding Principles.

- ★ [See Tool 14: Sample briefing note: Tracing approach of the ICRC and Nigerian Red Cross Society for UASC as a result of the armed conflict, ICRC](#)
- ★ [See Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC](#)



Tool 11: Sample terms of reference for a UASC technical working group

Tool 12: IOM/UNICEF Guidelines on assistance and protection to children affected by humanitarian crises, focus on UASC, IOM and UNICEF regional offices for West and Central Africa

Tool 13: Example standard operating procedures (SOP) for emergency response for UASC in Jordan, Child Protection Sub-Working Group – UASC Task Force, Jordan

Tool 14: Sample briefing note: Tracing approach of the ICRC and Nigerian Red Cross Society for UASC as a result of armed conflict, ICRC

Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC

Child Protection Working Group, [Child Protection in Emergencies Coordinator's Handbook](#), 2010.

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Inter-agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, [Gender-based Violence Resource Tools, Establishing Gender-based Violence Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\) for Multisectoral and Inter-Organizational Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings](#), IASC, 2008.

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[United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model](#), 2013.

United Nations Children's Fund, [Cluster Coordination Guidance for Country Offices](#), 2015.



Assessing children's risk and vulnerability to separation prior to an emergency, and mapping local and national capacity to respond, is essential for informing prevention and preparedness efforts (see Chapter 3) and later assessments of separation during and after emergencies. Chapter 5 sets out a range of methods to assess the nature and scale of separation after an emergency strikes, including desk reviews, rapid assessments, population-based estimations, ongoing surveillance and trends analysis, and situation analysis. The chapter also covers the organization of separation assessments, which should set the stage for planning programmes and responding to the needs of UASC during and after emergencies (see Chapter 6).

05

Assessment of separation and risk of separation

TOPICS

5.1. Assessing risk of separation and mapping capacity

5.1.1. Assessing risk and vulnerability to separation

5.1.2. Mapping local and national capacity to respond, and critical gaps

5.2 Assessment of separation

5.2.1 Desk review and projection

5.2.2 Rapid assessment

5.2.3 Population-based estimation

5.2.4 Ongoing surveillance and trends analysis

5.2.5 Situation analysis

5.3 Organizing assessments

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Assessing the risk of and vulnerability to separation, and mapping the capacity to respond, should include children, communities and governments, where appropriate, and be conducted as early as possible to inform prevention of separation activities.
- Estimating the nature and scope of separation, while challenging in emergencies, is an essential prerequisite to planning UASC programming.
- The nature and scale of separation determined by assessments, which should use a range of methodologies in a variety of sites, should inform rapid response and longer-term programme planning and priorities.
- Assessments can have different components and use a variety of methodologies based on the context, including desk/secondary data reviews, rapid assessments, population-based estimations, ongoing surveillance and trend analysis, and situational analysis.
- A rapid assessment of UASC should be conducted at the earliest possible opportunity; however, urgent actions to prevent and respond to family separation should be initiated before assessments are finalized.
- Multiple assessments of the same type in the same location should be avoided; an assessment of the situation of UASC should normally be undertaken as part of a broader protection or child protection needs assessment to avoid duplication.
- Assessments should be undertaken with the active involvement of communities, including children, where this is safe, meaningful and appropriate.
- Assessment findings should be comprehensively triangulated, verified and analysed before informing programming responses.



05

Assessment of
separation and risk
of separation

5.1 Assessing risk of separation and mapping capacity⁶⁰

Assessing the risk of separation and mapping existing capacity to respond are the precursors to any preparedness or prevention activities (see Chapter 3).

5.1.1 Assessing risk and vulnerability to separation

During preparedness planning, it may be possible to broadly predict the risk of and vulnerability to separation, as well as the likely nature and scale of separation, in a given context by considering the factors below. Issues of family and community resilience and social cohesion underpin all of these factors. **Such a prediction will be indicative and should only inform risk mitigation measures and initial priority activities until more detailed assessment information is available.** Such risk assessments can also form the basis for a desk review conducted in the early stages of an emergency (*see Chapter 5.2.1*).

- **Pre-existing patterns of separation, risks and vulnerabilities**, and the likely impact of an emergency on exacerbating such risks and vulnerabilities (*see Chapter 2.2*): Information about children living outside of family care prior to an emergency indicates pre-existing prevalence and patterns of separation and which children are most vulnerable to separation. For example, it may be common in certain communities to send children to live in kinship care, or to place them in institutional care, in order to access education and livelihood opportunities that are not available to them when living with their families. Prevalence rates give an indication of family fragility/resilience, while understanding vulnerability may indicate which children are most vulnerable to separation during and after an emergency. Additionally, children living outside of family care may be unable to locate their families following an emergency.
- **Communities' attitudes towards and capacity to prevent/mitigate separation**: In many cases family separation is preventable. The degree to which potential hazards have been identified, their potential to cause separation defined, and contingency plans put in place to prevent and respond to separation during and after an emergency will give a strong indication of the potential scale of separation during and after an emergency. Related to this, the existence of functional state systems with a mandate to address separation will be a key factor in mitigating separation (*see Chapter 5.1.2*). A community's customs and attitudes towards 'orphaned' or otherwise unaccompanied and separated children (as well as other highly vulnerable groups of children) and forms of care provided (including through institutional care) *before the emergency* should be included.

⁶⁰ See United Nations Children's Fund, 'Conducting a Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis', chapter 6, section 2 in: *Programme Policy and Procedure, Programme Operations*, UNICEF, 2007.

- **Type of emergency:** Different types of emergencies impact separation in different ways. Sudden onset emergencies, such as earthquakes, are likely to cause higher levels of separation during their initial aftermath than slow onset emergencies. The timing and context in which the emergency occurs is also important; sudden onset emergencies that hit during school hours may cause significantly more separation than those that occur at other times. Conflict tends to cause separation in a variety of ways, including through the forced displacement of populations and the recruitment or abduction of children by armed forces and armed groups (see Table 2: Characteristics and risk of separation by type of emergency).
- **Household coping mechanisms:** Emergencies affect household livelihoods, meaning that households often have to employ additional coping mechanisms to meet their basic needs. Sending children out of the household is one such mechanism. This can occur when households send children to live in kinship care, place children in institutional care, send them away to work, or marry them off at an increasingly young age. Mechanisms are often increasingly deployed over time if means of livelihoods are not restored or diversified.
- **Policies of all national and local authorities pertaining to UASC:** This should include policies that apply to 'orphaned' children and those separated prior to the emergency as well as asylum-seeking and refugee UASC.

★ See Chapter 5.2.1, Assessment of separation: Desk review



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TABLE 2
CHARACTERISTICS AND RISK OF SEPARATION BY TYPE OF EMERGENCY

Type of emergency*	Examples & impact of separation	Characteristics
Rapid onset natural disaster, such as flood, earthquake, tsunami or landslide	<p>Tsunami (2004): Up to 15,000 Indonesian children estimated to be separated from their families.⁶¹</p> <p>Cyclone Nargis (2008): 1,876 UASC documented in Myanmar.⁶²</p> <p>Haiti earthquake (2010): 8,212 UASC documented, of whom 2,318 had been reunited one year later.⁶³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often, there is insufficient warning and therefore little time to take evasive action. • Government/local authorities may be overwhelmed with immediate needs but likely to be receptive to support. Cooperation may be more straightforward than in complex emergencies. • Rapid reunification may be possible when immediate actions are taken, since families are unlikely to have travelled far. • Despite a lack of quantifiable data, evidence suggests that children face a heightened risk of trafficking following natural disasters.⁶⁴ Families displaced before the event (as a result of armed conflict, for example) may be more vulnerable to family separation.⁶⁵ • Extreme events often generate media attention and a sizeable international relief effort, presenting challenges in coordination and negative messaging, which can result in increased separation.
Drought, famine, chronic poverty and food shortages	<p>Ethiopian drought (1983-1985): An estimated 20,000 UASC sought sustenance in relief shelters in Ethiopia; of these only 7,000 were reunited with families.⁶⁶</p> <p>Horn of Africa famine (2011): 5,704 UASC recorded in the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System in Kenya (excluding Kakuma), Somalia and Ethiopia as a result of famine and armed conflict in Somalia.⁶⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow in onset and often linked to protracted conflict, including possible scenarios such as military sieges, mass rural starvation, and typically the migration of populations in search of food. • Separation may be a strategic short term-coping strategy made by families in order to survive, which becomes long term or permanent. The separation may have occurred before the emergency was declared and thus be more difficult to identify. • Despite early warnings of food shortages or even famine conditions, situations may become acute.
Armed conflict and political unrest	<p>Rwandan genocide (1994): More than 119,577⁶⁸ UASC initially documented; 56,984 were reunited by 1997.⁶⁹</p> <p>Kenyan election (2008): UNICEF estimated that more than 7,000 children were separated following post-election violence (including those separated before and during the violence).⁷⁰</p> <p>Libyan political unrest (2011): Up to 500 children estimated separated and an unknown number believed associated with armed forces or armed groups.⁷¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political instability and insecurity affect work with governments. • Although there may be a build up to full-scale armed conflict and unrest, populations may have to flee without warning or the chance to prepare, resulting in many separations. • Family separation may also result from the capture, detention or arrest of parents or carers. • Recruitment of children into armed forces and armed groups is a major cause of family separation in armed conflict and other situations of unrest. Released children who are reunited into fragile circumstances may be re-recruited.⁷² • Chronic or recurring conflict can result in children being separated for many years. Of the almost 2,500 children still registered as separated in Liberia in 2002 following more than a decade of instability and conflict in the region, 45 per cent had been separated for more than seven years.⁷³

* Note that across all types of emergencies, one common characteristic is the possible resulting movement of people, including UASC, across international borders. However, destinations and circumstances vary by emergency and often depend on history or pattern of previous displacements.

^[61] United Nations Children's Fund Evaluation Office, *Children and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Evaluation of UNICEF's response in Indonesia (2005-2008)*, Country synthesis report, UNICEF, 2009, page v.

^[62] Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System. Note that, typically, typhoons cause fewer separations than other emergencies.

^[63] Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System.

^[64] United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Najat Maala M'jid, A/HRC/19/63*, 2011, paras. 27-31.

^[65] According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), more than 19.3 million people were forced to flee their homes by disasters in 100 countries in 2014. Hundreds of thousands more are still displaced following disasters in previous years. See: www.internal-displacement.org, accessed 13 January 2016.

[66] Save the Children, *Children Separated by War*, 1995, p. 80.

[67] Recorded statistics on separated children/unaccompanied minors in the Horn of Africa, according to the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System, July 2012. Note: This does not represent the true scale of separation due to incomplete documentation and lack of access to all areas.

[68] Number registered rather than the actual number of children, since some children were likely registered multiple times.

[69] Merkelbach, Maarten, 'Reuniting Children Separated from their Families after the Rwandan Crisis of 1994: The relative value of a centralized database', *International Review of the Red Cross*, no. 838, 30 June 2000.

[70] Williamson, John, and Aaron Greenberg, *Families, Not Orphanages*, Better Care Network Working Paper, 2010, p. 10.

[71] Save the Children and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Protection of Children during Organized and Spontaneous Population Movements', Unpublished draft, Save the Children and UNHCR, 2002, p. 11.

[72] For further guidance, see the Paris Principles Steering Group, *Child Recruitment, Release and Reintegration Handbook*, 2015.

5.1.2 Mapping local and national capacity to respond, and critical gaps

As part of preparedness (*see Chapter 3*), it is essential to identify the existing capacity and gaps in responding to UASC. This includes identifying national and international actors, in order to collaboratively plan geographic and functional divisions of responsibility, ensure coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), where present, and National Societies. Such **capacity mapping allows the emergency response to build, develop or strengthen capacity where necessary**, beginning with families/carers, then individuals and groups within the community, and extending to all institutions, including government and non-governmental structures, that impact children.

Emergency preparedness and response should aim to increase the resilience of communities, and care must be taken not to destroy coping mechanisms. Communities, including children, should be seen as the first responders; it is important to remember that traditions and values, as well as capacities, will determine how individuals and groups deal with UASC before the emergency response from the aid community is effective.

Mapping of local and national capacity should be undertaken with community members and include:

- **Identification of systems of traditional and formal care**, current levels of functioning, and capacity for expansion, including standby foster carers, training additional carers or increasing current residential care capacity as a last resort for the shortest possible time, where appropriate and up to minimum standards
- **Understanding of local coping mechanisms and support systems** for vulnerable families
- **Capacity, organizational readiness and proposed role of all child protection actors**, including government and local authorities, and their capacity to prevent and respond to family separation (for example, number of trained social workers and existence of an efficient case management system, including referral mechanisms)
- **Capacity of civil society and local organizations**, including community-based child protection groups. Assess capacity by asking, for example: What is your impact? Are you potential future partners? Does your staff have transferable skills?

- **Level of representation, participation and consultation** with boys, girls, women and men, including groups with specific needs within formal and informal structures and services
- **Existing coordination systems and capacity to coordinate** a large-scale emergency response. Ask: Can these be strengthened or adapted?



Liberia – Adolescents working to prevent separation

Adolescents who received prevention of separation training in the emergency zones of Liberia are carrying out prevention and identification work even in the absence of humanitarian agencies. Rates of family separation in Liberia are comparatively lower in geographic areas where prevention of separation awareness-raising was carried out with communities, as opposed to areas where no prevention work was carried out.

(Save the Children and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Protection of Children during Organized and Spontaneous Population Movements*, Save the Children and UNHCR, Unpublished draft, 2002, p. 40)



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5.2 Assessment of separation

Estimating the full scale of family separation in the early days of an emergency is extremely challenging, but numbers are likely to be higher than those identified through initial rapid assessment or those indicated from population registration statistics, where separation may be missed or hidden. At other times, such as after Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the reverse can be true due to misunderstandings of the definition of UASC, underscoring the need to **ensure clear understanding of definitions by those undertaking assessments** and collecting data. In some instances, mixed migration or complex and multi-layered problems, including pre-existing separation, for example, can make it difficult to clearly establish the scale of separation, even in the longer term. In such situations, it is important to highlight that numbers of UASC registered or reunited should not be the only indicator of programme success. Other indicators of success might include monitoring and prevention of separation activities or sustainable reunification activities – that is, the percentage of reunified children who have stayed with their families for more than six months relative to numbers of registered UASC (see Chapter 6.1.2).

In addition to the scale of separation, **the nature of separation should also be explored in initial and ongoing assessments**, including causes and types of separation, and the current situation of UASC, including care arrangements and protection risks. This helps to paint a more complete picture of separation in a given context.

Assessments of the scale and scope of separation should use a range of methodologies in a variety of sites, based on the context, to inform rapid response and longer-term programme planning and priorities.

A wide range of methods can be used to assess the nature and scale of separation. The tools below are a starting point; their use may vary by context.

★ [See Tool 16: Sample assessment tools from various sources](#)


TABLE 3
BEST PRACTICES IN ASSESSMENTS OF FAMILY SEPARATION

<p>An ethical approach to assessment demands:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to follow-up action, if required. • Establishing a referral pathway prior to the assessment for any cases requiring urgent follow-up or care. • Refraining from taking action if the local community can cope by itself, unless its actions violate the basic rights of children. • Avoiding the creation of false expectations. • Avoiding methods that could stigmatize children, endanger them in any way or increase the incidence of family separation.
<p>Assessments should ideally be conducted:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By using different methodologies among different segments of the population to give a full picture of separation; however multiple assessments of the same type in the same location should be avoided. • By a team with training and experience in family separation in emergencies, including assessment methods, child-friendly interviewing and informed consent. • By team members with knowledge of the context (specifically, the historical, social and political situation), or those thoroughly briefed on pre-existing separation issues in the region. • With due regard for the confidentiality of information, ensuring that all assessors understand the need for confidentiality, that systems are in place for safe transmission and storage of data/information collected, and agreement exists on information-sharing. • With the active participation of members of the affected community, including children and families. In highly politicized circumstances, careful judgement must be exercised in the choice of team members who may wish to pursue their own agenda. • In ways that build on and are informed by existing knowledge and documentation, particularly any assessments undertaken in the preparedness phase (<i>see Chapter 5.1</i>). • In ways that engage children's participation (where this is safe, meaningful and appropriate), consider their opinions and wishes, and are age-, gender- and culturally sensitive, using 'child-friendly' listening and interviewing techniques. • Using direct observation and key informant interviews with a broad and gender-balanced range of key community informants and leaders, including children, religious leaders, women's groups, local and national authorities, teachers, health workers, soldiers, prison authorities, orphanage staff and staff of local and international organizations. • In places where UASC are likely to be found, including in hospitals, prisons and all forms of residential care. • In such a way as to sensitize the community, the authorities, non-governmental organizations and others regarding issues related to family separation.
<p>Assessments should consider:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the causes and patterns of separation. • Numbers of all UASC in various locations disaggregated by age and sex. • Identification of groups of children at special risk, such as those who are disabled or chronically ill, associated with armed forces or armed groups, or in detention (or whose parent are in detention), children who are parents and head households, adolescent girls, babies and very young children. • Information on local practices and types of care arrangements in place for UASC before and during the crisis. • Reports or evidence of missing children, including estimated numbers and potential causes (ensuring referrals where relevant to other organizations, such as the ICRC). • Reports or evidence of children being taken away from their community, including estimated numbers and information about who is taking them away and for what reason. • Analysis of measures taken by the community itself and its resources, such as community members with transferable skills, such as social workers, or active youth groups, such as scouts. • Analysis of the potential impact of relief programmes on family unity. • Identification of factors with the potential to cause new separations or aggravate the circumstances of children already separated, such as patterns and degrees of violence, mortality rates, displacement, climatic conditions, lack of food security and access to basic services, lack of income-generating activities, recruitment into armed forces or armed groups, and residential care provision.

(Adapted from International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, pp. 30-32)

5.2.1 Desk review and projection

Assessments of the risk of and likely nature and scale of separation collected prior to an emergency (see Chapter 5.1.1)⁷⁴ may be revisited after an emergency and used to form the basis of initial projections on the potential scale of separation and which children are likely to be the most vulnerable. Additional contextual information may be gathered *after* the onset of the emergency by reviewing existing sources of information, such as national statistics/surveys on children living outside of parental care, assessments and registrations of affected populations (either from communities, governments or aid agencies), for additional data on separation. Such data can be captured systematically through a **secondary data review tool**; for example the [Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit](#) provides a useful desk review tool (see Tool 16).⁷⁵ Such information should be used to inform short-term planning and prioritization in the very first stages of an emergency while further information is gathered, and to identify information gaps that require attention in rapid assessments.

 In refugee situations, **UNHCR's proGres database** can contain very useful information on UASC, children living outside of parental care, and child-headed households. However, it must be considered in context and balanced against the quality of identification that is conducted at registration. Some children may not easily be identified at registration and therefore may be underrepresented, whereas others may choose to register as individual households even when they are not separated due to perceived benefits.

★ [See Chapter 5.1.1, Assessing risk and vulnerability to separation](#)

5.2.2 Rapid assessment

Where significant separation has occurred during or after an emergency, affected populations may identify separation as an issue during an inter-agency multisectoral assessment, such as the Inter-agency Standing Committee's **Multisector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)** (for non-refugee settings). However, lack of information on separation gathered in the MIRA process should *not* be taken to indicate that separation has not occurred. **The addition of the following questions to MIRA may be helpful in enabling assessors from any sector to identify whether or not separation is an issue during initial rapid assessments or 'go-and-see' visits:**

Are there children in this location who have been separated from their usual caregivers since the emergency? If yes:

- What are the main causes of separation?
- Which children are most affected?

⁷⁴ Such information can be gathered during emergency preparedness planning with the objective of identifying risk reduction and mitigation measures.

⁷⁵ A generic secondary data review template is available on [<CP AoR.net>](#). It enables searching on multiple sources of child protection data by specific risks, including separation. This desk review is associated with the *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit* but can be conducted as part of preparedness for an emergency.

- What is their living situation?
- Who, if anyone, is providing care for them?⁷⁶

Beyond MIRAs, **Child Protection Rapid Assessments (CPRAs)⁷⁷ may be useful in the aftermath of a rapid onset emergency. They are intended to give a broad snapshot of the nature and scale of urgent child protection-related needs, including separation, across an emergency-affected population within the immediate post-emergency context.** A rapid assessment should be informed by and build upon information previously gathered and synthesized through the child protection desk review (see Chapter 5.2.1). This helps to define needs, capacities and vulnerabilities and support the development of an inter-agency strategy with clear objectives and prioritization of activities. Child Protection Rapid Assessments do not replace a more comprehensive assessment or the establishment of ongoing efforts to establish more robust mechanisms to gather data on child protection issues.

The *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit* provides guidance on methodology and standard tools (templates for desk review, key informant interviews and direct observation) for assessing a range of child protection issues, including separation and alternative care. The toolkit can be adapted and further, context-specific assessment questions relating to separation can be included, if necessary, according to the context. **The key elements of ‘what we need to know’ (WWNK) about UASC for each assessment site include:**

“Child Protection WWNKs in the rapid onset or large-scale emergency phase:

- a. Unaccompanied and separated children
 1. Patterns of separation from usual caregivers of boys and girls
 2. Types of care arrangements for separated and unaccompanied children and existing gaps
 3. Capacities and mechanisms in the community to respond to child separation
 4. Patterns and levels of institutionalization of children
 5. Laws, policies and common practices on adoption⁷⁸ (in and out of country)”

(Child Protection Working Group, *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit*, December 2012, p. 14)

Rapid assessment data can be used to:


- Identify appropriate, separation-related **programmatic interventions.**
- Ensure that interventions **build upon existing capacities** and resources.
- Identify **priorities, including geographic locations**, for interventions.
- Define the need for more **comprehensive assessments**, such as for children living in residential care, or to address issues of abduction and trafficking.

⁷⁶ Questions are adapted from the *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit*, 2012.

⁷⁷ Global Protection Cluster, Child Protection Working Group, *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit*, December 2012.

⁷⁸ Note that more and more countries are adopting laws related to guardianship, foster and kinship care as well as domestic and intercountry adoption.

- Define evidence-based **advocacy priorities** with stakeholders such as donors, governments, and armed forces and armed groups.

 The Child Protection Rapid Assessment is not designed for refugee settings. It can be adapted for use in refugee situations. However, attention must be paid to where and how questions are asked to ensure which communities are targeted (such as new arrivals, existing caseloads or host communities). Because the CPRA does not include non-sensitive questions relating to protection of refugee children (about access to territory or asylum procedures, for example), it may be necessary to add targeted questions, depending on the context.

Where possible, the [CPRA key informant interview questions on UASC](#) should be used as a basis for assessments, adapting the questions, as necessary, to the situation. It is also important to consult with the local population or those familiar with the context regarding the suitability of terminology/language and the degree to which certain questions are particularly sensitive or politicized and the appropriateness of including them. When key informants provide information or give their opinion, it is important to note the source of this information or what has led them to form this opinion.

★ [See Tool 16: Sample assessment tools from various sources](#)

A further, comprehensive assessment may be required where it is evident or suspected that separation coincides with the recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups, ensuring that links are established with any actors who have been working to address this issue before the emergency, where relevant. In such situations, reference should be made to the [Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit](#), 2012, [The Paris Principles: Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups](#), UNICEF, 2007, and the Paris Principles Steering Group, [Handbook on Child Recruitment, Release and Reintegration](#), 2015.

5.2.3 Population-based estimation

Although rapid assessments gather indicative data on family separation, these data are predominantly qualitative and provide key informants' estimates of the number of UASC at a given time at specific sites. Findings from rapid assessment data cannot be extrapolated to the entire emergency-affected area or to the UASC population as a whole. Likewise, data analysis from case management systems can provide verified and detailed information about UASC who have been identified and referred for case management (*see Chapter 7.3*). However, such information may not be representative of all UASC in a population or emergency-affected area.

In such circumstances, **a population-based estimate may be necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the nature and scale of separation in an emergency-affected population at a specific time**. While usually it is not

possible to conduct a survey with a representative sample of the population, even information from smaller samples, if well-chosen through purposive sampling,⁷⁹ can be useful.

Population-based estimates are usually conducted using a **household survey** and complementary tools, with survey sites and households selected through a population-based cluster approach to ensure that they are representative of the affected population. The 'neighbourhood method' can be used to facilitate the collection of information on multiple households through a single survey by asking survey respondents to also report on their neighbours. This approach generates information on the prevalence, number and basic characteristics of UASC, including reasons for separation.



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Population-based estimate, Democratic Republic of the Congo

A 2014 household survey conducted in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Save the Children and Columbia University used population-based sampling and community-based surveillance tools to estimate rates of separation following the M23 rebel group's takeover of Goma in 2012. The study identified a prevalence rate of 8.47 per cent separation among children living in emergency-affected communities since rebel attacks in 2012; this included 1.87 per cent unaccompanied children. Seventy-six per cent were unintentional separations, usually due to the death of caregivers. Forty-four per cent were aged between 5 and 9 years old. And 5.31 per cent of children were found to have separated from their previous caregivers and left the community; these children were slightly older and almost half had separated intentionally, most often because of food insecurity.

(Save the Children and Columbia University, *Measuring Separation in Emergencies, Pilot Summary Report. DRC Population Based Estimation Tool, July – August 2014*)


⁷⁹ For guidance on purposive sampling, see: 'Development of an Assessment Plan: Decide on a sample method and sample frame', part 1, step 2 in: *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit*, p. 16.

5.2.4 Ongoing surveillance and trends analysis

Family separation is a dynamic process, and the causes and types of separation during and after an emergency evolve over time. In some contexts, particularly slow onset emergencies, the scale of primary separation is small, but major issues of secondary separation may emerge later. Data analysis from case management systems can provide verified and detailed information about UASC who have been identified and referred for case management (see Chapter 7.3). However, such information may not be representative of all UASC in a population or emergency-affected area. **A number of additional approaches can be used to monitor the number, trends and basic characteristics of UASC at defined sites over time.**

In emergency contexts, **population screening and registration exercises** provide an opportunity to identify UASC and immediately refer them for documentation and appropriate support. Population profiling information will normally include the number, status, sex and age of UASC identified in a given population, the type of separation, and current care arrangement. Analysis of this data also enables documentation of the prevalence of separation, profile of UASC, and trends in separation over time. The quality of this data may be variable, and information should be checked to ensure that definitions are consistently understood and applied. Data may then be added to secondary data reviews (see Chapter 5.2.1) to build up as comprehensive a picture of separation as possible. The profile of one sample cannot be extrapolated to the whole population. However, the more profiles conducted of different populations (for example, for different provenances or at different points in the emergency), the better the chances that an accurate overall picture of UASC can be constructed.

In situations of displacement, populations may be screened as they cross borders or enter displacement camps. In most humanitarian contexts, registration exercises will be undertaken, often in association with authorities, in order to direct the delivery of humanitarian assistance. **While initial registration is usually done at the household level, most UASC who have been separated due to a recent emergency may be identified through the addition of a contextually adapted and appropriate question to registration exercises, such as: *Were all the children here living with you before [the war/fighting/specific event or time]?***

 In many refugee contexts, all individual refugees will have registration data entered into UNHCR's proGres database, which can then be used to define the prevalence of separation and profile of UASC, including child-headed households.

Comprehensive screening and registration exercises are less likely to take place among internally displaced populations or among emergency-affected communities remaining in their place of origin. In such situations, it may be possible to establish **community-based surveillance systems** to identify children for referral and follow-up and to monitor long-term trends. Community-based surveillance usually relies on community focal points across a network of

selected sites to provide regular reports of new cases of UASC within their reporting zones. The rationale is that community members will be privy to insider knowledge about the people who live close to them and, with proper organization, training and incentives, this knowledge can be routinely gathered and centralized to get a picture of separation in context. For this system to work, it is imperative that community focal points fully understand the definitions of the children and the reasons for identification so that separation is not inadvertently incentivized.

Additionally, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM's) **Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)**, a tool to map displacement and assess needs, has been used as an entry point for including relevant child protection/UASC variables into broader assessments. It can also trigger more in-depth assessment, such as the Child Protection Rapid Assessment. The Displacement Tracking Matrix is comprised of various data-collection methods, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, registration, observations and physical counting, sampling and other statistical methodologies (*see Tool 16*).

5.2.5 Situation analysis

A child rights/child protection situation analysis may be necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of separation, current care arrangements, risks, vulnerabilities, and coping mechanisms, and the wishes and aspirations of UASC.

The affected community itself is a resource: Community leaders, teachers, social workers, aid workers and others may have valuable information about UASC in their community. **A UASC situation analysis should incorporate primary research and participatory methods**, which ensure that the voices of children and communities are included.⁸⁰ Key informant interviews are one such participatory method that help to provide a rough idea of whether or not separation is a significant phenomenon, and can also be used to provide detailed qualitative information on the care and protection of UASC. The Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit provides a sample questionnaire that can be used with key informants (*see Tool 16*).

A second participatory approach is a **focus group discussion**, which can be a valuable tool for collecting in-depth, qualitative information about the issues facing UASC after the emergency phase. Such discussions can also involve UASC themselves, once they are safe, meaningful and appropriate to conduct. For example, focus group discussions conducted with UASC and their caregivers can help us understand the protection risks they face and how services are perceived. The Child Protection Rapid Assessment does not address focus group discussions; for guidance on conducting discussions, refer to the [Emergency Child Protection Assessment Toolkit](#).

⁸⁰ See, for example: Save the Children, *Practice Standards in Child Participation*, Save the Children, 2005, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Listen and Learn: Participatory assessment with children and adolescents*, UNHCR, 2012.

A situation analysis of UASC should inform emergency work as part of a wider strategy and should:

Map and analyse existing information

- **Be broader than and expand upon a needs assessment**, plan interventions and approaches for the medium term and establish **more robust data-collection mechanisms**.
- **Take into account the context**, all pre-existing information and current risks to children.

Assess and verify

- Recommend **adjustments to and assess capacity to scale up programmes** where necessary; ensure that successful programmes can be scaled up to address the needs of a significant percentage of the total caseload.
- Investigate modalities for **responsible handover of programmes**, including capacity-building needs and realistic time frame/resources for work with UASC, which are often underestimated.
- Incorporate **primary research and participatory methods**, including key informants, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Children have much to contribute; include them in assessments using appropriate participatory approaches that build upon their resilience.⁸¹
- Be **validated by stakeholders**, including representatives of the community and partner organizations, to promote a shared understanding of the protection gaps identified.

Analyse findings and prioritize responses

- Establish the **causes of separation** and factors that may increase separation.
- Identify **risks** faced by UASC and define **vulnerability** to these risks.
- Identify **existing mechanisms to care for and protect children from abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect**. To the extent possible, include community care mechanisms and support structures, faith groups, formal government/non-governmental structures, relevant legal standards, policies and procedures, and political commitment, capacity and resources to support a child protection response.
- Consider the **strengths and weaknesses of the emergency response**, identify gaps in knowledge and highlight areas for further expert guidance or research.
- Indicate **priorities for next steps and response**, including medium-term interventions, more robust data-collection mechanisms and modalities for the handover of programmes.

⁸¹ See, for example: Practice Standards in Child Participation, 2005; Listen and Learn, Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents, 2012.



5.3 Organizing assessments

When carrying out assessments in multiple locations, close coordination and use of a common methodology facilitates comparative analysis and helps determine priorities. To avoid duplication, it is recommended that assessments are inter-agency. An assessment of UASC should normally be undertaken as part of a broader protection assessment or, for those actors working within the UN/cluster system, a child protection rapid needs assessment, alongside other assessment methodologies. If other surveys, such as shelter, food security or education assessments, are being conducted with a representative sample, it may be possible to incorporate aspects relating to separation into these tools (see the Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).⁸² The group responsible for coordinating work with UASC in-country should provide the forum for agreeing who will undertake assessments in which geographic locations and how findings will be shared among all those working with UASC (see Chapter 4.2).

Since the assessment process may be the first time that emergency-affected populations interact with humanitarian workers, **it is critical that any staff members taking part in assessments have the information and contacts to be able to make urgent referrals to emergency services, and are able to inform participants and communities about what they should expect as follow-up** (see the Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*). Assessment staff should also have the technical knowledge to take practical action to identify UASC, promote quick reunification, address urgent protection/care needs and prevent further separation while they are in the assessment location (see Chapters 3.1 and 8.3).

Before undertaking assessments, **all assessment staff should be trained in the relevant assessment methodology and must have a clear understanding of the definitions of UASC, have agreed on an interpretation of the definitions** in the local language, and have reached an understanding on how to convey these definitions according to cultural understandings of childcare and development (see Chapter 8.1.1). Assessment staff must also be able to explain the objectives of assessing the situation of and programmatic interventions with UASC, to avoid creating false expectations of assistance, or creating fear those children may be removed.

⁸² For guidance, see: Child Protection Working Group, *Guidelines on the Integration of Child Protection issues into Multisectoral & other Humanitarian Assessments*, 2016 (forthcoming).



Southern Tunisia: Communicating UASC definitions to Libyan families

While pre-testing the rapid assessment tool, it became clear that Libyan families did not easily understand the words 'separated' and 'unaccompanied', even when assessors explained the terms. Instead of using these words, it was decided that assessors should ask specifically about children who were not living with their usual caregivers but with other members of their extended family because of the crisis (separated children) or children who were living neither with their usual caregivers nor with their extended family members as a result of the crisis (unaccompanied children).

(Adapted from Child Protection Working Group, *Inter-agency Child Protection Rapid Assessment*, Southern Tunisia, CP AoR, 2011, p. 20)

Finally, it is important to **triangulate and validate** the data gathered from different sources, including representatives of the community and partner organizations. This is an important step during analysis of any assessment findings, since it promotes a shared understanding of protection gaps identified and will later inform the response. The *Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit* also provides detailed information on data analysis and interpretation, which is the culmination of each assessment and informs programming response. However, note that if the key informant questionnaire is being adapted, the data analysis tool also needs to be revised accordingly.



Tool 16: Sample assessment tools from various sources

Child Protection Working Group, [Child Protection Rapid Assessment Toolkit](#), 2012.

Child Protection Working Group, [Assessment and Measurement Taskforce](#).

Child Protection Working Group, *Guidelines on the Integration of Child Protection issues into Multisectoral & other Humanitarian Assessments*, 2015 draft, 2016 (forthcoming).

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Appendix D: 'Guidance for Effective Use of the UASC Mapping', in: [No Small Matter: Ensuring protection and durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated refugee children](#), 2007.

Save the Children, [Putting Children at the Centre: A practical guide to children's participation](#), 2010.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Listen and Learn: Participatory assessment with children and adolescents](#), 2012.



Chapter 6 sets out the essential components of programmes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). They are the ‘basics’ necessary for programme design and implementation, which are the same as those for all emergency programmes: a strategic approach, solid programme design that supports national child protection systems, strong partnerships – whether with government or communities/civil society organizations – and the necessary resources (human, financial and material) to implement programmes for an appropriate period, including, where necessary, sufficient time for transition or handover.

06

The basics: Programme planning for UASC

TOPICS

6.1 Programme development

- 6.1.1 Supporting broader child protection systems through strategic programme design
 - Systems-strengthening
 - Planning for handover of programmes and exit strategy

- 6.1.2 Designing a programme
 - Programme monitoring and evaluation

- 6.1.3 Identifying potential partners
 - Working with governments
 - Special considerations in complex emergencies
 - Working with communities/civil society organizations
 - Community-based child protection mechanisms

6.2 Programme resources

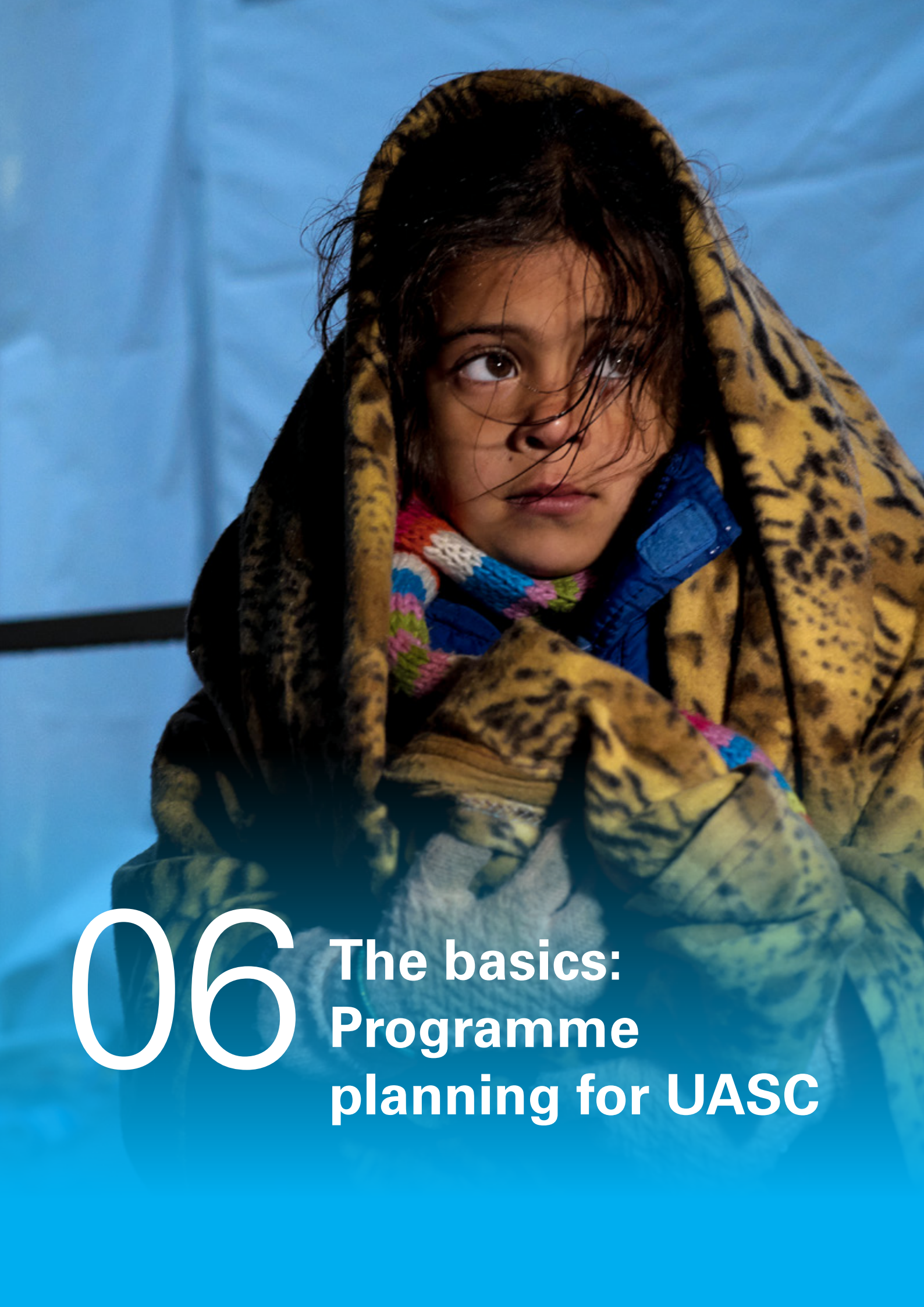
- 6.2.1 Programme staff, training and capacity building
 - Staffing roles and competencies
 - Training

- 6.2.2 Volunteers working with UASC

- 6.2.3 Budgets for UASC programmes

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Programme development should be consistent with child rights-based approaches and the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (*see Chapter 1.1*).
- Programme design for UASC should involve: first, understanding, assessing and analysing the situation (*see Chapter 5.2*); second, planning and coordinating programme response; third, implementing that programme response; and fourth, monitoring and evaluating the programme for continual improvement. Accountability measures should be incorporated into each phase.
- Programmes for UASC should aim to address underlying vulnerabilities and contribute to the strengthening of child protection systems, where necessary.
- The programme design process should be participatory to reflect the opinions of children and communities and should also involve consultation with external stakeholders.
- Programmes for UASC require a long-term commitment from organizations. Programme design should be planned with long-term actors such as the government (and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees – UNHCR – in refugee settings) to ensure that sustainable, and not parallel, systems are developed and that a plan for transition and eventual handover to government/other partners is implemented.
- The handover of information management systems, where required, needs to be carefully timed and managed.
- Strong partnerships may be sought with government, communities and civil society.
- A realistic assessment of and advocacy for sufficient resources – human, material and financial – for each phase of the activities across the programme cycle is essential when designing a programme for UASC.



