



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Bank of Key Advocacy Messages for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This document, developed for child protection advocates at international, national, and local levels, provides sample key advocacy messages on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. These messages are intended to be further contextualised and tailored to specific contexts, audiences, and opportunities.

These messages have been developed by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action—a network of operational agencies, academic institutions, policymakers, donors, and practitioners that facilitates inter-agency technical collaboration on child protection in all humanitarian contexts. Significant contributions were made by UNHCR, Save the Children International, UNICEF, the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, and the Alliance’s Advocacy Working Group (AWG). These messages contribute to broader efforts to place children and their protection at the centre of humanitarian action and advance the Alliance’s strategic goal of ensuring child protection is recognised and prioritised as essential and lifesaving across the humanitarian system.

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OVERVIEW

Children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, enabling them to develop to their full potential and thrive.¹ This is true regardless of where children live, including in humanitarian crises contexts. Children, in all their diversity, have the right to participate in decisions that concern them and exercise their agency without discrimination.²

Advocacy grounded in child protection expertise can have a powerful impact in ensuring greater protection of children in humanitarian action. Collective advocacy to engage decision makers at all levels can be especially effective. However, in contexts where advocacy capacity is stretched, child protection advocacy often lags behind.

To address this, three overarching key advocacy messages have been developed, alongside further detailed points under each key message, to provide accessible, content to support effective advocacy for child protection in humanitarian action more broadly. They are intended as a foundation for creating context-specific messages, helping to enhance efficiency and serve as a strong advocacy tool for child protection advocates. They are accompanied by two annexes: one presenting key statistics on the impact of humanitarian crises on children and their protection, and another providing simplified messaging to highlight the essential, life-saving nature of child protection in humanitarian action.

Key Message 1: In humanitarian crises, children suffer first and most from widespread and severe violence, with profound impacts on their immediate safety and long-term well-being.

Key Message 2: Child protection, prevention, and response interventions in humanitarian settings are critical to save children's lives and prevent long-term, irreversible harm.

Key Message 3: Addressing harm to children in crises requires a coordinated approach across humanitarian sectors that places children and their protection at the heart of humanitarian responses.

Annex 1: Key statistics on the impact of crises and conflict on children and their protection

Annex 2: Key messages on the essential and life-saving nature of child protection in humanitarian action

"It's the youngest in our societies - the people that we are meant to be protecting and nurturing - who are among the worst hit"

Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator³

KEY MESSAGES

Key Message 1: In humanitarian crises, children suffer first and most from widespread and severe violence, with profound impacts on their immediate safety and long-term well-being.

Children in humanitarian crises face urgent and life-threatening risks:

- Humanitarian crises are child protection crises, often resulting in immediate harm to children and those close to them.⁴ These crises weaken and overwhelm children's protective environments, disrupt routines, and severely hamper the ability of families, communities, and child protection systems to ensure children's safety.
- Conflict, disasters associated with natural hazards, and climate-induced emergencies expose children to multiple and often concurrent protection risks such as forced displacement, family separation, physical, sexual and psychological violence, abduction and trafficking, neglect, and exploitation including child labour, child marriage, and child recruitment and use.
- In conflict settings, attacks on essential services and infrastructure such as schools and hospitals and the deliberate denial of life-saving humanitarian assistance destroy safe spaces for children and cut off their access to basic necessities.
- Violence against children in humanitarian crises can have fatal, life-altering, and serious physical and psychological consequences. Children may suffer severe physical injuries or long-term psychological trauma from exposure to violence, exploitation, or loss of caregivers.
- Many forms of violence against children—especially sexual violence and domestic violence—often go unreported due to stigma and fear of repercussions.⁵

Experiencing violence during crises can have lifelong consequences for children's safety and well-being:

- Protecting children from physical, sexual, and emotional harm and exploitation is crucial— not only to save lives in the immediate term but also to prevent adverse childhood experiences that can have lifelong impacts on their learning, development, behaviour, health, and well-being.⁶
- Protecting children is key to realising their full potential. Harmful childhood experiences can negatively impact their health, education, interpersonal relationships, future job opportunities, and earning potential, severely compromising their ability to thrive.

Violence against children in crises has a detrimental impact on society and sustainable development:

- Violating children's rights, including their right to protection, weakens the foundations of society and undermines investments in education, health, and other areas of humanitarian response.⁷
- Adverse childhood experiences disrupt social cohesion, hinder economic development, and impede sustainable peace for communities and nations.⁸
- Protecting children from harm is essential to breaking cycles of violence and fostering resilient, peaceful, and prosperous societies.

