

Putting the Pieces back Together: Centring Children and Their Protection in the Humanitarian Response in Gaza

A Statement from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

With the ceasefire in place in Gaza, humanitarian aid is rapidly increasing to those who have lived under siege. **The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action urges that this support includes the workforce and resources necessary to meet the urgent protection needs** of Gaza's 1.1 million children — who represent half of the population — and respect, protect, and fulfil their rights.

The children of Gaza have suffered and witnessed violence and extreme deprivations for years, the scale of which has worsened horrifically over the last two years. Nearly every child has been exposed to violence, displacement, and psychological trauma. Since October 2023, more than [64,000 children](#) have been reported killed or injured – including over [10,000 who sustained life-altering injuries](#) requiring long-term rehabilitation and psychosocial care. Over [58,000 children](#) have lost one or both parents, and thousands of families have been separated from each other. With [97% of schools damaged or destroyed](#), their education has been curtailed. [Health systems](#) have been destroyed, and [malnutrition](#) is high and rising. All of this taken together, Gaza's children have had their rights violated, their childhoods taken away from them, and their futures altered.

In the humanitarian sector, “child protection” means preventing and responding to abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence against children. In Gaza, family and community protection systems have either collapsed or significantly weakened. One in four families now reports sending children into hazardous or exploitative work to survive, while cases of early marriage, domestic violence, and sexual violence and exploitation have [sharply increased](#), a reality consistent across all humanitarian crises. Children with disabilities face compounded protection risks due to the [loss of assistive devices](#), inaccessible shelters, and limited access to inclusive services.

Despite prolonged denial of humanitarian access — a grave violation of children's rights on its own — communities and child protection practitioners in Gaza have worked tirelessly to protect children, their families, and communities. However, the scale of children's needs has been far beyond what they could humanly achieve with limited access and resources. The children of Gaza remain in urgent need of life-saving and life-sustaining child protection services. As humanitarian access opens up, we must invest in reinforcing the efforts of local and international actors on the ground, through a coordinated and adequately resourced child protection response, positioned as a central component of both the immediate 60-day life-saving plan as well as through all phases of recovery.

In Gaza, widespread devastation leaves children without safe spaces to sleep, learn, or play, including amid widespread debris and unexploded ordnance that poses especially serious risks to children. As rights holders under international law, with distinct needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities, children are entitled to specific attention in humanitarian response. Furthermore, as per the principle of “centrality of protection”, all humanitarian programs should consider protection of children as an integral part of their humanitarian aid programs. Planning should be done with children as active participants, with humanitarians listening to their voices and concerns for their safety.

A coordinated, multi-sector response is essential to reduce the pressures that are driving families towards harmful coping strategies. Priority must be given to supporting families in order to prevent further separations, child labour, the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, or the early or forced marriage of children, both in the first 60 days and in the longer term.

Programming such as cash for child protection should be considered to address immediate harms rooted in a lack of access to financial resources. Other interventions, such as legal aid, winterisation, clearing unexploded ordinance, among others, must be child-focused and designed to take into account how children are experiencing this crisis.

FOR CHILD PROTECTION SPECIFICALLY, CRITICAL PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

1. **Strengthen response services:** An urgent expansion of child protection response services, including case management, is urgently needed to support children harmed or at heightened risk. This includes family tracing and reunification, temporary family- and community-based alternative care, and care for child survivors of [gender-based violence](#). Children need empathetic, well-trained professionals to provide protection services, to help them access other lifesaving services, and advocate on their behalf across the humanitarian system. Child protection professionals and other community members providing support also require care themselves, as the majority are simultaneously experiencing the trauma of the past years.
2. **Expand Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:** Relentless exposure to violence and loss has triggered an acute [mental health crisis](#) among Gaza's children. [Clinical data and frontline reports](#) reveal symptoms such as severe anxiety, depression, nightmares, and emotional numbness. Caregivers, many severely impacted themselves, are struggling to provide the support children need at this time. Almost all children need urgent psychological assistance, including psychological first aid, psychoeducation in support groups, and access to specialised mental health services. MHPSS must be integrated across child protection, education, health, and broader humanitarian interventions. Children and adolescents also need safe spaces, which should be prioritised in the response.
3. **Scale-up parenting and caregiver support programmes:** Parenting programmes should be made available to all caregivers, including those caring for children who are not their own. This support has been shown to strengthen the relationship between children and their caregivers, lessen the use of harsh parenting methods, and mitigate both immediate and longer-term child protection risks. These programmes are essential to support families navigating the immense stress of the crisis and will help children develop in a safe and protective environment.

A CALL TO ACTION

The ceasefire is a welcome relief, but it leaves behind over a million shattered childhoods. Protecting children is only possible if the ceasefire is respected by all parties, and international humanitarian and human rights laws are upheld at all times. It is critical that these are fully respected and that the children of Gaza and beyond are protected in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all applicable legal frameworks, and our shared morality.

The international community must uphold its obligations under the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda; grave violations against children, including killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access, must not only stop, but be systematically documented and addressed through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

Further to this, child protection services must be explicitly prioritised, at the same level as other life-saving sectoral interventions, by humanitarian leadership and funded by donors within the [60-day plan](#) for delivering aid in Gaza and consistently strengthened beyond this timeline. The children of Gaza will continue to carry the scars of their experiences, and nothing can replace what they have lost. However, with support for their whole selves – mind and body – these children can rebuild quality lives.