06

**The basics:
Programme
planning for UASC**

6.1 Programme development

Humanitarian interventions, including UASC programmes, should be 'rights-based',⁸³ drawing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁸⁴ (see Chapter 1.1).

When designing UASC programmes, **links with broader child protection and protection initiatives or human rights monitoring bodies**, as appropriate, should be established so that risks for UASC are recognized and assessed. Coordinated protection monitoring and response should be implemented – for example, via the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) for grave violations against children in armed conflict or via the Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Arrangement (MARA) for sexual violence in conflict.⁸⁵

Follow these steps to develop UASC programmes, incorporating accountability measures throughout:⁸⁶

- Step 1: Understand, assess and analyse the situation of separation.
- Step 2: Plan and coordinate a UASC programme response.
- Step 3: Implement a UASC programme response.
- Step 4: Monitor and evaluate UASC programmes against agreed indicators.

★ [See Tool 17: Step-by-step guide to UASC programme development](#)

★ [See Tool 18: Child Protection Minimum Standards, Standard 13: Unaccompanied and separated children](#)

★ [See Tool 19: Tools and resources to support programme design](#)

⁸³ Note that the International Committee of the Red Cross uses a needs-based approach in its assessments/situation analyses.

⁸⁴ International Rescue Committee, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, 'Child Protection Monitoring', Standard 6 in: *Action for the Rights of Children: Foundation Module 2*, 2009.

⁸⁵ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012. See also: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations Children's Fund, *Guidelines: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict*, UNICEF, 2014, <[www.mrmtools.org/mrm/files/MRM_Guidelines_-_5_June_2014\(1\).pdf](http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/files/MRM_Guidelines_-_5_June_2014(1).pdf)>, accessed 14 January 2016; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 'Provisional Guidance Note: Implementation of Security Council resolution 1960 (2010) on women, peace and security (conflict-related sexual violence)', 2011, <www.refworld.org/pdfid/4e23ed5d2.pdf>, accessed 14 January 2016.

⁸⁶ Gostelow, Lola, *Towards a Human Rights-based Approach to Programming in Emergencies: A discussion paper*, Draft report, 2007. For information on accountability, see Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*.

6.1.1 Supporting broader child protection systems through strategic programme design

Strategic programme design should:

- **Prioritize the issues identified in the situation assessments or situation analyses.**
- **Draw on lessons learned from interventions for UASC in other emergencies.**
- **Cover all the different elements of the response to UASC**, including areas for further research.
- **Include an overall timeline and exit strategy (such as proposals for transition and handover).**
- **Include a funding strategy that addresses funding beyond the emergency period.**
- **Collaboratively develop a protection strategy** under the lead and coordination of the Child Protection coordination group or other coordination body and, in refugee contexts, within a broader refugee protection strategy (see Chapter 4.2).

Strategic programme design may require both a systems-strengthening approach and limiting the scope of UASC programme responses to match priorities and capacity.

Limiting UASC programmes can be difficult, particularly in the absence of many of the elements of a national child protection system or where an exclusive focus on UASC creates a risk of voluntary separation or stigma. However, prevention and response to family separation is a core protection priority in all emergencies. In many emergency situations, it can be challenging to identify in-country child protection capacity, but there are usually forms of statutory and customary systems to address other protection concerns, such as child abuse and sexual violence, which, if appropriate, can allow actors to focus on identification, documentation, tracing, reunification and related activities. While limiting the scope of activities, it is important not to lose sight of the wider picture and, through relevant coordination groups, to call for more actors to get involved, release advocacy statements, request additional funding and promote the involvement of government and other local actors in improving child protection systems. Indeed, realistic programme goals need to be set within a broad understanding of context and vision for change.

Systems-strengthening

Increasingly, child protection interventions aim to address underlying vulnerabilities, rather than target individual groups or categories of children. This is due to the fact that where child protection systems are strong, children are likely to be better protected. Thus, **one of the long-term objectives of organizations responding to family separation in emergencies should be to contribute towards the strengthening of child protection systems, focusing on factors that reinforce resilience for UASC.**

Where strategies responding to UASC in emergencies address child protection needs more broadly, they lay the foundations for child protection systems to be

further developed and strengthened at the appropriate time. **Family tracing and reunification programmes can often be entry points for system development**, since these two areas tend to have strong support from governments, community members and donors. They also reveal gaps in the existing child protection system and require information management and case management systems to be successful.⁸⁷ Priorities will change throughout the programme cycle, so good monitoring and evaluation are also key to reorient programme work towards child protection system-strengthening. Indeed, efforts to strengthen both formal and informal child protection systems can provide an opportunity to ‘build back better’ by strengthening systems that support *all* children at risk, including UASC. This in turn mitigates the risk of separation and builds preparedness for future emergencies (see Chapter 3.1.2).

Key systems-strengthening actions:

- Work with governments to **strengthen social welfare systems**, including support to curricula or training programmes for social workers and development of **case management and information management systems** (see Chapter 7.2).
- Advocate with national partners to ensure that their activities strengthen national and community-based child protection systems and that **basic services are available and accessible to all children**.
- Promote **access for all children to national child protection systems**, including marginalized and vulnerable children.
- Advocate with governments for **appropriate child protection legislation, policies or practices**:
 - Declare a moratorium on international adoptions and the creation of new residential care facilities during an emergency.
 - Review alternative care legislation to ensure that institutional care is a last resort.
 - Ensure that alternative care policies are appropriate for potential refugee children.
 - Ensure access to legal documentation, including birth registration for newborn children in refugee and displaced populations, to protect against loss of identity or access to services.
- Strengthen mechanisms for **alternative care arrangements** for children without parental care (see Chapter 10).
- Support the establishment, where relevant/required, of **best interests procedures** by authorities for UASC and other children at risk (see Chapter 7.2.5).
- Implement or strengthen projects to **increase rates of birth registration** (see Chapter 3.1.2).
- **Provide technical training on family tracing and reunification** for government social workers or child protection agency staff.

★ See Chapter 3.1.2, *National-level prevention and preparedness*

⁸⁷ See, for example: Canavera, Mark, *Strengthening Child Protection Systems through the Emergency Response to the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti*, Draft, 2013.


Haiti: Systems strengthening

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the Government of Haiti was devastated. It was several months before the country's child protection agency, the Institut du Bien-Etre Social et de Recherches (IBESR), was able to fully participate in the response to unaccompanied and separated children. IBESR was dealing with a range of issues in addition to family tracing and reunification, namely, medical evacuations of children, adoption, cross-border movement of children and children in residential care centres. While the focus was on coordinating lifesaving emergency actions, it was clear early on that there would be a real and important opportunity to work towards long-term reinforcement of the child protection system, with a vision to handing over the process to government social services in due course.

Initially, technical and coordination meetings were held several times a week, evolving to weekly and then to bimonthly

meetings. After a few months, meetings were held at IBESR. Monthly one-day workshops were held for case coordinators and caseworkers on a range of different child protection themes to provide ongoing support and learning opportunities. Additionally, there was a concentrated effort to build on the work of the UNICEF Haiti country office before the earthquake to strengthen the child protection system. It was possible to scale up much of this work following the earthquake, including by transferring approximately 100 social workers from the inter-agency family tracing and reunification working group to IBESR, where they continue to work on a range of child protection issues.

(Case Study: Haiti, UNICEF, 2013)

 A key approach as well as a strategic priority for UNHCR is working with host governments to ensure that refugee children have access to national child protection systems, since this has proved to be one of the most effective and sustainable ways – even in emergency settings – to prevent and address the multiple protection risks that displaced children face. Collaboration between UNHCR and state authorities, as well as other UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), enables the strengthening of referral pathways and care for displaced children requiring protection services, including UASC. Establishment of community-based child protection mechanisms is also an important systems-strengthening measure in refugee situations. When it comes to UASC, **specific actions to strengthen access to child protection systems for refugee children include the following.**

To ensure that:

- National policies on UASC, including alternative care and family reunification, specifically consider the needs of refugee children and include relevant provisions to ensure that care is within refugee children's own community.
- Roles and responsibilities among the different government bodies that are responsible for child protection and refugee protection (such as the ministry of social welfare and ministry of border protection/interior) are clearly defined in terms of UASC, and are trained on child protection and refugee protection.
- State child protection services are adapted to the needs of refugee children (by addressing linguistic, cultural, religious, geographic and socio-economic barriers).
- Refugee children access birth registration (*see Chapter 3.1.2*).

Planning for handover of programmes and exit strategy

Even at the early stage of programme design, it is important to plan programmes in a manner that considers their handover and exit strategies. Programmes for UASC require a **long-term commitment** that does not stop when children are reunited or the emergency is declared over. International organizations are likely to continue implementing programmes until the majority of UASC are reunited and arrangements for follow-up are in place. Handover is therefore likely to involve children for whom tracing has been unsuccessful and children who are hard to place and require long-term alternative care, as well as ongoing follow-up of children already placed in alternative-care settings and reunited children (*see Chapters 10.5 and 12.5*). Case management may also have revealed the need for interventions in other areas, such as gender-based violence, child labour or exploitation.

Ideally and where possible, organizations implementing direct programme work for UASC will be able to **hand over these responsibilities as local capacity recovers or is developed**, based on a transition plan agreed to with local partners and in close collaboration with the ministry of social welfare or other relevant ministry/governmental bodies. In the refugee context, programme handovers

should also involve UNHCR. For handover of programmes to national authorities to be successful, a functioning child protection system needs to be in place; where this is not already the case, capacity must first be built.⁸⁸ In countries without functioning, effective or willing government structures, capacity building may need to instead focus on civil society organizations for implementation.

Lack of funding can be a significant constraint to the development of a responsible transition strategy. Where this is the case, organizations should **advocate for an extension of donor funding to allow for an intensive handover period**, working side by side with national counterparts. Where programme work is not handed over responsibly, there is more likely to be a subsequent increase of children in residential care, and children may become more vulnerable to threats, abuse and exploitation.

While circumstances will differ in each emergency, **global experience shows that, early on in programming, organizations should:**

Build national and local capacity

- **Allocate time and resources to analysing likely future developments in the country**, including where UASC/child protection work will fit in local administrative structures and professional training and future risks (such as conflicts or natural disasters). Realistically assess costs of maintaining follow-up/protection work.
- **Develop government capacity (where required) and foster ownership** over the long term and with sustained effort. If working with the government, include its logo on training materials and documents to make its endorsement evident. Include as many field-level staff as possible in training (not just one team member), to create a critical mass of people speaking the same programme language.
- **Consider seconding staff to relevant ministries, organizing programme exchanges with ministry staff or providing funding for their professional development, or supporting local institutions**, including universities, as a part of capacity building.
- **Ensure that the purpose, objectives and criteria of UASC programme are discussed, fully understood, agreed upon and written down** during the transition so the original purpose is not lost or distorted over time.

★ [See Chapter 5.1.2, Mapping local/national capacity to respond and critical gaps](#)

Plan for handover of individual cases and case management systems


- **Include the possibility of absorbing existing caseworkers into programmes with new actors** as part of handover planning to ensure continuity for the children who remain.

⁸⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *A Systems Approach to Protection of Children – A UNHCR framework for protection programming for children*, Draft, 2012.

“Who owns the information:


While [government involvement in information management] may not be possible at the onset of an emergency, special attention needs to be paid to building government capacity for information management in order to ensure long-term sustainability. When working with governments, special attention needs to be paid to data security and confidentiality.”

(Child Protection Working Group, Information Management, Standard 5 in: *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 65)

- **Ensure that remaining caseloads of children (who may be very vulnerable) are absorbed into relevant government/local authority structures and social welfare/protection programmes, where they exist, and programmes for UASC, orphans and vulnerable children, whether implemented by government/international NGOs/NGOs or through local partnerships.**
-  **In a refugee context, where UNHCR undertakes case management activities for refugees with protection needs, including children, the best interests procedure is used for UASC and other children at risk (see Chapter 7.2.5).** Other agencies need to ensure that their work with UASC contributes to this process and **does not create a parallel system.** This will also help to ensure a smooth transition for short-term actors. In the long term, UNHCR also aims to support governments to take on child protection work, including for UASC.

★ [See Chapter 7.2, Case management](#)

Plan for handover of information management systems (see Chapter 7.3)

- **Consider and carefully time handover of information management systems, where required and appropriate, to ensure that capacity exists for government/local authorities to manage and maintain systems; do so only when a risk assessment concludes there is no risk/potential risk to beneficiaries from handing over confidential information, especially in situations of armed conflict.⁸⁹**
-  **In a refugee context, UNHCR usually retains a comprehensive registration of all refugees. The organization should be consulted on the handover of sensitive information concerning refugees to ensure safeguards are in place (such as non-disclosure of refugee data to countries of origin) (see Chapter 7.2.5).**

★ [See Chapter 7.3 Information Management Systems](#)

★ [See Tool 20: Key questions when considering support for government use of an Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System](#)

6.1.2 Designing a programme

There are many approaches and tools available to support programme design, including child rights programming and logical frameworks. Whatever approach is taken, coordination with a wide range of actors is recommended (see Chapter 4.2); this will invest both human and financial resources into efficient delivery of UASC programmes. Children and communities should also be consulted so that programmes reflect the opinions of affected populations. Different tools and donor guidelines use a range of terminology, but the basis of good programming, including in prevention of separation and response to UASC, is a solid programme design. This generally includes a logical framework that sets out objectives, outcomes, outputs and activities.

⁸⁹ See also the International Committee of the Red Cross, *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, 2013.

Here is one recommended approach to programme design:

Standard 13 Family separation is prevented and responded to, and unaccompanied and separated children are cared for and protected according to their specific needs and their best interests.

(Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 117)

STEP 1: Decide on priority UASC interventions, which were identified as needs in the situation analysis, (ensuring that they build on existing capacities and mechanisms).

STEP 2: Set clear objectives to achieve the desired outcomes/result of the programme.

STEP 3: Establish relevant indicators for which data can be collected to measure progress towards the programme objectives (both quantitative and qualitative indicators are recommended).

STEP 4: Select activities and related outputs required to achieve outcomes/results.

When setting objectives, reference can be made to the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

Indicators and targets can then be set and used as ‘signals’ to measure achievement of objectives.



TABLE 4
MEASUREMENT OF UASC PROGRAMMES


OUTCOME INDICATOR	OUTCOME TARGET
1. Surveillance systems and services are in place to prevent unnecessary separations	Yes
2. Percentage of children registered for tracing that has been reunified and stayed with their family for more than six months	90%
3. Percentage of registered UASC in appropriate and protective care arrangements	100%
ACTION INDICATOR	ACTION TARGET
4. Adapted registration forms, SOPs, information, referral and case-management systems in place within one week of the emergency	Yes
5. Percentage of registered UASC who are reunited with their caregivers	90%
6. Mechanisms in place for registration and receiving information and for active tracing of immediate family members and relatives	Yes
7. Percentage of children who have received at least one follow-up visit within one month of being reunited with caregivers	100%
8. Percentage of registered UASC in appropriate interim or long-term alternative care	100%
9. Percentage of registered unaccompanied children in long-term alternative care who are receiving monitoring visits at least once a month	90%

Notes:

- "Appropriate" and "protective" to be defined in country or context
- "Appropriate interim care" can be defined in country according to the Alternative Care Toolkit (ACE)
- Indicators and targets should be contextualized to ensure that measurement is relevant for each particular situation or programme.

(Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 121)

★ [See Tool 18: Child Protection Minimum Standards, Standard 13: Unaccompanied and separated children](#)


 UNHCR's Results Based Framework and its planning and reporting tool 'FOCUS' are key monitoring references since they define objectives, outputs and indicators across the organization. The Results Based Framework includes specific impact and performance indicators on child protection (including UASC) as well as others that relate to child protection. The indicators are reported on by UNHCR and its partners and inform planning; they also aim to improve programming for protection.

Programme monitoring and evaluation

Programme monitoring is essential to understanding what elements of the programme are working well and what areas need to be adapted or revised. Indicators⁹⁰ are selected at the initial planning stage of a project or programme so that change can be measured from the start of implementation, providing benchmarks against which to measure both the achievement of objectives and the effective implementation of activities towards these objectives.

Whereas monitoring is an ongoing process involving continuous review of activities, an evaluation is a specific, time-bound exercise that is usually conducted after a given phase, such as emergency response, or at the end of a programme. Programme evaluation is usually intended to inform and improve future programmes and may be specific – for example, comparing outcomes for UASC in different placement options.

Organizations will use a range of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches, tools and methods, but there is increasing evidence that **participatory, inclusive M&E practices** lead to recommendations that have a better probability of being implemented and adopted. Taking a participatory approach to M&E requires a significant investment from organizations in time and the use of a range of methods (workshops, semi-structured interviews with relevant staff, affected children, families and community). However, such an approach also ensures relevance, fosters a sense of ownership among local people, maximizes engagement and enhances local capacity.

 UNHCR and partners conduct Participatory Assessments annually, holding separate discussions with women, girls, boys and men, including adolescents, in order to gather accurate information on specific protection risks they face and the underlying causes, to understand their capacities and to hear their proposed solutions. The Participatory Assessment analysis informs the protection strategies and programming for UNHCR's operations in a specific country.

It is also important to **solicit the opinions of other partners and organizations.** This is particularly relevant where work is part of a larger response – for example, where there is a cross-border element. Different perspectives can provide the checks and balances necessary to harmonize programmes and approaches and ensure that agreed policies and procedures are being followed.

⁹⁰ Achieving change for children is usually a long-term process that can be monitored and evaluated using different types of indicators, often referred to as output or process indicators and outcome indicators. Different terms may be used, but monitoring outcomes provide information about whether activities are bringing about the desired changes.

6.1.3 Identifying potential partners

In any context, to effectively work with UASC, coordination and, in many instances, partnerships with other organizations or actors are essential. Such partners may include:

- **Governments** at regional, national, subnational and local levels
- **United Nations agencies and international organizations**
- **International Committee of the Red Cross**
- **Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies**,⁹¹ including local branches and volunteers
- **National, regional or international NGOs** working in child protection or legal aid/protection, including coalitions, alliances and networks
- **Community-based organizations** such as village committees, cooperatives, women's groups, credit organizations, parent-teacher and child/youth associations
- **Academic institutions**, including training and research institutions and professional associations
- **Faith-based groups and institutions** relating to all religious communities.

A partnership can be established at any stage of the programme cycle, but early partnerships facilitate shared understanding of the situation, jointly agreed objectives and a procedure to establish what will be achieved and how. Whether the partner is a government department or ministry, a community-based organization or a local NGO, the same principles apply.

★ *See Chapter 4.2, Framework for national and subnational coordination*

★ *See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and specific needs of UASC*

Faith-based groups are often uniquely placed within communities to respond to the needs of UASC and vulnerable children and have traditionally played this role. Where religious communities are partners in UASC-related activities, refer to the UNICEF guidelines on partnerships with religious groups, which underscore the need to “identify common ground and maximize our comparative advantages, but also to encourage open dialogue, even about complex, sensitive issues. This is especially true in addressing attitudes and practices sometimes associated with religious beliefs which harm children physically or emotionally, or exclude them from fully participating in their societies.”⁹²

Partnerships with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement⁹³ should be in accordance with Resolution 10 of the Council of Delegates of

⁹¹ Other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement include National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (International Federation).

⁹² United Nations Children's Fund, *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children*, Foreword, UNICEF, New York, 2012.

⁹³ The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is made up of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2003 and its Annex on 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between movement components and their external operational partners'. A specific 'model agreement' has been agreed upon and designed to ensure that National Societies can comply with Movement policies whenever they work with UNHCR, and that the UNHCR itself respects the Red Cross identity and the modus operandi of the National Societies.

★ *See Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC*

Working with governments

Governments have primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of all children – including forcibly displaced children – under their jurisdiction, even in emergencies. Likewise, the international community has a responsibility to work with and through existing government structures, where possible and appropriate. **Where government structures are weak, UASC programming should support government capacity building at the national and local level** (see Chapter 6.1.1).

There are some positive examples of governments coordinating and leading child protection activities and coordination groups. In some contexts, the emergency has proved to be an important entry point for developing long-term protection programmes, especially where emergency response programmes are built on existing structures and the government is involved from the start of the emergency, as was the case in Aceh, Indonesia following the 2004 tsunami.⁹⁴

However, not all governments are able or willing to fulfil their international obligations when operating under severe constraints and with limited human, financial and technical resources, or are parties to a conflict linked to the humanitarian crisis, especially protracted conflicts. Organizations may also find themselves working in emergencies with an interim government or without a functioning government in large parts of the country and thus having to negotiate with armed non-state actors to gain access to populations, including UASC, or indeed to negotiate for the release of children recruited by armed forces or armed groups.

Special considerations in complex emergencies

Engagement with governments following natural disasters is likely to be more straightforward than in complex emergencies. Additionally, careful negotiation, dialogue and, in some instances, advocacy may be required when seeking to work with a State that is unwilling to take responsibility for its obligations or

⁹⁴ United Nations Children's Fund Evaluation Office, *Children and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Evaluation of UNICEF's response in Indonesia (2005-2008)*, Country synthesis report, UNICEF, 2009, p. vi.

that is complicit with or responsible for violations of children's rights. Capacity building in these situations may instead focus on informal elements of the system, such as community-based child protection mechanisms.

Deciding how best to work with governments or armed non-state actors in complex emergencies is challenging, and forming relationships based on trust can take time. Every situation is unique and the subnational or national coordination group for UASC (supported by the global Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, if necessary) should provide a forum for solutions and decisions, related to information-sharing, for example.

★ *See Tool 20: Key questions when considering support for government use of an inter-agency child protection information management system*

Working with communities/civil society organizations

A community-based approach places communities at the heart of protecting their own children, and their responses to children at risk should not be overlooked. Communities are a key resource in identifying vulnerable children, including UASC, and in responding to and monitoring their needs. Thus, communities can be incorporated into protection programmes. **An understanding of pre-existing, community-based protection mechanisms and responses to UASC, and engaging with and supporting these as appropriate, is central to developing an emergency response to UASC.** Indeed, experience from the response to UASC in Indonesia following the 2004 tsunami found that those projects that were disconnected from traditional, community and/or local district structures had comparatively poor outcomes and impacts compared to those projects that were linked to and built on existing mechanisms.⁹⁵

At times, community networks/civil society organizations can also act as a substitute for national authorities – for example, where the government does not have the capacity to engage in emergency response or has no presence in affected areas, or where there are political sensitivities. Supporting and **linking civil society organizations to national initiatives**, such as human rights commissions, can also create momentum for change or strengthen child protection systems. Indeed, in Myanmar in 2010, child protection system strengthening was successful due to efforts to link community-based child protection mechanisms and government structures at the outset of emergency response; this government partnership set a framework for subsequent collaboration and strengthening.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Children and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Evaluation of UNICEF's response in Indonesia (2005-2008)*, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Eynon, Alyson, and Sarah Lilley, *Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Emergencies through Community-based Mechanisms – A discussion paper*, Save the Children on behalf of the Child Protection Working Group, 2010, p. 17.

Community-based child protection mechanisms⁹⁷

After mapping local/national capacity and gaps (see *Chapter 5.1.2*), an essential aspect of preparedness and programme development is to build a strategy to work with and support community-based child protection mechanisms, as appropriate and necessary.

Whatever form or name they take, community-based groups are an important part of child protection programming responses. Supporting or establishing such groups is an important means of strengthening child protection, supporting shifts in social norms and practices that might be harmful to children, as well as empowering communities. That said, establishing new groups takes time and cannot be accomplished rapidly as part of an emergency response.

Key activities to establish or support community-based child protection mechanisms include the following:⁹⁸

- Conduct all work in a manner that supports healthy national child protection systems
- Use a dialogue-oriented, culturally sensitive approach
- Plan for and take systematic steps to promote sustainability
- Develop improved systems of training and capacity building
- Promote genuine child participation⁹⁹
- Prioritize the effective management of issues of power, diversity and tolerance
- Embed child protection supports within wider community development processes
- Cultivate awareness of, and take steps to respond to and prevent, 'Do no harm' issues
- Institute systematic programme evaluations and learning to improve practice.

⁹⁷ See: Wessells, Mike, *What are We Learning about Protecting Children in the Community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings*, Save the Children Fund, 2009.

⁹⁸ Adapted from Wessells, 2009, pp. 82, 83.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Save the Children, *Practice Standards in Child Participation*, Save the Children UK, 2005.

Indonesia: Building community ownership

In East Java Province, Indonesia, trafficking of girls was a widespread yet taboo problem that, in 2003, communities did little to address. In a strategy of building community trust, Save the Children framed the first meeting with village development workers as a forum to identify and address general community problems. Having built trust using this indirect approach, they took three steps to enable communities to recognize the problem and to take responsibility for addressing it.

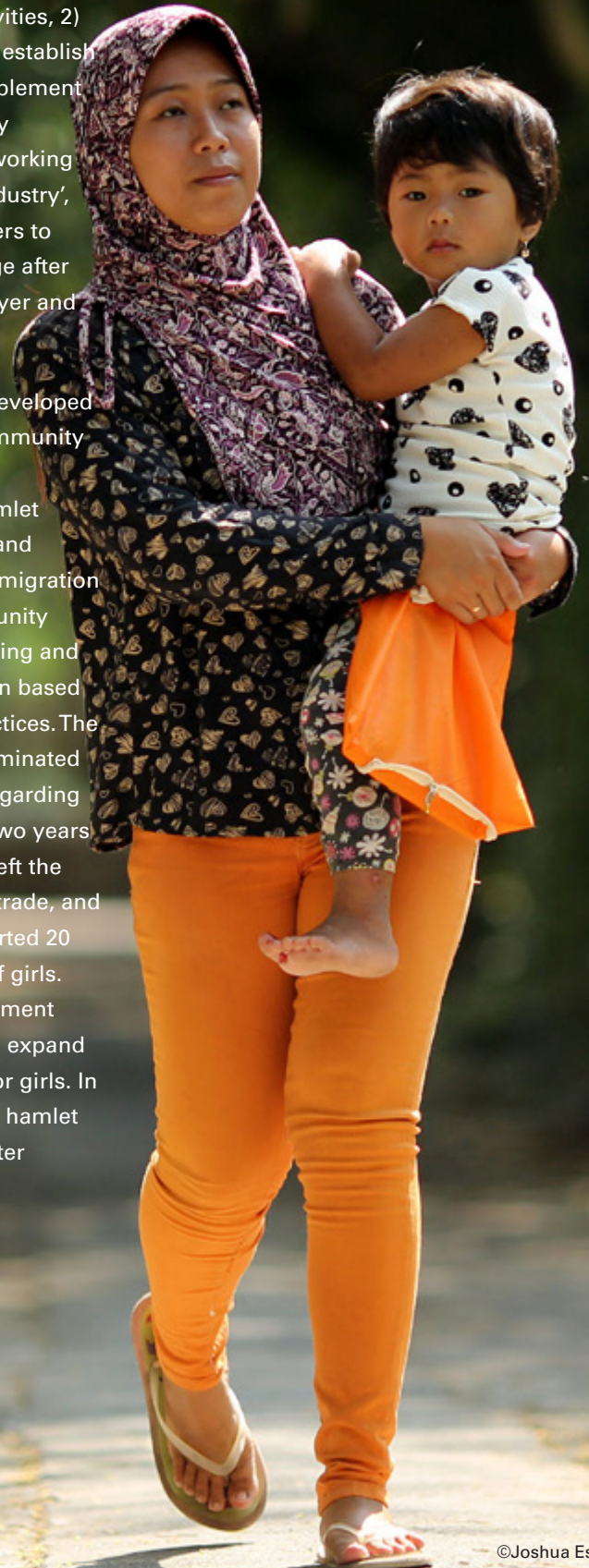
First, village development workers mapped the entire village, circling homes of missing girls or girls at risk. This mapping exercise highlighted the magnitude of the problem: 140 people were missing and 90 per cent were girls aged 14 to 17 years. Seeing how great the problem was, villagers broke their silence, began to take ownership of the problem, and asked questions such as, "Why do girls leave the village and not boys?"

Second, village development workers identified 'positive deviants' – people who were at risk of becoming involved in trafficking yet who had developed a positive coping

strategy for avoiding it. Positive deviant families used strategies such as: 1) engaging in diverse income-generating activities, 2) helping their daughters establish a small business to supplement family income, 3) openly discussing the risks of working in the 'entertainment industry', and 4) allowing daughters to work outside their village after investigating the employer and kind of work.

Third, the community developed its own action plan. Community watch committees were established in every hamlet to monitor the brokers and traffickers and map the migration flow of girls. The community launched an anti-trafficking and safe migration campaign based on positive deviant practices. The local government disseminated rules and regulations regarding travel documentation. Two years later, no new girls had left the village to enter the sex trade, and the community had averted 20 attempts at trafficking of girls. Also, the district government had committed funds to expand training opportunities for girls. In place of the taboo, each hamlet held anti-trafficking poster contests.

(Wessells, Mike, What are We Learning about Protecting Children in the Community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings, Save the Children Fund, 2009, p. 36, Matrix document 48)



6.2 Programme resources

A realistic assessment of the resources – human, material and financial – for each phase of activities across the programme cycle is essential when designing an UASC programme. For example, identification, documentation, tracing and reunification; case management; and care of UASC are all labour-intensive and need to be allocated resources accordingly. Ensuring successful and fully resourced programmes often requires **targeted advocacy for sufficient resource allocation** from country offices, headquarters or donors.

6.2.1 Programme staff, training and capacity building

Working with UASC requires adequately skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff, both senior-level programme managers or advisers and field staff/case workers.

Consideration should always be given to the **availability and capacity of national and local government and local NGOs**. Focusing on international staff risks undermining ownership of the programme and excluding valuable local capacities and knowledge. It is good human resource management practice to work through local organizations/government rather than recruiting skilled staff away to work for international agencies or NGOs. Where national capacity has to be developed, programmes should seek funding for a national counterpart to shadow international staff over the course of the programme.

Child-to-staff ratios for caseworkers should take into account the abilities of staff, the needs of children and logistical issues, such as travel distances and security conditions, as well as other demands upon their time, for example, attending meetings or administrative tasks. Ideally, caseworkers should work in mixed gender pairs.

Competencies for child protection in emergencies

Staff who have special responsibility for child protection need particular skills and attributes. Depending on the situation, specific competencies might be needed, such as resilience to stress and multi-tasking. Recruitment needs to assess behaviour and attitude, as well as skills and experience, using appropriate competency frameworks and useful recruitment processes.

(Child Protection Working Group, Standard 2 in: *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012)

Staffing roles and competencies


Each staff member has an important role to play in UASC programmes. **The core staff functions for emergency response to UASC include:**

- Senior-level child protection coordinators and managers
- Child protection case managers
- Child protection case workers (and, in some cases, community volunteers)
- Information management officers
- Information technology and data management staff
- Administrative staff
- Drivers and logistics experts.

★ [See Tool 21: Core staff functions for an emergency response to UASC](#)

The Child Protection Working Group¹⁰⁰ developed the **Core Competencies Framework** to provide a set of standards to facilitate staff recruitment, performance management and professional development, with the aim of protecting children, including UASC, in emergencies.¹⁰¹ The inter-agency nature of the competencies and their common application is intended to enable the development and coordination of sector-wide capacity-building efforts. The framework can serve as a starting point for planning and recruitment. Requirements in every situation will be different. However, developing job profiles in line with the Core Competencies Framework will ensure that appropriate skills are identified.

Essential skills for work with UASC include:

- **Technical knowledge** and skills related to identification, documentation, tracing and reunification along with case management.
 - **Excellent communication skills and sensitivity**, for example, in identifying children and conveying programme goals without disrupting current care arrangements.
 - **Ability to put people at ease, empathize, provide appropriate support and avoid causing further distress** to children and adults who may be fearful, upset or angry.
 - **Ability to complete the inter-agency agreed standard forms to a high standard.**
 - **Familiarity with data confidentiality issues.**
 - **Training and competency in working with and interviewing children.**
 -  **Knowledge and skills related to refugee protection**, including refugee children.
- ★ *See Tool 22: Additional staff competencies related to preventing and responding to child separation, CP AoR Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) Competency Framework*
- ★ *See Tool 23: Terms of reference for child protection specialist (UASC), emergency (surge) missions, UNICEF*

Training

UASC programmes must have the capacity to **regularly train, mentor and supervise** everyone carrying out identification, documentation, tracing, reunification and case management activities, remembering that the staff or volunteers may themselves be affected by the emergency. Staff engaged in interviewing and documenting UASC may feel disheartened or upset. Facilitating support for these staff members through formal and informal meetings, where they can share experiences and feelings, is very important. Enabling them to see the importance of their work – for example, by accompanying children on reunifications with their families – will also provide motivation.

¹⁰⁰ Child Protection Working Group, *Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) Competency Framework*, 2010.

¹⁰¹ *Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) Competency Framework*, p. 4.

There is a recognized lack of suitably experienced, qualified child protection staff, including those with specific skills in working with UASC in emergencies. Capacity development is now one of the key work areas of the Child Protection Working Group, which has a capacity-building task force. **Training packages** are available in a range of formats, including face-to-face training and e-learning courses on UASC. Sufficient time and resources need to be allocated to adapting these training materials to each context.


Training topics

The focus of training for emergency UASC programmes should be on developing the knowledge and skills to address immediate situations involving separation. The list below is not exhaustive, and should be tailored to the needs and gaps highlighted in initial assessments (see Chapters 5.1 and 5.2).

Principles, policies & definitions

- *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*
- Definitions and causes of separation
- Knowledge of the legal and policy framework and minimum standards for work with UASC, including alternative care.

Programmatic work

- Emergency work with UASC; prevention of separation; identification, documentation, tracing and reunification, including relevant forms from the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (see Chapters 8, 9, 11 and 12)
- Cross-sectoral prevention work and child protection mainstreaming (see Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC)
- Case management and referral mechanisms; individual case assessment; best interests assessment and best interests determinations
 - For UASC, case management training “must be provided to all child protection staff working on relevant projects, including programme managers, and must be factored into project budgets and plans.”¹⁰² Case management training programmes can utilize the [Inter-agency Guidelines, Child Protection Case Management Training Manual for Caseworkers, Supervisors and Managers](#),¹⁰³ which provides general training that can be adapted for UASC-specific concerns (see Chapter 7.2).
 -  UNHCR and partner staff involved in case management for refugee children will also be trained in best interests procedures¹⁰⁴ (see Chapter 7.2.5).

¹⁰² McCormick, Christine, *Case Management Practice within Save the Children Child Protection Programmes*, Save the Children, 2011, p. 27.

¹⁰³ Child Protection Working Group, *Child Protection Case Management Training Manual for Caseworkers, Supervisors and Managers*, January 2014, <www.globalprotectioncluster.org/assets/files/field_protection_clusters/Somalia/files/Child_Protection/CM%20training_manual_ENG_.pdf>, accessed 14 January 2016.

¹⁰⁴ See: *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child, 2008*; UN High Commissioner for Refugees and International Rescue Committee, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, November 2011.



TRY THIS: PRIORITIZE TRAINING STRATEGIES DURING EMERGENCIES

- Prioritize training topics based on the situation at hand.
- Divide caseworkers into teams and provide initial training to teams according to tasks, such as tracing.
- Provide a brief (1-2 day) training with regular follow-up training that builds on prior knowledge.
- Provide regular 'on the job' training, support and mentoring to caseworkers by a few experienced staff, such as informal meetings relating to specific casework responsibilities or challenges raised in case conferences (taking confidentiality into account).
- Provide rolling training when it is not possible to take a significant amount of time out during an emergency; once the situation is stabilized, provide more comprehensive trainings.

- Identifying trafficked/smuggled UASC; response, protection and prevention mechanisms (*see Tool 3*)
- Appropriate alternative care provision (*see Chapter 10*)
- Nutritional needs, risks and appropriate responses for unaccompanied and separated infants (*see Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

Skills & working methods

- Confidentiality and code of conduct in relation to UASC programming for all staff (*see Chapter 7.1*)
- Working with children, including listening, interviewing skills and family mediation skills for caseworkers (*see Tool 40*)
- Negotiation, coordination, advocacy, supervision, mediation and facilitation skills for managers
- Information management, confidentiality, information security, computer and database skills for information managers (*see Chapter 7.3*).
- ★ *See Inter-agency Guidelines, Child Protection Case Management Training Manual for Caseworkers, Supervisors and Managers*
- ★ *See Child Protection Working Group Training Modules*

6.2.2 Volunteers working with UASC¹⁰⁵

Volunteers, whether members of community-based protection, youth and faith-based groups or members of the affected community, are an invaluable resource. They are likely to have much greater insight into the real situation of children, especially if they live among them. Volunteers can play a variety of roles, including, where appropriate, identification and referrals of UASC for further documentation, assessments and follow-up on care arrangements.

To support volunteers, promote appropriate involvement and optimize their contribution, organizations should:

- **Select volunteers** in consultation with the community and children. The ability to communicate with children and to be accepted and trusted by vulnerable families can be more important than reading and writing skills.
- Make volunteers aware of the organization's **child protection policy and how it applies to them, and sign a code of conduct.**
- Make volunteers fully aware of their **responsibilities and any entitlements.**
- Provide volunteers with all the resources necessary to fulfil their role without additional stress.
- Provide **training materials and written information** to support volunteers' work **in local languages and simple terms** that are understood in and relevant to the local culture.
- Provide **appropriate training** based on a realistic assessment of their capacity and **ongoing, regular supervision and support** to volunteers, ideally at all times by case workers or social workers with the capacity to provide oversight.

¹⁰⁵ Based on Wessells, 2009, pp. 37, 45, 46.

- Ensure volunteers' **basic understanding of UASC and case management** (definitions; objectives of identification, documentation, tracing and reunification; importance of family unity; prevention of separation; appropriate alternative care options), in addition to task-specific training.
- Promote **standard approaches to incentives/stipends and resources** for volunteers (according to what is normally done in-country) in order not to create hostility or competition among volunteers of different organizations who work in the same location.
- Be aware of **sensitivities** around working with communities, such as ethnic tensions, and remember that volunteers are also affected by events.
- Aim for a **mix of male and female volunteers**, where possible.

6.2.3 Budgets for UASC programmes


Adequate funding enables strong programmes. **When developing budgets for programmes with UASC, organizations should consider:**

Programme elements

- **Types of alternative care** that will likely be part of the programme pending reunification and the expenses associated with them. For example, group care is costly while family-based care (such as foster care) is frequently lower in cost. However, the latter requires resources to mobilize the community, assess and monitor care arrangements
- **Whether wet feeding is required** for newly arrived/identified unaccompanied children with no other immediate support (for example, children in reception centres pending reunification or family-based care)
- **Specific funding requirements in addition to identification, documentation, tracing and reunification/case management components**
- **Material support costs and needs of UASC**, vulnerable children and their families/caregivers
- **One-off emergency expenditures**, which can be allocated for local purchase of materials for urgent cases to be decided upon at the programme manager's discretion
- **Long-term funding for 'systems-building'** since emergency funding is likely time-limited.

Human resources

- **Cost requirements for adequate case management human resources**, bearing in mind the staffing ratios (adjusted to context) recommended by the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* and the *Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit*:
 - Caseworkers should not handle more than 25 cases (fewer for lower training levels or when caseworkers manage urgent/complex cases that require extensive follow-up).
 - Caregivers may care for a maximum of eight children (fewer for long-term care).
- **Need for capacity building** of community protection groups, government or other actors

- **Cost of training and staff development and adequate supervision and mentoring**, support visits from headquarters technical staff/consultants, and regional training events for staff, including cost of venue, catering and materials for training workshops
- **High staff turnover and training needs in emergencies**
-  Need for additional protection staff to be assigned to registration points as well as capacity building of registration staff to ensure that vulnerable children, including UASC, are identified and referred for services. In addition, a budget may be needed for additional staff (UNHCR or partner staff) to conduct best interests assessments or best interests determinations and follow-up.