Key Message 2: Child protection, prevention, and response interventions in humanitarian settings are critical to save children's lives and prevent long-term, irreversible harm.

Child protection prevention and response interventions are essential to saving lives and enabling children to thrive in peaceful and resilient societies:

- Preventing harm to children amidst conflict and crises is possible, and even short-term programmes can have a significant impact. If we wait to act until a child suffers an abuse or violation, it is already too late, as the harm can have irreversible impacts.
- Investing in children's protection, rights, and well-being today strengthens future generations, in support of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#)⁹, and contributes to building peaceful and resilient societies.
- Addressing risk factors while strengthening protective factors reduces harm. For example, tackling harmful social norms, food insecurity, and other risk factors—while strengthening protective measures like parenting support and quality education—prevents severe outcomes such as child recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups.¹⁰
- Timely response interventions, informed by early warning systems and indicators, are critical to address urgent protection needs of children who have already experienced harm, and to prevent potential or further harm. For example, immediate interventions such as family tracing and reunification reconnects unaccompanied or separated children with their support systems and reduces their exposure to further violence, exploitation, and neglect; particularly crucial for young children who may otherwise lose their identity.
- A holistic approach to child protection strengthens families and communities, creating safe, nurturing environments. Empowering communities to drive solutions, alongside engaging children as active participants, ensures that responses are effective, inclusive, and sustainable.
- Recovery and reintegration support are vital for children's healing and for fostering long-term peace and stability. For example, children associated with armed forces and armed groups, children born out of rape,

and survivors of trafficking require tailored support that prioritises mental health, family and community reintegration, as well as access education and livelihoods.

- Children’s protection needs, risks, and capacities are intersectional, varying by age, gender, ability, legal status, and other diversity factors.¹¹ Protection responses must be inclusive and tailored to ensure no child is left behind.

The Child Protection in Humanitarian Action sector has evidence-based standards, tools, a skilled workforce, and solution-based approaches to protect children:

- Momentum continues to build behind the [global goal of ending all forms of violence against children](#) and evidence-based solutions are known and within our reach, even in humanitarian settings.¹²
- Effectively addressing the diverse protection risks that children face requires specialised technical knowledge and skills that consider children's development and the specific nature of each protection concern. Without this expertise, interventions may not fully meet the needs of children and their families, and could do harm.
- The Child Protection sector has developed evidence-based tools and standards that have proven to be effective and require ongoing investment and support.
- While caregivers and general humanitarian workers can play a critical role in children’s protection, they often lack the expertise to address these specific risks. Therefore, social workers, parasocial workers, and trained staff from local, national, and international governmental and nongovernmental agencies are essential to delivering high-quality child protection interventions in humanitarian settings.¹³
- A robust, evidence-based body of work to facilitate a strong child protection response. The [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(CPMS\)](#) is the foundational interagency resource for preventing and responding to violence against children in humanitarian crises.¹⁴ When these standards are not met, overstretched or inadequate services can put children at greater risk.

Local actors, communities, and children play a central role in protecting children before, during, and after crises:

- Supporting community, local, and national actors to lead child protection efforts is essential. These actors often possess the best understanding of their context, including the needs and most effective, sustainable solutions to protect children.
- The lived experience, expertise, and leadership of affected populations and community, local, and national actors is central to quality, sustainable child protection interventions. This includes community-led and community-level child protection interventions, meaningful participation of children, their families, and communities throughout the humanitarian programme cycle, ensuring accountability, and a focus on capacity strengthening and sharing.¹⁵

Key Message 3: Addressing the root causes of harm to children in crises requires a coordinated approach across humanitarian sectors that places children and their protection at the heart of humanitarian responses.

Children's needs are holistic and require multi-sectoral approaches:

- Children's needs are interconnected, and the protection risks they face are closely tied to challenges across health, education, nutrition, and other humanitarian sectors. For example, food insecurity can force families to separate, exposing children to the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking and recruitment and use by armed groups or armed forces. Malnutrition and hunger increase household stress, heightening risks of neglect, domestic violence, child labour, and exploitation.
- Upholding children's rights and addressing root causes of harm require a coordinated effort across all sectors to ensure their well-being and protection. For example, integrating child protection into food assistance can reduce negative coping strategies like child marriage or child labour, while safely identifying and referring at-risk children for urgent protection services, like case management, alternative care, or psychosocial support.
- A holistic and multi-sectoral approach to children, their well-being, and prevention of harm provides a concrete path to delivering on humanitarian actors' collective responsibility to uphold the Centrality of Protection.¹⁶