Logistics, support, and monitoring & evaluation

- **Safe and reliable transport needs of all staff/partners (keeping distances in mind)**, such as cars, motorbikes and bicycles, fuel and drivers, local transport, car hire and per diems
 - **Equipment for information management systems**, such as computers, software, USB sticks, etc.
 - **Supplies & translation costs**, such as family tracing and reunification kits, translated forms/documents, interpreters, printing of awareness-raising messages, posters, leaflets, tracing lists, or photographs, radio/TV broadcast fees and mobile/satellite phone purchases and credit
 - **Monitoring and evaluation.**
- ★ *See Tool 24: Template budget for response to separated and other affected children, IRC*



Tool 15: Resolution 10 and 'Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners', ICRC

Tool 17: Step-by-step guide to UASC programme development

Tool 18: Child Protection Minimum Standards, Standard 13: Unaccompanied and separated children

Tool 19: Tools and resources to support programme design

Tool 20: Key questions when considering support for government use of an Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System

Tool 21: Core staff functions for an emergency response to UASC

Tool 22: Additional staff competencies related to preventing and responding to child separation, CP AoR, *Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) Competency Framework*

Tool 23: Terms of reference for child protection specialist (UASC), emergency (surge) missions, UNICEF

Tool 24: Template budget for response to separated and other affected children, IRC

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Chapter 7 sets out the case management cycle as the basic structure within which all activities involving unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) should be undertaken. Ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent/assent are preconditions to ethical and effective case management. The chapter walks readers through best practices in the case management cycle, including establishing and supporting national case management systems, implementing a case management approach with UASC, prioritizing caseloads, individual case assessment, and case closure after follow-up. Finally, information management systems are covered, as they play a central role in organizing, linking and analysing information about individual cases and entire caseloads.

07

Case management and information management for UASC

TOPICS

7.1 Confidentiality, informed consent and unaccompanied and separated children

7.1.1 Confidentiality

7.1.2 Informed consent for UASC

7.2 Case management

7.2.1 Establishing and supporting case management systems

7.2.2 Implementing a case management approach

7.2.3 Prioritization

7.2.4 Individual case assessment

7.2.5 The UNHCR best interests procedure

7.2.6 Case closure after follow-up

7.3 Information management systems

7.3.1 Inter-agency and organization-specific information management systems

7.3.2 Data analysis

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Ensuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent/assent are essential prerequisites to all actions regarding UASC.
- Consent is the preferred legal basis for processing personal data. It is important that when asked to provide consent, the beneficiary is in a position to fully consider the risks and benefits of the processing operation. In order to determine whether the individual in question is in a position to give consent, account should be taken of all the possible factors that may be affecting her or his vulnerability.
- Case management underpins all UASC-related activities – from identification until case closure; this requires working within or contributing to the establishment of national case management systems.
- Case management enables all interventions and information related to an individual child to be coordinated and managed without losing sight of the long-term goal of family reunification.
- When faced with large caseloads or limited resources, it may be necessary to prioritize actions and cases for tracing or urgent basic-needs interventions, based on the likelihood of rapid reunification and on vulnerability.
- Individual assessment regarding the needs and best interests of a child is a basic element of case management. In the absence of a national process adequate to determine what actions are in the child's best interests, the *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child* can be useful. In refugee situations, the best interests procedure, as laid out in the guidelines and accompanying handbook, is a requirement.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, May 2008; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, November 2011.



KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- There are two kinds of case closure for UASC: tracing closure/suspension and general case closure within the case management system. Organizations should develop criteria for case closure when a child no longer needs support, monitoring or care planning. A tracing case can be closed for a reunified child when a formal review results in a decision that further post-reunification follow-up is no longer needed. However, even when a child has been successfully reunified and reintegrated into his/her family, he/she should be referred into the general child protection case management system if there are protection concerns beyond his/her separation.
- A confidential and effective information management system, which includes data protection protocols and information-sharing protocols, is an essential part of case management.
- In line with their mandates, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) use their own databases and information management systems, but may agree on information-sharing with humanitarian organizations working with UASC, as appropriate. The ICRC only shares information when the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share his/her information with other organizations.

07

Case management and information management for UASC

7.1 Confidentiality, informed consent¹⁰⁷ and unaccompanied and separated children

Confidentiality and informed consent/assent are evolving areas that are being addressed by a growing inter-agency effort and by individual organizations, each of which provides its own guidance on the subject.

7.1.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality must be a primary consideration when working with UASC. Confidentiality is important in keeping children safe, protecting their dignity and well-being, and establishing and maintaining trust. This means, for example, not writing a child's name on the outside of a file or on his/her picture, not including children's names in mass-tracing campaigns, or unnecessarily discussing a child's situation with those who do not need to know the information for identification, documentation, tracing, reunification or protection purposes and are not equally bound by confidentiality. However, confidentiality does *not* mean never discussing a case. For example, tracing workers may need to discuss cases with supervisors, or caseworkers may need to discuss a particular child during case conferences.

★ See [Tool 25: Sample confidentiality and data protection checklist, IA CP IMS](#)

Most of the time, agreement or consent is obtained from a child/carer to share information with others. However, on some occasions, information is shared without agreement; indeed, adhering to the best interests of the child may at times mean overriding their desire to keep information confidential. In such circumstances, '**limited confidentiality**' is applied. 'Limited confidentiality' refers to situations in which there may be legal or other obligations that override the individual's right to confidentiality. Limited confidentiality applies when:

- There are concerns about a child's/young person's safety and well-being that require sharing of information (for example, with relevant service providers).
- A criminal offence has been committed and laws mandate reporting it to the police or other authorities (under mandatory reporting laws).

This is a challenging issue. Moreover, **mandatory reporting** can conflict with both ethical and organizational principles and policies, and with contractual obligations of organizations' staff. Some organizations' staff members are

Confidentiality: Information is only shared with others **with consent** of the child/carer, only on a '**need to know**' basis, and only if it is **in the best interests of the child**.

¹⁰⁷ See also: International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Managing Sensitive Protection Information', Chapter 6 in: *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, ICRC, 2013.

also bound by a contractual and professional duty of discretion. This means, among other things, that they may not respond positively to requests to share confidential information they obtained in the exercise of their official functions with judicial or law enforcement authorities without appropriate authorization by their organization's executive authorities. In most countries, staff members of United Nations organizations and the ICRC enjoy functional immunity from jurisdiction. This means that while they may indeed break the law if they do not report or share certain information with law enforcement or judicial authorities, they cannot be sued or prosecuted for refusing to do so (immunity from the legal process). Other organizations, and in some countries even those mentioned above, will not enjoy such immunity and will have to comply with reporting or testimonial obligations under domestic law, with possible negative consequences in terms of trust and access to children. In some circumstances, mandatory reporting even results in action that is not in the child's best interests, such as punishment.

Organizations working with UASC must be aware of any mandatory reporting requirements in their context and of the level of legal protection they and their staff members enjoy in that country (immunity from legal process). The latter information will be available from the organization's legal department or country representation. Where mandatory reporting laws exist and where an organization and/or its staff do not enjoy immunity from legal process, the organization will need to adopt appropriate risk mitigation measures to address the tension between legal obligations and a commitment to confidentiality that facilitates the access and trust required to work with UASC. "Where there are concerns that some actors may not be able to maintain confidentiality, or if reporting may put them or the child at risk, **decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis and should be guided above all by the best interests of the child.**" ¹⁰⁸

When obtaining informed consent/assent (see below), the laws and limits of confidentiality of each organization, including mandatory reporting requirements, must be appropriately explained to the child/caregiver.

7.1.2 Informed consent for UASC

Before proceeding with documentation, case management and any other actions related to care and protection (for example, referrals), it is necessary to obtain 'informed consent' from the child.

Informed consent: "The voluntary agreement of an individual who has the capacity to give consent, and who exercises free power of choice. To provide 'informed consent' the individual must be able to understand, and take a decision regarding, their own situation. Informed consent may be sought from a child or from the child's caregiver[1], according to the age of the child and their level of maturity."

(Child Protection Working Group, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012, Standard 5: 'Information Management', p. 66, 67.)

¹⁰⁸ Child Protection Working Group, 'Information Management: Mandatory Reporting', Standard 5 in: *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012, p. 66.

“Informed assent[2] is the expressed willingness to participate in services. For younger children who are by definition too young to give informed consent, but old enough to understand and agree to participate in services, the child’s ‘informed assent’ is sought.”

(International Rescue Committee and UNICEF, *Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse: Guidelines for health and psychosocial service providers in humanitarian settings*, 2012, p. 16.)

Informed consent is the preferred legal basis to process UASC’s personal data, including for the purpose of sharing their personal data. Assent is not a legal basis for processing information, although it is a useful concept in case management.

Consent, or if consent is not possible, one of the alternative legal bases set out below, may be needed from the child and/or caregiver at various stages in the case management process for various different actions or decisions. For example, consent should be obtained for permission to conduct an interview, for permission to share information for the purposes of service provision, and for permission to share information for tracing. Additionally, consent will also be required in connection with the different services provided for UASC – for example, for reunification or for enrolment in a particular activity. While assent is not a legal basis for information-sharing for tracing, it may be used by some actors for certain actions that have a lower burden of responsibility – for example, conducting interviews. For more information on obtaining consent relating to case management, including interviewing and referral to services, see the *Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management & Child Protection* (pp. 115-118).

1) Consent for the processing of personal data, including for the purposes of tracing

Scenario A: The child is in a position to give consent

The right to protection of personal data is part of the rights protected under the fundamental right to protection of an individual’s private sphere (including family life, home and correspondence) against intrusion from others. Among other things, **the right to data protection requires that a clear legal basis be established when collecting and processing personal data.**

Consent is the preferred legal basis for processing personal data (such as registering a person, exchanging or transferring personal information to a third party, etc.) every time the beneficiary is in a position to provide a freely given, specific and informed indication of his/her wishes. Consent can be given either through a written, oral or other statement or by a clear affirmative action by the beneficiary signifying his/her agreement to his/her personal data being processed. It is important that in making this decision the beneficiary is in a position to fully consider the risks and benefits of the processing operation.

In order to determine whether the individual in question is in a position to give consent, account should be taken of the possible various elements of vulnerability that may affect him/her. Age is one of them. There is no clear cut 'legal age of consent'. Different countries may have different rules on the subject (in most cases no such rules exist), and those rules may not be enforceable against international organizations. Most importantly, the level of maturity of individual children varies from context to context and from child to child. In some contexts, beneficiaries may not be aware of their exact date of birth, or not be accurate about their age. UASC are also particularly vulnerable by nature of their separation, and thus require additional safeguards.

The officer in charge/case worker should seek informed consent by explaining in simple, age-appropriate language why information is being sought and what it will be used for, including how it will be shared. 'Informed' means that the child truly understands the significance and risks involved in any actions that may be undertaken and that his/her decision is made with full information. Likewise, organizations should undertake a risk analysis of what undertaking actions with the informed consent of children means for agencies/staff.

In addition, the consent should be documented and specify **at least** the following items:

- Purpose of the collection (for example, tracing, referrals to services, etc.)
- Extent of the consent (whether there are limitations to the processing or sharing of data, etc.).

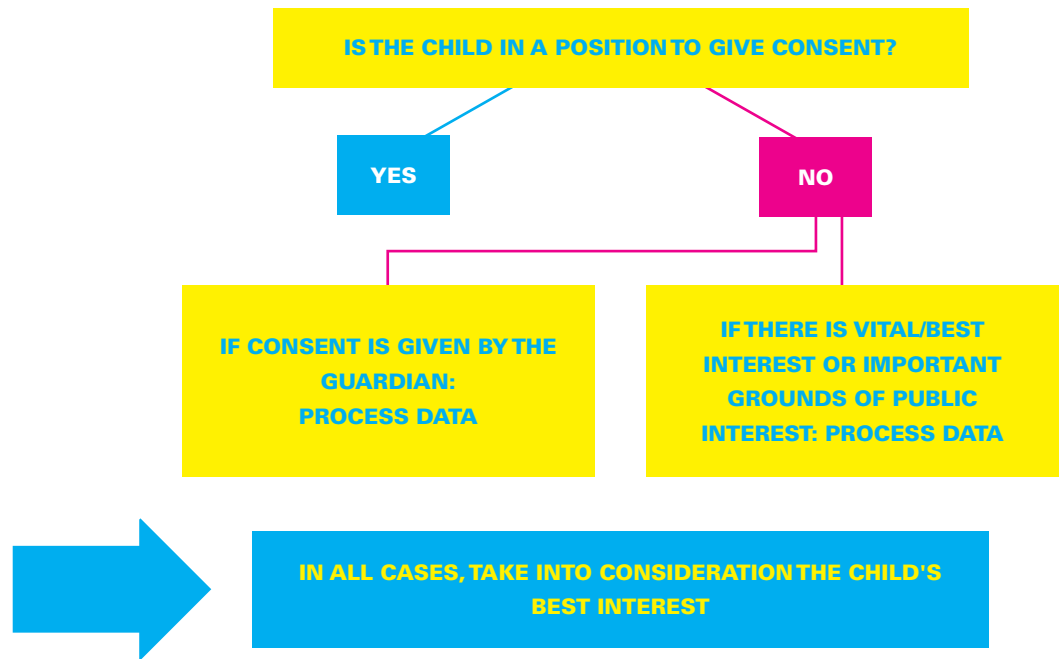
Scenario B: The child is not in a position to give consent

If a child is unlikely to be in a position to give such consent, especially where the child is too young or the decision is too weighty for the child herself/himself to provide consent, then organizations could proceed in one of the two ways:

A. Process data in the vital/best interests and/or for important grounds of public interest (this case applies to national and international organizations in the performance of their respective mandate, where this mandate is recognized in law). This would involve:

- In the case of vital interest, having sufficient elements to consider that, in the absence of processing, the beneficiary could be at risk of severe physical or moral harm.
- In the case of best interests,¹⁰⁹ the objective is to take into consideration what is most conducive to the child's well-being to prevent any adverse consequences that may result from processing the child's personal data.
- In the case of important grounds of public interest, being clear that the specific processing of data is within the mandate given to the international organization under the applicable legal instruments.
- In any case, providing clear information to the beneficiary as to the proposed processing operation.
- Ensuring the beneficiary has a say/a right to object.
- Ensuring that the processing is in the best interests of the individual.

¹⁰⁹ The ICRC does not consider the best interest as such to be a stand-alone legal basis for processing data.



- B. Process data based on the consent of a guardian. A guardian is the person who has the authority to decide for a child under national law (a parent, a person appointed by law, or a relative¹¹⁰). This would involve:
- Provision of full information to the guardian, and signature of consent.
 - Ensuring the child is clearly informed and his/her views are taken into account.
 - Ensuring that the processing is in the best interests of the child.

However, this should only occur when it is in the best interests of the child to inform/obtain consent from the guardian. **Despite consent provided by a guardian, information may not be shared when it is not in the best interests of the child.**

2) If consent is refused

A. If children refuse consent

Some children may be unwilling to give consent because they are confused, anxious, afraid, suspicious or for other reasons. When children refuse consent for tracing, gently explore their reasons and support them in making a decision that is in their **best** interests, ensuring they understand the process and purpose of tracing. If consent is still withheld, a comprehensive assessment should be carried out by the officer in charge/case worker to identify whether the processing of the data is in the **vital/best**¹¹¹ interests of the child.

¹¹⁰ For separated children, a family member looking after the child does not need to be formally established as a legal guardian in order to provide consent.

¹¹¹ The ICRC does not consider the best interest as such to be a stand-alone legal basis for processing data.



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Confidentiality and consent best practices: IOM data protection policy

In 2009, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was the first international organization to have a mandatory data protection policy for personal data of beneficiaries, which also set benchmarks for other areas of data protection. The policy is based on relevant international standards, namely UN Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Files, but also European Directive 95/46/EC on Protection of Individuals with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and on the Free Movement and Convention (of the European Council) for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data. The policy includes key principles such as the supremacy of the best interests of the child, respect for the views and opinions of the children, noting that the weight given to them should depend on the age and maturity of the child and considerations regarding guardianship.

(Communicated by an IOM protection policy officer, 2015. See also: International Organization for Migration, *IOM Data Protection Policy and Manual*, 2009)

B. If guardians refuse consent

Sometimes guardians may refuse to provide consent on behalf of a child if they do not understand why information about or actions regarding the child are necessary or if the approach is not culturally appropriate. Guardians may also be attempting to hide information about the child, particularly if they are abusing or exploiting the child. To handle situations like this, staff should clearly explain again why the information is collected or actions undertaken, the purpose for which the information will be used, and the likely benefits for the child. Likewise, explain the consequences of not providing consent, for example, to a child's health or well-being. Depending on the situation, it may be necessary to seek mediation by community or religious leaders. In all situations, the best interests of the child should be paramount. If consent/assent is still withheld, a comprehensive assessment should be carried out by the officer in charge/case worker to identify whether the processing of the data is in the vital/best interests of the child (*see Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5*).

- ★ [See Tool 26: Sample informed consent form \[OK TO ADD HERE? IT WASN'T CITED IN THE TEXT\]](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 7.3, Information management systems](#)

7.2 Case management

Case management helps individual children and families through direct social work-type support and information management, and facilitates monitoring, referrals and coordination of service provision.

Tracing family members and reuniting UASC, where in their best interests, can be a long and complex process, often involving a number of actors. At the same time, it may be necessary to address protection issues in addition to identification, documentation, tracing and reunification activities for that child, including provision and monitoring of appropriate care, health or psychosocial support. **Case management enables all interventions and information related to an individual child's identification, documentation, tracing, reunification and protection needs to be coordinated and managed without losing sight of the long-term goal of family reunification.** It can also build national capacity and provide evidence for legal action, such as court orders to remove children, where necessary.

7.2.1 Establishing and supporting case management systems

While developing new case management systems at a national level is unlikely to be a priority in the immediate emergency phase, **organizations' internal systems should support good case and information management, and be designed to feed into a national social welfare system** (see Chapter 6.1.1). Organizations should refer to Minimum Standard 15 as the basis for such work:

It is important to spend time analysing how well existing systems function and whether temporary support is required to help the government strengthen or re-establish them (see Chapter 5.1.2). Where systems are non-existent or inaccessible, they need to be developed or advocated for. Case management procedures that support identification, documentation, tracing and reunification and facilitate linkages to other systems, such as government or informal systems, can include:

- **Standard operating procedures (SOPs)**, as necessary, that define roles, responsibilities and relationships among different actors involved in each step of case management, services and referral systems, and information management systems
- **Information management systems**, including data protection protocols, are valuable tools to facilitate the building of case management systems, including thoroughly analysing caseload trends that inform ongoing case management and broader child protection programming (see Chapter 7.3)

Planned handover of caseloads from departing organizations to national partners or other responsible agencies (such as UNHCR in a refugee context), where appropriate and safe. This includes data contained in information management systems, once appropriate data protection protocols are in place (see Chapters 6.1.1 and Tool 20).

Standard 15, Case management:
"Girls and boys with urgent child protection needs are identified and receive age- and culturally appropriate information as well as an effective, multisectoral and child-friendly response from relevant providers working in a coordinated and accountable manner."

(Child Protection Working Group,
*Minimum Standards for Child Protection
in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 135)

7.2.2 Implementing a case management approach

To be effective, case management requires opening a case file in which all actions and outcomes are recorded, assigning a caseworker for each individual child, and developing a care plan.¹¹² In addition to providing a structured approach to assisting a child, case management also helps to prevent further harm through initial and ongoing assessments. **Standard 15 on case management**¹¹³ outlines the essential components of implementing a case management approach for each case.¹¹⁴

CASE MANAGEMENT CYCLE



(Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012, p. 137)

Case management meetings should be held regularly, allowing caseworkers to share achievements with supervisors and seek support to address obstacles in specific cases. **Confidentiality** must be emphasized in case conferences, which should be held in private and attended only by those who play a role in supporting action needed to protect the child.

Ideally, a caseworker, such as a government social worker or child protection worker from a non-governmental organization, should be allocated a limited number of cases, depending on their complexity, the caseworker's abilities, and

¹¹² The terms 'case plan' and 'care plan' are sometimes used interchangeably. The term 'care plan' is used in this field handbook.

¹¹³ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012.

¹¹⁴ There may be small differences in the components or the terms used for each component by different actors.

other factors (such as travel time needed for home visits). Generally, a ratio of 25 cases per caseworker is recommended. This allows the caseworker to get to know the children, carers and families, and promotes a sense of accountability.

There are significant **resource and funding implications** in maintaining good case management. Good case management relies on sufficient senior-level staff with relevant social work skills and competencies to train, support, mentor and supervise caseworkers, especially on very complex UASC cases (*see Chapter 6.2*). There are also challenges related to a lack of, or inadequate, services. For example, long-term placement is required for a child where tracing has been unsuccessful but foster care services are not yet developed. In such cases, organizations should develop joint advocacy strategies to address deficiencies.

★ [See Chapter 6.2.1, Programme staff, training and capacity building](#)


★ [See the Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management & Child Protection](#)

7.2.3 Prioritization

When there are large UASC caseloads and limited resources, it may be necessary for senior staff and those interviewing children to prioritize actions.

Using an agreed prioritization system, both internally and across relevant organizations, can help manage caseloads and ensure tracing is carried out effectively and efficiently.

Decisions about when and how actions and cases are prioritized will depend on the circumstances. Prioritization can be particularly helpful in rapid onset, fast-moving emergencies where many children can be rapidly reunited.¹¹⁵ In other emergencies, documentation of *all* known UASC should be carried out before tracing begins so that children, particularly the very young, do not forget information before it is recorded. Note that, in some complex emergencies or protracted conflicts, separation can occur and new UASC cases can be detected *long after the onset of the emergency* and will need immediate documentation followed by tracing (*see Chapter 9*).

 In refugee settings, an efficient way to prioritize is to ensure that child protection personnel are present at registration points, and that registration staff are trained to identify UASC (*see Chapter 8.2*). When UASC are identified, they can be referred to child protection personnel who can conduct a rapid best interests assessment to screen and prioritize the child.

Prioritization involves finding out information about the child's immediate circumstances during identification and documentation (*see Chapters 8 and 9*) in order to determine urgent actions. Asking a number of simple questions is often sufficient, although in some cases this information may not

¹¹⁵ The use of a prioritization system was recommended in the following report: Child Protection Working Group, Key Findings of the Global Child Protection Working Group (CP AoR) Learning and Support Mission to Haiti, CP AoR, 2012, p. 12.

become apparent until the child is documented. The purpose of collecting this information is to allow the caseworker to decide which children have a high chance of rapid reunification or increased level of vulnerability.

Prioritization criteria 1: High chance of rapid reunification

Family tracing action for cases that have a high chance of quick success should be immediately prioritized over family tracing for cases that are likely to be more challenging; otherwise, opportunities for reunification may be missed. Likewise, the 'traditional' approach to identification, documentation, tracing and reunification, where documentation of all children is carried out before tracing begins, could mean that the opportunity to reunite some children is lost. Acting quickly to assist these children can result in rapid reunifications. Essential information to make that assessment includes:

- How recently separation occurred
- Whether family members are likely to be close by and easy to locate
- Whether children/families have mobile phones, an agreed meeting point or can be found by searching the area or nearby 'lost children' posts.

Prioritization criteria 2: Increased level of vulnerability and risks

If large numbers of children are separated from their parents or other relatives in an emergency, **priority should be given to the most vulnerable**, whether separated or unaccompanied, taking into account that the latter are likely to be more vulnerable. Similarly, for young children or others with insufficient information for tracing, immediate action should *always* be taken to collect and record as much information as possible – then and there – in the area in which they are found (*see Chapter 9.1.2*).

An initial assessment of the level of risks children are exposed to should be made. Identification of UASC is a flag that might reveal other vulnerabilities that should be followed up on after the initial phase. Gain further understanding of the child's vulnerability and care arrangements by asking:

- Does the child have specific physical, emotional or security needs, or is she/he particularly vulnerable?
- Is the child's current care arrangement appropriate?
- Are the child's basic needs being met?

Urgent protection needs must be addressed immediately. For example, a child for whom family tracing looks extremely challenging but who is abused by his/her current caregiver should be removed from that care arrangement and given immediate support, although tracing may not begin immediately.

To best apply these two criteria, as much information as possible should be obtained when first meeting the child (*see Chapter 9.1*). However, **cases can change in priority** (for example, from Priority 3 to Priority 1), if staff can obtain more detailed information to aid family tracing at a later date.

Ideally, senior staff members who are trained in such a system should carry out prioritization, working in coordination with interviewers. However, case

managers also need to know how to prioritize cases on their own, with support from senior staff. This entails understanding what information is important to record on the registration forms and asking probing questions that may reveal critical information. In an emergency response, senior staff should establish the prioritization criteria or matrix and support case managers in applying them. Where prioritization criteria are used, a suggested method is to allocate one family tracing and reunification team per location to carry out prioritization and to 'fast track' those children given high priority for tracing or other protection interventions, including adequate alternative care.

- ★ [See Tool 27: Sample prioritization tool for UASC](#)
- ★ [See Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan](#)
- ★ [See Tool 29: Sample case management flow chart, UNHCR, Jordan](#)

7.2.4 Individual case assessment

Individual case assessments are important. However, the different terminology and procedures used by various organizations for assessments can be confusing, making it difficult to decide whether, which or when to complete assessments for individual children after completing the registration form.

Assessments and best interests assessments (BIAs) (see Chapter 7.2.5) should be part of a broader child protection process, including identification, documentation, tracing and reunification, case management, referral and follow-up, in partnership with key national/international child protection actors. In all assessments, including BIAs, the child's views are essential and need to be considered according to his/her maturity and capacity. Try to avoid multiple assessments of the same child at the same time.

7.2.5 The UNHCR best interests procedure

The best interests procedure (explained in the guidelines¹¹⁶ and handbook¹¹⁷ on determining the best interests of the child) is the mechanism that UNHCR puts in place to ensure that the best interests principle, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 3), is respected in work with individual children. The best interests procedure is UNHCR's specific approach to case management for all children at risk, including UASC, and is part and parcel of UNHCR and partners' broader child protection programming in a refugee setting. States have the primary responsibility to implement the best interests principle, however, few countries have an established best interests procedure

¹¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of a Child, May 2008.

¹¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines, November 2011.



TRY THIS: UNDERTAKING ASSESSMENTS

Registration form completed



Is further information needed for case management?

Are there specific/complex protection issues/individual needs?



YES

Complete an individual case assessment – for example, a best interests assessment (BIA).

NO

Review the need for individual assessment regularly since a child's resilience and circumstances change over time.

accessible to refugee children. **The best interests procedure was therefore developed as a framework for assessment and decision-making for individual children in the absence of a national process for refugee children.**

In practice, the best interests procedure has two components: the best interests assessment, or BIA, and the best interests determination (BID).

A BIA is an assessment made by staff taking action with regard to individual children, designed to ensure that primary consideration is given to the child's best interests. It does not require any particular formality, but must be conducted by staff with adequate training and with the participation of the child. Best interests assessments should be conducted as soon as a child has been identified as at risk; BIAs can then be systematically used and updated until a durable solution is implemented. Best interests assessments are an essential element of case management and general child protection work for all children at risk, but are specifically applied for UASC in the following circumstances:

- Prior to initiating tracing
- Prior to placement in alternative care (in non-complex situations, otherwise a BID is required)
- Prior to family reunification (in non-complex situations, otherwise a BID is required).

★ [See Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form, UNHCR](#)

A BID describes the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation, involve decision-makers with relevant areas of expertise (making up the BID panel), and balance all relevant factors in order to assess the best option. Note that a BID process should not unduly slow down the family tracing and reunification process. Best interests determinations can be used wherever practitioners feel it is useful or necessary, but they are required under the following circumstances:

1. Temporary care situations for UASC in exceptional cases
2. Identification of durable solutions for UASC after a period of time, to a maximum of two years (UNHCR's durable solutions are voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement)
3. Possible cases of separation of a child from parents/guardian against the parents/child's will; this can be adapted to cases of separation from long-term carers (*see Chapter 9.4*)
4. Cases of unresolved custody, particularly for identification of durable solutions or alternative care
5. Prior to family reunification in complex cases, such as trafficking, children associated with armed forces or armed group, or cross-border reunifications (*see Chapter 12.1*).

★ [See Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form, UNHCR](#)

Best interests procedures: Frequently asked questions

Are governments involved in the best interests procedure?

The involvement of relevant national child protection authorities in best interests procedures is generally good practice, although not always possible. In some situations, government involvement can potentially be linked to additional protection concerns. A number of child protection decisions clearly fall within the competency of a State – such as custody, adoption and separation of children from parents or legal custodians – and require the involvement of national child protection authorities and/or courts. In the absence of any state authorities or when they are unwilling or unable to take responsibility, the best interests procedure is recommended as a provisional measure. However, procedures developed outside national child protection systems should remain the exception.

Who can use the best interests procedure in a refugee setting?

In refugee settings, UNHCR is responsible for ensuring the implementation and coordination of the best interests procedure, but both UNHCR and child protection partners can and should use it and be able to conduct BIAs and prepare BID reports. Competent representatives of UNHCR, key child protection partners and government agencies are usually part of the BID panel.

How do other agencies' procedures relate to the best interests procedure in a refugee setting?

In a refugee setting, the best interests procedure is the approach used for case management of children at risk, including separated and unaccompanied children, so all procedures should be harmonized with it. Practically, the ICRC's procedures are considered to be equivalent to a BIA for tracing purposes. The inter-agency registration form or other registration forms for UASC used by child protection partners can also be considered to be equivalent to a BIA for tracing purposes, if this is agreed to as part of standard procedures in each context.

Can the best interests procedure be used in a non-refugee setting?

The best interests procedure was designed for a refugee setting, but it is widely held as a good practice standard in case management (for example, in the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*), and can be adapted by any agency for use in other settings. However, it should be noted that where the best interests procedure is used in refugee settings (since UNHCR along with the host government remain the accountable entities for child protection), the established guidelines should be followed by all agencies and the procedure remains coordinated by UNHCR.



“Develop guidelines for closing cases that are specific to the caseload and context and in line with legal requirements if these apply. Closing a case is different from transferring case management responsibilities to a different agency. It may happen for a number of reasons – for example, completing the care plan, because the child turns 18 and receives adequate support, or because of the death of a child. **At a minimum, closing a case involves the authorization of the caseworker’s supervisor. Cases should only be closed after a process of consultation involving all the service providers.**”

(Child Protection Working Group, Standard 15: Case management, in: *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2012, p. 141)

7.2.6 Case closure after follow-up

There are two kinds of case closure when dealing with UASC:

1. **Closure/suspension of a child’s tracing case** either following reunification and follow-up or a decision to discontinue or temporarily suspend tracing (see Chapters 11.4.2 and 12.5). After such a tracing closure/suspension, the child should be integrated into the general child protection case management system to address and monitor any other protection concerns.
2. **Closure of a child’s case in the general child protection case management system.**

A tracing case can be closed for a reunified child when a formal review results in a decision that further post-reunification follow-up is no longer needed. However, even when a child has been successfully reunified and reintegrated into his/her family, he/she should be referred into the general child protection case management system if there are protection concerns beyond the separation.

Organizations should develop criteria to identify when a child no longer needs support, monitoring or care planning.

Once a decision has been made to close the case, a case closure form should be completed and the file archived, with this status reflected in the relevant information management system (see Chapter 7.3).



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(Fulford, Louise Melville, Tool 28 in: *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013)

Haiti: Criteria for general case closure

The child’s case may be closed when all the following have been achieved:

- a. The child has been placed in long-term care.
- b. A minimum of 6 months have gone by since the placement.
- c. Follow-up has been conducted at a minimum of every 12 weeks.
- d. Any specified elements of the permanency plan have been implemented.
- e. The long-term caregiver and the child (where able to express his/her views) are satisfied that they no longer need support with the placement.
- f. The child has fulfilled all necessary integration criteria:
 - Is protected from abuse, exploitation and neglect
 - Is engaged in education and/or training activities
 - Is receiving any necessary health care
 - Actively participates in social activities
 - Expresses willingness to remain in long-term care placement.

OR

- The child is legally adopted outside Haiti
- The child is in a care arrangement or supported independent living with a long-term care plan in place, has turned 18 and received support for a minimum of 12 months.

Data confidentiality: “Information collected on any individual child, caregiver or community member must be treated in a confidential manner. It is therefore important to **keep the number of professionals who have access to the information to a minimum**; the fewer people involved the easier to ensure confidentiality. Within their work, caseworkers must ensure that cases are given appropriate **reference codes** with which they can be identified without disclosing personal information unnecessarily. The only function of reference codes is to connect personal information and other information. Similarly, any personal information that is passed on/shared electronically should be sent as a separate attachment and be password protected. **Sharing of information should be strictly on a need-to-know basis and done only if it is in the best interests of the child.** Another way to protect personally identifiable information is to share only aggregated data, depending on its intended use.”


(Child Protection Working Group, Standard 5: Information management, in: *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, p. 66)

7.3 Information management systems

Information is the essence of tracing and case management. Agencies working with UASC both seek and generate information, which they may share with partners or referral agencies, if it is deemed to be in the child’s best interests. **It is essential to create a structure in which various layers of information can be organized and managed – that is, an information management system (IMS) – and to ensure that all participants understand and use the system.**

An IMS comprises:¹¹⁸

- **Internal systems** that enable an organization to collect, transfer and exchange the information necessary for tracing and case management within that organization
- **External systems** that enable sharing of information necessary for tracing and case management among organizations
- **Protocols and agreements** for information storage, sharing and security, confidentiality, and data protection.

 Sharing of information about refugees and asylum-seekers always needs to be handled with the utmost care. In some cases, if their current location or the fact that they have sought asylum becomes known, this can put them and/or their family members at risk or jeopardize their chances of eventually returning home. This is particularly the case with information that is shared back to a refugee’s home country. In practice, with the exception of the ICRC, whenever information needs to be shared about refugees for the purpose of tracing and reunification across borders must be coordinated with UNHCR.

Paper systems and simple Excel spread sheets may be appropriate for small numbers of cases or for children in a single location. However, a more sophisticated electronic database may be more efficient when there is a larger caseload (more than 200-300 cases), when children are moving between various locations, and when more than one organization is working with UASC. **Secure storage and data protection protocols are equally necessary for paper systems as they are for ensuring confidentiality and protection of electronic data**, and arrangements must be made to ensure all data are backed up, especially in insecure environments – for example, by storing regularly updated copies of databases outside the affected area/country.

When more than one organization is documenting UASC, a 'lead' organization should centralize all the information regarding the caseload.¹¹⁹ This allows the names of missing children to be cross-matched with the names of all documented UASC (see Chapter 9.2). **Centralization of data** can be accomplished through the lead organization entering all data from forms completed by all participating organizations or, vice versa, through organizations entering their own data and sending or synchronizing data electronically.

¹¹⁸ Uppard, Sarah, and Celia Petty, *Working with Separated Children – Field Guide*, Save the Children UK, 1998, p. 86.

¹¹⁹ The International Committee of the Red Cross uses its own database and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing, as appropriate, with humanitarian organizations working with unaccompanied and separated children, provided that the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share his/her information with other organizations.



Uganda: Importance of centralizing information on UASC

“While it was agreed that agencies would use the [inter-agency] database to record information about [UASC], in reality, agencies have continued using their own data management tools. The result is that agencies have had their own separate lists, which are difficult to harmonize. Disparity regarding names and numbers of [UASC] recorded by the different agencies also created difficulties in gaining an accurate picture of the scale of the issue.”

(Child Protection Working Group Uganda, *Lessons Learnt and Ways Forward from the Congolese Refugee Influx to Uganda 2008/2009*, CP AoR, 2009, Unpublished report, p. 6)

An **information-sharing protocol (ISP)** on management, data protection and sharing of UASC-related information across agencies can help to clarify the different roles, responsibilities and relationships among various organizations involved in case management. Information-sharing protocols are distinct from standard operating procedures (SOPs) (*see Chapter 4.3*) and are necessary whenever personal data or confidential information related to UASC is exchanged across organizations.

- ★ [See Chapter 7.1.2, Informed consent](#)
- ★ [See Tool 25: Sample confidentiality and data protection checklist, IA CP IMS](#)
- ★ [See Tool 32: Questions to ask while developing data protection and information-sharing protocols](#)
- ★ [See Tool 33: Sample information-sharing protocol, Turkey cross-border operations](#)
- ★ [See Tool 34: Template for an information-sharing protocol agreement](#)
- ★ [See Tool 35: Template data protection protocol, IA CP IMS](#)

Whether digital or paper, the success and usefulness of an IMS depends on the quality of data entry and the skills of those using it. The information management team, including data entry staff, can make an important contribution to quality control and case management. Where included as part of the child protection team and trained in basic child protection issues, data entry staff can identify problems with forms and gaps in case management. Similarly, the information management team may be aware when individual cases have been neglected or important information has not been acted upon. In this way, an IMS can act as a monitoring tool: If forms are not completed properly or the system is not used correctly, this may indicate that work on the ground is also not being carried out to a high standard.

- ★ [See Tool 36: Sample data management process, Save the Children UK, Dadaab, Kenya](#)

7.3.1 Inter-agency and organization-specific information management systems

Information management systems are continuously developed and improved. While the inter-agency and organization-specific tools highlighted here represent current tools that may evolve, the necessity of and guidance above on using IMSs – whatever their form – hold true.

The Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System (IA CP IMS) was developed to promote the use of a standard, practical, field-level tool to support effective case management for the child protection sector.¹²⁰ It is comprised of database software and accompanying resources and guidance documents, such as standard forms for work with UASC and template data protection protocols (see *Tools 32 and 35*), that can easily be adapted to specific contexts. These offer guidance on general data protection and storing and backing up information, as well as on information-sharing.¹²¹ In addition to customizing protocols for their country programmes, organizations should develop procedures to regulate how long information on the IA CP IMS is kept and by whom, as well as information archiving and destruction.

The IA CP IMS cannot instruct staff on how to implement a programme. Rather, it can reflect actions taken: Capturing key information and then allowing staff to use this for purposes such as planning work, keeping track of pending action and analysing data trends. The child protection expertise needed to design, implement and monitor any child protection programme cannot be replaced by the IA CP IMS. The capabilities and functions of the IA CP IMS include:¹²²

- **Case management.** Caseworkers can store and organize children's information in electronic case files that can be adjusted and edited as a case progresses. The system can flag tasks that are due (or overdue) for each child in a caseworker's caseload, ensuring timely management and follow-up.
- **Family tracing and reunification.** The database systematically records both children who are separated/unaccompanied in emergencies and those reported missing, and facilitates instantaneous matching of records, allowing for quicker identification of possible 'lost' or relocated children.
- **Data analysis.** The database can produce reports based on a user's need for information and can generate data analysis of aggregate data or trends. Such analysis can inform a child protection programme's design, strategy and resource allocation.
- **Information-sharing, data protection and confidentiality.** The system allows information on children to be shared and synchronized easily between child protection agencies and/or offices within an agency, where there

¹²⁰ As of early 2013, the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System had been used by 20 countries. For training in using the system, see: Child Protection Working Group, *Inter-Agency Child Protection Information Management System Training Manual*, 2014, <http://CP_AoR.net/resources/inter-agency-child-protection-information-management-system-training-manual.zip-13mb>, accessed 17 January 2016.

¹²¹ See Tool 35: Template data protection protocol, Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System, 2010 version.

¹²² Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System fact sheet, <http://CP_AoR.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/IA-CP-IMS-Fact-Sheet-2011-ENG.pdf>, accessed 17 January 2016.

CPIMS+ and Primero


Protection-Related Information Management for Emergency Response Operations,¹²³ or Primero, is an initiative under development by UNICEF. This next-generation tool integrates child protection information management systems with related systems, such as those dealing with gender-based violence and the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM), and with digital documentation tools. As an integrated system, Primero works as a one-stop shop, systematically capturing and analysing data across case management and incident-based monitoring by participating organizations. Primero strengthens inter-operability and facilitates linkages between information management systems. It securely and safely collects, stores, manages and shares data for integrated protection-related incident monitoring and case management. Utilizing strict security protocols and user-specific access, Primero includes the development of data-exchange procedures and tools to enhance security and statistical compatibility, ensuring confidentiality, avoiding duplication and promoting more comprehensive and effective case management. With the ability to function both online and off-line and with limited or no connectivity, Primero makes the most of mobile data collection tools on smartphones or tablets.

are compatible databases. The database also has built-in safeguards to protect children's information and promote best practices in confidentiality by allowing different levels of user permission and access to information. There are options to withhold or encrypt information when sharing files electronically between agencies, and data protection can be specified according to each child's wishes.

- **Customization by context.** Database administrators in each country have complete flexibility and autonomy to design the database to meet the needs of their specific programme or context. The tool can be used in emergency contexts, development contexts or across the continuum of care in both.

For reasons related to their respective mandates and issues of confidentiality, UNHCR and the ICRC have developed their own information systems and do not use the IA CP IMS. However, oral or written information-sharing agreements can be used on a case-by-case basis to facilitate cooperation and collaboration for referral and reporting purposes.

In line with its mandate and neutral, impartial and independent approach to fulfilling its exclusively humanitarian mission, the **ICRC uses its own database (Prot 6) and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing as appropriate with other humanitarian agencies working with UASC, provided that the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share his/her information with other organizations.**

 **ProGres is an information management system used for refugee registration and case management.** ProGres is used in most UNHCR operations, including in emergencies, and the software has the capability to include biometrics and fingerprints. Registration of refugees is primarily the responsibility of States, however UNHCR provides support as needed. UNHCR has registration kits in stock that can be sent immediately to an operation depending on need. These kits may include, for example, the actual software, registration/ration cards, card readers, slips, tokens, wristbands as well as stationery, etc. Individuals with protection concerns will be registered with a specific needs code, and all registration staff are trained to identify individuals with specific needs and will make referrals as needed. ProGres is used for case management of all refugees, not just UASC. In ProGres version 3, only UNHCR staff are able to access the information, but they can exchange information with partners using other information management systems, including the IA CP IMS and CPIMS+. Progres version 4 can be used directly by other agencies for case management for child protection, including UASC.

¹²³United Nations Children's Fund, 'Introduction to Primero,' <<https://prezi.com/evdfu5cl0h4o/introduction-to-primero/>> accessed 17 January 2016. The application has been field tested in Jordan, Kenya and Somalia, in preparation for rollout in 2016.

7.3.2 Data analysis

In an emergency situation or in the immediate aftermath of an emergency, particularly where circumstances are rapidly changing, the collection of sound and reliable data can be challenging. But it is usually possible to identify trends and patterns, such as a gender imbalance, among registered UASC in an IMS. **A dedicated capacity to rapidly analyse data is important**, whether this is done manually by reviewing the information and noting apparent trends or patterns or by entering data into a computerized database and generating reports.¹²⁴ Such analysis can provide important verified and detailed information about individual children in the case management system, overall caseloads and trends, and should inform programme planning, resources, responses and monitoring (*see Chapter 6.1.2*). Analysis and reporting can also provide evidence to support donor reports/appeals and advocacy with governments.



Tool 20: Key questions when considering support for government use of an Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System

Tool 25: Sample confidentiality and data protection checklist, IA CP IMS

Tool 26: Sample Informed Consent Form, CP AoR

Tool 27: Sample prioritization tool for UASC

Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan

Tool 29: Sample case management flow chart, UNHCR, Jordan

Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form, UNHCR

Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form, UNHCR

Tool 32: Questions to ask while developing data protection and information-sharing protocols

Tool 33: Sample information-sharing protocol, Turkey cross-border operations

¹²⁴ The Child Protection Working Group evaluation following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti noted the importance of the appointment of full-time information managers to clusters. Child Protection Working Group, *Key Findings of the Global Child Protection Working Group (CP AoR) Learning and Support Mission to Haiti*, CP AoR, 2010, p. 4.

Tool 34: Template for an information-sharing protocol agreement

Tool 35: Template data protection protocol, IA CP IMS

Tool 36: Sample data management process, Save the Children UK, Dadaab, Kenya

Child Protection Working Group, [Inter-agency Guidelines for Case Management & Child Protection](#), January 2014.

Child Protection Working Group, [Inter-agency Guidelines, Child Protection Case Management Training Manual for Caseworkers, Supervisors and Managers](#), January 2014.

Child Protection Working Group, [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Child Protection Standard 5: Information Management](#), 2012.

de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson and Jacqueline Botte, [The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years](#), Working paper, UNICEF, 2007.

De Lay, Brigitte, [Mobility Mapping and Flow Diagrams: Tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children](#), United States Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2003. [I THINK THIS IS THE CORRECT REFERENCE – I FOUND IT IN TOOL 55. FULL REFERENCE WAS NOT PROVIDED IN THE HANDBOOK]

International Committee of the Red Cross, [Professional Standards for Protection Work](#), 2013.

International Organization for Migration, [IOM Data Protection Manual](#), 2010.

McCormick, Christine, [Case Management Practice within Save the Children Child Protection Programmes](#), Save the Children UK, 2011.


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UNHCR, UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child, 2008.

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United Nations Children's Fund, [Mobile Technologies for Child Protection: A briefing note](#), 2011.





Chapter 8 sets out the basic elements of identifying children as unaccompanied or separated. All identification relies on the consistent application of the definition of 'unaccompanied and separated children' (UASC), especially by accounting for diverse local contexts, cultures and vulnerabilities. The chapter covers measures to locate and identify UASC, whether via information campaigns, liaising with other humanitarian actors or actively searching for such children. It then details urgent actions that may need to be taken immediately upon identification of the child, in advance of his/her documentation (see Chapter 9).

08

Identification of UASC

TOPICS

8.1 Promoting consistency when identifying UASC

8.1.1 Applying definitions within the local context, culture and levels of vulnerability

8.2 Measures to locate and identify UASC and record information on missing children

8.2.1 Information campaigns
Informing actors in the wider humanitarian response

8.2.2 Starting the search to locate UASC

8.3 Actions to take when UASC are identified

8.3.1 Addressing urgent needs and protection problems

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Identification is the process of establishing which children have been separated from their families or other caregivers, and where they may be found, with the objectives of facilitating family tracing and ensuring that children receive appropriate care and assistance until reunification or until alternative long-term solutions are arranged.
- Staff undertaking identification should apply the definitions of unaccompanied and separated children within the local context/culture and account for varying levels of vulnerability.
- In circumstances in which kinship networks and other customary protective mechanisms sustain children, the overall vulnerability/resilience of individual UASC should determine the need for targeted interventions rather than his/her separation status only.
- Identification of UASC must be carried out urgently as part of a coordinated and strategic programme response, involving the government and local organizations, where possible.
- In addition to conducting information campaigns, child protection actors working with UASC should actively search for such children, in coordination with general humanitarian actors.
- The objectives of identifying UASC should be communicated through a coordinated information campaign that is socially, contextually and culturally appropriate to minimize the risk of either creating separation or, conversely, creating suspicion and leading people to hide children.
- Separated children (as opposed to unaccompanied children) are often overlooked during identification; information campaigns should convey that families caring for separated children need to make sure these children are documented.

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Sensitive inquiries should be made to ensure that infants, very young children and girls are not missed or hidden, especially where analysis of data shows a gender imbalance among identified UASC.
- If a child is identified as unaccompanied or separated, immediate action may be needed to address protection, security or health concerns. In doing so, organizations working with UASC should be aware of specific agency mandates – for example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) mandate to lead and coordinate international action for the protection of refugees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC's) exclusively humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

08

Case management and information management for UASC

8.1 Promoting consistency when identifying UASC

“Identification is the process of establishing which children have been separated from their families or other caregivers, and where they may be found.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2004, p. 33)



TRY THIS: ENSURING CLEAR DEFINITIONS WITHIN

DIFFERENT CULTURES

Write down the definitions, programme objectives and programme criteria in local languages. To avoid confusion and ensure consistency, make copies for field staff to refer to when communicating with affected populations. This could be a task for the coordination group or could be carried out during field training, particularly joint trainings, to ensure mutual understanding and agreement. Staff can also refer to the guidance note for the UASC Registration Forms endorsed by the Inter-agency Working Group,¹²⁵ which includes the definitions and key points necessary to complete the forms.

Clearly defined programme objectives and agreed definitions are essential to target UASC and to avoid creating false impressions, potentially leading to children who are not unaccompanied or separated being put forward and thus creating separations or, on the other hand, UASC being hidden.

The objectives of identification are to facilitate family tracing and to ensure that children receive appropriate care and assistance until reunification or until alternative long-term solutions are arranged. However, organizations may use different criteria for UASC or prioritize based on separation status and resilience/vulnerability. This is important to recognize, especially if there are joint programmes or training initiatives.

Definition of UASC: All actors working with UASC should use the definitions set out in the introduction to this field handbook; likewise, they should explicitly list the age of children covered by these definitions as ‘any person under the age of 18 years’, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

8.1.1 Applying definitions within the local context, culture and levels of vulnerability

Consistent definitions of UASC are essential for programmes to reliably identify target group(s); however, every situation is different. An understanding of the historical, social, economic and cultural context, childcare beliefs and practices, and level of resilience/vulnerability is necessary when applying those definitions and targeting programmes. This understanding encompasses formal, informal and traditional structures, as well as coping mechanisms of communities. **Identification interventions should build on traditional values and community practices, and be aware of potential confusion with locally used terms.** For example, the local term for an orphan may be a child with only one parent, meaning that if staff perceive ‘orphans’ and ‘unaccompanied or separated children’ as the same, they may go on to incorrectly identify children with only one parent as unaccompanied or separated.

¹²⁵ Inter-agency Work Group, Inter-agency UASC Registration Form Package available at: <<http://CP.AoR.net/resources/inter-agency-reg-form-package-english/>>, accessed 21 January 2016.

HOW CONTEXT AND CULTURE CAN AFFECT THE APPLICATION OF UASC DEFINITIONS

Unaccompanied children:

"are those children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives, and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so."

A child who is alone or with other children

(for example, in a child-headed household) is clearly unaccompanied.

However, if **a child is in the care of adults who are not relatives**, an understanding of local law or custom is necessary.

Separated children:

"Separated from both parents, or from their previous primary or customary caregiver, but not necessarily other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members."

Generally the term '**previous legal or customary caregiver**' refers to the person with whom the child lived and by whom he/she was cared for prior to the emergency, without necessarily implying legal responsibility.

Example 1:

A child in the care of a clan member in a clan-based culture that views clan members as close relatives (such as Somalis):

- Is not unaccompanied.
- May not require documentation for tracing, if tracing can be done through the clan system.
- May require individual case assessment if care arrangements are of concern.

Example 3:

A child in the care of an aunt who was his/her main caregiver prior to the emergency:

- Is not separated.
- May require documentation for tracing or referral to the Red Cross IF family contact was lost as a result of the emergency.
- May require individual case assessment if care arrangements are of concern.

Example 2:

A child in the care of an unrelated village member:

- Is unaccompanied.
- Documentation for tracing is likely required.
- May require individual case assessment if care arrangements are of concern.:

Example 4:

A child in the care of an aunt, but who previously lived with his/her parents:

- Is separated.
- May require individual case assessment if care arrangements are of concern.

★ See Tool 38: Decision tree for determining a child's separation status, UNHCR

Understanding vulnerability and determining priorities

In the past, we tended to train staff on who is a separated child and who is an unaccompanied child, then send them out to the field to identify and register children, under the assumption that separation equals vulnerability. **Separation is a high predictor of vulnerability, but it does not equal vulnerability.** When the scale of separation overwhelms your financial and human resources, you are forced to take a more detailed look at children's stories. Some UASC might be doing well – they are being taken care of by their aunt, they plan to stay in an area of safety, or they just want the chance to make contact with family back home, whereas another child might be completely alone, have suffered sexual abuse during the journey and now be at risk of recruitment into an armed group. So by tailoring responses to individual needs, we can stretch resources to go further and reach more of the children who really need our support.

(Communicated in 2012 by a global child protection adviser, Save the Children)

Not all UASC need targeted interventions, particularly when children are sustained by kinship networks and other customary protective mechanisms. An understanding of each child's situation – whether the separation is voluntary, how resilient he/she is, whether there are additional factors that make him/her more vulnerable – is needed to determine whether an unaccompanied or separated child requires support and, if so, what kind. This will ensure that resources go to supporting the most vulnerable children and that such support matches the needs of the child. Organizations should consider applying or adapting a framework for vulnerability and resilience criteria, including a matrix for decision-making, prioritization, training and supervision.

★ *See Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan*

★ *See Chapter 7.2.3, Prioritization*

Rwanda: Identifying and prioritizing UASC based on context-specific definitions and vulnerability

In 2014, UNHCR faced a daunting caseload of Congolese UASC living in refugee camps in Rwanda. Concerned about capacity, not doing harm and reaching the most vulnerable, UNHCR wanted to ensure that programming priorities reflected local understanding of a cultural norm caregiving. UNHCR commissioned a research study that designed and piloted an assessment tool to adapt the definition of UASC to local contexts by understanding how refugee communities defined acceptable customary caregiving. In the two camps surveyed, the study found that group discussion participants and key informants almost universally accepted caregiving by maternal and paternal grandmothers, aunts, and uncles as a cultural norm. As one participant said, "The child of my child is my child." While these children should not be presumed free of protection concerns, neither were they inherently vulnerable. This helped to prioritize the caseload of UASC and freed up staff to pay greater attention to UASC most in need of attention, address related child protection concerns, and allocate time to deal with root causes of those very protection risks.

(Birnbaum, Muhorakeye, Gatete and Canavera, Determining Acceptable Customary Caregiving Arrangements with Congolese Refugees in Rwanda, UNHCR/Child Protection in Crisis (CPC) Learning Network, 10 April 2015)




8.2 Measures to locate and identify UASC and record information on missing children

Working through the child protection coordination group or specific UASC technical working group, **organizations should jointly develop a plan for identification of UASC, including:**

1. **Implementation of an information campaign**
2. **Active search for UASC, including monitoring mechanisms coordinated with community-based child protection mechanisms.**

Where possible and relevant, identification should be carried out within an agreed identification, documentation, tracing and reunification (IDTR) framework, ensuring optimal scale and reach and preventing duplication, which can result in multiple interviews of children by different organizations.

 UNHCR registration and screening procedures (both at registration and other key points) identify and prioritize children at risk. All registration staff members are trained to identify individuals with special needs, register them with a special needs code, and make referrals as needed. Once an unaccompanied or separated child is identified, UNHCR and its partners will follow up and conduct a best interests assessment (BIA), which may lead to a best interests determination (BID) and further case management support (see Chapter 7.2.5).

8.2.1 Information campaigns

Information campaigns are an important method of communicating information about UASC and family separation to the affected community, including children, and to other actors in the humanitarian response. Without an effective, culturally and socially appropriate information campaign targeting the affected population, people may lack awareness of the services available to them. **Information campaigns can be used to raise awareness and carry out advocacy relating to the:**

- **Importance of supporting family unity**
- **Risks of family separation**
- **Objectives in identifying UASC and registering missing children**
- **Provision of clear information on immediate action to be taken if UASC are found, known about, or are being cared for**
- **Provision of clear information on how to report cases of missing children.**

Such campaigns are particularly important because **separated children can be deliberately hidden**, because their current carers may not understand the purpose of screening and tracing processes, may form an attachment to them, or wish to retain the child for labour or other forms of exploitation. In such cases, information campaigns may persuade their current carers to report separated children in their care and/or encourage identification by neighbours, community members, teachers or children themselves. **However, information campaigns must not promote the idea that UASC will receive special assistance – apart from help to find their parents – since this could encourage children to come forward, even if they are not separated.**

Separated girls are often far less visible and may be living in abusive or exploitative situations. **Information campaigns may need to specifically target infants, very young children and girls**, especially when there is a gender imbalance in UASC registration statistics.



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'Hidden' girls

"Registration figures show generally that there are more boys than girls registered as unaccompanied and separated children because girls tend to be more easily integrated into foster families before they reach the camps. Girls may be used as domestic workers and consequently not registered; they may be taken as 'wives' by older men in the camps; or they may be trafficked out of the camps. The inadequate identification and consequent low registration rate of unaccompanied or separated girls may result in abuse, exploitation, early/forced marriages and early pregnancies."

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions: Assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors*, A/60/300, para. 48, 2005)

Other children, such as those who have been trafficked or who are migrants, may be afraid to be identified. Often fearful of reprisal, detention or expulsion, these children are more hesitant to step forward and identify themselves as unaccompanied or separated. This highlights the importance of ensuring that children understand the objective of identification and underscores the need to use a range of methods to reach marginalized children.

★ [See Chapter 3.1.4, Messages on prevention of separation: Developing information campaigns](#)

Informing actors in the wider humanitarian response

The information campaign should also target actors in the wider humanitarian response community, including United Nations agencies, international, national and local organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government officials, and military and United Nations peacekeepers, especially those involved in logistics, transport and camp management.

Targeting cross-sector programmes with significant overlap, such as infant and young children feeding, education and health programmes, is particularly important. Moreover, assessments of broader population movements can trigger questions to help identify UASC, such as those currently implemented by the International Organization for Migration's (IOM's) Displacement Tracking Matrix, in coordination with the Child Protection Working Group.



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Haiti: Family tracing and reunification and infant feeding programmes

Lack of awareness about an artificial feeding programme for children under 12 months who could not be breastfed meant family tracing and reunification officers did not refer any children to baby tents. Conversely, in none of the 10 baby tents in Port-au-Prince visited by the researcher were nutrition staff aware of Save the Children's child protection work, despite the fact that baby tent staff had daily contact with orphans and separated children.

(Emergency Nutrition Network, *Field Exchange Issue 41*, 2011, p. 67)

- ★ [See Chapter 3.1.4, Messages on prevention of separation: Key messages to emergency actors in other sectors of the humanitarian response](#)
- ★ [See Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages – Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR](#)
- ★ [See Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners](#)

8.2.2 Starting the search to locate UASC

In addition to the information campaign, child protection actors working with UASC should undertake an active search, in coordination with general humanitarian actors, to locate UASC. This must be sensitively carried out in order to not disrupt current care arrangements by appearing to offer benefits to UASC not available to other children. The search can begin as soon as possible – even before assessments are completed. However, a rapid assessment or situation analysis should be undertaken to establish the extent and causes of separation (*see Chapter 5.2*).

The first step is to map locations for the search; this will enable planning to ensure all locations are visited or monitored. **Map locations where:**

1. **UASC are known or thought to be (based on information from assessments, if available).**
2. **There is a risk of separations still occurring.**
3. **There is the potential for separations to occur.**

Priorities should be agreed upon based on any information (from rapid assessments, for example) indicating that certain children or groups of

children are particularly vulnerable. This could include, for example, very young children, children in unsafe locations or at risk of abuse or exploitation, or high concentrations of UASC in single locations.

Where possible, identification teams should be of the same nationality and speak the same language as the affected population. They should also include a mix of male and female workers, since adolescent girls in particular may be nervous to be identified by men. If marginalized ethnic groups are among those affected, it is important to be aware of potential sensitivities and ideally have them identified by staff or volunteers from the same ethnic group.

Anyone identifying children should also be ready to take preventive actions where separation is ongoing (see Chapter 3.1.1). Inevitably, field staff identifying UASC will face many challenging situations and should be trained to identify urgent protection issues, recognize urgent health problems and know who to contact if immediate action is required and to whom children with protection problems should be referred.



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Haiti: The use of helplines to identify UASC

Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, helplines were rapidly set up in the capital, Port au Prince. The call-centre phone number, which was free to use, was intended for use by front-line service providers – such as nurses, doctors, child-friendly space monitors, and NGOs and partners – who were likely to have information on children separated from their families. As soon as UASC were reported to the call centre, the organization covering that location dispatched field staff to interview the child and decide if documentation for tracing was needed and whether any further assistance was required.

(Monier, Cifora, 'Call centre responds to needs of separated children in Haitian quake zone', June 2010, UNICEF website, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/haiti_53986.html, accessed 21 January 2016)

TABLE 5
STEPS TO ENSURE AN EFFECTIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE SEARCH FOR UASC

Steps	Tips
<p>1. Meet with and talk to a wide range of people and actors</p>	<p>These may be local authorities, police, military, community leaders/chiefs, families, teachers, health workers, camp managers, religious leaders or local organizations to learn more about where UASC might be, why and how they became separated and the possible whereabouts of their families and communities. Other children are often an excellent source of information.</p>
<p>2. Map and visit locations where UASC might be found</p>	<p>This may include churches, mosques, hospitals/health centres, feeding centres/baby tents, residential children’s homes, boarding schools, welfare institutions, temporary shelters, marketplaces, places frequented by children working and living on the streets, in or around military camps or schools, and camps for refugees or internally displaced persons. It will be more obvious if a child is alone at night or at meals.</p> <p>Where populations are on the move, check places where separation is likely to occur, such as transportation sites; points where people gather for water, health care or other services; or routes people will likely follow if fleeing from danger.</p> <p>UASC are likely to be in extended family or kinship care, spontaneous foster care or foster care organized by local authorities or NGOs; they may be with their own community, other groups caught up in the conflict, refugees, displaced persons or the host community.</p>
<p>3. Negotiate access to detention centres/prisons</p>	<p>As well as finding UASC who are detained, women or other family members may have information on where their children can be found or they may wish to report missing children. It is important to be in close contact with and refer cases to other organizations that may already have access to places of detention or that conduct activities to locate missing persons and their families, such as the ICRC (<i>see Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response</i>).</p>
<p>4. Follow up on reports of UASC among groups of children recruited by armed forces or armed groups, and working, trafficked or abducted children</p>	<p>UASC may be found among groups of released children associated with armed forces or armed groups, as well as among trafficked, working or abducted children. It is important to keep in mind the sensitivities and safety of these children while including them in identification, documentation, tracing and reunification programmes, where tracing is required. Referrals to specialist organizations may also be necessary.</p> <p>Information on confirmed or suspected cases of UASC among these groups should also be passed on to existing programmes working with these children.</p>

Kenya: Identifying UASC in community-based care

Children represent more than half of the nearly 500,000 people living in the Dadaab refugee camp, near the Somali border in northeast Kenya. Many of these children were separated from their parents during flight from the Horn of Africa drought or Somali conflict, were left behind in the camp as their parents returned to Somalia, or were sent with relatives to the camp in the hope of receiving an education and better services. Because the traditional Somali community system encourages care for children who are not biologically their own, many UASC were spontaneously fostered by the time agencies had identified them.

Often, agencies learn of such children through camp registration and verification carried out by UNHCR and the Kenyan Government Department of Refugee Affairs. When caregivers indicate that a child is not related to them or does not usually live with them, he/she is registered as separated. In other instances, information-sharing

and awareness-raising activities prompt community members to approach Save the Children to report UASC cases. Cases of abandoned children may also be reported by medical agencies.

However, spontaneous foster care cases are often hidden until the foster family is processed for resettlement to a third country and it becomes apparent that the child is not biologically related to the caregiver. At this point, if it is in the best interests of the child, tracing may be initiated so that parents can give consent for the child to be resettled with his/her foster family. To solve this problem, the Government of Kenya is working with child protection agencies to review and finalize national guidelines for alternative care to account for refugee UASC, support foster care and improve protection of UASC.

(Save the Children, Kenya, 2012)



8.3 Actions to take when UASC are identified

When a child is first identified, some initial assessment (see Chapter 7.2.4 and 7.2.5) or actions may need to be taken prior to documentation (see Chapter 9).

★ [Tool 39: What to do if you come across children who are separated or reported missing, Global Child Protection Cluster](#)

Some States conduct age assessments on UASC where there is doubt regarding their claimed age, in particular among asylum-seekers. It is a complex issue and certain specific safeguards need to be flagged.¹²⁶ Methods used for age assessment must be safe, respect human dignity and allow for a margin of error. Age assessment procedures should be used only as a last resort, informed consent must be obtained and, because bold age assessment is not an exact science and uncertainties are likely to remain, individuals whose age is being assessed should be given the benefit of the doubt. Although there is no internationally agreed upon guidance and the methods might vary from country to country, assistance should be given based on need and vulnerability, not age alone. One recommended source of guidance is the Separated Children in Europe Programme, [SCEP Statement of Good Practice](#), 2010, which has been agreed to regionally.

8.3.1 Addressing urgent needs and protection problems

If you have identified a child, you may need to take immediate action to address protection, security or health concerns. The first step should always be assessment, including of urgent protection concerns and care arrangements (see Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5, and Tools 3, 30 and 31). You may then need to address urgent protection concerns through immediate intervention or referral, while also beginning the process of documenting the child for family tracing (see Chapters 9 and 11). This should include referral to relevant services or organizations, including UNHCR for refugees and asylum-seekers (see Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

The process of identification may also reveal other protection problems and **context-specific** risks for children. UASC, particularly refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, may be affected by the following threats, among others: detention, neglect or discrimination within their care setting, child labour, sexual exploitation, abuse or violence, former recruitment by armed forces or armed groups, risk of recruitment or re-recruitment, formerly trafficked or at

¹²⁶ For further resources, see Smith and Brownless, [Age Assessment Practices: A literature review and annotated bibliography \(discussion paper\)](#), UNICEF, April 2011, and Smith and Brownless, [Age Assessment: A technical note](#), UNICEF, 2013.

risk of being trafficked, forced early marriage, and lack of documentation and lost identity (such as lack of a birth certificate or statelessness).¹²⁷

★ **Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response**



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Jordan: Additional risks to unaccompanied women and girls fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic

“The ‘guarantor’ system in place until 19 July 2012 places unaccompanied women and girls who have entered Jordan at risk. The Government of Jordan previously prohibited refugees who entered without a visa from leaving transit facilities, unless a Jordanian citizen agreed to guarantee and register them with the governorate. While some refugees have relatives in Jordan able to serve as guarantor, many women, especially those who did not flee with their husbands, depend on strangers to exit transit facilities. This system increased risks of exploitation and trafficking for women and girls who are often forced to turn to unknown men for assistance.”

(International Rescue Committee, *From Harm to Home: Action needed to protect Syrian women and girls*, IRC, July 2012, p. 2)

These protection risks are an indication of the need for further assessment and follow-up (see Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5). In addition, **immediate responses that may be required include:**

Immediate care and protection

- **Removal of a child** to a safe and secret location, if necessary. Where care is provided for trafficked children, their location should never be made public.
- **Screen children believed to be trafficked.**¹²⁸ This is very important to ensure they are provided with appropriate support and their situation is not made worse; trafficked children are victims of serious crimes and particular security arrangements and procedures may be necessary.
- **Protect survivors of sexual violence from further harm** caused by inappropriate or insensitive interventions and ensure they are only interviewed by those responsible to conduct such interviews, respecting their dignity and rights.¹²⁹
- **Arrange urgent medical examination and treatment**, including child-friendly sexual and reproductive health care and referral to partners able to provide specialist services and support for survivors of sexual violence (see Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC).

¹²⁷ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, statelessness is estimated to have affected up to 12 million people by the end of 2010, 55 per cent of them children (*UNHCR Global Trends 2010*, UNHCR, 2011, p. 35).

¹²⁸ International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Protecting Refugees and Other Persons on the Move in the ECOWAS Space*, IOM and UNHCR, 2011. See Chapter 10 for detailed information on interviewing and immediate actions to support trafficked UASC.

¹²⁹ See World Health Organization, *Guidelines for Medico-Legal Care for Victims of Sexual Violence*, WHO, 2003.


- Keep children safe from further harm, including by ensuring that measures are in place to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (for example, by screening and training carers in ways to keep children safe and by recognizing that survivors of sexual abuse/violence are at higher risk of being abused again).

★ [See Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response](#)

Referrals

- **Refer suspected trafficked children** to UNICEF/UNHCR or the International Organization for Migration and/or the national authorities.
- **Refer suspected trafficked/migrant children who have crossed international borders** to UNHCR; these children may be in need of international protection.
- **Refer migrant/trafficked children with specific needs for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification/restoring family links** to relevant actors, whether in-country or cross-border, including authorities, when relevant, appropriate and in a child's best interests.
- **Refer UASC infants and young children** to infant and young children feeding programmes and ensure they are provided with appropriate infant feeding (see Matrix on p. 267: *Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).
- **Refer children without identity documentation** to relevant authorities or legal aid partners.
- **Consult on children who are potentially stateless** with UNHCR, given their mandate to prevent statelessness and to protect the rights of stateless populations.
- **Alert national and international agencies that are visiting locations where UASC are or may be detained, since their vulnerabilities may be heightened in detention.**

★ [See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC](#)

 Unaccompanied and separated children who are asylum-seekers or refugees have similar needs for assistance and protection as all UASC. However, their parents/caregivers may still be in their country of origin or even a third country. Having lost the protection of their own government, **special issues related to the status of UASC asylum-seekers and refugees need to be considered** in order to protect these children and ensure their best interests are met (see Tool 3). Where necessary and as appropriate, vulnerable children should be prioritized in protection procedures, including refugee status determination. Organizations working with UASC in emergencies need to be able to identify these children, understand their rights, be aware of potential additional protection risks, and identify priority actions, including referral to UNHCR, relevant state authorities responsible for refugees or other agencies with relevant mandates. Furthermore, UASC should be able to access registration and assistance – for example, by having their own ration cards.

A young girl with brown hair, wearing a purple dress with floral patterns and a gold bracelet, stands barefoot under a large, wrinkled blue tarp. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting.

Refugee status determination

Unaccompanied and separated children may also have sought asylum or have expressed a need for international protection. In its guiding principles, the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children provides the following guidance:

“Separated children seeking refugee status **should be admitted to the territory of an asylum country.**”

Refugee or asylum-seeking children **should not be detained.** However, in situations where they are detained, this detention must be used as a measure of last resort and should be for the shortest period of time (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37).

When **assessing an individual child’s claim for refugee status,** the following aspects should be taken into account: the child’s age and views, noting in particular the need for expert assessment; the appointment of a legal representative as well as a guardian to promote a decision that will be in the child’s best interests; and a recognition that the child should be given the benefit of the doubt should there be some concern regarding the credibility of his or her story.

In cases of large-scale refugee movements where individual refugee status determination is not possible, States may grant refugee status to all members of a group. In such circumstances all separated children are entitled to be granted the same status as other members of such a group.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, pp. 60-61)



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Mexico: Identification procedures for UASC asylum-seekers

In Mexico, all UASC arriving in a detention centre are supported by child protection officers from the National Migration Institute. These officers receive training from the National System for Integral Family Development, the Mexican Family Welfare Agency and Child Protection Institution, the National Human Rights Commission and international organizations, including UNHCR. Child protection officers are charged with conducting age-appropriate interviews with UASC in order to gather data on their identity, nationality, immigration status and the whereabouts of their family, as well as to screen for protection, medical or psychological needs, including for access to asylum procedures. The information gathered is used by authorities to conduct best interests assessments.

(Communicated by a UNHCR child protection officer, 2015)



Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies

Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response

Tool 5: Sample core child protection messages, Horn of Africa drought, CP AoR

Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners

Tool 28: Vulnerability and resilience criteria for differential interventions with unaccompanied and separated Somali and South Sudanese children in the Horn of Africa and Sudan/South Sudan

Tool 38: Decision tree for determining a child's separation status, UNHCR

Tool 39: What to do if you come across children who are separated or reported missing, Global Child Protection Cluster

Save the Children Alliance and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Separated Children in Europe Programme Training Guide](#), 2004.

Smith and Brownless, *Age Assessment: A technical note*, UNICEF, 2013.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund and Save the Children, [Separated Children in Europe \(SCEP\) Programme, Statement of Good Practice](#), Fourth revised edition, SCEP, 2010.



Chapter 9 sets out how to document unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) – from conducting the interview, completing forms and taking photographs, to guidance on documenting specific groups of children such as infants, young children, those with insufficient information for tracing, and those previously living in residential care. The chapter also covers digital documentation and the use of identity bracelets or labels, where appropriate. Finally, the chapter covers documentation of missing children by parents searching for their children, an important way to facilitate positive tracing through cross-matching with UASC documentation.



09

Documentation¹³⁰

TOPICS

9.1 Documenting unaccompanied and separated children

9.1.1 Conducting the interview with the child

9.1.2 Documenting infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing

9.1.3 Documenting children previously living in residential care

9.1.4 Completing forms

9.1.5 Photographs

9.1.6 Digitized documentation

9.1.7 Identity bracelets/labels

9.2 Missing children

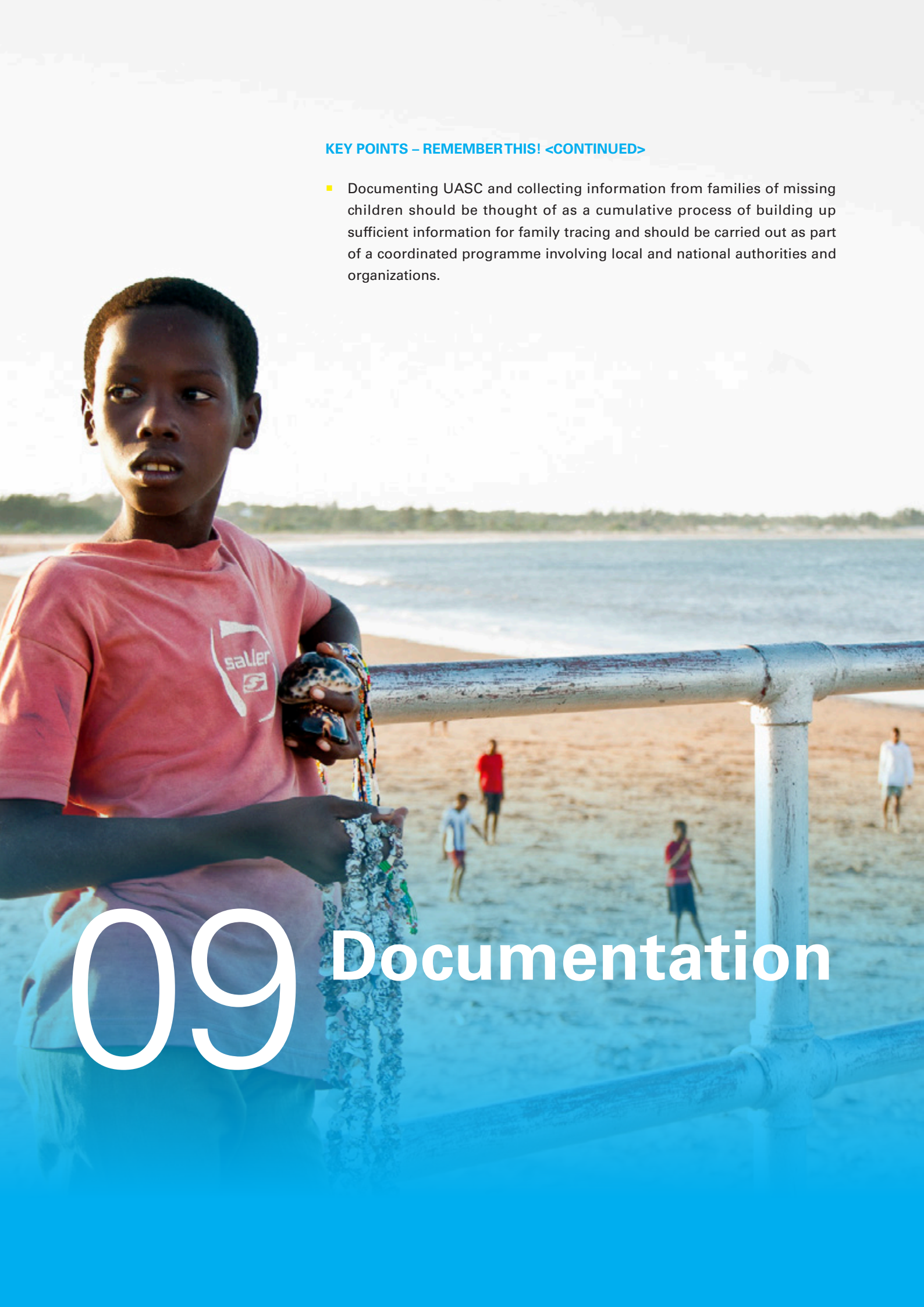
KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Confidentiality must be a foremost concern during documentation. Children must be fully informed about the purpose of the documentation and tracing process, and their informed consent/assent must be obtained.
- In addition to finding out information needed for family tracing and reunification, documentation should identify any other needs and facilitate broader case management.
- Early action and photographs are a particularly important part of the process for young children and those children with an insufficient or very limited amount of information for tracing. It is important to collect and record as much information as possible when these children are found.
- All records pertaining to the child, including photographs, must be linked to the child, his/her registration form and his/her unique reference number.
- Only trained staff with the ability to empathize and provide appropriate support should interview and document UASC.
- Multiple interviews of children by different organizations should be avoided.
- Successful tracing depends on the quality of information recorded on the registration form; quality control in the documentation process should be ensured through appropriate training, support, supervision of staff and spot checks.
- Information taken from families on missing children should be cross-checked with records of UASC to facilitate positive tracing.

¹³⁰ Note that the International Committee of the Red Cross and some other organizations refer to 'registration' of UASC rather than 'documentation'. Within the Inter-Agency Working Group for Unaccompanied and Separated Children, the processes and forms used are harmonized, even if terminology is different.

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Documenting UASC and collecting information from families of missing children should be thought of as a cumulative process of building up sufficient information for family tracing and should be carried out as part of a coordinated programme involving local and national authorities and organizations.

A young boy with dark skin and short hair is the central focus. He is wearing a pink t-shirt with a white logo that says 'saller' and a small 'S' below it. He is holding a colorful beaded necklace in his hands. The background shows a beach with several other people walking in the distance. The sky is bright and clear. The overall scene is peaceful and captures a moment of daily life for a child in a coastal setting.

09 Documentation

9.1 Documenting unaccompanied and separated children

Documentation: Recording all the information needed to carry out family tracing, identify care and protection needs, and develop a case management plan. This is the first step towards protecting and preserving the identity of a child and tracing her/his family members. Documentation also refers to collecting information from parents/ carers of missing children.

Documentation should be thought of as a cumulative process of building up sufficient information to trace a child's family through interviews or informal contact with the child. A number of interviews may be required, especially when the child is young, distressed or has difficulty communicating, and follow-up should continue periodically to check whether new information has come to light.

Successful outcomes for UASC, including positive family tracing and reunification, depend on:

- **How documentation is organized and implemented**
- **The skills of the person documenting the child**
- **How the information gathered on the child and his/her family is used, managed and shared.**

Documentation should be **carried out within an agreed framework for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification (IDTR)**, where possible and relevant. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) can clarify roles and responsibilities for documentation in each location, ensuring there are no gaps in coverage and minimizing the risk of children being documented by multiple organizations (*see Chapter 4.3*). Where there are large numbers of UASC identified, the UASC technical working group at the subnational/ national level should agree on criteria for prioritizing documentation, normally for the most vulnerable, such as very young children, unaccompanied children living in difficult circumstances and children with obvious protection risks (*see Chapter 7.2.3*).

Documentation should also identify individual needs and facilitate broader case management, including detailed individual case assessment (*see Chapter 7.2*). The most appropriate action for each child will not always involve family tracing/reunification. Some UASC may wish for family tracing and contact with family but may not wish to be reunited, or family reunification may not be in their best interests. In such cases, social/economic support may be more relevant. Other UASC may know the whereabouts of family but need help re-establishing contact or making decisions about reunification.



South Africa: Voluntary separation and UASC

An anecdotal account of one project found that the majority of children supported were teenagers whose families voluntarily sent them away to earn money to improve their lives. Their personal objective was not reunification, but jobs, education and long-term shelter. Initially the limited resources for unaccompanied and separated children were used incorrectly, focusing on tracing and reunification. Subsequently, the project emphasized social integration of children through enrolment in school and age-appropriate vocational training, complemented by cross-border advocacy and awareness-raising in the place of origin against hazardous migration.