Protecting children from harm is a shared responsibility and moral imperative. Effective change is possible through concerted efforts of humanitarian leadership, multi-sectoral actors, donors, and affected communities:

- While states hold the primary responsibility to protect children, it is also the responsibility of all humanitarian actors to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action as enshrined in the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\)'s 2016 Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).¹⁷ If we want children to survive the horrors of conflict and crises, we must prioritise essential protection efforts across all contexts and interventions, ensuring the entire humanitarian system is actively engaged in realising broader child rights, including their right to protection.¹⁸
- Humanitarian leadership can play a critical role in prioritising child protection by integrating it into strategic objectives, advocacy, and resource mobilisation efforts. This is essential to achieving broader protection outcomes.
- All humanitarian workers across all sectors play a role in placing children's rights and children's protection from abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence at the center of the humanitarian programme cycle. This includes advocating with stakeholders—in their spheres of influence, for example managers and organisational leadership, partners, and donors—to prioritise and resource specific actions to centre children and their protection in humanitarian action.

- Donors play a critical role in facilitating flexible, multi-sectoral and long-term funding for child protection outcomes. They should ensure that all new humanitarian proposals integrate child protection and support adherence to Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.
- Accountability to children across the humanitarian programme cycle is everyone's responsibility. Engaging with children and integrating their ideas, views and experiences through stages of the humanitarian response, leads to more effective and relevant decisions on programmes and policies that will impact their lives, wellbeing, dignity, and protection.

Critical approaches to protecting children in humanitarian action

These critical approaches are intended as a non-exhaustive list but seek to outline five core actions to coalesce child protection advocacy across the sector which, if taken by key stakeholders across and beyond the humanitarian system, will be central to strengthening the protection of children during humanitarian crises.

- 1. Prioritise children and their protection in all humanitarian action.**
- 2. Increase consistent, predictable, multi-sectoral, and multi-year funding for child protection.**
- 3. Shift power and resources to communities and local and national actors.**
- 4. Promote children's safety and prevent harm through holistic approaches.**
- 5. Strengthen children's role as active participants and full rights holders.**

ANNEX 1: Key statistics on the impact of crises and conflict on children and their protection

Millions of children in humanitarian settings are experiencing unprecedented levels of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence:

- Children are disproportionately affected by the consequences of armed conflict and violence, climate-related disasters, and other humanitarian crises.
- More than one in six children globally live in conflict zones—nearly double the proportion in 1990.¹⁹
- Children constitute 40% of all forcibly displaced people despite being only 30% of the world's population and due to the protracted nature of conflict, the majority of these children will spend their entire childhoods in displacement.²⁰

Widespread disregard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law in armed conflicts has led to an alarming rise in grave violations against children, having devastating consequences for their protection²¹:

- There was a 21% increase in grave violations regarding violence against children in armed conflict in 2023. This number represents only the tip of the iceberg, and the real figures are likely even higher.²²
- Children are being killed, maimed, recruited and used by armed forces and groups, abducted, subjected to sexual violence and denied humanitarian aid. Critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, is under attack or used for military purposes, while life-saving humanitarian aid is deliberately blocked, further endangering children's lives and rights. In addition, children are detained solely on the basis of their actual or alleged association with armed groups.²³

The climate crisis is one of the defining child rights crises of our time. The costs and consequences of our collective action or inaction will be felt most deeply by children - impacting their rights, protection, and well-being²⁴:

- The climate crisis deeply impacts children's rights, as they are more vulnerable to its environmental consequences. About one-third of children globally face four or more compounded climate stresses, which greatly impacts their environmental safety.²⁵
- Over one third of children are highly exposed to heatwaves and nearly one in seven children are highly exposed to riverine flooding worldwide.²⁶
- Extreme weather events and global climate change act as “threat multipliers” for violence against children, making difficult situations (such as poverty, displacement, and loss of education) far worse and allowing violent acts to persist.²⁷ Addressing the climate crisis will be the ultimate test of accountability to the world's children.²⁸

ANNEX 2: Key messages on the essential and life-saving nature of child protection in humanitarian action

Key message 1: In crises, children suffer first and most from violence, with devastating consequences for their immediate safety and long-term wellbeing.

- Humanitarian crises weaken and overwhelm children's protective environments, severely hampering the ability of families, communities and child protection systems to ensure children's safety.
- Conflict, forced displacement, and disasters expose children to harms such as exploitation, child marriage, and worst forms of child labour including trafficking, and recruitment and use into armed forces or armed groups.
- Violence can be fatal or cause life-altering consequences. For example, children may be killed or maimed from explosive remnants of war, or face life-threatening mental health conditions following sexual violence.
- Protecting children from physical, sexual and emotional harm and exploitation is crucial to save lives now, and to break the cycle of violence for a peaceful future.