(Communicated in 2012 by a child protection adviser, Save the Children, South Africa)

9.1.1 Conducting the interview with the child¹³¹

Confidentiality must be a foremost concern during documentation. Children must be fully informed about the purpose of documentation and the tracing process and their informed consent/assent should always be sought prior to interviewing them (see Chapter 7.1).

When interviewing children, staff should follow these steps:

- Conduct the interview in a quiet, calm, secure and stable location that provides some privacy.
- Consider the timing of interviews as most appropriate for the individual child taking into account the individual child's needs, age, and developmental stage.
- Avoid the use of an interpreter wherever possible.
- Explain to the child why he/she is being interviewed, why the information needs to be written down, how it will be used, and with whom it may be shared **with their consent**.
- Seek informed consent/assent of the child/carer (see Chapter 7.1)
- Take time at the beginning of the interview to put the child at ease and engage with him/her.
- Focus on the child, not the task of filling out forms.
- Behave in a manner that is appropriate to the child's age and social and cultural context, including sensitivity to gender concerns.
- Be aware of both verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Portray an open, supportive attitude and avoid confronting or criticizing the child.
- Use a range of age-appropriate interviewing techniques.
- Conclude the interview on a positive note.

¹³¹ For training on interviewing children, see Child Protection Working Group, *Training Package – Interviewing children: A forensic interview*, 2014, <http://CP_AoR.net/resources/interviewing-children-forensic-interview-package-2014-zip-7mb/>, accessed 21 January 2016.

★ [See Tool 40: Conducting interviews with children](#)

9.1.2 Documenting infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing

Sometimes it is difficult to obtain sufficient information through documentation to start tracing, either because the child is simply too young, or because he or she is unable to communicate the necessary information. As a result, tracing can be delayed while more straightforward cases are prioritized or while further information is gathered. Because very young children are likely to forget information quickly, **such delays can result in lost opportunities to sufficiently document children for tracing and should be avoided. However, documentation of these children can be very successful if time and resources are devoted early, including the use of specially trained personnel.**

To increase the chances of successful tracing for these children, **it is important to collect and record as much information as possible – there and then – in the area where they are found** (see Chapter 8.2). This may be the only opportunity to learn about their situation, including the location of their home and place of origin (if different). **Staff working with very young children who are unaccompanied or separated or children with insufficient information should:**

- **Conduct the interview as soon as possible** (see Tool 40).
- **Question every person who is close by, including children, and write down all the information**, even if it does not appear to make sense at the time.
- **Record any details of the child's developmental stage or behaviour** that could help to provide identification, and any words or phrases that the child uses frequently.
- **Record the details of where the child was found, the date and time, what he or she was wearing, jewellery and any items found with him/her, and photograph these items**, since they may facilitate identification or be important in verification.
- **Continue the documentation process after the first interview by working with the child's carers.** Carers can be asked to carry out certain activities that may help to prompt memories and to record any information or behaviour that may help in tracing, such as encouraging them to draw pictures of their homes/families or listening for information that may help with tracing, such as landmarks near their home, the colour of their uncle's motorcycle, their nickname for their grandmother, or memories of events or holidays.¹³² Be aware that standard initial interviews may not produce useful information for tracing when very young children are distressed and confused.¹³³
- **Be creative and use special techniques, such as drawing, play, singing, dancing, role-playing, storytelling, mobility mapping and flow diagrams to help children remember or express information.** This specialized work requires sufficient time and 'detective work', including observation and analysis, and should only be carried out by skilled staff in a child-friendly environment. Do not rush or compel children to provide information.¹³⁴

¹³² de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson and Jacqueline Botte, *The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years, A working paper*, UNICEF, 2007, p. 26.

¹³³ Adapted from de la Soudière, 2007, pp. 21-25.

¹³⁴ Adapted from de la Soudière, 2007, pp. 21-25.



Rwanda: Creative documentation through mobility mapping

An historical mobility map translates a child's mental picture of life before separation onto paper. The interviewer asks a child to draw places where he/she used to go – their 'mobility map'. The map's primary purpose is to stimulate the child's memory and generate discussion between the child and a tracing worker. However, the drawing can also be used to identify and decipher tracing clues.

The International Rescue Committee-Rwanda piloted this tool to address a large number of difficult tracing cases. Mobility mapping complemented and provided an alternative to standard documentation interviews, and allowed social workers to break through "seemingly insurmountable information barriers" with "untraceable children." New information was discovered in 58 per cent of cases, and several children were successfully traced.

(Adapted from: United States Agency for International Development, *Mobility Mapping and Flow Diagram: Tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children*, 2003, pp. 3-5)

- **Support children after working with them**, since painful memories may have been recalled.

If it is impossible to establish a child's identity, despite all efforts, "the relevant authorities should take appropriate measures to ascertain it. **A new identity should be established only as a last resort.**"¹³⁵

- ★ [See Chapter 11.2.8, Tracing of infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing](#)

9.1.3 Documenting children previously living in residential care

In contexts where UASC include those living in residential care before an emergency *and* children who are newly separated as a result of the emergency, **it may be necessary to prioritize which children to document first** (see Chapter 7.2.3). Newly separated children are likely to have a higher chance of successful tracing and may be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. However, **sometimes children previously living in residential care lose track of their primary caregivers in the chaos and also have urgent tracing or other needs** (see Chapter 2.1.2). When prioritizing, organizations should ask:

- What priorities were identified in the rapid assessment or situation analysis?
- Prior to the emergency, were residential care centres regulated and did they keep well-organized records, including individual documentation and case files? If so, children living there are less likely to have urgent needs unless centres were directly affected by the emergency.
- Did the emergency cause residential care centres to lose records? If so, contact with family members could have been lost, resulting in urgent family tracing needs.

¹³⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004.

- Did children have to leave their care setting – for example, due to damage or attack? If so, they may need help returning when conditions are safe and carers are present.
- Is there a shortage of food, water, basic supplies or services such as electricity? If so, alternative accommodation may be required.
- Is there an increased risk of abduction or trafficking of children in residential care as a result of the emergency? If so, urgent prevention and monitoring measures are required.

When possible, **undertake rapid registration of children in residential care** to ensure children have not gone missing, to identify children with priority needs or who lost contact with family, and to track future movement of children. Often, residential care centres accept children newly separated as a result of the emergency. These UASC need to be screened, registered and prioritized for tracing/other needs.

★ [See Tool 41: Rapid registration list, IAWG-UASC](#)

9.1.4 Completing forms

All children who need tracing should be documented on either the standard Registration Form or Extended Registration Form as soon as possible following identification. However, mandate differences may also mean that the forms used in different contexts may vary. Inter-agency standard forms usually are used in cluster situations. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies use their own standard forms.

★ [See Tool 42: Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC](#)

★ [See Tool 43: Extended Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC](#)


★ [See Tool 44: Guidance note on Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC](#)

★ [See Tool 45: ProGres needs codes, UNHCR](#)

Documentation should not wait until forms are adapted; additional information can always be obtained later. Even then, forms should only be customized by senior child protection managers,¹³⁶ in consultation with documentation/tracing staff, for highly localized contextual and language issues, since the inter-agency forms were designed to capture the necessary information for IDTR and case management.

Successful tracing depends on the quality of information recorded on the registration form. Staff undertaking documentation should:

- **Complete forms to the highest standard:** Information must be accurate, legible and useful.

 In a refugee situation, the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and/or relevant national refugee authorities register refugees, including children.** UNHCR is committed to providing documentation of all individual refugee adults and children. In the height of an emergency, this registration might be undertaken at the heads of household level. When individual-level registration starts, separated children are registered individually (cross-referenced to their carer's family) and receive **best interests assessments (BIAs)** as soon as possible. Agencies using the Inter-agency Registration Form must include the child's **proGres case number** to ensure case coordination.

¹³⁶ Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, and United Nations Children's Fund, *Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System Training Manual*, Part 2, Section VIII, Handouts/Additional Resources, Document 16, 'Guidance on Customizing Paper Forms'.

- **Use temporary ID codes, if a computer has not generated a registration ID:**
 - **Agree with other organizations on the format for a temporary code**, for example, one format might be: AGENCY/LOCATION CODE/DATE/YOUR INITIALS/CHILD'S NUMBER.
 - **Assign ID codes to all documentation, photographs or objects** relating to a child. Where the child's name is not known, this number is the only way to link information to the child.
- **Understand the information management process**, including how a unique reference number (generated by computerized databases, where in use) is allocated to each child's records, how many copies of forms are required and what should happen to the forms once completed.
- **Store a copy of the form near the child's location**, enabling urgent tracing during an emergency.

Senior staff should:

- **Train, support, and supervise documentation staff**, including on local contextual issues, such as the way family names are recorded or membership in social groups is determined.
- **Regularly check registration forms**, for example, at the end of each day.
- Encourage field staff to communicate any difficulties in understanding or completing the forms.
- **Check the 'paper trail' regularly** to ensure that completed forms go where they should and information is transmitted correctly.



Somalia: Documenting clan membership

Because formal records of all the clans and sub-clans in Somalia do not exist, there can be a lack of clarity over which clan a child may belong to, sometimes leading to disputes. Field staff documenting children need to be fully aware of sensitivities relating to clan membership and how to address any problems that may arise.

(Communicated in 2012 by an IDTR consultant, UNICEF Regional Office for East and Southern Africa)

9.1.5 Photographs

Photographs are an important part of the documentation process, providing a record of the child for reference, verification and possible use in family tracing. **Informed consent/assent** must be obtained before taking photographs and an explanation given to the child of how the photographs will be used.

Photographs should be taken **as soon as possible** after separation, especially of infants whose appearance is likely to change and for whom there may be no other way of carrying out family tracing. Digital cameras or smart phones are normally used but, when unavailable, Polaroid cameras are a good substitute, especially for small caseloads. **High-quality photographs are essential:** to ensure the child's face is visible and large enough to recognize, take the

photograph from the chest upward and ensure he/she is looking straight at the camera. The photographs should be shown to the child afterward.

The name of the child must never be written on his/her photograph for confidentiality and security purposes. However, like all records pertaining to the child, **the photograph must be linked to the child, his/her registration form and his/her unique reference number.** Record the child's unique reference number with the photo, whether through photographing the child holding a number board or writing the number on the photo itself.

★ [See Chapter 11.2.3, Photo tracing](#)



TRY THIS: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TOOLS DURING PRIORITIZATION

Digital documentation tools may be particularly helpful in trying to prioritize in rapid onset, fast-moving emergencies. Where available and staff are already trained in their use, these tools may speed registration of UASC and fast track family tracing and reunification.

However, time is of the essence in emergencies. Stick to the basics and be creative using the tools you have on hand; do not delay the start of prioritization or programming while waiting for new technologies. Once available, new tools can be integrated at a later time.

9.1.6 Digitized documentation

There are increasing efforts to digitize documentation on smart phones, tablets or other digital platforms. These digital registration tools are essentially 'electronic paper' and, while useful to make documentation and tracing more efficient, they should *not* be mistaken for case management tools.

9.1.7 Identity bracelets/labels

Identity bracelets or labels can be used both as a way to prevent separation and to indicate that a child has been documented as an UASC. In situations such as planned population movements, the child's name and other information, such as home/intended location, is written on the ID bracelet/label, which is attached to a young child who may not otherwise be able to provide this information; this can help with tracing if he/she becomes separated. Identity bracelets or labels can also be attached to UASC *after* documentation to indicate which children have been documented, make them more easily visible in a crowd and prevent them from becoming lost again.

However, publicly labelling children as unaccompanied or separated potentially makes them targets of adults looking to exploit or abuse children and **use of any such methods should be risk-assessed.** Where possible, consensus should be reached among all actors on their use. Other, less visible methods of identifying documented children can also be used, such as a small permanent pen mark on the inside of a child's arm. Children may also prefer this method, which is less likely to make them feel stigmatized.

9.2 Children unaccounted for

Missing children are those children “whose families are without news of them and/or are reported unaccounted for, on the basis of reliable information, owing to armed conflict or internal violence, natural catastrophes or any other situation that may require the intervention of a competent State authority.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, *Handbook for Parliamentarians*, no. 17, 2009, p. 9)

Documentation of missing children, like UASC, concerns not only family tracing and reunification but should also be linked to prevention of separation and protection responses. **When a child goes missing, safety is paramount and should be the first consideration.** When child protection actors become aware of a missing child, they should consider the security aspects of the situation and, where necessary, particularly in cases of suspected abduction or trafficking, contact child protection authorities, police and – in cross-border cases – border control.

Documenting information from families searching for their children is an important aspect of family tracing and can speed up reunification. **Information taken from families on missing children should be cross-checked with records of UASC** through electronic database matching features, or manual searches of UASC lists and spread sheets. Information on missing children should be treated in the same way as information relating to UASC with regard to confidentiality and data protection.

Collection of information should only be undertaken by trained staff members who are able to empathize with and support distressed families. It is important to manage families’ expectations and to take into consideration the impact of their loss on their everyday life. If the children cannot be located, they might be ‘missing persons’ following the emergency. Initiatives on missing children and their families may also be raised by organizations to draw attention to the needs of families of missing persons.

In addition to cross-checking information taken from families with records of UASC (through electronic database or manual searches), child protection actors are encouraged to refer families looking for their children to the ICRC and the National Societies for Restoring Family Links services.

Should there be instances where ICRC and National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies are not present, other child protection actors may provide tracing services consistent with the best interests of children.



Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies

Tool 40: Conducting interviews with children

Tool 41: Rapid registration list, IAWG-UASC

Tool 42: Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC

Tool 43: Extended Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC

Tool 44: Guidance note on Registration Form for UASC, IAWG-UASC

Tool 45: ProGres needs codes, UNHCR

de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson, and Jacqueline Botte, [The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years, A working paper](#), UNICEF, 2007.

De Lay, Brigette, [Mobility Mapping and Flow Diagrams: Tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children](#), United States Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2003.

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United Nations Children's Fund, [Mobile Technologies for Child Protection: A briefing note](#), 2011.

United Nations Children's Fund, [RapidFTR.com](#) website.



Chapter 10 sets out the framework for alternative care of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), with reference to the United Nations *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* and the *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*. Care options for UASC can be diverse and range from family-based care to residential care, which should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest period of time necessary. It also addresses the care needs of groups of UASC that require special attention, such as those under the age of 5 and adolescents. Assessment of current care arrangements, as well as identification and monitoring of alternative care arrangements is a central component of the chapter. Finally, the chapter covers long-term and permanent care options such as adoption for UASC who are unable to be reunited or for whom reunification is not in their best interests.

10

Alternative care of unaccompanied and separated children

TOPICS

10.1 Framework and key elements of alternative care for UASC

10.2 Assessment of current care arrangements for UASC

10.3 Identification of alternative care arrangements for UASC

10.3.1 Special considerations when arranging alternative care for UASC

Care of infants and young children

Care of and support to adolescents

10.3.2 Residential care

Temporary assistance to support children in residential care

Preventing secondary separations and reducing residential care

10.3.3 Temporary emergency care centres

10.4 Monitoring care arrangements

10.4.1 Action in the event of child abuse, exploitation or neglect

10.5 Long-term/permanent care for UASC

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- While this care may take the form of informal or formal care, it is the quality of care that is central to the well-being of UASC, as per internationally agreed guidance.
- For most UASC, alternative care is only required as an interim measure while family tracing is carried out and prior to family reunification.
- Special attention should be given to unaccompanied and separated infants and young children (especially those under the age of 3), since they need alternative care arrangements that enable healthy attachment to carers. Likewise, adolescents and child-headed households may require specific support.
- Family-based care within the child's community is usually the preferred care option and is more likely to provide children with the security, stability and physical/emotional care needed for healthy development.
- Residential care should only be used where appropriate and in the best interests of the child. New long-term residential care facilities should not be set up in emergency situations, and measures should be taken to prevent secondary separations by reducing the use of existing residential care.
- Monitoring of all children in alternative care is essential, ideally through local child welfare systems or community structures.
- Organizations must establish guidelines to be followed to prevent abuse, exploitation or neglect, and to respond in the event of actual or suspected cases of abuse, exploitation or neglect of a child, based on international guidance.

TOPICS

10.5.1 Overview of long-term/permanent care options

10.5.2 Adoption

Advocacy relating to intercountry adoption following emergencies

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- For those UASC who are unable to be reunited, decisions on long term-care arrangements should be made through an active process that involves the child and, ideally, local authority social workers or child welfare workers.
- Adoption – whether national or intercountry – is not an appropriate form of care for UASC *during or immediately following emergencies*. In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, the priority for UASC should be on reuniting children with their families and determining the best care placement until that is possible.
- However, national adoption or its equivalent (and, in some cases, intercountry adoption) can sometimes provide the best long-term care for UASC after the emergency phase, if it has been determined that they are unable to be reunited with any family members. Adoption should only be considered when handled through legally established procedures.

10

Alternative care of unaccompanied and separated children



10.1 Framework and key elements of alternative care for UASC

For most UASC, alternative care is only required as an interim measure while family tracing is carried out and prior to family reunification; others may need long-term care.

As every child's circumstances are unique, the best care arrangement for each child will be different. Ideally, a range of options should be available and developed with community leaders, local authorities and the affected population to promote a sense of shared ownership regarding care of UASC. Regardless of the particular form of care, the **quality of alternative care provision** is central to the well-being of UASC. Because personnel involved in the emergency response may not be familiar with child protection or care issues and there may be minimal capacity to supervise on the ground, a **robust framework for alternative care** is essential, including the UN Guidelines for the [Alternative Care of Children](#) and the [Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit](#).

In most emergencies, extended family, friends, neighbours or other community members take in UASC spontaneously; it is only in extreme circumstances that this capacity may be overwhelmed or non-existent. **Where they are in the best interests of the child, spontaneous care arrangements should be supported.** UASC who are not in these spontaneous care arrangements may be living in a range of care settings, from existing residential care centres to living alone or with peers/siblings.

Organizations should consider these key elements of alternative care of UASC in emergency settings:

- **Assessment of the current care arrangements of UASC**
- **Identification of alternative care options for UASC, where necessary**
- **Capacity to monitor the situation of all UASC living in alternative care arrangements**
- **Prevention of secondary separations.**

For UASC who are unable to be reunited or for whom reunification is not in their best interests, **long-term, permanent alternative care arrangements** will also need to be decided upon.



“Alternative care is the care provided for children by caregivers who are not their usual primary caregiver. This care may take the form of informal or formal care. Alternative care may be kinship care; foster care; other forms of family-based or family-like care placements; residential care; or supervised independent living arrangements for children.”

Formal care: “Formal care includes all care provided in a family environment (see definition above of family-based care for examples) that has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures.”

Informal care: “Any private arrangement provided in a family environment whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives, friends or others in their individual capacity, on the initiative of the child, his or her parents and other people, without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or accredited body.”

Kinship care: “Kinship care is family-based care within the child’s extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature.”

Foster care: “Foster care is a care arrangement administered by a competent authority, whether on an emergency, short-term or long-term basis, whereby a child is placed in the domestic environment of a family who have been selected, prepared and authorized to provide such care, and are supervised and may be financially and/or non-financially supported in doing so. Informal foster care is where a child is taken into care without third-party involvement. This may also be spontaneous fostering if it is done without any prior arrangements.”

Family-based care: “Family-based care is a type of alternative care that involves the child living with a family other than his or her usual primary caregiver. This is a broad term that can include foster care, kinship care and supported child-headed households.”

Residential care: “Residential care is a group-living arrangement in a specially designated facility where salaried staff or volunteers ensure care on a shift basis. Residential care is an umbrella term that includes short- and long-term placements in institutions, small group homes, places of safety for emergency care, and transit centres.”

(Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group for Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, pp. 9-14. See also: United Nations General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142, para 29(b)-(c), and Cantwell, Nigel, et al., *Moving Forward: Implementing the ‘Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children’*, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, UK, 2012)

10.2 Assessment of current care arrangements for UASC

An assessment of current care arrangements should be carried out for all UASC living in family/kinship care, foster care, small group homes, supervised independent living arrangements and in child-headed households, as well as in residential care. This normally is part of an individual case assessment and may involve a best interests assessment (BIA) or, in some cases, a best interests determination (BID) (see *Chapter 7.2.4 and 7.2.5*). Given the potential risks to children, the capacity to monitor care arrangements effectively should be taken into account as part of the assessment.

It is important to assess existing family-based alternative care arrangements sensitively to avoid disrupting care arrangements that are in the best interests of the child. However, it is essential in all cases to find out the **views of the child** and assess the **carers' motivation, willingness and capacity** to provide a safe, caring, stable home for the child. While UASC are more likely to receive love and individual support in family-based alternative care than in residential care and, in many cases, family, kin or community members go to great lengths to provide excellent care, those working with UASC should never assume this to be the case.¹³⁷

All care arrangements carry risks that need to be assessed. These will be different for each individual child and depend on a number of factors, including the individual care arrangement itself and how well regulated the care system is in a specific context. Potential risks to children in family-based care include:

- Abuse/exploitation
- Discrimination within the family and lack of access to services relative to biological children
- An expectation that work, such as domestic service, will be provided in return for care¹³⁸
- Loss of inheritance, property, possessions or wealth due to self-serving motivations of carers¹³⁹
- Permanent separation from parents or previous carers due to families' movement or hiding of the child, or inadequate monitoring by agencies
- Discrimination within the family and lack of access to services relative to other children within the household.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Gale, Lacey Andrews, *Beyond Men Pikin: Improving understanding of post-conflict child fostering in Sierra Leone*, Feinstein International Center, 2008; and Delap, Emil, *No Place Like Home? Children's experiences of reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone*, Save the Children UK, 2004.


¹³⁸ Delap, 2004, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Save the Children Sweden, *Rwandan Experience of Fostering Separated Children*, Save the Children Sweden for UNICEF, 2001, p. 75.

- Breakdown of care arrangements, secondary separation and placement in residential care due to economic difficulties, such as financial strain placed on families caring for children
- Abandonment by carers, particularly during voluntary repatriation.

★ [See Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response](#)

Where an assessment of a child's current care situation exposes serious problems that cannot be addressed through support and monitoring, such as evidence of or risk of abuse or exploitation, the child should be removed immediately (see Chapter 10.4.1). Where monitoring cannot be assured, it may be in the best interests of certain children, particularly those living in fragile or unstable care arrangements, to be temporarily placed in a foster family or appropriate residential care while capacity for monitoring is developed.

 **Host communities in countries of asylum sometimes spontaneously take care of unaccompanied children.** This can potentially have long-term negative consequences even where care arrangements are positive and must be considered in the context of the rights of the child to durable solutions. This is particularly the case where the host community speaks a different language or practises a different religion than that of the child, and where the prospects for local integration are poor. Any temporary care arrangement for an unaccompanied child involving a host community family is considered complex, and would therefore require a best interests determination (see Chapter 7.2.5).

10.3 Identification of alternative care arrangements for UASC

Organizations planning to support, strengthen or develop alternative care arrangements should refer to the [Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit](#) for detailed guidance on all forms of alternative care.

Rather than hastily establishing residential care that is likely to disrupt spontaneous care arrangements, **every effort should be made to support and develop care options that build on and strengthen the systems already used by the community**, where these are in the best interests of children. Community-based approaches to care includes, among others, family/kinship care, foster care, small group care in the child's community and supervised independent living, some of which overlap. Unlike residential care, a community-based approach to care arrangements emphasizes continuity in socialization and development, promotes the integration of children into the community and increases the likelihood of individual care.

Family-based care within the child's community should be prioritized as the preferred care arrangement when developing a full range of care options for UASC.¹⁴⁰ While acknowledging and supporting the efforts of community members through public information campaigns and other means, organizations should simultaneously encourage family/community members to bring UASC to the attention of local authorities and/or organizations working with UASC to enable documentation for family tracing and monitoring of care arrangements.

10.3.1 Special considerations when arranging alternative care for UASC

Care of infants and young children

Family-based care – whether extended family, kin or foster – is better able to meet young children's developmental needs than residential settings, where individual care and attention is often lacking.¹⁴¹

All care arrangements for infants and young children should be closely monitored and supported. Those caring for infants and young children should have a good understanding of developmental stages and be willing to support healthy development through appropriate interaction and play. They should also understand the impact of loss and separation on young children and the ways in which these experiences may manifest – for example, regression to earlier developmental stages, appearing withdrawn, angry or sad, or having nightmares. Training in taking care of young children should take into account local ways of supporting babies and young children who are distressed or have experienced loss.

"In accordance with the predominant opinion of experts, **alternative care for young children, especially those under age of 3 years, should be provided in family-based settings.** Exceptions to this principle may be warranted in order to prevent the separation of siblings and in cases where the placement is of an emergency nature or is for a predetermined and very limited duration, with planned family reintegration or other appropriate long-term care solution as its outcome."

(United Nations General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142, para. 22)

¹⁴⁰ Cantwell, Nigel, et al., *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'*, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, UK, 2012, p. 118.

¹⁴¹ Cantwell, 2012, p. 39; Johnson, Rebecca, Kevin Browne and Catherine Hamilton-Giachritsis, *Young Children in Institutional Care at Risk of Harm*, Sage Publications, London, 2006.



The importance of infants forming a healthy attachment to a caregiver

Many UASC, particularly those in residential care, do not experience the continuity and quality of care they need to form healthy attachments to responsible, caring adults, which may lead to difficulties in adulthood.¹⁴²

Attachment to a consistent caregiver is fundamentally important for children from 6 months to 2 years of age, and recent studies suggest that deprivation of a consistent caregiver has potentially significant impacts on the brain development of children in institutional care.¹⁴³ Thus, training of carers, including adolescents who may be primary caregivers, should incorporate culturally appropriate ways to support healthy attachment and ensure understanding of its importance.

Supervised independent living:¹⁴⁵

*"Where a young person is supported in their own home, a group home, hostel, or other form of accommodation, to become independent."*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Attachment theory has been described by psychologist John Bowlby as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings." See: Bowlby, J., *Attachment: Attachment and loss*, vol. 1, Basic Books, New York, 1969, p. 194.

¹⁴³ Williamson, John, and Aaron Greenberg, *Families, Not Orphanages*, Better Care Network Working Paper, September 2010, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ 'Supported' independent living is a term used interchangeably with 'supervised' independent living. For consistency, the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children follows the UN *Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children's* use of 'supervised independent living'. See also Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, chapter 10.1, for information on how to support children living independently.

¹⁴⁶ Save the Children, 'Protection Fact Sheet: Child protection and care related definitions', <<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/5608.pdf>>, accessed 23 January 2016.

Where residential care of infants or young children is unavoidable, it should be based on the small group care model, promoting continuity of care, individual attention and opportunity to interact, engage with and develop strong bonds with a carer. Measures should be taken to minimize staff turnover, organize shift work to allow for continuity of carers and ensure a sufficient carer-to-child ratio. In addition, children living in residential care should be allowed to interact with children outside of the facility, where possible, to minimize discrimination and encourage healthy socialization.

Care of and support to adolescents

For adolescents (ages 10-19¹⁴⁴), the teenage years bring fundamental developmental changes, ranging from sexual development to greater capacity for abstract reasoning and independence. **Family-based care options, such as foster care, can still be perfectly acceptable for adolescents** and, in fact, for younger adolescents, should be the preferred care arrangement. However, some young people, unused to living in a structured family environment during separation, may have difficulty living as part of a family again or be unwilling to do so. Foster placements may also be hard to find for adolescents whose behaviour is, or is perceived to be, challenging.

Where family-based care is assessed to not be a suitable option, supervised independent living arrangements or child-headed households may be an important option for these adolescents. Some young people may already live independently, with or without the support of community members, in child-headed households. Likewise, girls with babies, who need the independence to establish themselves as young mothers without feeling undermined by foster mothers, may still benefit from the support of community members or mentors. Supervised independent living combined with livelihood support is also a useful way to support children leaving long-term care as they transition to adulthood and independence.

¹⁴⁴ The World Health Organization defines adolescents as those between 10 and 19 years of age. See: World Health Organization, *Health for the World's Adolescents: A second chance in the second decade*, section 2, 2014, p. 1, <<http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/section2/page1/recognizing-adolescence.htm>>, accessed 23 January 2016.



Yemen: Community-driven alternative care

In Yemen, a community-driven alternative care system was set up for asylum-seeking and refugee children by the local authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), together with refugee leaders. Small group homes are rented (with a capacity of six to eight children) next to neighbouring families who are carefully selected by community leaders and who agree to play a formal supervisory role over the children. Each child in an alternative care arrangement undergoes a best interests assessment (BIA) with regular home visits by the child protection partner and community outreach workers.

(Communicated by a UNHCR child protection adviser, 2015)

Child-headed households

Groups of children – sometimes siblings, sometimes unrelated – who live together are known as child-headed households or peer-headed households. Child-headed households may be increasing as a result of armed conflict, the HIV pandemic and natural disasters, as in Aceh province, Indonesia, following the 2004 tsunami.¹⁴⁷ Children living in child-headed households may be of similar ages, but older children often care for younger children and face responsibilities beyond their years. Such households often have **difficulties linked to meeting basic needs**, such as shelter, food and health care, as well as accessing education and vocational training. As a result, there may be increased likelihood of children who are forced into high-risk income-generating activities, such as commercial sexual exploitation, or be at risk of discrimination, abuse and other forms of exploitation.

Despite these challenges, many UASC see child-headed households as a positive choice, which allows them to remain together and protect their land or property. **Where it is the expressed wish of children to continue to live in a child-headed household, they should generally be supported, unless** there are circumstances such as very young children in the household. If there are concerns about safety and well-being, an **assessment** should be undertaken to look at the situation of each individual child as well as how they are coping as a group; in refugee situations, such an assessment must be a best interests determination (*see Chapter 7.2.5*).¹⁴⁸

A decision to provide material support for child-headed households or establish new independent living arrangements should be made only after a careful assessment of their individual circumstances. While **eligibility criteria** will be different in each context, children proposed for independent living or heads of household should, at a minimum, only include young people of an

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, *Alternative Care for Children without Primary Caregivers in Tsunami-affected Countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand*, UNICEF, 2006, p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/International Rescue Committee, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, UNHCR, 2011, p. 38.

appropriate age (over 15 years) who do not have additional health, psychosocial or other problems requiring intensive adult support and care. Likewise, those young people should have demonstrated maturity and the ability to care for themselves and other children, and to keep themselves safe.

Many child-headed households receive some support from extended family or community members; providing them with targeted support risks encouraging other children to leave families or families to abandon children to gain similar help. Providing support only to children in child-headed households/independent living arrangements may also increase discrimination against them. To avert this, **support should aim to increase the resilience** of children, should be **integrated with overall assistance** to vulnerable children in a given community to **avoid improving one group of children's standard of living above that of others**, and, where possible, similar support should be available to other families where children are vulnerable to separation. Support should be **context-specific**, accounting for rural/urban and other differences in a country.¹⁴⁹

★ **Tool 46: Deciding to support child-headed households**



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Rwanda: CARE Rwanda's Nkundabana ('I love children') Programme

"Challenged by the impact of civil war, genocide and HIV/AIDS, Rwanda is confronted with one of the highest percentages of orphans in the world. Communities already overburdened by social fragmentation, loss of labour from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and crippling poverty are unprepared to provide care for the children left behind. Even the capacity of extended family members to absorb orphaned children often reaches its limits; and frequently children are left to their own devices. The Nkundabana model mobilizes adult volunteers from the community – Nkundabana – to provide guidance and care for children living in households without adult support. Trained and supported by CARE in counselling, active listening, and life skills instruction, these volunteers provide the best alternative for children with no adult family members available for guidance and care. By making regular visits, Nkundabana has supported children to attend school or seek medical assistance, as well as provide an important emotional outlet in the form of psychosocial support."

(Cantwell, Nigel, et al., *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'*, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, UK, 2012, p. 52)

¹⁴⁹ Save the Children, *Children Separated by War: Family tracing and reunification*, 1995, p. 53.

Residential care: “A group-living arrangement in a specially designated facility where salaried staff or volunteers ensure care on a shift basis. Residential care is an umbrella term that includes short- and long-term placements in institutions, small-group homes, places of safety for emergency care, and transit centres.”

(Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group for Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, p. 14)

“The use of residential care should be limited to cases where such a setting is **specifically appropriate, necessary and constructive for the individual child** concerned and in his/her best interests.”

(United Nations, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, United Nations, 2009, para. 21)

10.3.2 Residential care

Despite a preference for family-based care, long-term residential care, either in an institution, small group home or other supervised living arrangements, may be in the best interests of some UASCs, such as those with specific physical or mental health needs that cannot be addressed in a family-based care setting. There may also be circumstances in which family and community-based care is not immediately available and temporary residential care and protection are required in the interim.

Residential care should be organized around the rights and needs of the child, in a setting as close as possible to a family or small group situation. Its objective should generally be to provide temporary care and to contribute actively to the child’s family reintegration or, if this is not possible, to secure his/her long-term care in an alternative family setting, such as through adoption or *kafalah* (Islamic guardianship). Where residential care, particularly small group homes, are used, it is important to ensure that the community understands the reasons for these homes and to ensure that children throughout the community are given similar support so that such care is not incentivized.

The growth of residential care for children has been a challenge in some post-conflict situations. **Current guidelines warn against the development of new residential care facilities in emergency settings.** This prohibition is based on past cases of foreign non-state actors establishing residential facilities in disaster zones regardless of existing policies and, in the worst instances, declining to cooperate in or actively obstructing family reunification for children in their care.¹⁵⁰ New residential care facilities in emergencies can also create the perception that children will be better cared for there, undermining traditional coping mechanisms and leading to family separation.

Where possible, capacity building should involve the development of a structure for licensing and inspection of residential care, implementation of minimum standards, codes of conduct, and a strategy for transition to family-based care based on internationally agreed guidance.

¹⁵⁰ Save the Children, 1995, p. 117.

Ethiopia: Small group care in a refugee camp

Shire operation in Ethiopia recently saw an average of more than 300 unaccompanied children arriving per month, mainly male adolescents. Sheer numbers, as well as the unusual demographics of Shire, dictated that, even though not the preferred option, small group care was established as an interim option pending efforts to place children in family-based care, including through reunification. The options for family-based care are very limited since the Eritrean refugee population are mainly young, single men who are themselves planning onward movements. For this reason, the turnover of refugee social workers is also quite high. Initially, one section of Mai Aini camp was designated to house over 1,000 unaccompanied children. This layout discouraged family- and community-based

child protection responses, with the general refugee community considering 'group-care children' as predominately the responsibility of the international community and local authorities. Recognizing the harm of this approach, UNHCR and partners decided to transition to an integrated shelter layout, in which unaccompanied children live in small group homes side by side with families who agree to support them, in communities of eight shelters facing each other around a central communal space to facilitate social interaction (instead of rows of shelters, for example). The programme continues with social mobilization and sensitization of the refugee community on the value of family-based care and support to foster families.

(Communicated by a UNHCR child protection adviser, 2015)

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2nd para, bullet point list. There seems to be a bullet missing re ensuring that assistance is delivered to the community as well, eg:

■

Temporary assistance to support children in residential care

Immediate assistance – including water, basic food, non-food items and appropriate food for infants – is frequently requested and may be necessary to ensure the survival of children in residential care. **Facilities should only be supported if they are committed to achieving minimum standards of care and strong protection procedures.** Likewise, support to residential care centres should be provided alongside support to communities and families whose children are vulnerable to separation, thus preventing separation.

Recognizing the potential unintended consequences of assistance to residential care centres, such as creating a pull factor for families struggling to support children, it is important to ask, **How can assistance be provided in such a way as to minimize the risk of creating separations?** To answer this question, try these methods:

- **Carry out a rapid needs assessment** to establish whether assistance is genuinely necessary (*see Chapter 5.2.2*).
- **Agree on the level of support by all organizations providing aid**, for example, only basic assistance to ensure the survival and well-being of children to avoid the perception that children in care are ‘better off’ than those in the rest of the population.
- **Set conditions and monitor** residential care centres that receive humanitarian assistance:
 - Access for documentation and tracing of all UASC
 - Commitment to the eventual aim of family reunification for all UASC
 - Minimum standards of care for all children in the residential care setting
 - Managers’ obligations regarding fair distribution and record-keeping.
- **Provide aid discreetly.**
- **Have a clear communication strategy** to inform community members and carers of the temporary nature of aid provision and the overall objective of family reunification.
- **Involve community members** in developing measures to prevent inappropriate admissions to residential care, including gatekeeping and screening procedures for new admissions.
- **Document all new admissions and establish a regular monitoring system.**
- **Ensure that assistance is also provided to surrounding communities** to a similar level as to the residential care centre. Where possible, it may be appropriate to include children in residential care in more general community assistance programmes.

Preventing secondary separations and reducing residential care

Secondary separation (*see Chapter 2.1.1*) may be a coping strategy in the aftermath of an emergency. Experience shows that **when UASC programmes do not include measures to prevent secondary separations, the numbers of**

children entering residential care can increase.¹⁵¹ Families who take in additional children or who are reunified with their children may not be able to increase their income to provide for another child, especially since livelihood capacities may have been reduced by the emergency, for example, through the loss of an income earner, land, livestock or crops. Where the protective factors that normally keep children safe are weakened, the additional financial burden of providing for another child can increase the likelihood of children being discriminated against, abused or exploited, and of the breakdown of the placement.

Steps to prevent secondary separation include:

- **Advocate for increased funding** for child protection emergency response and adequate long-term funding (see Chapter 6.2.3).¹⁵²
 - **Refer families to social protection or livelihoods programmes**, such as cash transfers, and **help families access all available/appropriate basic support** by:
 - Providing information on basic services
 - Making referrals for specialist services, where necessary (such as families accepting children newly disabled by the disaster who could feel rejected)
 - Arranging for adjustments to the family's ration card *before* reunification or placement.
 - **Discreetly provide appropriate 'one off' targeted assistance**, in line with the community's living standards, when families agree to provide foster care for additional children, such as bedding/cooking items, school uniforms or books. Where possible, such assistance should also be available to other families where children are vulnerable to separation.
 - **Generally avoid providing material support as 'payment'** to families providing alternative care for UASC, since this may motivate potential carers rather than the desire to help.
 - If family-based care is unlikely to be sustainable without material support, ensure support through transparency and consultation with affected communities.
 - If pre-existing foster care systems include financial support to foster carers, organizations and local authorities should agree on how alternative care is remunerated.
 - **Promote strong partnerships** among civil society organizations, communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- ★ [See Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit 2.3.2 for detailed guidance on targeting assistance to UASC or their caregivers](#)
- ★ [See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC](#)

¹⁵¹ United Nations Children's Fund, *Children and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Evaluation of UNICEF's response in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives (2005-2008), Overall synthesis report*, Evaluation Report, UNICEF, 2009, p. 33.

¹⁵² Child Protection Working Group, *Too Little, Too Late: Child protection funding in emergencies*, CP AoR, 2010, p. 17.

10.3.3 Temporary emergency care centres

Immediately after emergencies, UASC may be cared for in temporary emergency care centres, makeshift tents or shelters set up by communities or humanitarian organizations. Temporary emergency care can also accommodate demobilized children after initial separation from armed forces or armed groups. Such care arrangements must be carefully planned, well defined and managed to **minimize 'pull factors'** that may encourage separation.

Temporary emergency care is only acceptable for a very short period, such as 8 to 12 weeks, when other forms of family-based care do not exist or have not yet been identified. Alternative family-based care arrangements should be urgently explored for children not reunited during this period. Where used as a last resort, these care centres must meet minimum standards of security, water and sanitation, food, health care, staffing and management. Where such centres exist, they should be closed down as quickly as possible by identifying and developing alternatives in the best interest of each child.

★ [See Tool 47: Standards for temporary care](#)





10.4 Monitoring care arrangements

Monitoring of all children in alternative care should be carried out by way of regular visits and fed into effective case and information management systems.

While **monitoring ideally occurs through local child welfare systems and with the participation of community structures**, the person who carries out monitoring visits depends on the context. Where no national/local child protection system exists, organizations should undertake monitoring themselves or via partners, where possible in collaboration with local child welfare authorities. Volunteers/community members have an important role to play in monitoring, but must have the resources and support to carry out the work (see *Chapter 6.2.1*). Organizations placing children in alternative care settings have a responsibility to ensure that children are properly monitored and must consider **funding and long-term handover** of such monitoring.

Each child should have a **care plan** that feeds into a case management system and that includes the purpose and frequency of monitoring visits and the details of any agreed actions.¹⁵³ Organizations and caseworkers undertaking monitoring should clearly understand and convey the purpose of monitoring and follow best practices for conducting their visits.

★ [See Tool 48: Guidance on monitoring care arrangements](#)


Both the child and carer should know **who to contact if problems arise**, such as a trusted member of the community, child protection committee members or local authorities. Youth clubs or children's clubs, where available, also allow children to benefit from the support of peers, group leaders or youth workers. Finally, teachers, health workers and child protection committee members should be made aware of UASC and know to whom they should direct any concerns.

10.4.1 Action in the event of child abuse, exploitation or neglect

Organizations responsible for monitoring children in alternative care must **establish guidelines to be followed in order to prevent or mitigate the risk of child abuse, exploitation or neglect, and to respond to actual or suspected cases of abuse, exploitation or neglect of a child** and ensure that everyone carrying out monitoring is fully aware of these. Guidelines should be in accordance with national legislation and child protection procedures, and include the name of the person(s) responsible for assessment, investigation and removal of a child. Ideally, this person is a local authority official, or in countries of asylum, UNHCR, which has a mandate to assist governments in such matters.

¹⁵³ See: Fulford, 2013, chapter 6, for guidance on the frequency of monitoring visits.

Organization should use guidance provided in the *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*,¹⁵⁴ as a basis for developing procedures for assessment and possible removal of a child from his/her care situation:

- Caseworker(s) should not undertake assessment or investigation alone. Instead, they should contact the person named in the guidelines as responsible for this task.
- Assessments must:
 - Include the opinions of the child.
 - Take into account the context, cultural norms (such as expectations regarding domestic chores), and general socio-economic capacities of families in the same community.
 - Have a shared understanding of what constitutes 'abuse, neglect and exploitation'.
- Decisions should not be made in isolation and should include supervisors/ relevant professionals.
- All actions must:
 - Be based on what is in the best interests of the child and will do the least harm
 - Balance potential risk to the child against the harm of removal from a familiar situation
 - Be documented for the child's file.
- Where the child's life is at immediate risk, he/she should be:
 - Removed from the situation
 - Given emergency medical treatment and psychosocial support, as necessary.
- Where the child is at serious risk of being abused, exploited or neglected:
 - Explore mitigation of these risks via supervision and support
 - Remove the child from the situation if mitigation of these risks is not possible.
- If the decision is reached to remove a child against the carer's wishes, call on a respected person in the community to help mediate.
-  In refugee situations, where responsible state authorities are unwilling or unable to take action, UNHCR must take measures to protect the rights of a child of concern, in line with its international protection mandate. Where the separation is from a parent, a legal guardian or a relative, a best interests determination must always be conducted. For unaccompanied children in informal care, a best interests assessment may be sufficient, depending on the circumstances of the case and taking into consideration the duration of the care arrangement (see Chapter 7.2.5).

Decisions involving the separation of a child from parents/guardians fall within the competence of the State. Any intervention by international organizations to separate a child should only take place after an assessment and be of a provisional nature, which should be formalized through a statutory process.

★ See Chapter 7.2.4, *Individual case assessment*

★ See Chapter 7.2.5, *Best interests procedures*

¹⁵⁴ Fulford, 2013, pp. 90, 91.



Kenya: Removal of children from harmful care situations in Dadaab refugee camp

In Dadaab, the government children's officer works closely with Save the Children and is a member of the best interests determination (BID) panel. Where children are removed from harmful care arrangements, Save the Children and the children's officer work together to ensure this is done appropriately and alternatives are found, including foster care, other forms of alternative care if the child is at risk within the camp, or placement in institutional care, which must be approved by the children's officer. For those

old enough to express their opinion, the children's wishes are taken into consideration, while recognizing that alternative care options for children are limited. Although financial and human capacity remains low, regular meetings between Save the Children's child protection staff, the children's officer and UNHCR have improved care for children as the government takes more responsibility for the situation, including by ensuring agencies follow the Children's Act of 2001 to the letter.

(Adapted from Save the Children Kenya, 2012)

10.5 Long-term/permanent care for UASC

10.5.1 Overview of long-term/permanent care options

When active family tracing is discontinued (see Chapter 11.4.2) or if family reunification is not in a child's best interests, decisions will have to be made regarding long-term care. Depending on the circumstances, long-term alternative care options are likely to include kinship or foster care arrangements, guardianship, supervised independent living arrangements, appropriate residential care, or permanent arrangements, such as adoption, which gives full parental rights and responsibility to the adoptive parents.

“Long-term foster care meets the needs of certain children – such as those for whom adoption cannot be envisaged or is against their wishes – by providing family-based care for many years, sometimes into adulthood.... Other family-based care covers care settings where an existing family plays a formal care role similar to that of a foster carer – but does not operate within the foster care service. For example, families may be designated to look after children transitioning out of residential care, or to act as ‘guardians’ for children with long-term alternative care needs.”¹⁵⁵

This should always be an **active decision-making process** involving the child, rather than allowing an interim arrangement to become permanent by default. Approaching the decision in an inclusive, participatory way ensures that the long-term care arrangement is in the child's best interests and promotes a sense of permanency and stability for the future. Ideally, decision-making should involve local authority social workers or child welfare workers and should reference relevant child welfare policies, legislation and cultural practices in the country concerned. In the absence of a national process adequate to determine what actions are in the child's best interests, the UNHCR best interests procedure provides a valuable framework for making such decisions for all children (see Chapter 7.2.5). **While the best interests procedure can guide the decision-making process regarding formal foster arrangements or adoption, such decisions need to be formalized by national authorities or courts of law to have legal effect.**

The best solution for many UASC, especially those living in family-based care within their own community, will be to **remain in the same care placement to ensure continuity** and avoid further change, which can be distressing and unsettling for children. If it is agreed, following an assessment, that it is *not* in the best interests of the child to remain in his or her care placement, **transition to an alternative care placement should involve adequate preparation and support** to the child.

- ★ [See Chapters 7.2.4, Individual case assessment, and 7.2.5, Best interests procedures](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 12.3, Reunification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children](#)
- ★ [See the Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit, chapter 5](#)

¹⁵⁵ Cantwell, et al., 2012, p. 33.

“Adoption is an alternative means of care for children permanently deprived of their family environment. Full adoption aims to provide such a child with all of the rights relating to his or her adoptive parents as if the child had been born to them. In addition, it places on the adoptive parents equal parental responsibility to that of usual primary caregiver.

Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration in adoption, and deals with the safeguards and standards to be ensured by those States parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption, covering both national adoption and intercountry adoption.”

(Glossary, UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti Research Centre, <www.unicef-irc.org/php/Thesaurus/Glossary/Display.php>)

Kafalah: “The commitment to voluntarily take care of the maintenance, of the education and of the protection of a minor, in the same way as a father would do it for his son,” (Family Code of Algeria, Article 116). *Kafalah* creates parental authority and obligation of maintenance of the child by the caregiver on the one hand, and persistence of the child’s family bonds and preservation of the child’s family status, on the other. **Given the diversity of the Muslim world, kafalah must be considered in its national context.**

(Adapted from Fact Sheet No. 51, Kafalah, International Social Service/ International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children Deprived of their Family [ISS/IRC], December 2007, <<http://www.crin.org/docs/Kafalah.BCN.doc>>)

10.5.2 Adoption

Adoption may be understood differently in some contexts, including the “distinction between ‘simple adoption’, which does not usually involve a change of name and family identity, and ‘full adoption’, which does. There is also ‘open adoption’, which is where the birth family and adoptive family know one another and may have contact with one another and ‘closed adoption’, where the identity of the adoptive parents is not known to the birth parents. It is important that both the biological and adoptive families understand the conditions of the adoption prior to consent. Some traditional forms of adoption do not confer a change of legal status, leading to a blurred distinction between traditional adoption and long-term fostering.”¹⁵⁶

National adoption (domestic adoption) or its equivalent (for example, *kafalah*), which allows children to remain in their culture, usually offers the best long-term solution for UASC who cannot be reunified with their families.

Intercountry adoption,¹⁵⁷ which moves a child from his/her ‘State of origin’ to live with an adoptive family in another country, ‘the receiving State’, may be the best solution for individual children who cannot be placed in a permanent family setting in their national context.¹⁵⁸ In each case, the best interests of the individual child must be paramount in making a decision. **Effective regulation** of intercountry adoption¹⁵⁹ is essential to protect the rights of each child and his/her family, and to prevent commercial/criminal gain, fraud, child trafficking and deception of parents. Such regulation relies on the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, 1993, to which all State parties and all receiving States should adhere.¹⁶⁰

Organizations working with UASC in emergencies are unlikely to become involved in adoption programmes that are the responsibility of governments. Most countries have legislation that outlines steps governing the process of adoption. This may include, for example, an adoption law that covers both international and national adoption and covers prerequisites for adoption, criteria for which children may be adopted and in what circumstances, and who may apply to adopt, as well as adoption court orders and the rights/responsibilities conferred. Once an order is granted, the child has the same rights as the family’s birth children and the birth parents/prior guardians lose parental responsibility.

¹⁵⁶ Save the Children UK, *Facing the Crisis: Supporting children through positive care options*, 2005, p. iv, cited in the UNHCR/IRC *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, 2011, Annex 1, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ International adoption, while often used synonymously with intercountry adoption, refers to adoption when the child and adoptive parents are of different nationalities, regardless of where they reside. See: United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Intercountry adoption’, *Innocenti Digest*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 1998, p. 2, cited in Save the Children, *Policy Brief, Intercountry Adoption*, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ UNICEF’s position on intercountry adoption, <www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html>, accessed 23 January 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Based on UNICEF’s position on intercountry adoption, <www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html>, accessed 23 January 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Hague Conference on Private International Law, *Information Note to States and Central Authorities: Haiti earthquake and intercountry adoption of children*, HCCH, 2010.

Although they will rarely have to deal directly with adoption, **it is essential for organizations working with UASC to agree on policy regarding the adoption of such children during or immediately following emergencies and to understand relevant legal provisions and good practice, such as the following:**

- **Adoption is *not* an appropriate form of care for UASC during or immediately following emergencies;** long-term placement or domestic adoption and *kafalah* should only be considered after tracing efforts have been exhausted.¹⁶¹
- **A decision regarding adoption should only be considered once it has been determined that:**
 - **The child is ‘adoptable’ under national and international law.** Adoption can only occur when there is no hope for successful family tracing and reunification or parents freely consent to adoption after being fully informed of its consequences.¹⁶²
 - **The adoption is in the child’s best interests and is carried out in keeping with applicable national, international and customary law.**¹⁶³
 - **The child has been fully informed and his/her opinion has been taken into account, including freely consenting** (where required) without inducement and in writing.¹⁶⁴
- **Priority generally should be given to adoption by relatives** wherever they live,¹⁶⁵ followed by adoption within the child’s community or culture.
- **Adoption *should not* be considered when:**¹⁶⁶
 - **There is reasonable hope of successful tracing/reunification that is in the child’s best interests.**
 - **A reasonable time has *not* yet passed during which all feasible tracing efforts have been carried out.** This can take a considerable amount of time; national law may provide further guidance.
 - **Adoption is against the expressed wishes of the child or parents,** ...except when it is considered to be in the child’s best interest to be adopted without the consent of the parents.

★ [See Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response](#)

★ [See Chapter 12.3, Reunification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children](#)

According to UNHCR policy, **refugee children are not available for adoption in an emergency context.**¹⁷¹ Intercountry adoption procedures that take place in the post-emergency period should only be initiated after, “all reasonable measures have been taken in order to trace and reunite the child with his or her parents or family members where the child is separated from them.”¹⁷²

¹⁷¹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Policy on Adoption of Refugee Children*, UNHCR, 1995.

¹⁷²United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Recommendation Concerning the Application to Refugee Children and Other Internationally Displaced Children of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*, 1994, Article 2a, <www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher.HAGUEPRIVATE...3ae6b37420,0.html>, accessed 23 January 2016.

¹⁶¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142, para. 152; these guidelines do not fully cover adoption since this relates to permanent family life.

¹⁶² The adoptability of a child is determined according to the law and procedures of the State of origin. For further information, see the Hague Conference on Private International Law, *The Implementation and Operation of the 1993 Hague Intercountry Adoption Convention Guide to Good Practice No.1*, HCCH, 2008, 7.2.1, paras. 323-333 and the 1993 Hague Convention, Article 4 (a).

¹⁶³ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 21.

¹⁶⁴ 1993 Hague Convention, Article 4(d).

¹⁶⁵ 1993 Hague Convention, Article 4(d), para. 52.

¹⁶⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, p. 55.

- ★ *See Resources at the end of the chapter, including the Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit, the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, 1993 and UNHCR Recommendation Concerning the Application to Refugee Children and Other Internationally Displaced Children of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, 1994*

Advocacy relating to intercountry adoption following emergencies

Despite the above legal provisions and principles, intercountry adoption is frequently viewed as a suitable response to UASC, who are commonly perceived to be 'orphans' following emergencies.

Organizations working with UASC should raise awareness with governments, donors, NGOs, faith-based organizations, the media and communities, emphasizing:

- **Relevant legislation**, such as the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and its 1994 Recommendation Concerning the Application to Refugee Children and Other Internationally Displaced Children.¹⁶⁹
- **Children who are separated from their parents in an emergency cannot be assumed to be orphans and are not available for adoption.** Until the fate of a child's parents/other close relatives can be verified, each separated child is considered as still having living close relatives.

Organizations may also reference this common statement:

“The case of children separated from their families and communities during war or natural disasters merits special mention. Family tracing should be the first priority and intercountry adoption should only be envisaged for a child once these tracing efforts have proved fruitless, and stable in-country solutions are not available. This position is shared by UNICEF, UNHCR, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Hague Conference on Private International Law... and international NGOs such as the Save the Children Alliance and International Social Service.”

(United Nations Children's Fund, 'Press Centre: Intercountry adoption,' 31 July 2014, <www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html>.)

¹⁶⁹ See also: Hague Conference on Private International Law, 'Asian-African Tsunami Disaster and the Legal Protection of Children', Press release, HCCH, 2005, <www.hcch.net/index-en.php?act=publications.details&pid=3311&dtid=28>, accessed 23 January 2016.



Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC

Tool 3: Threats to UASC and response

Tool 46: Deciding to support child-headed households

Tool 47: Standards for temporary care

Tool 48: Guidance on monitoring care arrangements

[Better Care Network Toolkit](#) to aid social work and childcare practitioners and policy makers in planning and providing better care for children.

Cantwell, Nigel, et al., [Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'](#), Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, UK, 2012.

de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson and Jacqueline Botte, [The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years. A working paper](#), UNICEF, 2007.

[Fair Start Training](#) to improve professional caregiving skills for young children in public care.

Fulford, Louise Melville, [Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit](#), Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, particularly Chapters 3, 5.3, 10, and [Tool 28: Draft Standard Operating Procedures for Supporting Children's Community-based Care Arrangements](#)).

Hague Conference on Private International Law, [Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption](#), 29 May 1993.

Hague Conference on Private International Law website, [Intercountry Adoption Section](#).

Hope and Homes for Children, [Preventing the Separation of Children from their Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Review of Hope and Homes for Children ACTIVE Family Support Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003-2010](#), April 2012.

Oswald, Elizabeth, [Because We Care: Programming guidance for children deprived of parental care](#), World Vision, 2009.

Save the Children, [Intercountry Adoption Policy Brief](#), June 2012.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Policy on Adoption, 22 August 1995.


United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Recommendation Concerning the Application to Refugee Children and Other Internationally Displaced Children of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, 21 October 1994.

United Nations Children's Fund, Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Formal Care, 2009.

United Nations Children's Fund, [Technical Notes – Special Considerations for Programming in Unstable Situations](#): Chapter 4 and Annex, 2006.

United Nations General Assembly, [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#), 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142.

Williamson, John and Aaron Greenberg, [Families, Not Orphanages](#), Better Care Network Working Paper, September 2010.



Chapter 11 sets out the different types and methodologies for tracing children's families – whether informal, child/community-led or formal, organization-led. These include the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC's) Restoring Family Links programme, mass tracing, photo tracing, database cross-referencing, and centre-based, inter-camp and case-by-case tracing, as well as tracing for infants, young children or those with insufficient information for tracing. It also discusses cross-border tracing and good practice in family tracing, including challenging issues, such as children being present during the search for their family. The results of family tracing – whether positive (leading to verification) or negative (leading to discontinuation/suspension of tracing) – are followed by a discussion of verification, an important precursor to family reunification (see Chapter 12).

11

Family tracing and verification

TOPICS

11.1 Spontaneous, informal or traditional methods of tracing

11.1.1 Web-based tracing

11.2 Formal and organization-led family tracing: Approaches and methodology

11.2.1 International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Restoring Family Links

11.2.2 Mass tracing

11.2.3 Photo tracing

11.2.4 Cross-referencing and database tracing

11.2.5 Centre-based tracing

11.2.6 Inter-camp and in-country tracing

11.2.7 Case-by-case tracing

11.2.8 Tracing infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing

11.2.9 Cross-border tracing

11.3 Good practice in family tracing

11.3.1 Children accompanying tracing workers in search for family

11.3.2 Relocating UASC to facilitate tracing

11.3.3 Keeping track of UASC

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Tracing is the process of searching for a child's primary legal or usual caregivers and other family members, with the aim of finding a long-term solution that is 'in the best interests of the child'. This often means reunification with parents or other close relatives, although other long-term solutions may be identified, depending on the wishes of the child. Tracing also refers to the search for missing children, whose parents are looking for them.
- With their consent/assent, tracing should be carried out on behalf of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), where necessary, as soon as circumstances allow. Prioritization may be required where there are large numbers of UASC.
- Use varied and innovative approaches to tracing, choosing methods that fit the circumstances, as long as these are safe – for example, mass tracing or photo tracing campaigns in gathering places, such as a refugee camp or camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- The efforts of families and communities to find their children, where appropriate and not presenting a risk to UASC, should be supported – for example, by providing and/or enabling use of mobile phones.
- Cross-border tracing and reunification of refugees in countries of origin requires consideration of specific safeguards. As an organization with a unique mandate to provide Restoring Family Links services across international borders, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – in collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in refugee settings – will normally be responsible for organizing cross-border tracing and reunification. Other organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and implementing partners may also be involved; cross-border tracing should be coordinated among these and other relevant organizations, as appropriate.

TOPICS

11.4 Results of family tracing

11.4.1 Positive tracing

11.4.2 Deciding to discontinue tracing

11.5 Verification for family reunification

11.5.1 Validating family ties

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Family tracing should be proactive, but the safety of the child and his/her family must be paramount. In sharing information among organizations and in publishing information on UASC, the basic principle should be, 'maximum information for tracing at the minimum risk to the child and family'.
- Children should be kept informed of tracing results and involved in tracing as appropriate, depending on their age and circumstances.
- Tracing should not be discontinued until 'all reasonable efforts' have been made to trace family members, including extended family, or there is conclusive proof that all family members are dead.
- The decision to suspend active tracing should involve a formal review process, involving national authorities where possible. Discontinuing active tracing does not necessarily imply the case will be closed then, since tracing may be resumed at a later date and, regardless, the child's case should be integrated into the regular child protection case management system.
- Verification is a key protection measure and must be carried out for every child with positive tracing results before reunification. This includes validating family ties, prior to an assessment of whether reunification is in the best interests of the child (*see Chapter 12.1*).
- Verification involving infants and others who have difficulty communicating must follow methods specially developed to protect these children.

11

Family tracing and verification

11.1 Spontaneous, informal or traditional methods of tracing

Tracing, in the case of children, is the process of searching for a child's primary legal or usual caregivers and other family members. The aim of tracing is to find a long-term solution that is 'in the best interests of the child'. This often means reunification with parents or other close relatives, although other long-term solutions may be identified, depending on the wishes of the child.

Tracing also refers to the search for missing children, whose parents are looking for them.

Families will nearly always do whatever they can to find their children through active searches, using either modern technology, such as mobile phones, the Internet and local radio, or community networks and traditional structures, such as the clan system in Somalia. Indeed, **spontaneous tracing comprises many instances of family tracing and reunification, and organizations should support existing tracing practices where they do not pose a risk to UASC**, such as by sharing too much identifiable information. Examples of such support can include:

- Ensuring regular communication with and, where necessary, referrals for follow-up from community leaders undertaking spontaneous tracing.
- Asking community leaders and clan elders to be focal points for community-based tracing, so that they can support inquiries into the whereabouts of relatives from those communities or clans. This could include being available near registration points or by phone.
- Connecting communities or children with resources to facilitate tracing – for example, by providing a phone or phone credit to a child or community focal point who can help make or receive calls for children and their families.

The situation analysis (*see Chapter 5.2.5*) should identify what actions individuals and communities are taking to trace their children and whether these actions could be supported, for example, by making mobile or satellite phones available. Organizations should work closely with communities, where possible, to **ensure complementary methods, avoid parallel processes of family tracing and make linkages between formal and informal methods**. For example, if communities are carrying out tracing on behalf of UASC, organizations may remain involved through ongoing monitoring and follow-up. This was the case in Somalia, where clan naming is central to providing children's identities, and the clan system's oral culture facilitated successful tracing of children separated during recent displacement and conflict.¹⁷⁰ Organizations may be able to **learn from methods used by community networks**. In some situations, for example, where access is limited due to conflict, communities may be more successful in tracing than external organizations.

However, informal systems are not always inclusive of all affected children and have limitations in terms of effectiveness, depending on the situation – for example, if community networks are cut off in a certain area. Organizations should advocate for **equal treatment of all UASC** and carry out tracing on behalf of excluded children.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, C., 'The Interaction Between Cultural Mechanisms for Child Protection and Formal Child Protection Systems: Case studies from Somali communities', Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sussex, 2012, p. 30, 31.

11.1.1 Web-based tracing

In addition to traditional spontaneous tracing methods, there is real potential for web-based tracing to make a positive contribution to tracing and reunification of UASC, particularly given the possibility of future technological developments. However, **the global Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (IAWG-UASC) is not currently able to support or promote web-based tracing programmes, with the exception of the ICRC Restoring Family Links website.** Concerns have been raised by the use of web-based tracing techniques in past emergencies, including:

- **Open access to websites:** The lack of safeguards to protect the security of personal, confidential and possibly sensitive information could place children at risk of harm and potential abuse. There are also concerns related to informed consent of the child to share information. "Unless specific consent to do so has been obtained, personal information must not be disclosed or transferred for purposes other than those for which they were originally collected, and for which the consent was given."¹⁷¹
- **Potential duplication of existing and well-established tools and systems.**



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¹⁷¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, ICRC, 2013, chapter 6, p. 93.

Côte d'Ivoire: ICRC position towards web-based tracing: risk impact assessment and alternative approach

Concerns about web-based tracing services and current service providers include the following:

- Efficiency of the tools and methodology. As of considered as still publication, no reliable data or established records are available from various service providers regarding people who re-established contact with family members through their website.
- Long-term sustainability of the model. This is a problem in view of tough online competition and, notably, the model's relative added-value compared to vast social networking tools, such as Facebook, which have many more users.
- Target population. Some websites do not 'target' people affected by natural disasters.

But most importantly:

- Management of risks related to people who use such websites and their safeguards (data protection and security). Anybody can self-register without an intermediary, and nothing really prevents a child from registering his/her data on the website, which is public and could be accessed by persons wishing to abuse or exploit the child. Furthermore, the fact that the website is global and not context-related may prove to be problematic for two reasons:
 - It probably means that the same level of information and security is ensured for both sensitive and non-sensitive contexts.
 - The decision whether to launch a website is not context-specific.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has developed its own approach to web-based tracing for ICRC delegations and National Societies, which reflects the Movement's values and specific contexts, taking into consideration data security constraints and field needs. In

this way, it offers the right combination from a very large choice of online tools, with different options offered by the new [Family Links website \(familylinks.icrc.org\)](https://familylinks.icrc.org).

For example, when the ICRC delegation in Côte d'Ivoire proposed to put photos of unaccompanied children whose parents' location remained unknown on familylinks.icrc.org, prior to making a final decision they undertook a risk impact assessment based on the following questions:

- Have the children given their consent specifically for their photo to be put on the Internet?
- Does the group include children who are particularly vulnerable/exposed to a particular protection risk that might be heightened by putting their photo on the Internet?
- How can the ICRC make sure that the persons who contact the organization after having seen the children on the Internet are really their parents? What procedures have been put in place to ensure that no one misuses the system?
- Are the children in a secure place? Does the ICRC visit them regularly?
- What follow-up will the ICRC undertake?

In the end, based on the risk impact assessment, the ICRC decided to put the photos on its website. However, it is important to emphasize that this does not mean that that will be done automatically henceforth or in other situations. For every context and for every beneficiary group, a specific risk impact assessment will be conducted to decide whether or not it is appropriate to set up an online Restoring Family Links service for a specific context.¹⁷²

(Communicated by the ICRC child protection adviser, 2015)

¹⁷² Please note that, following adoption of the Data Protection Framework of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the process will be further institutionalized by conducting a Data Protection Impact Assessment for all activities that entail the publishing of data.

11.2 Formal and organization-led family tracing: Approaches and tracing methodology

Family tracing undertaken by organizations should be carried out as part of a **coordinated programme involving local/national authorities and organizations**, where appropriate. With the child's informed consent/assent, **family tracing should be carried out on behalf of every child** who is separated from his/her family by an emergency, where required (*see Chapter 7.1*). Successful tracing can result in either family reunification or restoration of family links – for example, when family reunification is not in the best interests of the child or when the child/family do not agree to reunification or wish to postpone reunification.

Tracing is carried out in a number of ways, described below. No matter which approach is taken, **tracing should be based on an analysis of potential risks to UASC and be in line with good practice**, including a commitment that a child's whereabouts will *not* be disclosed while seeking tracing information. **Priority in tracing should be given to the most vulnerable**: very young children, unaccompanied children living in difficult circumstances and those with obvious protection risks (*see Chapter 7.2.3*).



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Democratic Republic of the Congo: Emergency tracing among displaced populations

The temporary takeover of Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, in November 2012 by a rebel group caused the displacement of more than 130,000 people, mostly women and children. In response to the large number of UASC, UNICEF and other child protection actors conducted tracing in two phases. Phase one focused on places where displaced persons gathered. In such meeting spots, tracing kiosks were set up and reinforced by mobile tracing teams that rapidly registered children, set up temporary care arrangements, and traced and reunified children with their families. The second phase involved tracing outside of Goma

after accessibility improved, with tracing teams seeking families in the UASC's villages of origin. Through this approach, 400 children were reunified with their families in one month.

(Communicated by a UNICEF child protection specialist, Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2012)

11.2.1 The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Restoring Family Links

Restoring Family Links (RFL) is a generic term used to describe various activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement aimed at preventing separation, restoring and maintaining contact among family members separated by an armed conflict or natural or human-induced disasters, and clarifying the fate of persons reported unaccounted for. These activities include: organizing the exchange of family news; tracing individuals; registering and following up on children and adults to prevent their disappearance and to enable families to be informed of their whereabouts; reuniting and repatriating families; forwarding official documents (birth certificates, etc.) and issuing ICRC travel documents; providing material, legal, psychosocial and psychological support to families with missing relatives; offering support to authorities and promoting the establishment of mechanisms to clarify the fate of persons unaccounted for; and providing forensic management and identification of human remains. Restoring Family Links activities may take various forms depending on the situation and context. The ICRC, in collaboration with National Societies, offers these services for the benefit of UASC who are looking for their parents *both* within the same country (in-country) and across international borders. The Movement's principal strength lies in its worldwide Family Link Network, which includes the RFL services of the 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 80 ICRC delegations, and the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC, which can all apply the same principles and working methods.

As the coordinator of this network, the ICRC also manages the public website of the **Family Links Network**, <<http://familylinks.icrc.org>>, which was developed by the ICRC in cooperation with National Societies. The public website provides guidance to beneficiaries on RFL services offered by National Societies and the ICRC around the world and provides precise information on how to access these services. For a specific crisis (conflict, migration, or natural or human-induced disaster), online tracing services' can be activated on the website, where lists and/or photos of sought persons, those inquiring about a missing relative, and persons who survived emergencies or disasters can be registered and published. The website also includes pages explaining the variety of RFL services offered, news, videos and links to the websites of National Societies and ICRC delegations.

11.2.2 Mass tracing

Mass tracing allows tracing to be carried out on behalf of a number of children at the same time. A range of methods can be used for mass tracing, depending on the context, including:

- **Display of lists of children and photographs on billboards in public gathering places**, such as hospitals, schools, markets, collective centres, child protection focal points, information or registration locations in refugee/IDP camps or border crossing points. Such lists are organized by a child's area of origin, if known. For security purposes, the lists contain minimal, agreed

Liberia: Sample results of an evaluation of mass tracing methods & community views

- Most useful tracing information: Information that is linked to tribes and towns.
- Most preferred approach: Verbal announcements, communicated in different dialects by megaphone or vernacular radio. The town crier, used for individual cases of lost children, should be used for wider-scale tracing.
- Literacy and use of lists: Although publicly posted mass tracing list were rated highly by the literate and frequently used by children, communities were concerned that most people were 'unlettered' and found the lists intimidating and also felt forced to depend on the literate for assistance.
- Tracing board location: Moving the tracing board to different locations in the camp was useful and necessary; however, the community wanted to provide input on the most effective locations.
- Essential elements: The mass tracing booth/board was viewed as critical to tracing, since it gave the community a place to not only *receive* assistance/information but to also *give* information. Likewise, widespread community awareness-raising about the mass tracing system was essential to its success.

(Adapted from Save the Children Liberia, *FTR Review Report*, 2002, Unpublished, p. 9)

information about the child and family being searched for, as well as ways to contact the organization carrying out tracing.

- **Megaphone announcements** at key times or events draw attention to mass tracing lists.
- **Mid-emergency rapid compilation and sending ahead of mass tracing lists** to be read out or posted at transit sites or locations where populations on the move may stop on their journey.
- **Reading the names of UASC at aid distribution or public meetings** arranged via local authorities; such an event can double as a forum to raise awareness about preventing separation, documenting UASC and recording information on missing children.
- **Community distribution of tracing books/leaflets** with basic UASC information or photographs.
- **Public broadcast and publication of information about tracing services and individual children**; the medium will depend on the context and populations' access to the Internet, radio, television, newspapers or magazines. Note that while local radio stations and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) are widely used by tracing organizations, some communities' use of VHF (very high frequency) radio for tracing is considered illegal by certain governments and cannot be supported by tracing organizations.

Potential problems with mass tracing can include:

- Breaches of confidentiality, such as providing information that could place a child at risk. Mass tracing and photo tracing can be particularly risky for children associated with armed forces and armed groups, who may become targets for reprisals and stigmatization following public mass tracing campaigns. Mass tracing should be a last resort for these children.¹⁷³
- Information overload and lack of strategic targeting, such as overwhelming communities by providing information about too many children or failing to target specific communities with information relating only to children likely to come from their region.
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation means that the effectiveness and relevance of methods used are not evaluated (*see Chapter 6.1.2*).

11.2.3 Photo tracing

Photographs, like radio messages, can be particularly valuable where there are low literacy levels, and can be used for tracing on a range of media, depending on the context. **Photo tracing is often the only method available for infants, young children or other children with insufficient information for tracing.**

In emergencies resulting from armed conflict or other situations of violence, asking questions and circulating information may endanger the child or family. In sharing information among organizations and in publishing information on UASC, including photographs, the basic principle should be, '**maximum information for tracing at the minimum risk to the child and family**'.

¹⁷³ Paris Principles Steering Group, *Child Recruitment, Release and Reintegration Handbook*, Draft, 2015.

Organizations undertaking photo tracing should:


- **Only circulate or display photos with an identifying number. Children's names and current locations should be withheld** until any claimant and relationship to the child is verified.
- **Commence photo tracing as soon as possible for babies**, since chances of recognition decline rapidly as time passes.
- **Use photographs of the child wearing the clothes he/she was found in; photographs of possessions or items of clothing found with the child can be displayed alongside photographs of his/her face.** Parents may be able to recognize distinctive shawls, blankets or jewellery, even if facial features have changed.
- **Produce photographs in formats familiar to communities**, such as black-and-white versus colour photos.

★ [See Chapter 9.1.5, Documenting UASC, Photographs](#)

11.2.4 Cross-referencing and database tracing

In cross-referencing and database tracing, **the records of documented UASC and missing children are compared to seek matches.** This method is also called 'passive tracing', in contrast to 'active tracing', which involves investigations to locate a child's family based on available information.

Cross-referencing UASC records with information on missing children can be done **manually** by using a card index or other filing system, or **automatically** by using a computerized database. Using a computerized database allows quick searches using a range of fields, such as place of origin or family name. However, it is dependent upon data having been properly entered into the system. Information management systems can systematically record information on UASC and missing children, and facilitate instantaneous matching of records, allowing for quicker identification of 'lost' or relocated parties.

 **UNHCR's refugee registration system, proGres**, which contains personal data on all refugees registered by UNHCR, can be used to search for relatives of UASC or to find missing refugee children.

★ [See Chapter 8.2, Measures to locate and identify UASC and record information on missing children](#)

11.2.5 Centre-based tracing

Staff caring for UASC in residential care centres can trace on behalf of the children in their charge. This can be particularly effective when children originate from the surrounding area and centre staff have good local knowledge. The **development of relationships between centre staff and children over time may encourage children to confide in staff; it also provides more opportunities to gather additional tracing information beyond initial documentation.** Organizations working with UASC can support centre-based tracing through the provision of training and mentoring of care centre staff.


However, a potential problem is **lack of staff motivation** to carry out tracing where staff depend on the continued existence of the centre for their livelihood. This highlights the importance of ensuring that new residential centre-based care is always understood to be a short-term solution; ideally, centre staff should transition to community-based work. Where existing residential care centres are used for interim care of UASC, organizations should advocate for de-institutionalization that includes community-based employment opportunities for care centre staff.

★ *See Chapter 9.1.3, Documenting children previously living in residential care*

★ *See Chapter 10.3.2, Residential care*

11.2.6 Inter-camp and in-country tracing

Tracing is carried out by transmitting information between different camps, towns or cities, or other locations within a country on behalf of **family members who may be separated across refugee or IDP contexts**, where they may remain for a number of years. Inter-camp tracing can be challenging; camps may be far apart, in remote locations, and have a number of different organizations working in them. In such contexts, it can be helpful to:

- **Allocate sufficient resources (human, logistical) to establish a coordination group** between camps/towns in situations in which a high number of inter-camp/in-country tracing requests are expected.
- **Develop standard operating procedures to clarify roles and responsibilities, and to agree on policy and procedures** relating to the provision of transport, maximum waiting times for reunification following positive tracing, and the frequency of case updates. The goal should be to avoid long delays, which are frustrating and distressing for children and families and have led to children putting themselves at risk by setting out alone to find their family.
-  In refugee contexts, **coordinate with UNHCR** to search across refugee camps or settlements as well as in urban settings. UNHCR is responsible for inter-camp and in-country tracing for refugees and asylum-seekers, often supported by national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies or other partners.

11.2.7 Case-by-case tracing

Case-by-case tracing is an **active, investigatory search** on behalf of the child, carried out by the organization responsible for tracing or by partners, such as community groups. It involves travelling to the last place the child and family were together, the place of origin, or other location determined by the separation history. Such efforts can often produce positive results or further leads to follow, but require considerable resources (human, financial and logistical). Where populations are dispersed over a wide area, networks of volunteers can be engaged in the search – for example, by providing bicycles to those willing to visit distant villages. **While extremely time-consuming, this is one of the most common – and successful – methods of tracing on behalf of children, particularly for those who may be placed at risk through mass tracing, such as children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.**

11.2.8 Tracing infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing

Tracing for this group of children can be challenging and time-consuming, but this should never be a reason to defer tracing on their behalf. **Successful tracing often depends on immediate actions taken to document the child when young children or those unable to provide information for tracing are first identified**, including interviewing anyone with whom he/she is found and photographing the child and any items found with him/her. Information collected during documentation can be used to carry out tracing in any of the ways described above. Even where there is no information on the child's identity, information can be broadcast relating to where and when the child was found and photographs can be displayed.

Even though initial documentation may provide little information, active tracing efforts should continue – with the aim of finding out as much information as possible about infants and young children. One of the best ways of doing this is to **work with carers** who are in close contact with the children on a daily basis and can listen for clues (such as names, places, memories) that may come out over time and can aid in tracing.

★ *See Chapter 9.1.2, Documenting infants, young children or children with insufficient information for tracing*

11.2.9 Cross-border tracing



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Restoring Family Links across borders


The ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have a mandate to provide Restoring Family Links services across international borders. Non-governmental agencies and any other implementing partners should therefore coordinate all cross-border tracing with these organizations, and work in coordination with UNHCR in the case of refugees.¹⁷⁴

As an organization with a unique mandate to provide Restoring Family Links services across international borders, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (in collaboration with UNHCR in refugee settings) will normally be responsible for organizing cross-border tracing and reunification, including notifying the authorities in advance, and issuing travel documents to children who do not have identity documents. UNHCR will also ensure that refugee children go through voluntary repatriation procedures and receive relevant documents (*see Chapter 12.3*). Other organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration, UNICEF, NGOs and implementing partners, may also be involved. Cross-border tracing should be coordinated among these and other relevant organizations as appropriate for the situation.

Cross-border tracing is more likely to be successful when agency mandates are respected and a limited number of organizations are involved. In reality, there may be challenges to establishing and sustaining cooperation among all partners when working under pressure, sometimes with scarce resources and in difficult working conditions. Additionally, organizations may be working under differing mandates (*see Chapter 1.2*). However, organizations should include the key components, activities and indicators below, which can help make cross-border tracing programmes successful.

¹⁷⁴International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004.

TABLE 6
KEY COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL CROSS-BORDER TRACING PROGRAMME

Key component	Suggested indicators/activities
<p>Government authorities take an active role in coordination and implementation, where appropriate and possible.</p> <p><i>(See Chapter 6.1.3)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The involvement of authorities is facilitated and their capacity strengthened or developed, where necessary. • Emergency work with UASC is linked to a national framework for the care of all vulnerable children, where this exists. • For refugee children, UNHCR is involved.
<p>All partners are effectively coordinated.</p> <p><i>(See Chapter 4.2.3)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear framework defines mechanisms for coordinating activities, making decisions and sharing information at local, national and regional levels. • Agreements (such as Memoranda of Understanding or standard operating procedures), where necessary, emphasize the importance of cooperation and outline which organization is responsible for each aspect of identification, documentation, tracing and reunification/ Restoring Family Links in each location/country, including who will transport children for reunification.
<p>Standardized tools are used and appropriately implemented by all partners.</p> <p><i>(See Chapter 7.3)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to coordinate information management databases¹⁷⁵ early on to facilitate information-sharing as appropriate for the situation and for the purposes of family tracing and reunification/Restoring Family Links. • In some situations, efforts are made to centralize information to allow for cross-matching between and across country programmes, where possible. This is one option to consider. Any efforts would need to be accompanied by standard operating procedures and have data protection protocols and other considerations taken into account (<i>see Chapters 4.3</i>). •  Centralizing information on refugees and any information-sharing for refugees (especially back to the country of origin) should be agreed to with UNHCR. • Regular joint-training events bring together staff responsible for information management in all implementing countries.
<p>All implementing partners use standardized forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-agency standard forms are readily available, translated into all relevant languages and distributed in a timely fashion.
<p>Services are provided and mapped along key routes and at border crossing points for populations crossing international borders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information is provided to populations on the move about services available 'en route', including access to tracing services. • Capacity for rapid identification, documentation, tracing, verification and reunification is developed at camps that are close to border crossing points to facilitate reunification in situations where families are waiting for children to arrive (or vice versa).
<p>Regular and ongoing training supports good practice and promotes engagement by all country programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotating training events and programme exchanges promote a 'whole programme' approach and facilitate the exchange of ideas and understanding of challenges in each setting. • Training brings together case workers/staff from each country programme and involves a range of participating actors.
<p>Day-to-day operational aspects of tracing are effectively supported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cross-border liaison officer is appointed with sole responsibility for day-to-day operational support and monitoring of the programme's cross-border aspects, such as ensuring effective information exchange, follow-up and the logging of children's movements.
<p>Unaccompanied and separated children, their carers and families are kept fully informed and systems are in place for tracking children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All documented UASC are followed up on regularly while tracing is ongoing (at least every three months). • When families are traced, they are informed of necessary procedures and time frames before reunification, preventing frustration or children trying to find their own way home. • Children are informed of what they should do if they decide to move to another location.