Key message 2: Child protection prevention and response interventions in humanitarian settings save lives and prevent long-term irreversible harm.

- The risks children face in crises are both predictable and preventable. Timely child protection interventions are essential to save their lives and prevent long term harm by reducing risks and strengthening protective factors.
- For example, actions to prevent family separation stabilises a child's environment and protects them from harm. If separation does occur, family tracing and reunification is critical to prevent further harm, such as trafficking and recruitment into armed groups.
- A well-funded and capacitated child protection workforce is crucial as the first line of response in addressing essential and life-saving protection needs.
- Recognising child protection as [life-saving](#), the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) prioritises it alongside food, water, and medical care.²⁹

Key message 3: Addressing harm to children requires a coordinated, cross-sector approach that puts protection at the heart of humanitarian response.

- Children's risks are intrinsically connected to challenges across health, education, nutrition, and other sectoral areas of intervention.
- For example, food insecurity can increase household stress, heightening risks of neglect, domestic violence, child labour, and exploitation. As such, integrating child protection and food assistance interventions reduces the risk of harm to children while ensuring at-risk children receive urgent protection services, such as case management, alternative care, or psychosocial support.
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) mandates protection central to humanitarian action—ensuring all sectors and actors are actively engaged in protecting children.³⁰

ENDNOTES

1. [2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019).
2. See for example Articles 2, 12 and 19 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UN CRC) – the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. Ensuring children are safe from all forms of physical or mental violence, discrimination, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse is a legal obligation of duty bearers and non-negotiable.
3. [2025 Global Humanitarian Overview \(GHO\) Event in Geneva, Upholding International Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflict](#) (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2025).
4. [UNHCR's Child Protection Data from 2015-2021](#) (UNHCR, 2022); [Child Protection – The Issue](#) (Global Protection Cluster); [The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).
5. [Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children](#) (UNICEF, 2014).
6. See for example: [Everything you need to know about adverse childhood experiences](#) (Jayne Leonard in Medical News Today, 2020); [ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions](#) (the Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University); [Ending Violence Against Children: Key Messages and Statistics](#) (End Violence Against Children, 2020).
7. [Ending Violence Against Children: Key Messages and Statistics](#) (End Violence Against Children, 2020).
8. [Ending Violence Against Children: Key Messages and Statistics](#) (End Violence Against Children, 2020). See also [The violence prevention dividend](#) (UNICEF, 2022) for economic costs of violence against children.
9. [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).
10. [Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2022).
11. The term “children” is used as an all-encompassing term that captures *all* children, in their uniqueness and diversity. This includes children of all **ages** below the age of eighteen years. It means children of all **sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions**. It means children with diverse abilities and disabilities. And it means children with **other diversity aspects**, which include, but are not limited to, different racial and ethnic identities; different social, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds; and children of any minority group. See: [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action. 2021-2025 Strategy](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).
12. Target 16.2 of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) outlines global ambitions to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children”; Webpage: [End Violence Against Children](#).
13. [The Unprotected: Overview of the Impact of Humanitarian Crises on Children in 2023](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2024).
14. [2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019).
15. [Background Paper I Protection of Children from the Ground Up: Enhancing Localised Approaches in Conflict and Crises](#) (Mara Tissera Luna, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2025).
16. [The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action - Statement by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) Principals](#) (Refworld, IASC, 2013).
17. [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\)'s 2016 Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) (IASC, 2016).
18. [The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action - An Introduction](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2023).
19. [Data - Stop the War on Children](#) (Save the Children, 2025).
20. [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022](#) (UNHCR); [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020](#) (UNHCR); [GRID 2023: Internal displacement and food security](#) (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre/Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023); [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action – 2021-2025 Strategy](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).

21. [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action – 2021-2025 Strategy](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).
22. [Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#) (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 2024); [Stop the War on Children: Pathways to Peace](#) (Save the Children, 2024); [Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children](#) (UNICEF, 2014).
23. [Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#) (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 2024).
24. [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action – 2021-2025 Strategy](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).
25. [The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index](#) (UNICEF, 2021).
26. [The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index](#) (UNICEF, 2021).
27. [The Climate Crisis and Violence Against Children](#) (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, 2022).
28. [A Clarion Call: The Centrality of Children and their Protection within Humanitarian Action – 2021-2025 Strategy](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2021).
29. [Central Emergency Response Fund Life-Saving Criteria](#) (UN CERF, 2020).
30. [The Centrality of Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Action - An Introduction](#) (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2023).