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

★ [See Chapter 4.2.3, Cross-border/regional coordination](#)

11.3 Good practice in family tracing

Tracing methods vary for each context and child. That said, in *all* contexts, organizations and staff conducting tracing should:

- Commence tracing as soon as possible.
- Work with local organizations, networks and communities.
- Use varied and innovative tracing methods.
- Ensure that systems are in place to protect confidentiality and safeguard information.
- Ensure emotional support is available throughout the tracing process and involve children in their own tracing, as much as possible.
- Where tracing has stalled, actively seek alternative long-term solutions (see Chapter 10.5).

★ *See Tool 49: Organizational guidance on best practices in family tracing*

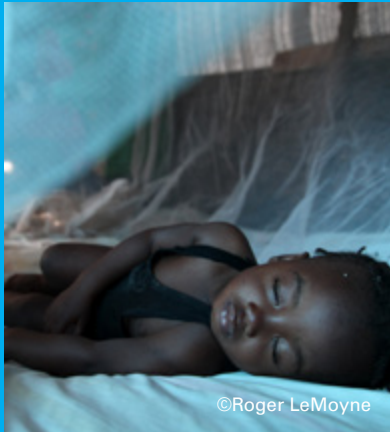
11.3.1 Children accompanying tracing workers in search for family

When tracing has failed because of difficulties in locating a UASC's home, it may seem that the only solution left is for the child to accompany tracing workers on their search. This could result in finding family members who welcome the child or discovering information that will help with tracing. However, **there are many risks involved in taking a child on a search for family, since the outcome cannot be predicted and he/she may be faced with upsetting news.** There have also been cases of children being left behind in their home area – for example, with a village elder – when family tracing has failed.

Confronted with a choice between abandoning family tracing and seeking alternative long-term care or taking the child on a search for family members, tracing workers are faced with a dilemma: The child has a right to live with his/her family, yet it is also the tracing worker's duty to protect the child from harm. **Such situations can only be addressed on a case-by-case basis following a detailed assessment of each child's circumstances, weighing the potential benefits against the potential risks.**

★ *See Tool 50: Evaluating whether children should accompany tracing workers while searching for family*

★ *See Chapters 7.2.4, Individual case assessment, and 7.2.5, Best interests procedures*



Haiti: Children accompanying tracing workers in searching for family

“Ideally we wanted to locate family members and then carry out a process of verification and mediation between child and family members before reunification. This was particularly important when a child had been separated for a significant time. However, in cases where all possible tracing leads had been exhausted and where the child was not able to remember or articulate how to reach certain locations, the only option left was to take the child with social workers in a car or on foot in the hope of jogging his or her memory, enabling the child to guide the social workers to the location where his or her family might be. The advantage was that this did allow us to successfully locate family members in cases that

otherwise might have stalled indefinitely. The disadvantage was that the family had no warning that the child was coming. In some cases, the family believed the child to be dead. In other instances, there had been other major changes in the family, such as the death of a family member. Because neither the child nor family had been prepared in advance, the sudden reunifications were very emotional.”

(Personal communication, child protection adviser, Haiti 2010-2011)

11.3.2 Relocating UASC to facilitate tracing¹⁷⁶

Where a child is not able to provide sufficient information for family tracing, **moving the child to live closer to his/her home area could help to stimulate memories that may make tracing easier.** A careful **assessment** should always be carried out for each individual child *before* making such a decision if there is any likelihood that family members may remain near the child’s current location. Moving children also risks separating them from their more recent community, increasing their isolation.

⚠ Moving refugee UASC to their country of origin to facilitate tracing is not recommended. It requires careful consideration and must be discussed and agreed to with UNHCR. Refugee children, like refugee adults, need international protection and may lack this protection in their country of origin. **A best interests determination (BID) is essential when considering durable solutions** for refugee children, including voluntary repatriation to the country of origin, even if this facilitates family reunification. There is also the possibility that parents may remain in the country of asylum, which could result in permanent separation (see Chapter 12.3)

★ See Chapter 7.2.4, *Individual case assessments* and 7.2.5, *Best interests procedures*

¹⁷⁶ It is not the practice of the International Committee of the Red Cross to move unaccompanied and separated children to another location to facilitate tracing.

11.3.3 Keeping track of UASC

Tracing can take months or even years, and **in the interim period between documentation and positive tracing, some children 'disappear' and can no longer be located.** This may occur for several reasons: Families or children move on to seek better conditions or flee conflict, and children may be abandoned by or leave their carers, sometimes returning home on their own. Many children move numerous times from place to place or carer to carer, living in a variety of circumstances and in some cases being associated with armed forces or armed groups. Some may be re-registered elsewhere by a different organization, but if their records are not matched on a centralized system, any progress in tracing will be lost.

To keep track of documented UASC, it is recommended that organizations:

- **Follow-up regularly** (every two to three months) to re-interview children and caregiver(s) to check on any plans to move and where, recording any new information in the child's case file.
- **Inform children what they should do to ensure that tracing can continue if they decide to move to another location, decide *not* to undertake a planned move, or get lost and do not arrive at their expected destination** (for example, tell them the authority/organization they should report to). Children can also be provided with a standard form to hand over to organizations responsible for family tracing at their destination; this can facilitate ongoing tracing and updating of records.
- **Develop a network of community protection monitors or volunteers to raise communities' awareness** of the need for children or carers to inform tracing organizations before moving or, if this is not possible, when they reach their destination, so that tracing records can be updated.
- **If entire populations have to move suddenly, carry out mass tracing at their new destination;** this will update records of documented UASC and document any new separations.

11.4 Results of family tracing

Family tracing may produce positive results through a variety of means: successful cross-matching on a computerized database, a family member coming forward to claim the child, a successful search for family member(s) or further information coming to light through the tracing process. However, in some cases, family tracing fails to produce any results at all.

11.4.1 Positive tracing

When the family member(s) who the child has been searching for is found, verification must be carried out in the hope that this will lead to reunification (see Chapter 11.5). However, there are a number of other possible outcomes from positive tracing, including:

- **The family member(s) is located, but is *not* the specific person the child was searching for.** An assessment should confirm whether it is in the child's best interests to be placed in his/her care while tracing for the specific family member continues (see Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5).
- **The specific family member(s) is located, but is living in an insecure or unsafe location.** A decision must be reached about what is in the child's best interests, including an assessment that includes the views of the family and child (through a best interests procedure for refugee children) (see Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5). If reunification is delayed, family contact should be maintained through whatever means are available, for example, through a telephone call or the Red Cross Message (RCM) system, if in place (see Chapter 12.1.1).
- **The specific family members are located but are unwilling or unable to be reunited with the child.** In this case, the person conducting the tracing should work with the family member(s) to fully understand their concerns, determine if these concerns can be addressed, and work with the family and the child through assessment and family mediation to determine what actions are in the best interests of the child (see Chapters 7.2.4, 7.2.5, and 12.2.2). If reunification is delayed, family contact should be maintained. However, if the family member does not want the child to know that he/she has been found, organizations are obliged to honour that wish and not inform the child.
- **Information confirms that the family member(s) with whom the child wished to be reunited is not living.**

No matter the outcome, children must be informed of positive tracing, unless the family member does not wish for the child to know that he/she has been found. If he/she is old enough, keep the child involved in discussing next steps after positive tracing. Appropriate support must be provided if children learn of the death of family members/previous caregivers. When family reunification cannot go ahead, a long-term alternative care arrangement that is in the child's best interests needs to be agreed (see Chapter 10.5).

It is generally accepted that tracing can stop when:

- **All reasonable efforts have been made following natural disasters** or parents have been identified among the dead; this will generally be a substantially shorter period of time than that required in conflict situations.
- **The child is over 18 years.** However, there should be flexibility in relation to age, especially where there are no alternative ways of re-establishing family contact; each case should be assessed individually and tracing continued if there is potential to find family.
- **All reasonable efforts to find family have failed over a set period of time.** 'Reasonable efforts' will differ depending on the child's age and particular circumstances. For babies, a period of two years of tracing is reasonable. This period must be extended for other children for whom enough tracing information exists or when communication with and access to the child's area of origin or a vast area of displacement is very poor and access has not been possible for tracing teams.

(Adapted from the International Rescue Committee, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, 'Separated Children', Critical Issues Module 6 in *Action for the Rights of Children*, 2009, pp. 49, 50)

As a result of family tracing or information from hospitals, morgues or other relevant authorities, caseworkers might find themselves in a position of having to deliver news of the death of a family member/previous caregiver to a child. **First and foremost, this information must be *thoroughly verified* and, if possible, accompanied and certified by a death certificate, before announcing it to the child. In case of any doubt, practitioners should refrain from delivering such news to the child.** Once the information is verified, it is essential to plan and make arrangements for the way in which the news will be delivered and the child supported during and after he/she has been informed.

★ [See Tool 51: Delivering news of death to a child](#)

11.4.2 Deciding to discontinue tracing

Tracing can be completed in hours or days, or can continue for a number of years. Indeed, there are many examples of successful tracing after five years or more. However, **children whose family members cannot be easily traced should not be left 'in limbo'**. Their case files should stipulate the frequency of visits to re-interview and update findings, and dates of periodic case reviews and case conferences should be included in their care plan to ensure that everything is being done to trace family and that the child's care situation remains appropriate.

Tracing should not be discontinued until 'all reasonable efforts' have been made to trace family members or until there is conclusive proof that all family members are dead.

The decision to stop active tracing and determine long-term alternative care should involve a formal review process. A best interests determination (BID) may be used for refugee UASC in all circumstances and for all UASC where there is no national process in place. Where possible, national authorities should always be involved in this process, which should be linked to a national framework for care of all vulnerable children, if such a framework exists.

Organizations working with UASC have a responsibility to ensure that their programme plans, including for transition or handover, reflect the long-term needs of UASC for whom tracing has been unsuccessful and of those children who are hard to place and require long-term alternative care. Links should be made with long-term development programmes. In post-emergency or other settings where there is no national framework for the care of vulnerable children, or where systems are not fully functioning, an element of capacity building and system strengthening will be required (*see Chapter 6.2.1*).

Discontinuing active tracing does not necessarily imply the case will be closed, since tracing may resume at a later date; regardless, the child's case should be integrated into the regular child protection case management system (*see Chapter 7.2*). Discontinuing active tracing also does not mean that the family can never be found; cases can be archived but remain on the database, meaning that they can be reopened should new information come to light.

★ [See Chapter 10.5, Long-term/permanent care for UASC](#)

11.5 Verification for family reunification

“**Verification** is the process of establishing the validity of relationships and confirming the willingness of the child and the family member to be reunited.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, p. 37)

When positive tracing occurs, the next step before reunification is verification, which encompasses two elements: validation of family ties and assessment of whether reunification is in the best interests of the child (see Chapter 12.1).

11.5.1 Validating family ties


Ensuring that the child does indeed have a genuine family relationship with the claimant is essential. Unfortunately, it is possible for children, especially infants, very young children or those unable to communicate effectively, to be handed over to the wrong person. This could be a genuine mistake, or it could be prompted by the desire of adults to replace a different lost child, or the intention could be more malicious: to use a child for labour or other forms of exploitation or, in conflict/post-conflict situations, to take revenge on a family or remove a witness to killings.

Validation of family ties can be done by:

- **Completing verification forms:** Those organizations that use standard forms, such as those included in the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System¹⁷⁷ can use the Adult Verification Form and Child Verification Form.¹⁷⁸ The Adult Verification Form leads staff through questions to ask parents/previous carers about the child, family members, circumstances of separation, etc. The Child Verification Form does the same for children who are old enough to answer. By comparing answers and the information in the child’s documentation, relationships can be verified. Completing both forms ensures that each step of the process is recorded and each party confirms the relationships.
- ★ [See Tool 52: Sample Child Verification Form \(Ethiopia\), IA CP IMS](#)
- ★ [See Tool 53: Sample Adult Verification Form \(Ethiopia\), IA CP IMS](#)
- **Checking official documentation:** Parents/previous carers and/or children may have documents, such as birth certificates, identity cards or passports, which prove family relationships. In some circumstances, staff can check relationships with officials who know the family.

¹⁷⁷ Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System template forms for family tracing and reunification.

¹⁷⁸ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees can use specific forms for the best interests procedure, although, depending on the context, it can be agreed with partners that standard forms are considered equivalent to a best interests assessment (BIA) for UASC. The International Committee of the Red Cross uses its own database and information management tools, but will agree on information-sharing, as appropriate, with humanitarian organizations working with unaccompanied and separated children, provided that the beneficiary (child or adult) has given his/her consent to the ICRC to share his/her information with other organizations.

- **Following guidance on verification for infants, young children and children with difficulty communicating.** Though difficult, in the absence of information from children, relationships must be verified by other means. It is essential to fully document all the validation steps and ensure the child goes to his/her family, since there may be subsequent claims to the same child.
-  **In refugee situations, asylum and proGres documentation can also be used,** since most refugees are asked to list family members left behind and in-country.

How to verify family ties for younger children and children unable to provide information:

Step 1: In all cases, ask adults requesting family reunification with infants to:

- Pick out the child's photo from a number of photos of children the same age.
- Describe the child, including birthmarks, scars, markings, tattoos or other defining physical characteristics.
- Describe the clothing, jewellery or objects the child was wearing/carrying at separation.
- Recall the place where the child was left and how the separation occurred.
- Identify any words or phrases the child knew before the separation (if the child was already talking), including nicknames or how the child pronounced names of particular family members.
- Name locations or places that the child knew at the time of separation. For example, with his/her current carer, a child might talk about 'going to the river' or to a church where families sing.
- Whenever possible, ask family members' neighbours to corroborate relationships, including whether the parent/relatives had a child (or other relation, such as a nephew or grandchild) of a certain age and sex, and to recall any information about the place and date of separation.

Step 2: Compare answers to the child's documentation, including updates from current carers (see Chapter 9.1.2).

(Adapted from de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson and Jacqueline Botte, *The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years, A working paper*, UNICEF, 2007, p. 31)

DNA testing should *not* be used routinely to verify family relationships; for cases in which DNA testing is suggested, it is essential to refer to the following guidance:

DNA testing and unaccompanied and separated children

DNA testing is a scientific method of confirming relationships among individuals through a comparison of their respective DNA material, since all persons with blood relations share a similar sequence of DNA. Cell samples can be drawn from an individual's blood, saliva or, less intrusively, hair samples. The use of DNA to establish family relationships has been available for a number of years, and it is performed primarily to confirm parent-child relations, as well as sibling, grandparent-grandchild and uncle and aunt relationships. Given its scientific nature, the results of such tests are usually taken as conclusive over documentary and other forms of proof of the claimed family relationship.

DNA testing may be suggested as a way of establishing family links for reunification purposes, for example, in the case of babies or very young children with no supporting documentary evidence, or if the link is disputed (for example, two sets of parents claiming the same child). **DNA testing to verify family relationships may be resorted to only where serious doubts remain after all other types of proof have been examined.** It is also important

to note that there is no universally recognized definition of 'family', and the nature of family relationships should be understood based on the refugee's social and cultural background.

In cases where every step has been taken to use other methods to verify family relationships (photographs, oral evidence, questionnaires) without success, **DNA testing should only be carried out to meet the child's 'best interests' and should be conducted in keeping with a rights- and dignity-based approach,** and so as to ensure full respect for the principle of family unity. Appropriate procedures include explicit and informed consent (reasons, methodology, implications and safeguards) from the child or his or her caregiver or guardian and pre-test counselling performed by qualified, sensitized personnel. Pre-test and post-test counselling should include implications and unexpected results. When testing to establish parent/child relationship, consider administering the test only on the mother and taking 'proven marriage' as evidence that her spouse is the father.

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Note on DNA Testing to Establish Family Relationships in the Refugee Context*, June 2008)



Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC

Tool 49: Organizational guidance on best practices in family tracing

Tool 50: Evaluating whether children should accompany tracing workers while searching for family

Tool 51: Delivering news of death to a child

Tool 52: Sample Child Verification Form (Ethiopia), IA CP IMS

Tool 53: Sample Adult Verification Form (Ethiopia), IA CP IMS

de la Soudière, Marie, Jan Williamson and Jacqueline Botte, [The Lost Ones: Emergency care and family tracing for separated children from birth to five years. A working paper](#), UNICEF, 2007.

De Lay, Brigette, [Mobility Mapping and Flow Diagrams: Tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children](#), United States Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2003.

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International Rescue Committee, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, [Action for the Rights of Children, 2009, Critical Issues Module 6: 'Separated children'](#).

United Nations Children's Fund, Christian Children's Fund, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Introduction to Child Protection in Emergencies: An inter-agency modular training package](#), 2007.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Note on DNA Testing to Establish Family Relationships in the Refugee Context](#), June 2008.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#), May 2008.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Rescue Committee, [Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines](#), November 2011.





Chapter 12 walks those working with unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) through the delicate process of reunification and reintegration into their families following positive tracing. The first step is assessing whether reunification is in the best interests of the child and possibly delaying or deciding against reunification. The chapter then discusses preparation of children, families, caregivers and communities, and undertaking individual casework before carrying out the actual reunification, when this is determined to be in the best interests of the child. The chapter also covers the specific concerns of reunification for refugee children and return of children not found in need of international protection. Lastly, the chapter addresses how to facilitate the child's successful reintegration into his/her family and community, including through follow-up after reunification.

12

Reunification and reintegration

TOPICS

12.1 Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests

12.1.1 Delaying reunification or deciding not to reunite a child

12.2 Reunification

12.2.1 Preparation before family reunification

12.2.2 Individual casework or family mediation

12.2.3 Carrying out the reunification

12.3 Reunification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children

12.3.1 Durable solutions for refugee UASC

12.3.2 Best interests procedure and durable solutions


12.4 Return of children found not in need of international protection

12.5 Reintegration

12.5.1 The importance of follow-up after reunification

12.5.2 Factors requiring special attention during follow-up after reunification

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS!

- Not all positive tracing cases lead to reunification; sometimes reunification is delayed or there is a decision not to reunify if reunification is not in the best interests of the child. When the family and child both want reunification but there are concerns that the reunification is not in the child's best interests, agencies cannot prevent their independent reunification but can choose not to facilitate it.
- A full assessment – for example, a best interests assessment (BIA) or best interests determination (BID), where there is no national process for determining best interests – should be carried out if there are doubts as to whether the reunification should go ahead and should always precede a decision *not* to reunite a child with his/her family.
- Family reunification, which should be based on the child's consent and genuine participation, consists of three phases: First, preparation before family reunification; second, carrying out the reunification; and third, follow-up after reunification.
- Preparations for reunification must involve the child (or children, in the case of sibling groups), their family, interim carer(s) and community, and take account of any particular protection risks.
- Ideally, reunification will be with one or both parents. If not possible, reunification with other family members is usually the preferred alternative, where in the best interests of the child.
-  For refugee children, a BIA is always required before family reunification. Reunification in the country of origin or other complex circumstances requires a BID, with consideration for safe return and whether the circumstances that led to the child's flight have ceased to exist. Cross-border reunification of refugee children needs to be closely coordinated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

TOPICS

12.5.3 Responsibility for follow-up after reunification

12.5.4 Strengthening/developing local capacity

12.5.5 Elements included in follow-up after reunification

12.5.6 The role of families and communities in follow-up after reunification

KEY POINTS – REMEMBER THIS! <CONTINUED>

- Where possible, assistance to reunited families should also be provided to families where children are vulnerable to separation; organizations should agree on standardized provision.
- In the interests of the child's future development, follow-up after reunification is essential for ensuring the child is fully reintegrated back into family life. Depending on their circumstances, some children and their families need more intensive follow-up than others; as far as possible, follow-up should be designed to fit the needs of the individual girl or boy.
- Follow-up should focus on strengthening families and communities, and should be carried out through local child welfare systems or community structures and feed into effective case and information management systems, where existing and functioning. Where there is no alternative to the provision of follow-up by external agencies, activities should be carried out in a way that develops local capacity.
- Where resources are scarce or there are large numbers of children requiring follow-up, it may be necessary to prioritize children and families who require special attention, based on criteria developed with the affected children themselves, their families and communities.
- Referral to programmes of economic/livelihood support, education, psychosocial support and health care are essential aspects of follow-up.
- Organizations should have criteria for tracing closure and handover to standard case management systems.

12 Reunification and reintegration

12.1 Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests

“When tracing is successful, an assessment should verify that family reunification is in the best interests of the child. In cases where there are serious concerns, it may be necessary to involve the appropriate authorities, existing welfare systems, other agencies and local communities for any further action or future support required.”


(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, p. 37)

Following positive tracing and verification of family ties, organizations and staff should then assess whether reunification is in the best interests of the child by:

- **Completing verification forms:** Verification forms should include confirmation by all parties of their willingness to go ahead with reunification and should highlight any immediate problems (such as access to education) that need to be addressed *before* reunification (see *Chapter 11.5.1, Tools 52 and 53*).
- **Assessing the living conditions and circumstances the child will return to, including security:** The living conditions that the child will return to are frequently more difficult than they were before the emergency; poverty should not rule out reunification. However, if there are extreme difficulties, interventions may be required to enable the family to accept the child. The family circumstances may also have changed because of death, sickness or remarriage of family members. Likewise, there may be continuing insecurity in the area.

Family reunification will generally be in the best interests of the child. **In straightforward cases**, such as brief, accidental separation, these two steps will be sufficient to confirm that reunification is in his/her best interests, and to identify the necessary preparation of the child(ren), family members, interim carer(s) and community, and the follow-up required to support reunification.

However, in **complicated cases**, a more detailed assessment may be necessary to reach a decision and put support in place *before* reunification. This assessment should include the child and family's circumstances before reunification, their experiences during separation and their current situation. **In particularly complex cases**, for example if a child was trafficked or smuggled, especially if the family was implicated, a full assessment may be necessary where there is no national process for determining best interests (see *Chapters 7.2.4 and 7.2.5*).

 In refugee settings, the best interests procedure must be followed and requires a BIA for family reunification and/or, for complex or cross border cases, a BID.

- ★ [See Tool 54: Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests in complex cases](#)
- ★ [See Tool 30: Best Interests Assessment Form, UNHCR](#)
- ★ [See Tool 31: Best Interests Determination Report Form, UNHCR](#)
- ★ [See Chapter 7.2.5, Best interests procedure](#)

Family reunification will not be in the best interests of *all* children, such as those from abusive families. Therefore, family reunification should not be seen as the only measure of success. UASC programmes may need to educate their own organizations or donors on the importance of seeking the most appropriate solution for each child.


12.1.1 Delaying reunification or deciding not to reunite a child

An assessment of whether reunification is in the best interests of the child sometimes results in a decision to delay reunification. This can happen for a number of reasons, including insecurity near the family's location, family relocation to more appropriate accommodations, or the need for community sensitization or health/psychological treatment that will not be available to the child after reunification. The child may also wish to wait until he/she completes a school term/year or until education certificates are awarded. **The best interests of the child should be the determining factor in any delay in reunification;** if a delay is agreed upon, family contact should always be maintained, where possible.

Factors that suggest that family reunification might not be in a child's best interests

- After all reasonable efforts, information gathered on the child and his or her family remains insufficient to make an informed decision as to whether family reunification could lead to violations of the rights of the child.
- Doubts exist as to the legitimacy of the family relationship.
- Family members have provided false information about essential facts relating to the reunification (such as the identity of family members).
- There are indications of past or current child abuse or neglect within the household that the child will join.
- The family member that the child will join lives in an environment that is likely to expose the child to physical or emotional harm (for example, the family member is in detention or in an area affected by armed conflict or natural disaster).
- The child has disclosed past abuse or neglect, or fears of future harm.
- Reunification will or is likely to expose the child to abuse or neglect.
- The family member that the child will join is not his or her father or mother.
- The child is reluctant to be reunited with the family member(s).
- The child and the family member that she/he is joining have never lived together or have not lived together for a significant period of time.
- The reunification will result in the child being separated from a family member who is close to him/her or with whom there has been a dependency; reunification could affect custodial rights or contact with a family member.

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, UNHCR, 2008, annex 4, p. 87)

 For refugee UASC, if the traced family lives in an area that is still unsafe and insecure, reunification may *not* yet be in the best interests of the child; this is especially true if reunification is supposed to take place in the country of origin. It may be decided in consultation with the child and family that postponing reunification may be a preferable temporary solution to protect refugee children. The child and the family need to maintain contact during this period, for example, through Restoring Family Links (RFL) services provided by the Family Links Network, such as Red Cross messages or phone calls. Reunification should take place as soon as the area becomes safe enough, in consultation with the child and family. It is also important to consider the ability to monitor the child's care situation after family reunification in the country of origin, where access may be restricted.

By default, family reunification should always be presumed to be in the child's best interests. Therefore, **the decision not to reunite a child with his/her family should only be arrived at following a comprehensive verification and assessment process** that includes the child's wishes and factors such as security. Such decisions normally fall within the competency of States; in the absence of similar national procedures, a best interests procedure can be a useful tool to make such an assessment. Note that a decision *not* to reunite a refugee child must be based on a BID decision (*see Chapter 7.2.5*).

Additionally, if the **family's involvement in trafficking of the child** is verified, reunification is likely not in the child's best interests. **Access to education or other services** may also be an important aspect in deciding whether or not reunification is in the best interests of the child. The extent to which these factors should influence the decision depends on the individual case, taking into account the overall circumstances and wishes of the child/family. **Family mediation and counselling** should be available to a child and his/her family or previous carer if either party refuses reunification.

A decision may be deferred for review at a future date since circumstances may change. It is important, however, that cases are not left pending indefinitely, since children need stability and certainty.

When a final decision is made to not reunite a child, his/her case should be referred to national authorities, where possible, if the authorities are not already involved. Likewise, a long-term alternative care arrangement that is in the child's best interests needs to be agreed upon and take into account the child's wishes.

It is also important to be aware that **when both the family and child want reunification but there are concerns that the reunification is not in the child's best interests, agencies cannot prevent their independent reunification. However, they can choose not to facilitate it.** In such cases, organizations involved should counsel children on their reasons for not facilitating the reunification. They should also ensure that the child and parents are making an informed choice by sharing information about what risks are involved in their decision to reunify and what they can do to mitigate those risks.

★ [See Chapter 10.5, Long-term/permanent care for UASC](#)

12.2 Reunification

“Reunification is the process of bringing together the child and family or previous care-provider for the purpose of establishing or re-establishing long-term care.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, 2004, p. 37)

Even in clear-cut circumstances, reunification is a major step for the child and family. Although the definition of reunification refers to bringing together the child and family/previous caregiver, a child can also be reunified with another family member, whether or not this person is the previous carer. Such temporary care placements need to be formalized by national authorities or courts to have legal effect.

In general, the decision on whether children should be reunited after successful tracing should only be made by senior staff when:

- The verification process has been completed and is positive.
- The living conditions to which the child will return have been assessed and are acceptable.
- The child, child’s guardian (where applicable) and family member(s) with whom the child will be reunited are *all* in agreement that reunification is in the child’s best interests.
- The local authorities have been informed and are in agreement, where relevant.
- The security situation has been assessed and it is safe to go ahead with reunification.

Family reunification consists of three phases:

1. **Preparation before family reunification for the child, family, interim carer(s) and community**
2. **Carrying out the reunification**
3. **Follow-up after reunification.**

The verification process should not in any case cause unreasonable delay in reuniting a child with the family.


12.2.1 Preparation before family reunification

Acceptance of the child is a key factor in his/her successful reintegration, and preparation of each stakeholder – the child, family, interim carers and communities – is vital. The degree and type of preparation required will vary depending on individual circumstances and issues highlighted during verification. Adequate time and resources for preparation are critical to improving long-term outcomes for UASC; funding proposals should highlight the importance of this investment (*see Chapter 6.2.3*).

Preparation for reunification should include all individuals directly involved in the reunification – the child,¹⁷⁹ family members, and interim carer(s) – as well as communities. Preparation activities should provide the individual with relevant information (shared with consent) and sufficient time to absorb this information; psychosocial, livelihoods and other support or referrals to

¹⁷⁹ If the child is associated with armed forces or armed groups, conduct a risk assessment and refer to the Paris Principles Steering Group, *Child Recruitment, Release and Reintegration Handbook*, 2015.

adjust to life after reunification; and an active role in shaping the planning and conducting of the reunification, where in the best interests of the child. Preparation should be tailored to the child and situation. For example, specific additional preparations are necessary when a decision is made to reunite a child with his/her family in a different country. These include permission to travel from authorities on both sides of the border and issuance of appropriate supporting documentation for travel and transport.

 If refugee children attended school in the country of asylum, any relevant certification or documentation should be obtained from the education authorities and should accompany children. For refugee children born in the country of asylum, it is also important to obtain an official birth registration.

The child and the caregiver may naturally have formed attachment depending on the length of separation/period in interim care. It is normal for the child to have separation anxiety leaving the interim caregiver to return to customary caregivers, especially if reunification is to a new location. Note that **if an interim carer refuses to release a child** during preparation for or the actual reunification, organizations working with UASC should involve local authorities, community leaders or child protection staff of humanitarian organizations. This is a serious child protection concern and must be urgently addressed, particularly if there is a chance that the family or caregiver will leave with the child.



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Liberia: Children's voices in the reunification process

(Children said that) in order to make informed decisions about reunification, they needed to be given more facts. They wanted specific information, negative and positive, about their families' situation, the security situation in their areas of origin, and protection measures in place upon their return. They also wanted to be consulted on the type of information to be given to their families by social workers concerning their experiences during separation. Family poverty would not deter them from returning home, but they expressed concern over lack of educational opportunities, particularly if they have been attending school in their asylum countries.

(United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks, *IRIN Report, Liberia: Child reunification workshop*, IRIN, 2001)

★ [See Tool 55: Checklist for preparing for reunification](#)

12.2.2 Individual casework or family mediation

Not every case of positive tracing can or should result in an immediate or 'easy' reunification following verification; some children simply may not be ready yet. In many cases, children and families know one another's location, but a range of circumstances, often exacerbated by the emergency, result in separation. Such 'deliberate' separation may be the result of a genuine belief that children

will be better off elsewhere or an attempt to lessen the burden on families. In other situations, children leave their homes because of ill treatment or neglect and may not wish to return. **Such situations may require a period of time to repair relationships or improve circumstances through family mediation prior to reunification.**

Family mediation requires skill and experience to develop a relationship of trust and to work with the child/family to **resolve the issues that prevent the child from living with the family.** While organizations can provide information to families and children about the risks of residential care or living on the streets, **family mediation must take into account the local culture and economic situation** of children/families and try to **not impose solutions.** It may be helpful to work with or through trusted local leaders, such as respected community members or religious leaders, or to seek a mentor for the child. Referral for livelihood support may also be helpful (*see Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC*).

Where family mediation or other forms of support fail to resolve the issues, it may be necessary to seek alternative care solutions, recognizing that family reunification is not in the best interests of every child (*see Chapter 12.1*).

★ [See Chapter 7.2 Case management](#)

12.2.3 Carrying out the reunification

Family reunification is the culmination of all the effort that has gone into tracing and, for the children and families concerned, it means the end of waiting. Although generally a joyful occasion, there may be mixed emotions for those involved. Where there is good preparation and a shared understanding of future support, reunification should be a positive experience for everyone; ways to ensure this include:

- Involving all parties, including the child, in deciding what should happen as part of reunification
- Good planning and preparation, including informing and involving local authorities and/or community leaders, as appropriate
- In cross-border reunifications, ensuring clearance from the authorities in *both* countries
- Organizing appropriate transportation for the child (accompanied by a trusted adult or staff member) and/or the family, depending on the circumstances
- Providing hard copies of all relevant documentation, including follow-up care plans/contacts to both the child and family
- Ensuring that a trusted person accompanies the child to the reunification
- Ensuring that there is formal handover of the child to the family with whom he/she is being reunited and acceptance by the family (and community, if present), including signature of the reunification form by the responsible family member. **Children should *not* be placed in the care of anyone other than the family members with whom they are being reunited,** and the handover form should *not* be signed by anyone else, such as a village elder.

- Taking photographs of the occasion for the family and previous carer(s), if appropriate.

The reunification can take place in the home of the child. **The key issue in reunification is the child's genuine participation.** Public ceremonies may also happen naturally, depending on the community, as indicated by the child's wishes and consent. Where a number of children are being reunited together, organizations responsible for the children should ensure the individual emotional needs of each child are still met.



12.3 Reunification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children

Family reunification for refugees requires consideration of additional factors and may take place within the same country of asylum; between two different countries of asylum; between the country of asylum and the country of origin; or between the country of asylum and the country of resettlement. Family reunification is normally the priority for refugee UASC, unless a BIA/BID determines differently.

12.3.1 Durable solutions for refugee UASC

The search for solutions is an integral part of the care and protection provided by UNHCR to those refugee UASC who fall under its mandate.

With traditional solutions not yet available for the vast majority of refugees and others of concern, UNHCR has sought to resolve protracted situations by continuing its pursuit of comprehensive, forward-looking strategies for all populations of concern.¹⁸⁰ The traditional three durable solutions are complementary and all should be given full consideration before identifying the most appropriate. Because decisions on durable solutions have a serious and long-term impact on a child's life, they cannot be carried out without the establishment and application of adequate safeguarding measures. Therefore, for all refugee UASC, a best interests determination (BID) should be undertaken when considering all appropriate durable solutions.

UNHCR defines durable solutions as:

- **Voluntary repatriation**, in which refugees return in safety and with dignity to their country of origin and re-avail themselves of national protection.
- **Local integration**, in which refugees legally, economically and socially integrate in the host country, availing themselves of the national protection of the host government.
- **Resettlement**, in which refugees are selected and transferred from the country of asylum to a third State that has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status.

For all refugees undertaking **voluntary repatriation**, whether as an individual on their own or as part of a group repatriation, UNHCR must undertake an individual **voluntary repatriation assessment**. As part of the assessment for UASC, UNHCR must ensure that the child understands the situation, receives adequate and age-appropriate information, and is making a free and an informed choice. The safety and dignity of the return movement must also be carefully planned and confirmed. If the voluntary nature of the repatriation is confirmed, the **Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF)** should be completed for the child. The form is an important document, usually agreed upon by governments of the country of origin and the country of asylum through a tripartite agreement with UNHCR, and may be necessary for entry, for the receipt of assistance, or for access to national services and protection in the country of origin. All UASC who are repatriated should be monitored and followed up by relevant child protection agencies in the country of origin, so arrangements should be made for **case handover** between agencies and/or governments. Where a child is not being repatriated to be reunified with their parents, considerations for the continuation of tracing activities should also be

¹⁸⁰ UNHC, Solutions Strategies, EC/66/SC/CRP.15, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/5596446f9.pdf>

included in tripartite agreements and through coordination with child protection and tracing agencies in the country of origin.

In **local integration**, local authorities bear the primary responsibility for identification and implementation of a long-term care arrangement for refugee children. Refugee UASC should be entitled to the same rights and services as national children without appropriate parental care. “Although the placement of a child depends on the standards and practices of each country of asylum’s social welfare system, the decision should always be in the child’s best interests and without discrimination of any kind.”¹⁸¹ Where the local authorities are unwilling or unable to support care arrangements for UASC, UNHCR and its partners can assist with short- to mid-term placements (*see Chapter 10*).

Resettlement in a third country is available to refugee children and adults alike. However, resettlement is a protection solution for *some* refugees, not all, and generally is only considered when other durable solutions are not available. Although UASC can be considered a particularly vulnerable group, it is important to note that of the 16.1 million refugees of concern to UNHCR around the world, only about 1 per cent are submitted by the agency for resettlement.¹⁸² The resettlement countries determine criteria and quotas for resettlement and not all resettlement countries accommodate unaccompanied children. For refugee UASC who do not have family members in a third country and are unable to benefit from local integration, **resettlement can be considered when repatriation and local integration are considered impossible within an acceptable time frame**. As with any other durable solution, resettlement cannot be decided upon without a comprehensive assessment of the child’s situation and wishes for the future. When resettlement has been identified as the best durable solution for the child, efforts should continue to allow the child to re-establish contact with her/his family. **Resettlement of the child should not lead to the closure of family tracing**. However, it is important to bear in mind, and to inform the child, that resettlement can make family reunification more difficult.

Whatever durable solution is decided, in the interim, refugee children’s current care arrangements should continue if an assessment finds that the child’s needs are adequately met. **It is UNHCR’s policy¹⁸³ that refugee children in an emergency context are not available for adoption.**

★ **Tool 56: Sample Self-repatriation Form, Save the Children**

★ **See Chapter 10.5, Long-term/permanent care for UASC**

★ **See Chapter 11.2.9, Cross-border tracing**

¹⁸¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, UNHCR, February 1997, para 10.4.

¹⁸² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Resettlement website, <www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html>, UNHCR Global Trends 2015 <<http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>>.

¹⁸³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Policy on Adoption of Refugee Children*, UNHCR, 1995, p. 1.

12.3.2 Best interests procedure and durable solutions¹⁸⁴

UNHCR has established the best interests procedure to ensure that safeguards are in place for important decisions relating to individual children. This includes decisions regarding durable solutions for refugee UASC, which require a complex balancing of relevant factors and rights in each case. **The inherent complexity of such a decision, combined with its fundamental and long-term impact on a child's life, in most cases will require a formal best interests determination (BID).** For durable solutions, BIDs ensure that children's views are taken into account and that a durable solution that serves the child's best interests is identified.

A BID should be carried out for all refugee UASC to identify the durable solution that is in his or her best interests. The results of family tracing are a key factor in determining this; thus, **a reasonable amount of time shall be provided for tracing** before a recommendation on a durable solution is made through the BID. **As a general rule, a BID shall be undertaken within two years from the moment an unaccompanied or separated child is identified.** Note that an unaccompanied child can also be repatriated or resettled with a long-term foster family, if all avenues for tracing have been exhausted after a minimum of two years, the placement is in line with the wishes of the child and is in his/her best interests.

At times, the three durable solutions may not be available within a reasonable time frame and a decision regarding a durable solution is kept pending. This can occur after a peace agreement, when there is a need to wait to decide whether voluntary repatriation may be a realistic option; in cases with outstanding tracing results; or in cases in which more time is necessary to determine whether a current temporary care arrangement may develop into local integration as a durable solution for the foster family and potentially for the separated child. In these situations, the focus needs to be on ensuring that the child is in appropriate, protective alternative care.

Like all UASC, refugee UASC require appropriate preparation, follow-up and monitoring. Where tracing or reunification is not in the best interests of the child, alternative durable solutions must be found. If the child wishes to apply for and is granted asylum or permitted to stay on humanitarian grounds, possible durable solutions are either local integration or resettlement in a third country.

★ [See Chapter 7.2.5, Best interests procedure](#)

★ [See the UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child and the Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines](#)

¹⁸⁴ This section is based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, UNHCR, 2008; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Rescue Committee, *Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines*, UNHCR, 2011.

12.4 Return of children found not in need of international protection

‘Children found not in need of international protection’ are those who have not been granted refugee status after going through the entire refugee status determination (RSD) procedure, including appeal, or those who do not qualify for asylum on humanitarian grounds.

In such cases, return of the child to his/her country of origin is likely to be considered. Nevertheless, **procedural safeguards and support measures** need to be in place before any decision is implemented. A multidisciplinary, inter-agency panel can be established to deal with individual cases of rejected unaccompanied children.¹⁸⁵ Considering the child’s age, sex and vulnerability, and giving due weight to his/her views, the panel will determine adequate alternative durable solutions and recommendations to ensure the child’s safety and well-being. Temporary support measures should also be agreed upon and undertaken until the durable solution is implemented. The panel should also consider cases of rejected applicants who recently turned 18 years old but who were registered as unaccompanied children.

Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child may be at risk upon return, all efforts should be made to advocate, with the support of relevant agencies, for the right of the child to local integration. However, when return of the child is deemed the most appropriate solution despite this risk, the best interests of the child require that she/he is not returned *unless*, before the return:

- A parent who can take care of the child is located in the country of origin and is informed of all the details of the return

Or:

- A relative, other adult caregiver, government agency or child-care agency has agreed to, and is able to provide, immediate protection and care upon arrival.

Appropriate counselling should be provided to a child who is to be returned, particularly in cases of individual reluctance or family pressure not to return. The child should be encouraged to communicate with family members and his/her health should be screened beforehand. For sick or otherwise vulnerable children, files shall be given to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or government institutions in the area of return to ensure continued care.

Post-return monitoring and follow-up of an unaccompanied child who lawfully returns to his/her country of origin after a rejected claim is the responsibility of the country of origin. As part of assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports States in fulfilling this duty and does so in line with previously mentioned best interests considerations. UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM work jointly with national

¹⁸⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, UNHCR, 1997, p. 3.

authorities both in the host country and the country of origin to support the implementation of reintegration programmes and adequate care arrangements for these children. Post-return monitoring can, in some cases, be done as part of UNHCR's overall monitoring of conditions in the country of origin.

Note that individuals who have just turned 18 years old are sometimes returned to their country of origin without appropriate planning and support, resulting in extreme difficulties. Although falling outside the age of UASC, it is important that, whenever possible and based on the recommendations of the BID panel, measures are put in place to support the reintegration of these young people.

★ *Tool 56: Sample Self-repatriation Form, Save the Children*



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Libya: Post-return monitoring system

During the height of the Libyan crisis (February-September 2011), key protection actors operating in Zarzis, Tunisia, on the border with Libya, managed an integrated referral system. Those UASC who were found not to be in need of international protection and were cleared by UNHCR were assisted in returning and reintegrating to their countries of origin, mainly in West Africa, where this was found to be in their best interests. The IOM, together with Save the Children, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Tunisian child protection authorities, supported their return. For more than 90 cases of UASC returning to Niger, the IOM engaged a local child protection NGO that could provide reintegration assistance in Niger to receiving families. The NGO carried out monitoring visits for six months after the return, with the support of the IOM office in Niamey.

(Communicated by an International Organization for Migration protection policy officer, 2015)

12.5 Reintegration

12.5.1 The importance of follow-up after reunification

Follow-up: “A range of activities for children and their families to facilitate their reintegration. These activities may include social and economic support. Follow-up is usually required for family reunification.”

(International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, *The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, ICRC, p. 39)

In the interests of the child’s future development, follow-up after reunification is essential for ensuring that the child is fully reintegrated back into family life.

For a variety of reasons, **UASC may experience problems settling back into life with their family** or with family members with whom they never previously lived. Changes in a family’s circumstances caused by conflict, poverty or major domestic upheaval, such as the death or remarriage of a parent, can lead to difficulties, even when there has been good preparation and both parties are eager for the reunification to go ahead. For some children, reunification is a disappointing experience. Girls, in particular, may have limited opportunities to participate in education or vocational training programmes without financial support, and have little hope of earning income. For young mothers, the lack of childcare can be an additional obstacle. Faced with a bleak future, some children may become depressed or even suicidal, particularly when they are isolated from peers and community.

It is essential to be aware that not only those families accepting UASC face problems; following emergencies, communities as a whole are likely to be faced with difficulties, such as lack of access to services, loss of livelihoods and legal struggles. **It is more equitable to consider the protection, survival and development needs of *all* children in the community, not just reunited children, and where follow-up support is provided, the needs of families in the community should also be considered.**

12.5.2 Factors requiring special attention during follow-up after reunification

For some children, especially those separated accidentally, briefly and easily welcomed back, the need for follow-up will generally be minimal. Such children may require one visit in the first month and another visit in the third month to check that there are no unforeseen problems or protection issues, as per the [Alternative Care in Emergencies \(ACE\) Toolkit](#).¹⁸⁶

Other children and their families, such as those separated for a long time or returning home with a new disability, may need substantial support over a long period. **Follow-up should be designed to fit the needs of the individual child rather than becoming an inflexible process** where, for example, every child has a pre-set number of follow-up visits after reunification. Boys and girls will have different needs, which are likely to vary according to gender, age, disability, ethnicity and experiences during separation.

¹⁸⁶ Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, see section 7.5, ‘Follow-up Post Reunification’.

The **child's relationship with his/her family and community** is a key element in determining the depth and frequency of follow-up required. In cases where these relationships are positive, there may be less need for intensive follow-up. The question of how much follow-up is needed and for how long will also depend on the existing **assets, relationships and resources available to the family and the level of services in the community** to support and protect children and families.

Criteria for prioritizing cases must be agreed upon when the lack of resources and/or practical constraints limit the amount of follow-up that can be carried out following reunification. These criteria should be developed in consultation with the affected children themselves, their family and community. **Organizations should take the following factors into account when developing criteria to prioritize cases for follow-up after reunification** (see Chapter 7.2.3):

Circumstances of the child related to his/her separation:

- Long period of separation
- Significant harm or abuse during separation, such as sexual violence or association with armed forces or armed groups
- Physical injury/disability or emotional/psychological difficulties
- Child becoming an adolescent
- Voluntary separation or prior concerns regarding the family's care and protection of children.

Circumstances into which the child will return, including the amount of possible preparation:

- Family members are particularly impoverished, ill or have other major problems that affect their ability to provide care.
- Extended family members who the child has not lived with before will be providing care.
- Family has significantly changed since separation, for example, through remarriage or death of family members.
- A fragmented or fragile community lacks functioning child protection systems.
- The community is hostile, particularly towards children forced to commit violence against their own families or communities, children associated with armed forces or armed groups, or girls who became pregnant during conflict.
- Children are from an ethnic minority or marginalized group.
- The child or family are reluctant to reunify.

Usually, though not always, the closer the relationship between adult and child, the more protected a child is. Thus, children living with less closely related adults might be at greater risk of abuse or marginalization within the family. Research carried out in Sierra Leone¹⁸⁷ found that mistreatment of children

¹⁸⁷ Delap, Emil, *No Place Like Home? Children's experiences of reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone*, Save the Children UK, 2004, pp. 17, 18.

placed with extended family was, according to children, one of the most significant problems facing children in the community. Such mistreatment included inadequate food, forced labour for long hours rather than attending school, physical violence and children reportedly feeling unloved. Findings suggested that children living with grandparents were better cared for than those living with aunts or uncles.

12.5.3 Responsibility for follow-up after reunification

After reunification, children become the responsibility of the family and community. Ideally, follow-up should be conducted by local child welfare systems or community structures, if existing and functioning.

A comprehensive mapping of local capacity should be used as a basis for deciding who should provide follow-up and how much capacity building and support, if any, is required (see Chapter 5.1.2). Where there is no alternative to the provision of follow-up by external organizations, every effort should be made to involve local authorities and organizations concerned with child protection, as a way to promote community ownership. All follow-up activities should be carried out in a way that develops local capacity – for example, by involving key community members in the design, implementation and evaluation of follow-up programmes and providing training, mentoring and other support.

Follow-up – whether via formal systems, such as local authority social workers, or informal mechanisms, such as child protection committees – should be linked to an accountable agency and within a structure that:

- Feeds into an effective case management and information management system
- Is linked with and adheres to national statutory processes, where they exist
- Incorporates clear referral pathways for services such as psychosocial support or legal aid
- Ensures capacity to supervise, support and review work of those undertaking follow-up
- Has clear criteria for closing cases.

12.5.4 Strengthening/developing local capacity¹⁸⁸

Where local capacity to carry out follow-up needs to be developed, **organizations that are able to be involved over the long term should assess:**

- Which local structures can most appropriately meet the protection and development needs of children most at risk of being marginalized and exploited.
- How the relatively short period during which international funds are available can be used to support existing structures or introduce new sustainable ones.

¹⁸⁸ Based on: Uppard, Sarah, and Celia Petty, 'Investigating local support systems', *Working with Separated Children – Field Guide*, Save the Children UK, 1998, p. 83.

- Where support can most effectively be targeted. This is likely to involve working with government at both central and local authority levels, developing links between community structures and government, and supporting community-based mechanisms.
- The need to help build local capacity. If training is required, assess who is most likely to benefit from it – such as government employees, community groups or national NGOs.

Analysing community capacity and how to support long-term protection of children takes time. It also takes time for local capacity to reach a level at which it can take over responsibility for child protection activities. This timing needs to be factored in from the outset of programming.

- ★ [See Chapter 6.1.1, Supporting broader child protection systems through strategic programme design](#)

12.5.5 Elements included in follow-up after reunification

Follow-up activities will depend on the individual child, family and context, and are likely to involve:

- Monitoring the quality of care arrangements (*see Chapter 10.4*)
- Providing emotional and/or practical support to a child during his/her transition
- Working with the child/family on one of the specific issues identified during preparation for reunification, such as behavioural concerns for adolescents returning after a long separation
- Identifying long-term specialized, culturally appropriate responses for some children, such as those suffering from mental health problems as a result of their experiences during separation
- Helping children and their families access the range of support necessary for the reunification or long-term alternative care arrangement to be sustainable
- Ensuring that children and families have information about basic services, humanitarian assistance and wider development programmes
- As a part of case management, facilitating referrals to relevant services or programmes and monitoring those referrals to ensure support is being accessed (*see Chapter 7.2*).

The **follow-up care plan**, which was ideally agreed upon before reunification and outlines details of contact persons and services arranged/referrals made, should be implemented.

During follow-up visits, children should have the chance to be seen privately and speak in confidence. Staff must be able to mediate with families and to advocate on children's behalf with service providers and authorities. Staff should also be familiar with national legislation and child protection procedures, as well as understand their responsibilities under organizational guidelines in the event of actual or suspected cases of abuse, exploitation or neglect of a child (*see*

Chapter 10.4.1). Follow-up visits should be properly documented. The Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System (IA CP IMS) provides standard inter-agency follow-up forms that can be adapted to local contexts. However, **the focus of the follow-up visit should remain on communicating with the child and family, and addressing any problems, rather than completing the forms.**

Note that children may be reunited with families in areas affected by ongoing insecurity, where there may be an additional need for protection monitoring that includes *all* children in a community.

Organizations should have criteria for family tracing and reunification closure. After reunification and follow-up, the family tracing process can be closed, but the child's case should then be integrated into the overall case management system. General case closure will not occur until *all* outstanding child protection issues are addressed (see Chapter 7.2.6).

★ [See Chapter 7.2, Case management](#)

★ [See Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC](#)

12.5.6 The role of families and communities in follow-up after reunification

Acceptance by family and community is fundamental to the well-being of returning children. For most children, being welcomed back, supported, ensured access to education, health care and other basic services, and given opportunities to engage with other children ensures their successful reintegration.

Families and communities can assist reunited children by:

- Supporting youth clubs and other forums that allow young people to meet for recreation, develop social competencies, discuss experiences of reintegration and benefit from peer support; clubs should be open to all boys and girls in a community rather than specific groups, and actively involve children in their set up, design and monitoring to emphasize their resilience and meet real needs
- Supporting existing local associations or clubs that integrate reunified children and provide them with vocational training and skills, including life skills and/or income-generating opportunities
- Organizing activities for *all* children with the youth section of the local Red Cross/Red Crescent
- Establishing support groups for families/carers and returning children; arranging occasional joint meetings of the two groups can facilitate an exchange of views and develop mutual understanding
- Encouraging children's participation in community projects, such as rebuilding schools or clearing land, to promote their sense of belonging and usefulness

- Supporting appropriate cultural practices to ‘cleanse’ or heal children. Such practices can be essential to reintegration when returning children are viewed as carrying ‘bad spirits’ from their experiences (such as with armed forces or armed groups). These practices should be supported *as long as* they are not harmful.¹⁸⁹



¹⁸⁹ United Nations Children’s Fund, *The Paris Principles: Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups*, UNICEF, 2007, section 7.53, p. 35.

Community acceptance and sexual violence

Girls may face particular problems on return to communities, particularly when they are known to have survived sexual violence, are young mothers or are pregnant. Work with communities on such sensitive issues, ideally commenced before reunification, will likely need to continue for some time. Extensive community dialogue and mediation may be needed for communities to be able to positively support and accept girls. Conducting traditional rituals, providing health care and livelihoods support, and developing links with women's groups can be helpful in promoting acceptance and reducing girls' isolation. It is important, however, not to make assumptions about the difficulties that survivors of sexual violence will face, since community members sometimes show solidarity, support and acceptance, and the children affected can show a great deal of resilience and capacity for successful reintegration.

Advocacy may be required for girls to be able to access education and appropriate skills training or

livelihood opportunities, including practical measures, such as the provision of childcare. Girls may be seen as a burden by their families and be under pressure to earn an income, particularly if their prospects for marriage are diminished as a result of their experiences during separation. This is likely to mean they miss out on education and, faced with few income-generating opportunities, girls may be left with no alternative but to engage in commercial sexual exploitation.

Boys can also be survivors of sexual violence, a problem that is often hidden and largely undocumented. Boys may have also witnessed sexual violence or be perpetrators themselves, for example, while associated with armed forces or armed groups. Where appropriate, this possibility should be raised, creating space for boys to discuss this issue and receive appropriate support. Initiatives should be based on an understanding of cultural norms, taboos and customs related to sexual behaviour.



Matrix on p. 261: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies

Matrix on p. 267: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC

Tool 30: Bests Interests Assessment Form, UNHCR

Tool 31: Bests Interests Determination Report Form, UNHCR

Tool 54: Assessing whether reunification is in the child's best interests in complex cases

Tool 55: Checklist for preparing for reunification

Tool 56: Sample Self-repatriation Form, Save the Children

De Lay, Brigitte, [Mobility Mapping and Flow Diagrams: Tools for family tracing and social reintegration work with separated children](#), United States Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2003. [I THINK THIS IS THE CORRECT REFERENCE – I FOUND IT IN TOOL 55. FULL REFERENCE WAS NOT PROVIDED IN THE HANDBOOK]

International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children UK, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Vision, [The Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children](#), ICRC, 2004.

Jareg, Elizabeth, [Community-Based Foster Homes in Ethiopia: An account of a follow-up experience ten years after phase-out](#), Save the Children Norway, 2005.

United Nations Children's Fund, [The Paris Principles: Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups](#), UNICEF, 2007.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [CRC General Comment No. 6 \(2005\): Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin](#), CRC/GC/2005/6, 2005.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Refugee Children: Guidelines on protection and care](#), UNHCR, 1994.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#), UNHCR, 2008.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Rescue Committee, [Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines](#), 2011.


Uppard, Sarah, and Celia Petty, *Working with Separated Children – Field Guide*, Save the Children UK, 1998.





SECTION TWO

UASC RESPONSE: A DETAILED GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTATION




Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) have urgent needs and may be at elevated risk of abuse and exploitation in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. To address these risks and vulnerabilities, organizations working with UASC should undertake these expedited steps for identification, documentation, training and reunification (IDTR) during and after an emergency. Each step should be undertaken urgently and creatively, using resources at hand, guided by the child's best interests, and coordinated with authorities and other actors/sectors (for details, see relevant chapters in Section two of this handbook).

Matrix: Meeting the immediate needs of UASC in emergencies

STEP 1. PREVENTION OF FURTHER SEPARATION AND PRESERVATION OF FAMILY UNITY: There is an ongoing risk of family separation during and after emergencies; continued prevention efforts will be required.

- **Monitor, report on and respond to situations where family separation may occur**, for example, at transport hubs, border crossings or distribution sites, and implement context-specific preventive actions.
- **Protect and assist children in place; only evacuate children as a last resort**, when in their best interests (including if life is under threat), and under proper conditions (with informed consent, keeping families together when possible, and with complete records and communication plan). Disseminate messages to affected communities on steps that they can take to keep their families tighter and prevent separation.
- **Ensure that humanitarian assistance – such as shelter, food and non-food items – is not distributed in a way that encourages families to divide into smaller households.**

STEP 2. IDENTIFICATION: Identification of UASC is an urgent priority in any emergency because many children can be rapidly reunited in the hours and days immediately following an emergency.


- **Inform** staff in all sectors as well as local authorities, community-based organizations, community and religious leaders, and camp managers of the need to identify UASC and to whom to refer them.
- **Avoid further separations when identifying children**; do not to provoke abandonment of children, incentivize separation or inadvertently encourage children to be hidden.
- **Where appropriate, launch a widely disseminated public information campaign**, for example, through radio or the distribution of leaflets and posters.
- **Establish/publicize specific child protection locations or 'focal points'** where UASC can be documented/assessed or missing children reported; make clear these are not places where children can be cared for or left.
- **Identify where separations might occur**, such as transportation sites, transit camps or distribution sites, and deploy staff there to identify any UASC and take immediate action.
- **Take immediate action to document and assess UASC once they are identified:**
 - **Trained workers should interview children**, record information and only remove children when certain there are no family/community members there or nearby (unless there is immediate risk to the child). If a child is unable to provide information:
 - **Interview any people with whom he/she is found** and record all the information they know about the child/family of the child and any information that may help to trace the family.
 - **Photograph infants/young children** wearing the clothes they were found in when identified; also photograph any objects/possessions found with the child.
 - **Assess immediate care needs or protection concerns**, and make arrangements/referrals.
 - **Allocate a caseworker** to monitor the child's situation via the case management system.
-  **In refugee situations, ensure that UASC are identified at registration.** Established good practices that support comprehensive and accurate UASC identification include training for registration officers on identification and ensuring child protection 'help desks' or screening points.

STEP 3. PRIORITIZATION: Where many UASC are identified and resources are limited, it may be necessary for organizations, authorities and those interviewing children to prioritize actions.

- **Decide which children will be prioritized and allocate one IDTR team per location to 'fast track' children given high priority** for tracing or basic needs interventions based on these criteria:
 1. High likelihood of rapid reunification
 2. High levels of vulnerability to immediate risks.

STEP 4. DOCUMENTATION: Documentation of UASC by trained staff allows urgent family tracing and provides a way to understand the child's wishes, assess his/her current situation and plan for the future. It is also critical to gathering information from families/caregivers looking for missing children.

- **Seek the active participation of communities**; they are likely to know far more than outsiders.
- **Do not repeat documentation** if it appears that an organization has already documented the child.
- **Before documentation, get informed consent from child/carers** to have information recorded, shared (on a need-to-know basis only for family tracing and reunification) and to be photographed.
- **Do not wait for a 'perfect' form to be finalized; forms can be improved later.** Use standard registration forms, or other agreed rapid registration list. *If you do not have access to these forms*, record details in a notebook/spread sheet and transfer to a form as soon as possible.


- **At a minimum, record:** Name of child, age/date of birth, sex, name of mother/father, permanent address before separation, details of separation (date/place), name of and relationship to caregiver, status, accompanying siblings, current location/contact, destination (if applicable), and comments (including priority/urgency).
- **Document all UASC** (including those separated prior to the emergency and those who cannot provide information) with interviews in a quiet, private place where they feel as safe as possible.
- **Photograph or record a description of clothing, jewellery and any items found with the child, and try to ensure these items stay with the child;** never write children's names on their photographs.
- **Agree on a format and assign temporary ID codes** to all documentation, photographs or objects to link information to the child.
-  **Ensure that identified refugee UASC are recorded with the correct specific needs codes in proGres,** and that the proGres ID or other refugee unique identification number of the UASC is recorded in any non-UNHCR information management system on UASC.
- **Record information from families looking for their children.** Take care to avoid raising their expectations.
- **Establish systems for safe forwarding/storage of information, ensuring data confidentiality and agreeing on information-sharing protocols.**
- **Store registration forms and all subsequent forms in a locked file.**

STEP 5. ALTERNATIVE CARE ARRANGEMENTS & ESSENTIAL NEEDS: Though it can take different forms, alternative care arrangements will be necessary until UASC are reunited or, in the longer term, for those UASC unable to be reunited or for whom reunification is not in their best interests.



- **Choose suitable alternative care options within local parameters and guided by a child's best interests;** potential carers should be screened, interviewed, and living situations assessed. Avoid emergency care centres wherever possible.
- **Family-based care within the child's community** (family, kinship or foster care), with priority given to children under 3 years, children with special needs or urgent protection concerns
- **Supported independent living/child-headed households,** where appropriate
- **Organized small group care within the child's community**
- **Temporary and appropriate residential care – in existing facilities, where appropriate – for the shortest time possible;** move to community-based care when possible, if in the best interests of the child. **New long-term care facilities should not be set up in emergencies.**
- **Monitor UASC in alternative care** by opening a case file, allocating a case worker to conduct visits, monitoring the child's well-being, supporting the placement, updating tracing and developing a care plan.
- **Adoption is not an appropriate form of care for UASC during/immediately after emergencies.**

STEP 6. FAMILY TRACING AND VERIFICATION: Emergency tracing, especially for children given high priority, facilitates quicker reunifications, minimizes the effects of separation, concentrates resources where they are most needed, and prevents children from entering long-term tracing. Start right away; do not wait until a complete information system is in place. If tracing is positive, verification – the process of validating relationships, confirming the willingness of the child and the family member to be reunified and assessing the conditions for reunification – should be undertaken.

- **Carry out tracing at the place the child is identified following documentation** by searching the immediate area, going to the child's last address (if possible), and using phones/SMS (text messaging) to contact family; keep the child at the location until it is certain no family are in the immediate area.
- **Manually or digitally cross-check documentation of UASC with that of missing children to find matches.**
- **Undertake 'mass tracing', including in camps for refugees or internally displaced persons or temporary accommodations:**
 - Display lists/photographs of UASC (with only the child's registration ID shown).
 - Make megaphone announcements at places where people gather.
 - Make and distribute flyers, posters and tracing books among communities.
 - Use radio announcements to cover a wide geographic area.
 - Set up an IDTR information centre (such as a tent, booth or kiosk).
- **Verify all family relationships and willingness to be reunited after positive tracing:**
 - Check official documents (such as identity cards or birth certificates).
 - Separately ask the child and family members the same set of questions about the child/family and make sure their answers match.
 - For babies and young children, ask adults to describe the child, place/circumstances of separation, the child, clothing, jewellery or other possessions at separation and words used by the child before separation. Compare answers to documentation and photos.

- Speak to community members and record more information on the child or family.
- **For long, intentional, voluntary or cross-border separations, very young UASC, or complex cases, undertake formal verification:** Fill out verification forms and assess conditions for reunification.
-  **In refugee situations, use proGres to help find the families of UASC.**

STEP 7. REUNIFICATION: Spontaneous reunification – when family members find one another – can occur. But when an organization successfully traces a family member on behalf of a child, it must ensure that reunification is appropriate and carried out in the best interests of the child.


- **Before reunification, plan the reunification and prepare the child, family caregiver and community for the event.**
- **For long, intentional/voluntary, cross-border and very young UASC separations or complex cases, take steps prior to reunification to support the child and family to prevent secondary separation,** including referral for assistance, livelihood support and family mediation.
- **Undertake a comprehensive assessment before reunification for all children.**  For straightforward refugee UASC cases, a best interests assessment (BIA) is necessary; for complex refugee UASC cases or cross-border reunification, a best interests determination (BID) is necessary.
- **Never prematurely reunify without preparation and consent of both child and family.**
-  **Ensure that refugee children have gone through best interests and voluntary repatriation procedures, and have relevant documentation before returning to their country of origin.**

STEP 8. FOLLOW-UP AND CASE MANAGEMENT: This is essential, since the child's needs do not disappear after the acute emergency phase or after reunification.

- **For children not reunited in the acute emergency,** ensure full documentation is completed and entered into a long-term tracing and case management system.
- **For children reunited,** follow up to check on the child's reintegration and enter into a case management system for child protection needs.
- **For both,** establish a referral system for timely and adequate services to address the child's needs.



Tool 37: Sample checklist for UASC emergency programme response



Organizations working with unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) should collaborate – bilaterally and through clusters/sectors – with other actors in the humanitarian response to refer individual cases of concern and to underscore the important role of other sectors in preventing separation of children and supporting family unity. Each sector has a particular role to play; find the relevant sector in the matrix below for sector-specific messages and actions to take with partners.

- ★ *Tool 9: Sample laminated card for cross-sector partners*
- ★ *See Chapter 3.1.4, Messages on prevention of separation: Key messages to emergency actors in other sectors of the humanitarian response.*

Matrix: Cross-sector programmes supporting the well-being and needs of UASC

Cluster/ sector	Essential messages and actions for UASC actors to take with sector partners	Further resources
<p>Aid distribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that UASC can obtain ration cards in their own name, regardless of their care arrangement. This prevents the need for children to attach themselves to inappropriate carers or remain in abusive situations in order to receive food or non-food items. • Do not require proof of citizenship or identity in order to obtain humanitarian assistance; assistance should not be denied to non-national UASC, those not registered at birth, or those who have lost documentation or are stateless. • Avoid targeting only UASC for distributions since this can promote separations. • Implement measures to prevent exploitation and abuse of children (such as exchange of food or non-food items for sex) by ensuring, for example, that child protection monitors are present or UASC are accompanied during distributions. • Design distributions to minimize risk of separation, for example, by proper queuing and sufficient staff to control crowds. • Display information on how to prevent separation and set up a 'lost children zone' near distribution sites, where children/parents can come if they are separated. 	<p>The Sphere Project, Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in disaster response: 2011.</p> <p>World Food Programme, Emergency Field Operations Pocketbook, 2002.</p>
<p>Early childhood development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood development (ECD) activities in emergencies are particularly important for young UASC (ages 0 to 6) who have lost the stability, care, stimulation and protection essential for their healthy development. These formative years are critical; intelligence, personality and social behaviour require an environment that promotes creativity and self-expression, interaction with peers and provides positive feedback to children.¹⁹⁰ • ECD activities can prevent separations by monitoring children vulnerable to separation and providing support to parents/carers who may struggle to care for their child(ren) following emergencies. • Promote the use of child-friendly spaces, which are widely used in emergencies to focus on young children's development, provide a first response to children's needs and as an entry point for working with affected communities. • Address the need for ECD and psychosocial stimulation in feeding programmes for malnourished infants.¹⁹¹ <p>★ See Chapter 10.3.1, Special considerations when arranging alternative care for UASC: Care of infants and young children</p>	<p>PlayTherapy Africa, Emotional Stimulation in the Context of Emergency Food Interventions, Final Report, Addis Ababa, August 2009.</p> <p>Save the Children, ECD Guidelines for Emergencies: The Balkans, 2001.</p> <p>UNICEF website: ECD Resource Pack.</p> <p>World Health Organization, Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being among Children in Severe Food Shortage Situations, 2006.</p>
<p>Education and vocational/ skills training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UASC may have disproportionately less access to both primary and secondary education than other children in the community. This may be due to insufficient funds for school fees, expectations of 'earning their keep' (for example, in extended/foster families), discrimination (of young mothers or children formerly associated with armed forces of armed groups, for example), or work/childcare obligations (as in child-headed households). • To prevent separation, ensure strategies are in place to protect educational facilities from attack and to discourage violence towards and recruitment of children. Also, avoid providing any form of education at residential care centres, since this can prompt parents to place their children in such centres. Instead, provide education in children's place of origin to discourage voluntary separation. • If children voluntarily separate in order to access education, give them opportunities for family tracing, restoring family contact and reunification, if they wish and if it is in their best interests. • Set up a referral system so that children, especially UASC, who are out of school can quickly be identified and receive the support required to access school. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 20: Education and child protection', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p> <p>Global Education Cluster, Education Cluster Coordinator Handbook, 2010.</p> <p>Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, INEE Minimum Standards for Education Handbook 2010, INEE, 2010.</p>

Cluster/ sector	Essential messages and actions for UASC actors to take with sector partners	Further resources
Education and vocational/ skills training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training for UASC should ideally be free, provided in local schools to the same standard as that available to other children in the community, and be inclusive of all children, including via flexible schedules for those who cannot attend during regular school hours. Facilities provided to UASC should always be available to other children and be mindful of any differences between refugees and host communities in terms of language or the curriculum. • For adolescents, secondary education, accelerated learning programmes or 'catch up' classes for those who may have missed school should be available, and – ideally – compatible with and recognized by the formal system of education. Provide relevant vocational/skills training for older UASC who do not wish to attend school. • Ensure that enrolment in education does not require documentation (such as a birth certificate, certificate of citizenship or identity papers). • Seek recognition of school certificates by the education authorities in the country or area of origin when refugee UASC are educated and/or sit for examinations under a different system in the country of asylum. Refugee children should return to their country of origin or resettlement with school certificates or other documentation of education obtained in the country of asylum. • During preparation for reunification or care placement, seek solutions to potential obstacles to school attendance and seek commitment from parents/carers to support children's attendance. • Where support (such as school fees or uniforms) is required to enable UASC attendance, aim to extend support to all families facing similar difficulties. As with economic/livelihoods support, prioritization criteria may need to be developed based on a range of factors, not just separation status. 	<p>Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies website, INEE Toolkit: Education in emergencies training materials.</p> <p>UNICEF, Education in Emergencies – A resource tool kit, Regional Office for South Asia in conjunction with New York Headquarters, 2006.</p>
Health care and water, sanitation and hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though they should not be provided with health care beyond what is available to children in the rest of the affected population, UASC may be unaware of or have difficulty accessing child-friendly health care. Additionally, UASC may have specific health-care concerns (such as drug or alcohol use, injuries, loss of limbs), especially those associated with armed forces or armed groups, or who survived sexual violence. • UASC ideally should have access to child-friendly, safe and confidential sexual and reproductive health care services (including for survivors of sexual violence, incorporating post-exposure prophylaxis, emergency contraception, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, HIV-related services, psychosocial support and family planning), immunization, drug/alcohol services, and specialist care appropriate for wounded, injured or disabled children. This includes outreach services for marginalized groups or individual children. • To prevent separation, health-care providers should maintain complete registers of admissions, discharges, deaths and medical evacuations; carers should be supported to make arrangements for care of other children left at home during another child's medical treatment. • Ensure affected populations, including all boys and girls, have safe access to appropriate and nearby facilities for water, sanitation and hygiene. Mobilizing communities to accompany children collecting water or using facilities can prevent children's separation and diminish risks of abuse or violence. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 21: Health and child protection', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p> <p>Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility Working Group, Handbook for Coordinating GBV interventions in Humanitarian Settings, 2010.</p> <p>The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2011: 'Minimum Standards in Health Action', pp. 287-354 and 'Minimum Standards in Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion,' pp. 79-138.</p> <p>World Health Organization, Guidelines for Medico-legal Care for Victims of Sexual Violence, 2003.</p>

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<p>Livelihoods and economic recovery, including cash transfers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate livelihoods support can promote family reunification, prevent separation and avoid negative coping. However, inappropriate interventions can have negative consequences for family unity; programmes that target <i>only</i> UASC or their caregivers may cause resentment, hinder children's reintegration or create false separations. • Review all planned activities to eliminate any incentives for children to leave appropriate care, such as interventions that disproportionately benefit children in residential care or the creation of employment opportunities for both parents and working-age children that are far from home/do not allow for childcare.¹⁹² • Ensure appropriate and broad targeting criteria that include UASC and caregivers, child-headed households and socially marginalized and economically vulnerable households <i>without</i> exclusively singling them out for assistance; this will reduce the risk of exploitation, prevent separation and support placement/reunification of UASC.¹⁹³ Consistently explain targeting decisions to the community. • Take into consideration those who cannot work, for example, due to childcare obligations, by setting aside a percentage of beneficiaries who can receive assistance without the work component. • In cash transfers programmes, ensure targeting, design and monitoring that reduces the likelihood of families taking in UASC purely to acquire a cash grant and that minimizes potential risk to recipients. For example, do not give cash to individual children and put safeguards in place, such as money deposited in a child's name that can only be withdrawn for specific purposes, such as education. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 19: Economic recovery and child protection', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p> <p>Child Protection in Crisis Task Force on Livelihoods and Economic Strengthening, The Impacts of Economic Strengthening Programs on Children, 2011.</p> <p>Overseas Development Institute-Humanitarian Practice Network, Cash Transfer Programming in Emergencies, Good Practice Review No. 11, 2011.</p> <p>Save the Children, Cash and Child Protection: How cash transfer programming can protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, 2012.</p> <p>SEEP Network, Minimum Economic Recovery Standards, Second edition, 2010.</p>
<p>Psychosocial support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing appropriate psychosocial support for UASC is critical to their well-being and resilience, as is supporting the capacity of carers and communities to provide appropriate support. Conversely, inappropriate psychosocial support and assumptions about the psychological needs of children can increase their distress, cause further harm and impede their recovery. • Ensure that UASC staff members are trained in psychological first aid, since they may be the first point of contact for children after shocking events. • Ensure that everyone who is in regular contact with UASC (such as teachers, carers and staff responsible for identification, documentation, tracing and reunification) are trained in how to communicate with, listen to and support children. Carers should understand that it is normal for children to have temporary reactions to catastrophic events, such as changes in behaviour, sleep problems, nightmares, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, anger, distress and guilt. • Promote rapid family reunification, which is critical to children's psychological and social well-being; recovery from harm is most likely to take place when children are cared for by those who they know well and trust. • Keep children informed and involved in what is happening to them and facilitate their participation and agency in decisions affecting their lives. • Restore a sense of normality, including by meeting UASC's basic needs and providing structured activities, appropriate care and strength- and resilience- building interventions that involve children, families and communities. • Ensure UASC's access to all services that promote psychosocial well-being, including social networks and child- or youth-friendly spaces, which provide psychosocial support, recreation, sports and other activities that restore a sense of normality and continuity, as well as education and possibly Internet access. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 10: Psychosocial distress and mental disorders', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p> <p>Child Protection in Crisis Network, Defining Success: Developing locally meaningful indicators for child-centred psychosocial programming in Uganda, 2010.</p> <p>Global Education Cluster, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Global Protection Cluster, Inter-agency Standing Committee, Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies, Field Testing Version, 2011.</p> <p>Inter-agency Standing Committee, IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, 2007.</p>

Cluster/ sector	Essential messages and actions for UASC actors to take with sector partners	Further resources
<p>Psychosocial support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the need for those in regular contact with UASC to be observant for any children who may require focused or specialized interventions, such as children previously associated with armed forces or armed groups and survivors of sexual violence. Children who show signs of prolonged or increasing distress, isolation, depression, suicidal thoughts or abuse of alcohol/other substances may need targeted interventions; identify and agree upon local indicators of distress. In such cases, local resources should be explored and supported as long as they are in keeping with the best interests of the child. Appropriate interventions to support psychological well-being of populations, including children, are likely to be rooted in communities and to emphasize the resilience of families and children. However, in some cases, coordinated referral and response mechanisms to specialized care outside communities may be required. 	<p>International Rescue Committee, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, 'Psychosocial support', Module 7 in: Action for the Rights of Children, 2009.</p> <p>Mental Health and Psychosocial Network website (MHPSS.net)</p> <p>Red Barnet (Save the Children Denmark), Psychological First Aid for Children – Training manual for practitioners, 2011.</p> <p>World Health Organization, Psychological First Aid: Guide for field workers, 2011.</p>
<p>Nutrition, including infant and young children feeding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although they should not be provided with nutritional support beyond what is available to children in the rest of the affected population, UASC may have difficulty accessing adequate nutrition or be discriminated against or denied access to it; infants in child-headed households may be particularly affected. • Nutrition services may also provide the opportunity to identify UASC that are not known to agencies, and nutrition service providers should be trained to do so. • Nutrition programmes should ensure that UASC are included and have access to available nutritional support, including infant feeding and ration cards, where these are used. Outreach services may be necessary to reach marginalized UASC. • Lack of nutritional support can contribute to family separation. Thus, it is particularly important to follow standard guidance on infant feeding in emergencies.¹⁹⁴ Ideally, babies under 6 months old should be fed breastmilk (appropriate alternatives are wet-nursing, breastmilk from a milk bank, unbranded (generic) infant formula and locally purchased commercial infant formula). • Infant and young children feeding programmes and UASC programmes should establish information-sharing processes to ensure referrals, follow-up and support for UASC or infants vulnerable to separation. • For malnourished UASC, ensure they can access assessment and appropriate treatment in feeding programmes that maintain complete registers of admissions, discharges and deaths. • Implement community-managed acute malnutrition programmes where possible, which prevents separation since carers/parents do not need to take children to feeding centres, leaving other children at home. Where this is not possible, help carers remaining with a child during treatment make arrangements for the care of any children remaining at home. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 22: Nutrition and child protection', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p> <p>IFE Core Group, Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies: Operational guidance for emergency relief staff and programme managers, v. 2.1, 2007.</p> <p>The Sphere Project, 'Minimum Standards in Food Security and Nutrition', Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2011, pp. 139-238.</p> <p>UNHCR, Guidance on Infant Feeding and HIV in the Context of Refugees and Displaced Populations, Version 1.1, June 2009.</p>
<p>Shelter & camp management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure shelter criteria do not discriminate against UASC or create/ increase discrimination in the community, for example, by providing better quality shelter to child-headed households. • Ensure accommodation and other spaces for UASC and other children at risk; ensure caregivers are safe, secure and can access services. • Identify a focal point in camp management structures for immediate response to child protection issues, including UASC referral to relevant organizations. 	<p>Child Protection Working Group, 'Standard 24: Shelter and child protection', in: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2012.</p>

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Shelter & camp management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ See Chapter 10, Alternative care of UASC 	<p>Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, 'Protection of Persons with Specific Needs,' chapter 11 in: Camp Management Toolkit, 2015.</p> <p>The Sphere Project, 'Minimum Standards in Shelter, Settlement and Non-Food Items,' Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2011, pp. 239-286.</p>
Transport and logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make UASC and caregivers aware of the need to contact organizations responsible for family tracing and reunification before they relocate, so that UASC's registration forms can be updated. • Ensure that transport staff inform UASC programmes when and where planned movement or relocation of populations will take place, so that prevention of separation work can be carried out <i>before</i> any movement occurs. • Deploy child protection monitors/UASC programme staff to population movements or relocations to actively prevent separation and respond to new separations. • Ensure transport staff keep families together on transport and do not allow departure until <i>all</i> family members and children are on board. • Ensure that transport staff register children and families before departing, and that families have access to identification tags to fill out for their babies or young children, where appropriate. Child protection actors can provide transport staff with pre-printed registration forms or at least pens and paper. • Arrange for UASC travelling alone to be accompanied by a known adult/ staff member with their case file and placed into the care of a designated adult on arrival. • Advocate for evacuation to be carried out only under proper conditions and disseminate evacuation guidelines widely <i>before</i> evacuation. <p>★ See Chapter 3.1.3, Humanitarian evacuation</p>	<p>Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, The MEND Guide: Comprehensive guide for planning mass evacuations in natural disasters, pilot document.</p> <p>Ressler, Everett M., Evacuation of Children from Conflict Areas: Considerations and guidelines, UNICEF and UNHCR, December 1992.</p>

[190] See: UNICEF website, Early Childhood Development in Emergencies, <www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40745.html>.

[191] World Health Organization, *Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being among Children in Severe Food Shortage Situations*, WHO, 2006, p. 4. Emotional and physical stimulation is created, for example, through expressing warmth and affection by looking into the eyes of the child during feeding.

[192] Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, CP AoR, 2012, pp. 168, 169.

[193] For example, which households or groups of children have the most difficulty getting enough food, water or cooking fuel, or lack the things needed for daily living, such as cooking utensils, clothes or blankets. For guidance, see: Fulford, Louise Melville, *Alternative Care in Emergencies (ACE) Toolkit*, Save the Children on behalf of the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2013, section 2.3.2.

[194] Emergency Nutrition Network, *Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies*, v. 2.1.



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